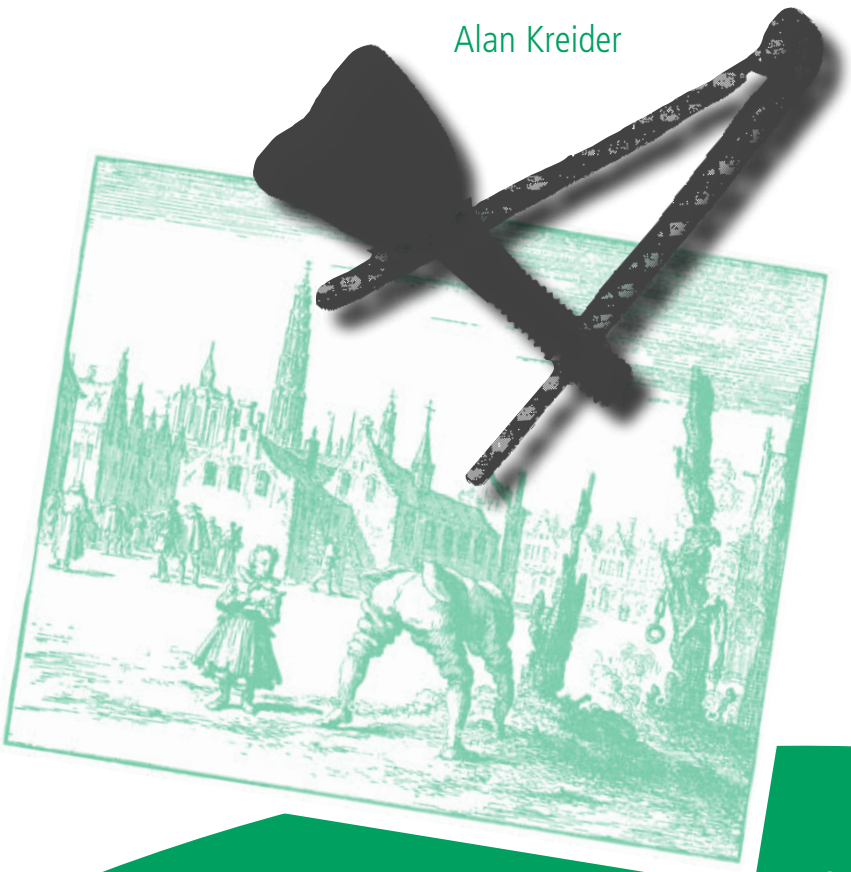
Mennonite Mission Network
The mission agency of Mennonite Church USA
Together, sharing **all of Christ** with all of creation

Missio Dei
Exploring God's work in the world ■ Number 16

Tongue screws and testimony

Alan Kreider



Series editor
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Missio Dei is published by Mennonite Mission Network to invite reflection and dialogue about God's mission in today's world. Some features in the series focus primarily on the biblical and theological foundations of the mission task. Others present ministry case studies or personal stories of attempts to be faithful to Christ's call. Perspectives represented reflect the passion and commitment of the agency: to declare in word and demonstrate in life the whole gospel of Jesus Christ, "across the street, all through the marketplaces, and around the world."

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 Tongue screws and testimony, Alan Kreider. Published in cooperation with Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind., and marketed and distributed by Herald Press (Scottdale, Pa., and Waterloo, Ontario). Phone: 1-800-245-7894.

Mennonite Mission Network, the mission agency of Mennonite Church USA, exists to lead, mobilize and equip the church to participate in holistic witness to Jesus Christ in a broken world. With offices in Elkhart, Ind.; Newton, Kan.; and Harrisonburg, Va.; the Mission Network supports ministries in more than 55 countries and 31 U.S. states.

The illustration used for the cover is taken from the *Martyrs Mirror*, Book 2, p. 661, "Sons of Maeyken Wens search for her tongue screw among her ashes," Jan Luyken, illustrator. Illustration is adapted from www.bethelks.edu/mla/holdings/scans/martyrsmirror

ISBN 1-933845-12-0

Printed in the United States of America.

09-077

Tongue screws and testimony

Alan Kreider

At the seminary where I work, I teach a course called "Mission and Peace." It is a required course, so it brings together students from various backgrounds.

Recently, midway through the course, we came to the session in which we deal with evangelism. I gave a lecture, after which a student raised her hand. "Well, I think St. Francis got it just about right. He said, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel; use words if you must.'" There was a general muttering of assent among the students. After all, he's St. Francis! And who are we to disagree with him?

But another student raised her hand. "Look, I was raised a Mennonite," she said. "And I've been in seminary for several years. But I'm still uneasy talking about my faith. I know that how we live is important, but I think talking's important, too. Last year I was in a group that went to Fort Benning, to the School of the Americas, to protest the way the U.S. Army was training Latin American soldiers to suppress political opposition. Before we went to Fort Benning, the leaders carefully prepared us. 'Here are some of the questions that people are likely to ask you,' they told us. 'How are you going to respond?' So we worked together on how to prepare good answers,

and then we tried them out on each other. We did a lot of role playing. It was really helpful. But," she said, "we've never done anything like this about Christianity. I'm uncomfortable talking about my faith—you know, to outsiders, to people who don't go to church and have questions."

This student was helpful to me. She got me thinking. Here we were, in the middle of our course on mission and peace. My student had learned a lot, and I respected her enormously. But her articulacy hadn't kept up with her discipleship. She was silenced, but not by tongue screws.

Allow me to explain. This student, as a good product of a Mennonite seminary, knew Anabaptist history. And she no doubt knew about Maeyken Wens[1], who in the 1570s was so eager to talk at her execution that the authorities ordered the construction of an iron device that would literally screw her tongue down. Nobody was screwing my student's tongue down, but she was finding it very hard to talk. Why? What is it that makes it so hard for her—for *us*—to talk about our faith, not only in our conversations with each other, but with outsiders, non-Christians?

My own experience in England

I'm not talking about this because I am good at sharing my faith. I feel my inability, too. And I've got some history with this. In 1974, my wife, Eleanor, and I left the faculty of Goshen (Ind.) College, where we were teaching music and history, to become Mennonite missionaries in England. We remained there for 26 years.

In the 1980s, there was a crisis in Europe about the stationing of intermediate range nuclear weapons in Britain. We got involved in inter-Christian debates about war, especially about nuclear weapons, which we called "the issue." We, of course, debated other issues as well, including discipleship, pacifism, whether John Howard Yoder's *The Politics of Jesus* was a good book, and whether the recipes in the *More with Less Cookbook* were edible. (These books were our two best sellers!) We, as Mennonite missionaries, were involved in interconfessional debates, debates with other Christians in which we were seeking to advocate an Anabaptist-Mennonite perspective. Into our world came Nzuzi.

Who was Nzuzi? Nzuzi was a Mennonite from Zaire, now the Congo. Nzuzi, bless him, was not interested in "the issue." He was interested in inviting people to become disciples of Jesus, in offering people the joy of discovering life and forgiveness in Jesus. He would do anything to share the gospel of Jesus. He told me, "I go up to people in the park, and I say, 'Can I tell you about what Jesus has done for me? I can talk to you about this; or I can sing my story—would you let me sing? Or I can dance the story. What can I do to share Jesus with you?' Alan, how do *you* tell people? Alan, what's *wrong* with you? Jesus is good news; he's changed my life. I want to offer him to others. There are so many people in England who don't go to church. Don't you want to tell them?"

Of course, I knew that church attendance in the UK was plummeting—from 15 percent in 1970 down to 7.5 percent in 2000. I also knew that the Mennonite Church in Congo was growing in numbers. Today, it is vastly larger than Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada put together. Still, I was sure that there was no way that Nzuzi's approach to testimony would work in the English culture that I knew. It might work among immigrants, of whom there were thousands. But with the English people? I also questioned whether the theology underlying Nzuzi's words was faithful to Jesus or the New Testament church.

In any event, Nzuzi soon disappeared. He went off to associate with other Christian groups that were more evangelistic than we were. But I found him question-posing. His faith was simple; his face was joyful. He was articulate about his experience of Jesus. And he asked me why I was spending most of my time trying to convert other *Christians* to my understandings of discipleship and ethical issues.

Now, nuclear war was—and is—an immensely important subject. Some Christians should be thinking and campaigning about

it full-time.[2] But wasn't it also important for me to communicate my faith to ordinary English people who weren't Christians? Why wasn't I spending more time thinking about the worldview, the convictions, the experiences, the worries of the 85 percent-plus of the English people who went into church buildings only for weddings and funerals? What did *they* think? What were *their* stories, their deep convictions, their preoccupations? Would I know how to listen to them, to talk with them? Was I silenced, not by tongue screws, but by something else?

Of course, I'm being a bit hard on myself here. There were non-Christians whom I was learning to know—English people who are today close friends and with whom I am still in frequent contact. A few of these friends have become Christian. As friendships developed with them, we were telling our life stories to each other and sharing what was most important to us. But, generally, I spent much of my time in England conversing with other Christians. Why? What had formed me to be this kind of person, who was articulate with Christians about matters on which we agreed or disagreed, but to be relatively inarticulate with non-Christians about the convictions and experiences of God and life that are central to my life and that might transform theirs?

So here are some thoughts. If it wasn't tongue screws that were silencing me, what was it? What is it that may silence many of us, as 21st century Mennonite Christians? I want to mention four things: Christendom, Mennonite Christendoms, the Enlightenment, and Post-Modernism. I will then conclude by describing a Christian lifestyle that may enable us to be articulate, a lifestyle of incarnation and explanation.

Four things that have silenced many Mennonite Christians today

Christendom

In the first three centuries, the Christian church was a counterculture. Christianity was a marginal religion that grew because it was interesting and reputed to be powerful spiritually. Christians were attractive and question-posing, and many of them seem to have offered verbal explanations of their lifestyles quite naturally.[3]

But in the fourth century, the Christian church's position in the world changed and most Christians became less articulate. By the end of the fourth century, Christians had political power and were forcing pagans to become Christians.[4] The advent of Christendom silenced most Christians in three ways:

By making everyone Christian. In Christendom, with the exception of a small minority of Jews, everyone was a Christian. In pre-Christendom, it had been clear that some people were Christians, but most people were in what the Christians called "the world." Now in Christendom, there was a general assumption that everyone was a Christian. Indeed, in Christendom, being a Christian was unavoidable; the faith was passed on by genetic means. So Christians became conventional. In the fourth century, for example, the church lost its former pacifism and its tendency to social equalization.

By professionalizing the church. In Christendom, patterns of professionalized ministry silenced many Christians. Christianity was now conventional, so a lot of Christians no longer talked about their faith. Why should they talk about it? And who should do the talking? In Ephesians 4:11, Paul had said that the gifts of the ascended Christ were that "some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry." But now that everyone was a Christian, there was no longer need of Christ's *missional* gifts—apostles, prophets and evangelists. So the church concentrated on the *maintenance* gifts—pastors and teachers. And the pastors and teachers performed the sacraments and spoke for the people instead of equipping them all for the work of ministry. In Christendom, articulacy was professionalized.

There was no longer need of Christ's *missional* gifts—apostles, prophets and evangelists. So the church concentrated on the *maintenance* gifts—pastors and teachers.

By locating mission, when it ocurred, on the periphery of the Christian community. Christendom did on occasion produce Christians who shared their faith in mission. But these missionary

treks were to distant lands—Christendom missionaries went from Christendom to pagandom. In Christendom, missionaries were often associated not with listening and testimony, but with *conquistadores* and trading companies and imperial administrators. This is not surprising since in Christendom the symbiosis of church, state and society was normal. This intermingling of Christianity and conventional Western values has effects on us today. The Christendom experience has led many people to associate faith-sharing with violence and cultural imperialism in which Christians *impose* something on other people.[5]

This is the setting in which Anabaptism arose, and the Anabaptists challenged the whole Christendom system. The Anabaptists asserted that not all Christians were Christian, that the gospel should be offered to all people, that the faith could not be territorially restricted or spoken about only by professionals. The Anabaptists were vigorously articulate. An obscure example of this, which my wife, Eleanor, and I have used in teaching in England, is Margaret Hellwart. We encountered her first in Arnold Snyder and Linda Huebert-Hecht's wonderful book, *Profiles of Anabaptist Women*.[6] Eleanor has, in fact, prepared a dramatic reading on Margaret, based on court records, which is made available in the centerpiece section of this booklet.

Around 1610 in Württemberg, in what is now southwest Germany, the Anabaptist Margaret simply refused to go to the parish church to take part in the Lutheran mass. Instead, she insisted on going around to her neighbors' houses to talk with other women about God's love. With Margaret's help, the neighbors could talk about God in their kitchens. The authorities were outraged at this. They interrogated Margaret, whom they called "stiff-necked," and chained her to her kitchen floor so she could not make neighborhood visits. But this did not stifle Margaret. The criminal records report that over the next 11 years, Margaret escaped from her chains no fewer than 21 times and went right back to her subversive testimony-giving. Listen to her statement to the authorities:

> *God has called me to tell the good news to my neighbors.Nothing can stop me from doing that. You see, people should learn to love*

one another with God's love. The true church is made up of people who live lovingly, righteously. As I understand the Scripture, people can hear the word of God at home when someone reads it out. We don't need to go to the village church.

. . . I just finally told the authorities to give up. Look, I said, I'm an old woman. I'm over 50, so I can't possibly learn anything new. Why don't you just leave me alone? I don't know any way other than God has taught me, and I'd rather obey God than the authorities. All I want is to live according to God's will, do good, and avoid evil. There's just no point trying to make me change my mind; I intend to remain an Anabaptist to my life's end.

Nothing—neither tongue screws nor chains to the kitchen floor nor anything else—could keep Margaret from sharing her faith.

The Christendom Catholics granted the Anabaptists a place of safety and inconvenience, but this was the deal—they would have to be silent.

As the centuries went by, however, the various groups who descended from the Anabaptists were bound to change. The Dutch *Doopsgezinde* were strongly affected by the Enlightenment and Pietism. Some became reasonable and culturally accommodated. Others, equally refined, became missionary. In the mid-19th century, it was the Dutch who were the first Mennonites to formally send missionaries abroad, to Indonesia.[7]

The Swiss Mennonites, in Canton Basel, chose a different route by cutting a deal with the Christendom authorities. In 1710, the Prince Bishop of Basel worked out a special arrangement for the local Swiss Brethren. In his Catholic canton the Prince Bishop allowed Anabaptists to live in enclaves. They could not live in villages or in the valleys, but only in isolated communities in the uplands, over 1,000 meters, and there they were not to engage in faith-sharing activities.[8]

The Christendom Catholics granted the Anabaptists a place of safety and inconvenience, but this was the deal—they would have to be silent. They would be *die Stille im Lande*. Of course, there were many places where people in the Anabaptist traditions didn't have arrangements this propitious. Many groups experienced discrimi-

nation and persecution. Some migrated and constructed impressive Mennonite communities, which in time also experienced persecution. But in many places, as the centuries went by, and as the Mennonites migrated, the Christians of Anabaptist extraction became still, inarticulate. Some of them made a virtue of their silence, calling it *Demut*, humility.

Mennonite Christendoms

The values of Christendom are not strange to us as Mennonites. For over the centuries we have created our own Christendoms.

Sociologically, we "Anglo" Mennonites in North America became homogeneous. So today, we often spend a lot of time with people who are very much like us. There are good reasons for this homogeneity. We are a communitarian movement, and our churches are, comparatively speaking, time-intensive. Fellowship is important to us.

Being a Catholic is different, as I realized recently when I talked with a friend who attends a parish in which there are 2,200 families. Their common life is bound to be less intensive than ours in much smaller congregations.

So we Mennonites have fellowship primarily with other Mennonites. Our friends tend to be Mennonites; we often choose to live near other Mennonites; we do business with other Mennonites. In a Mennonite Christendom, most of the people we have significant relationships with are Mennonite. This tendency to live in Mennonite Christendoms may be especially well developed among people who work for Mennonite institutions and church agencies. I teach at a Mennonite seminary and I know that if I am to break out of the Mennonite Christendom, I've got to work at it.

Some Anglo Mennonite churches—like churches in other Christian traditions—have grown by attracting Christians who belong to other churches who are drawn to our vision or to aspects of our life. These people from other Christian backgrounds encounter the theology of John Howard Yoder or attend a Mennonite church in which they hear sermons they agree with. They are attracted to a church that has no flags in it but that does have a vital communal life, a church that supports Christian Peacemaker Teams and Ten

Thousand Villages, a church in which it is normal to be pacifist.

I am grateful for this growth. These new Mennonites have brought us great strength. And, together, we Mennonites, new and old, are finding our voice and making a contribution to the Christian church in North America and beyond that is vitally important. But there is a danger. If our growth occurs primarily by radicalizing people who are already Christian, it is arguable that we Mennonites are parasitic. Other groups *convert* people; we *correct* them!

Where, then, do most Mennonites come from? Our historic means of recruitment is the bedroom! Over the centuries, Mennonites have had large families, so we have grown primarily by genetic means. We still try this. According to Conrad Kanagy's *Road Signs for the Journey*, 64 percent of Mennonites are "cradle Mennonites."[9] But this traditional Mennonite means of growth—bedroom evangelism—has stopped working. It has been ineffective since the 1960s. Why? The pill, of course. Mennonite families are now small, and our children's Sunday school classes are often depopulated.

If our growth occurs primarily by radicalizing people who are already Christian, it is arguable that we Mennonites are parasitic. Other groups *convert* people; we *correct* them!

The result of this, according to Kanagy, is that we North American Mennonites are graying, are decreasing in numbers, and have only 2 percent of our members who come from non-Christian backgrounds. This 2 percent, according to Kanagy, is a smaller proportion than in most Christian groups.[10]

New converts are, as we know, notoriously eager to bear testimony about their newly-discovered faith. Mennonite congregations need these new Christians desperately. Of course, a healthy church needs the deep traditioning, the virtue and communal character, that is built up across the generations and that produces Mennonite saints. At our best we know this well. But a healthy church also needs its Nzuzis, its new blood—people who naturally give testimony because they are joyful at the new life and liberation from sin and addiction that they have found in Christ and in Christ's community. These new Christians talk. They, in comparison with the 98 percent of Mennonites who come from Christian homes, are articulate about their faith.

The Enlightenment

The Enlightened philosophers of the 18th century hated Christendom. They despised most Christians, but some of them liked the Anabaptists. Voltaire, for example, made the one decent human in his *Candide* an Anabaptist named Jacques. The Enlightenment helped to bring toleration for us Mennonites that Christendom had never allowed, and I'm grateful for that. Nevertheless, I believe that the Enlightenment has helped screw our mouths shut. How?

The Enlightenment's advocates sought to privatize Christianity and to saturate the public sphere with their own rhetoric. In reaction to Christendom, they made Christianity personal and rendered its story unacceptable as a part of social discourse. The Enlightenment's advocates affirmed that:

- Religions are human constructs, attempts to cope with the unknown and mysterious.
- All religions are the same. They are morally equivalent and very subjective.
- Humans ought to live by universal values, not fettered by the contingencies of local histories and communities.
- Particularity is offensive, especially the particularity that Christians claim is God's salvific work in Israel, Christ and the church.
- Natural law is immutable. Even if God exists, God doesn't matter because God can't change anything.
- Miracles do not happen, therefore, and prayer changes nothing.
- People who have passionate religious convictions are fanatics, especially those who are willing to give their lives for their faith.

Note well that the Enlightenment thinkers consistently emphasize rationality and control. They align this emphasis upon control with technology and technique. Their worldview is mechanistic. It has no room for a God who can make a difference, a God who can act spontaneously, a God who can respond to prayer, a God who can stir up new initiatives and new hope, a God who can heal people. The Enlightenment, in short, leaves nothing to which Christians can bear testimony.

So the Enlightenment tempts us, in its technological backwash, to assume that we can micro-manage our lives. We forget what the prophet Jeremiah had claimed in the sixth century BCE: "O Lord,

the way of human beings is not in their control; mortals as they walk cannot direct their steps" (10:23). Why, we may wonder, do so many Mennonites who contribute to sharing time in our churches talk about health? Because health, despite our best efforts, is one area that we can't ultimately control. "As in Adam all die ..." (1 Corinthians 15:22).

Post-modernity

Competing with the Enlightenment for our allegiance is so-called post-modernity. This has added an attractive note of playfulness and indeterminacy to our way of thinking. Post-modernity enables Christians to be less certain and less tense. Its rhetoric appears to be modest:

- We live in a world of many narratives. You Christians have one meta-narrative, the Enlightenment has another meta-narrative, the Sufis of Turkey and the Jains of India have still other narratives, and so forth. Look, let's rejoice in this multistoried reality.
- Let's be flexible and inquisitive. Let's be open to pastiches, to quilts made of differing kinds of cloth.
- Let's recognize the importance of spirituality. All humans in their more sensitive moments have encountered mystery. We all have experiences that we can't explain.
- Let's not forget that spirituality is a matter of personal decision. Religion is private; it's my business, a taste choice. I'll choose my form of religion; you choose yours. Please don't bother me with your choices, and I'll not impose mine on you.

- If you Christians get serious about telling your story to other people, remember your tradition's abiding disposition to arrogance. Never forget that you have often imposed your religion by force. Do you want to be coercive like them?

Many of us Mennonites are attracted to this approach, and there are some things in it that we can greet, particularly the renewed openness to spirituality. But there are problems as well. We are embarrassed when people talk about Jesus, for this sounds particularistic and proud. So we are inclined to embrace theocentrism, and to reject that part of our Anabaptist tradition that is passionately Christocentric.

And there are so many questions: What about the atonement? What about Christology? What about other religions? Who are we to talk to others about Jesus when we don't know what we think? What can we say when our worldview has rendered it impossible for us to see God intervening in our lives and in our world in ways that take our breath away?

For our resultant reticence we have a rationale that is typically Mennonite—we're being humble! After all, shouldn't we be learning from other traditions? Shouldn't we be exploring the wisdom of other religions? So we, in our humility, don't bear testimony to God's saving work in Christ because we have nothing to say. At least, we reassure ourselves, we're not like some Christians, who talk all too glibly about their experiences of Jesus. So our humility is not without its snobbishness. And Jesus asks us as he asked his disciples in Luke 9:26, "Will you be ashamed of me and of my words?"

A post-Enlightenment, post-modern world, is a difficult place for us Anglo Mennonite Christians to bear testimony. Few of us are new Christians. We are repelled by Christendom. We are deeply shaped by the Enlightenment and post-modernity. We are afraid of giving offense, of not knowing how to answer questions, of being a poor witness. And we are soft-hearted, beneficent people who want to do good for God in the world. So we support digging wells and microenterprise and are ouchy about verbal testimony. As a result, it is hard for us to talk about Jesus. We are suspicious of mission. And we are even more suspicious of evangelism.[11]

There are good reasons to be suspicious of evangelism

Evangelism today is deeply in trouble, both within and beyond the churches.12 This is true even in so-called Evangelical churches. An article in a recent issue of Christianity Today bewails that "it seems harder for us to get excited about evangelism."[13]

Shrewd observers such as Brad Kallenberg, a former evangelist to students who now teaches philosophy at the University of Dayton (Ohio), have for some time been sensing that traditional evangelism is not working. Kallenberg's experience as an evangelist is that it is harder and harder to get people to respond.[14] Why?

When you ask Christians, Evangelical as well as non-Evangelical, to give word associations for evangelism, you get a strong list of negatives. Stuart Murray in his book, Post-Christendom, gives many of these (226), of which I list only a few: "the antics, poor witness, publicity seeking, and money grabbing of high-profile televangelists;" "manipulative approaches;" "'friendship' as an excuse for 'witnessing;'" etc.[15]

Does this list of stereotypes mean that Christians should stop giving testimony to outsiders? "No," says Murray:

> *Rehabilitating and reconfiguring evangelism are crucial but attainable tasks on the threshold of post-Christendom. Even where deep-rooted antipathy to evangelism means new language is needed, Christianity is at heart a missionary faith, and the desire of most Christians to tell the story is deeper than our reluctance to engage in activities we associate with evangelism.*[16]

But, Murray observes, if we're going to engage in bearing testimony in a post-modern, post-Christendom age, if we're going to tell the Christian story in the United States in which only 20-25 percent of the people are in church on a typical Sunday, we've got to reconfigure the way we speak. Maybe we, as Mennonites, should no longer talk about evangelism; instead, we could follow the Sri Lankan missiologist Vinoth Ramachandra in referring to "humble evangelism."[17] And humble evangelism, according to Stuart Murray, would involve *incarnation* and *explanation*.[18]

The missional alternative to "evangelism:" incarnation and explanation

Missional approach #1: Incarnation

How we live matters. What we believe determines how we live. We Mennonites like this. We like it when Stanley Hauerwas tells the story of Eli Yoder of Shipshewana (Ind.). One day, an aggressive evangelist was at work in Shipshewana, came over to Eli outside of Yoder's Department Store and asked, "Are you saved?" Eli scratched his head and said, "Over there is Joe Stoltzfus; he and I have had some problems with each other recently. Am I saved? Go and ask him!"[19] Yes, our lives will speak, and we love the spurious quote attributed to St. Francis. But if this incarnational approach is to work, five things are necessary:

Nonconformity. If our lives are to speak, they must somehow be question-posing. Our post-Enlightenment Anglo culture seeks to generalize control and to minimize risk. But we know that people are worried about jobs, finances and relationships, and that they often lack deep hope. For these Anglos, the ultimate purpose of life is "to move from birth to death as comfortably as possible."[20] And God? God may be there, but our real trust is in more evident reality. On a recent vacation in Michigan, we saw a cabin on whose front gate were the words, in mosaic, "In God we trust." We were intrigued by this. But when our eyes wandered up the sidewalk to the cabin's front door, we saw two signs, in fluorescent orange, "Beware the Dog." God, dog—who is our refuge and strength?

John Howard Yoder reminded us that we Christians live before a watching world, and each culture will view us according to its concerns.[21] How distinctive are we? Does God want us to live differently? Is God calling us to live more oddly, more interestingly? Does God want us to live in such a way that others can see that we are odd, individually odd, corporately odd?

I have learned a lot from Anna Geyer, a student of mine at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary's Iowa extension. Anna is a 30-year-old mother who lives with her husband and children north of the Black Diamond road, in an area where few Mennonites live. Anna tends a large garden, "The Cutting Garden," to which people can come and cut flowers. They may pay if they wish.

A wide variety of women gather at her kitchen table. Anna reports that people look at her and ask questions: "Anna, you're living in a way that I'm not used to. Why are you and your husband so kind to each other? Why do your kids talk politely? Why do you eat in an unusual way? Things are different for your kids. Why do you live like you do?" And at the right moment, which may take years in coming, Anna will say, "Because of Jesus." Anna is a radical, who lives simply, who is committed to a peacemaking lifestyle, who is a good friend and an excellent listener. She has built up a remarkable network of women who don't go to church but who want to talk about life—and about God. Anna is odd and interesting.[22]

I have also learned from Robert Martz, who was recently installed as pastor of Topeka Mennonite Church in Indiana. In June 2007, Robert discovered that he had the same blood type as a first-grade teacher who belonged to his church and who had been on dialysis for five years. So Robert came to her one day and said, "I think I have something that you can use." Robert gave her one of his kidneys. And people ask, "What's going on when a Christian will give a kidney for a sister in Christ? Why did you do it, Bob?" Robert replies, "I'm willing to trade two weeks of recovery for someone else's 15 to 20 years of health." And people take note.[23]

People also notice when Christians who are wealthy enough to leave the inner city choose to stay there. Or when members elect to live within walking distance of the churches and get involved in local schools and neighborhood associations. When Christians do not leave the city but stay with it, seek its shalom, learn to know people, and get involved in local struggles for God's kingdom, people notice—and ask, "Why do you do these things?" The answer is testimony to the God we worship whom we have come to know in Jesus the Messiah. As Catholic theologian Gerhard Lohfink has said, "It is the will of God to have a people in the world so that one can clearly see, by looking at that people, how God proposes that human society should be."[24]

The witness of Margaret Hellwart, 1610

A dramatic reading for small groups and worship services

Loud knocking at the door.

Margaret: Oh, no. Oh, no. Oh, my. (*Mutters.*) Quick. Hurry. (*Puts on the chains.*)

Constable: Open up. NOW. Open up.

Margaret keeps working with the chains, stands up straight, opens the door. Constable enters with an assistant.

Constable: So! Margaret Hellwart, we have come to check on you. Here, you, look at those chains. Are they strong? Are they locked up properly? I am suspicious of you, Margaret. You were so slow in opening the door and we heard the chain rattling. Tell us, now, the TRUTH. Had you slipped the chains off? Have you just put them back on again when you heard us at the door? Well? Well?

Margaret: *Silent.*

Constable: Two years it's been. Two years. We've warned you repeatedly about missing church. You know the law. You have to attend the mass. You are so stiff-necked. You have refused to conform to the Lutheran faith. Why? Why?

Margaret: *Silent.*

Constable: Not only not go to mass, we hear reports that you've been running around the countryside, village to village, infecting all the women folk with your crazy ideas. (*Makes noise of contempt.*) You have been warned NOT TO RECEIVE VISITORS in this house. But we know you have paid no attention to that order. You have had a steady stream of women coming here. What are you talking about to them? Eh? More of your "good news?" Eh?

Margaret: *Silent.*

Constable: Now about this chain. That's a good chain; I saw it properly fixed into the floor here last year. How are you getting it open? Eh? I know! George, your husband. He's helping you.

Margaret: *Shakes head vigorously*—It's not the husband.

Constable: Well, who is it then? Some of those women who come here to listen to you? Are they helping you get out of the chain? Eh? No answer? Right, then. We'll strengthen the chain again, fix a better lock. And no more tampering with it, you hear me? Eh? Stupid woman!

Constable exits.

Narrator: Margaret was first chained to her kitchen floor in 1610. She seemed to slip out almost as quickly as the authorities had secured her. Margaret just carried on with her evangelizing among local women, persuading them of Anabaptist understandings of the Christian faith.

Margaret stands up, steps forward, speaks directly to the audience.

Margaret: God has called me to tell the good news to my neighbors. Nothing can stop me from doing that. You see, people should learn to love one another with God's love. The true church is made up of people who live lovingly, righteously. As I understand the Scripture, people can hear the word of God at home when someone reads it out. We don't need to go to the village church.

Narrator: During the next 11 years, the authorities had to chain her up again 21 times. Fearless, Margaret compared her release from confinement to Peter's escape in Acts 12.

Margaret: I just finally told the authorities to give up. Look, I said, I'm an old woman. I'm over 50, so I can't possibly learn anything new. Why don't you just leave me alone? I don't know any way other than what God has taught me, and I'd rather obey God than the authorities. All I want is to live according to God's will, do good, and avoid evil. There's just no point trying to make me change my mind; I intend to remain an Anabaptist to my life's end.

Narrator: The last reference to "stiff-necked" Margaret was when she was 53 years old. And now, Margaret lies somewhere near her village of Beutelsbach (not far from Stuttgart in South Germany), in an ordinary burial site unblessed by the state church, awaiting the Great Resurrection.

Text by Eleanor Kreider, drawing on Walter Klaassen's "Margaret Hellwart of Beutelsbach," in C. Arnold Snyder and Linda A. Huebert Hecht, eds., *Profiles of Anabaptist Women: Sixteenth-Century Reforming Pioneers*. Studies in Women and Religion/Études sur les femmes et la religion, 3. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1996, pp. 64-67; and Gustav Bossert, *Quellen zur Geschichte der Wiedertäufer*, I, *Herzogtum Württemberg*. New York: Johnson Reprint, 1971, p. 887.

Collaboration. Learn to know people who may or may not be churchgoers but who seek God's kingdom and its justice. We live near them. We share interests with them. We get involved in common tasks with them. We enjoy them. We attend sessions of the city council together. We go on marches with them. We refurbish buildings together. By these means, Christians in south-central Elkhart (Ind.) are attempting to keep our part of the city from going the way of Gary, Indiana. Mennonite Christians are working and praying together with Christians of other churches. We are also working with people who are not church attenders, and with some people who are explicitly not Christian. But we all are explicitly committed to the well-being of a geographical area—and this does wonders both for ecumenicity and for evangelism.

Living out of control. At the heart of a life that leads to testimony is what Stanley Hauerwas calls "living out of control."[25] For our lives to speak, it is important that we, in some area, intentionally live by faith. It is vital that we engage in some type of adventure in which we have to take risks and relinquish control. We then pray, "God, it's up to you. We can only make it if you answer prayers, if you do miracles, if you make impossible things possible." It's only then that we have anything to say. As Hauerwas comments: "Christians in modernity have lost the ability to answer questions about the truthfulness of what we believe because we have accepted beliefs about the world that presuppose that God does not matter. The problem for Christians and non-Christians alike is that we Christians so often fail to live in a way that articulates what difference it makes that we are or are not Christian."[26]

God calls us to live in such a way that we can survive only if God matters. God calls us to be distinctive and free—free to live "out of control," free to act faithfully and to entrust outcomes to God. And we can live this way only if our lives are rooted in prayer and worship.

Prayer and worship. The discipline of prayer and worship is essential to live a distinctive, question-posing life. Many Christians have discovered the importance of beginning each day by praying a missional prayer—that we may see God at work in the day's

events and encounters. Some Christians go further and ask that they may find one occasion in which their lives can speak, and their lips can bear testimony, about God, about Jesus, about the living power of the Holy Spirit. Christians of this sort learn to recognize that "the Holy Spirit trains God's people to recognize God's hand at work."[27] This is what the "missional church" is about. It is recognizing that God is the actor, that God is pursuing God's mission of reconciling all things in Christ.

God's people, alerted by the Holy Spirit, recognize God at work, bear testimony to it, and get involved. This takes many forms. In *Treasure in Clay Jars: Patterns of Missional Faithfulness*, Lois Barrett describes how missional prayer affects the life of a Roman Catholic parish, the Transfiguration Parish in Brooklyn (New York).[28] One parishioner, Anne Pilsbury, is an immigration attorney. Every Saturday morning she meets with a parish team who will devote their day to working with the intense and varied needs of poor people who have no control of their lives. Before she and her 25 team members begin their daylong work, they spend an hour in contemplative prayer before the Host, praying the "Prayer of Abandonment" of Charles de Foucauld (1858-1916):

My Father, I abandon myself to you.
Do with me as you will.
Whatever you may do with me, I thank you.
I am prepared for anything; I accept everything.
Provided your will is fulfilled in me and in all
Creatures, I ask for nothing more, my God.
I place my soul in your hands.
I give it to you, my God,
With all the love of my heart
Because I love you.
And for me it is a necessity of love,
This gift of myself,
This placing of myself in your hands
Without reserve
In boundless confidence
Because you are my Father.[29]

When asked why she prays this prayer, Anne Pilsbury replies that when you pray like this, "you give up control over your life."[30]

Expressing hope. Living this way is an expression of hope. It is hope in God who works through Christians who are trusting enough to be odd, and to act oddly, because God's story is odd—and God's character is odd—and it's only through oddity that there is room for creative solutions to intractable problems. Conventional panaceas lead to despair, but the way of Christ leads Christians to "overflow with hope" (Romans 15:13).

And the presence of hope always elicits questions. The New Testament writers don't tell their readers to "evangelize" others. They tell them to live with hope. And if we have hope, and express that hope in deviant behavior, people will ask questions that lead to testimony. Peters puts this in classic form in his first letter: "Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting of the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3:15). It is *hopeful incarnation* of the way of Christ that leads people to ask questions and demand explanation. If we are hopeful, people will want to know why.

Missional approach #2: Explanation

If we are living hopefully and interestingly, then we can talk. Verbal articulacy will then point to God and will be our testimony to God's saving grace and life-transforming vision that God has shared with us in Jesus Christ. Why is this verbal explanation necessary? Because it's simply a fact that an unexplained action allows people to draw all kinds of explanation. And if they are impressed with our unexplained action, they will basically glorify us!

A friend of mine recently spent time serving at one of Mother Theresa's hospices in Calcutta. As he reflected later on his experience there, he noted, "It struck me that without a knowledge of Bengali, I could only point to *myself*."[31] Words without action are hollow, but actions without words are also limited. They are either incomprehensible or they only glorify ourselves.

As disciples of Jesus, we want to explain the particularist metanarrative that begins with Abraham and Sarah; that courses through the history of the Jewish people; that culminates in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus; and that through the Holy Spirit has been opened up to "all flesh"—to *everyone*! It is happening in the world today. Christianity is not a *Western* faith. It is a worldwide phenomenon

and it is growing more rapidly than Islam. So in order to explain the deviant incarnational style of Jesus' disciples, what is necessary?

Relationships. We can only explain when we have something to explain and when we've got relationships. Christians will, therefore, build friendships with our neighbors and colleagues—not to "convert" them, but because we want to be in genuine, reciprocal relationship with them. We want to be free to be ourselves; that is, to be Christians. And we want them to be free to be who and what they are. As neighbors and colleagues, we want to share life with them and to see what happens. Friendships are primary. I cannot overemphasize this. It is within the framework of friendship that things happen and that we and our friends change. As Anna Geyer says, in her experience it often takes a decade before the questions emerge. Stuart Murray agrees, stating that our "priority is to build relationships of respect and friendship."[32] In this situation we listen to the experience of others and discover freedom in speaking about our faith.

Love. We don't only talk about our faith because we want to be authentically ourselves. We talk about our faith because we are coming to love our friends. Bearing testimony is an act of love. It is not aggressive to offer the best that one has to someone else; it is compassionate. More than that, it is being unselfish, refusing to hoard what has blessed us. So when relationships are ready and the time is right, we share it. We can pray that our friendships with people will someday see these people coming to faith in Jesus Christ.

Stability. Relationships develop best when there is a commitment to a definite geographical locality for a period of time. Monastic founder St. Benedict required his monks to commit themselves to "stability." Likewise, prophetic contemporary American social philosopher, Wendell Berry, recurrently develops the importance of "place."[33]

When we as a church of "resident aliens" commit ourselves to a geographical area, a place, we encounter a wide variety of real people. Gradually, we learn to know them and discover that we and they, as neighbors, share common concerns. We learn to know the struggles of real people, and we and they talk about our local issues and struggles. We share with them the routines of neighborly existence. We support each other and have good times together. And we lament with them about misfortunes, both theirs and ours.

We engage in the "daily improvisational practices of neighboring, prayer and social commitment that establish signs of God's reign and hints of the pattern of the city to come."[34] As we engage in these practices and manifest fidelity in our relationships, we and our neighbors will find opportunity to talk about what our deepest convictions are and in what or Whom we put our trust.

Kathee Kime Kirchner has taught me about this. Kathee is an MDiv graduate of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary and an ordained Mennonite minister who has spent the past 18 years in an Elkhart (Ind.) factory packing pharmaceutical equipment. People's lives are all over the place, she says. Some people are strong, and the strongest, and the most vocal, are the Christian "women of color." The Lord has "brought them through" and they spontaneously bear testimony to God's faithfulness.

Other people's lives are full of desperation, reticent desperation. Kathee is convinced that the Lord can liberate these people from fear and desperation, deliver them from addictions and compulsions, and bring them freedom, forgiveness, joy and energy. In her factory, she has seen that the Lord brings people hope. Kathee has been present in stability as an embodiment and agent of hope. Across the years, 10 workers in that factory have asked her to perform weddings for them. Kathee is a Mennonite "worker priest" whose stability has enabled her to have a fruitful witness.[35]

Go to people. It is conventional for us to view our churches as "welcoming" and we may even at times invite people to come to our churches. I propose that if we're going to invite people, we invite them initially not to our churches, which can seem very strange to non-church-goers, but rather to a barbecue in our back yard. Or that we invite ourselves into their back yards or their homes, where they are comfortable. We do this by getting involved in something that requires us to go to their places. We circulate a petition, because we want to save the local school building from the wrecker's ball so it can be a community center. Or we get involved in a conversation while we are washing our cars, or when we need help because our lawn mower won't start.

Recently, our neighbors were playing music that was so loud that I couldn't think. Guys were working on cars, and my wife, Ellie, was in our kitchen baking chocolate chip cookies. On an

inspiration I went to the guys, carrying the baking tin of cookies. Children's hands reached up to take cookies as well. "Boy, those are good!" The guys turned down the music. The children said to Ellie, "Could you help us make chocolate chip cookies?" So Ellie invited five local kids to our house to bake cookies. While the cookies are rising, Ellie plays the piano, and the children dance. They trust Ellie. She has invited them to Bible school at our church and they have come. We pray for them every day. They are already facing big problems, and their future is uncertain. But God is opening up their world, and ours.

We need to think about how we talk about our faith. In a way, of course, we can't plan this. Formulas won't work. How we speak will depend on the person with whom we are talking and the nature of our relationship; it will depend on the transparency of our friendship. Missiologist Art McPhee has observed, "Jesus' model was ... inductive, spontaneous and natural, and most importantly Spirit-led."[36]

As congregations, we can study how to bear testimony; we can be for each other like the trainers who prepare people who explain what they're doing outside Fort Benning. With each other, we can talk about how we talk and how we listen. We can collect stories about how our conversations have gone, and we can do role plays. This might be a useful thing to include as we prepare people for baptism. In catechesis we can prepare the candidates to think about their own questions and talk about their faith in response to those questions. And, according to Anna Geyer, we will learn to do this as we start bearing testimony to each other in our churches.

In our testimony, we will focus on hope more than faith.[37] When we live our lives, and when we converse with non-Christians, we discover that non-Christians are often full of despair. The news is bad. Gas prices are soaring, health care is unaffordable, the weather is extreme and the climate is in trouble. The future looks dangerous.

And yet here are these Christians who have hope. Our hope is question-begging. "Why do you have hope? Why do you think it's worth working to get that mega-shredder in your neighborhood closed? Why do you think it's worth campaigning for undocumented immigrants or tutoring children in a local school? Why are you pouring your life out for people even when you've retired? Why

are you not afraid to die?" Because God has given us forgiveness, joy, and that most countercultural commodity—hope. And hope, as Paul says, "does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Romans 5:5).

This may bring people to our church, or it may not. We know that the gates of hell will not prevail against Christ's church (Matthew 16:18). But we don't know what the future will be for our kind of church. People may be drawn to Jesus, but never come to a church building. As Christendom wanes, a lot of people are not comfortable in church culture. Anna Geyer reports that "99 percent have had a bad experience with church. They don't want to be in church anymore; it was not life-giving." There is a lot of wounding and brokenness out there.

I suspect that in the coming decades hope-filled Christians will be experimenting with new forms of Christian togetherness. There will be table churches, house churches, emerging churches, new ways of being church.[38] These are springing up all over the place. Recently, I got e-mail from someone I have never met, who learned about me from an Australian we both know who promotes house churches Down Under. My new e-mail acquaintance wrote:

> *My wife and I lead a house church in Denver that is in the process of relocating from the suburbs into a working poor neighborhood of the city of Denver, with the desire to befriend and serve our neighbors and encourage the growth of more communities of faith. I have been in pastoral ministry and missions for decades (including as an inner-city missionary some time ago), but the path that we are on now is distinctly different.*
>
> *Over the last three to five years God has been trimming away a lot of stuff in our lives—traditional supports, possessions, theologies, reliance on programs, even some relationships—and leading us to a simpler, more focused walk with God and ministry among people. In the process, we've discovered some things. Ministry is very relational. If we have Jesus, we don't need much more. We need to pray. Always. God will build his church with or without us—we just need to follow his voice. And—and this is why I'm writing you—we've become Anabaptists.*[39]

Who can tell what shapes the church will take in the future? I can only observe, based on numerous cases like this, that many churches in the post-Christendom West will be domestic and that the Anabaptist tradition will have an abiding relevance.

What do pastors do as Christians learn to give testimony? They encourage their people to incarnate their faith in Christ in ways that are hopeful. And they equip their people to talk in response to the questions that inevitably arise. Pastors also name and call forth the gifts of their people. Not least, they tap the shoulders of their members who have the gift of bearing testimony.

Remember, in pre-Christendom, according to Paul, five gifts were necessary to equip the body of Christ for the work of ministry—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (Ephesians 4:11). In Christendom, only the pastors and teachers were needed and seminaries influenced by Christendom only train these. But now, in post-Christendom, we need all five gifts. When pastors or other church members see members who have the gifts of a pastor or teacher, but also of an apostle or a prophet or an evangelist, they should name these gifts and call them forth. And our congregations will become comprehensive "cultures of call."

There's a world out there ...

In closing, I return to my Congolese brother, Nzuzi. Nzuzi's vigorous way of bearing testimony reminds me of the worldwide church. His method of evangelism won't work with most English people; nor will it work with a lot of people in south-central Elkhart. We need to embody the message, corporately; we need to explain it, relationally and patiently.

Nzuzi, I think, was in a hurry. But I remain humbled by him, by his smile, and by his love for Jesus who had saved him from sin and death. Nzuzi was gratefully willing to do anything to share Jesus with other people. And I am humbled by his awareness that there are many more people in the world—even in England and in Elkhart, Indiana—who don't go to church than who do. There is a world out there of restless people who will remain restless until they find their rest in God—people who may be waiting for us, for our friendship and testimony, to point them toward God's kingdom.

Endnotes

1. Thieleman J. Van Braght, *The Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror of the Defenseless Christians* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1951), pp. 973-974. For comment on this story and how it relates to our difficulty in talking about our faith today, see Dale Bauman, *Are We Really Following Jesus If We Aren't Telling Others Why?* Mission Insight 11 special edition (Elkhart, Ind.: Mennonite Board of Missions, 2000).
2. For the ongoing dangers of nuclear war, see Joseph Cirincione, "The Greatest Threat to Us All," *The New York Review*, March 6, 2008, pp. 18-21. I owe this reference to Walter Sawatsky.
3. Alan Kreider, *The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom: Christian Mission and Modern Culture* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1999; Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 2007, ch. 2).
4. Alan Kreider, "Violence and Mission in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 31.3 (2007): pp. 125-133.
5. A much fairer and more nuanced treatment of the Western missionary enterprise is found in Andrew Walls, "Christianity in the Non-Western World," in his *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2002), pp. 41-42.
6. C. Arnold Snyder and Linda A. Huebert Hecht, eds., *Profiles of Anabaptist Women: Sixteenth-Century Reforming Pioneers*, Studies in Women and Religion/Etudes sur les femmes et la religion, 3 (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1996).
7. Hanspeter Jecker and Alle G. Hoekema, *Testing Faith and Tradition*, Global Mennonite History Series: Europe (Intercourse, Pa.: Good Books, 2006), pp. 73-74.
8. Hanspeter Jecker, "Dates for the History of the Anabaptists in the Jura," in Markus Rediger and Erwin Röthlisberger, eds., *Walk in the Footsteps of the Anabaptists* (Langnau: Swiss Mennonite Conference, 2007), p. 84.
9. Conrad L. Kanagy, *Road Signs for the Journey: A Profile of Mennonite Church USA* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 2007), p. 54.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55.
11. For a helpful discussion of the issues, see James R. Krabill, *Is It Insensitive to Share Your Faith: Hard Questions about Christian Mission in a Plural World* (Intercourse, Pa.: Good Books, 2005).
12. Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2004), p. 225.
13. Stan Guthrie, "A Hole in our Holism," *Christianity Today* (January 2008), p. 86.
14. Brad Kallenberg, *Live to Tell: Evangelism for a PostModern Age* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos, 2002), pp. 12-13.
15. Murray, *Post-Christendom*, p. 226.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 226-227.
17. Vinoth Ramachandra, *The Recovery of Mission: Beyond the Pluralist Paradigm* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 273.
18. Murray, *Post-Christendom*, p. 228.
19. Stanley Hauerwas recalls telling this story, which has many variants, but he —and we—have been unable to locate it in his published writings (Mark T. Nation e-mail to Alan Kreider, Feb. 11, 2008). Steve Nolt also recalls hearing Hauerwas tell it: Ervin

Beck, *MennoFolk: Mennonite and Amish Folk Traditions* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press), p. 211. Ervin Beck reports that Mennonite historian John L. Ruth considers this to be "the quintessential Mennonite story" (*ibid.*, pp. 38-39).

20. Jonathan J. Bonk, *Missions and Money*, revised ed., American Society of Missiology Series, 15 (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2006), p. 107.
21. John Howard Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1992).
22. Conversation with Anna Geyer, Jan. 14, 2008.
23. http://www.lutheranhospital.com/kidney/transplant.html; *Fort Wayne News-Sentinel*, June 18, 2007.
24. Gerhard Lohfink, *Does God Need the Church? Toward a Theology of the People of God* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1999), p. 302.
25. Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), p. 105.
26. Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2001), p. 231.
27. Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells, "The Gift of the Church and the Gifts God Gives It," in Hauerwas and Wells, eds., *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), p. 18.
28. Lois Y. Barrett, *et al.*, ed., *Treasures in Clay Jars: Patterns in Missional Faithfulness* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004), p. 26.
29. George Appleton, ed., *The Oxford Book of Prayer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 83-84.
30. Barrett, *Treasures*, p. 26.
31. E-mail from Art McPhee to Alan Kreider, Dec. 12, 2007.
32. Murray, *Post-Christendom*, p. 234.
33. Benedict, *Rule*, cap 58; Wendell Berry, *Standing by Words* (Washington: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2005), pp. 54-58; idem, "Imagination in Place," in his *The Way of Ignorance* (Washington: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2005), pp. 53-68. I owe these references to Michael Gulker.
34. Mark R. Gornik, *To Live in Peace: Biblical Faith and the Changing Inner City* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002), p. 114.
35. Conversation with Kathee Kime Kirchner, Jan. 14, 2008.
36. E-mail from Art McPhee to Alan Kreider, Dec. 12, 2007.
37. Murray, *Post-Christendom*, p. 232.
38. Stuart Murray and Anne Wilkinson-Hayes, *Hope from the Margins: New Ways of Being Church*, Grove Evangelism Series, 49 (Cambridge, England: Grove Books, 2000); Jeanne Hinton, *Changing Churches: Building Bridges in Local Mission* (London: Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, 2002); Stuart Murray, *Church After Christendom* (Waynesboro, Ga.: Paternoster Press, 2004); Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2005).
39. E-mail from John S. Hannah to Alan Kreider, Jan. 25, 2008.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1 How do you respond to the central thesis Alan Kreider puts forth in this booklet? What struck you most? With which part(s) do you most disagree?

2 Are you one of the people Kreider describes in our society—and even in the church—who are "suspicious" of evangelism? If so, what experiences in your life have contributed to these negative feelings?

3 Kreider identifies four things that have silenced many Mennonites today: *Christendom, Mennonite Christendoms,* the *Enlightenment*, and *Post-Modernism*. What definition does the author give to each of these terms? How would you rank their importance (1-4)? What additional influences do you feel might be at least as or more important than the four featured here?

4 What does the author mean by the following statements? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis?

- "The Christendom Catholics granted the Anabaptists a place of safety and inconvenience, but this was the deal—they would have to be silent. ... Some [Anabaptists later] made a virtue of their silence, calling it *Demut*, humility" (pp. 7, 8).
- "Where do most Mennonites come from? Our historic means of recruitment is the bedroom" (p. 9).
- "If our growth occurs primarily by radicalizing people who are already Christian, it is arguable that we Mennonites are parasitic. Other groups *convert* people; we *correct* them" (p. 9).

5 Kreider believes that for much of church history, the *missional* gifts of apostles, prophets and evangelists were deemed unnecessary or irrelevant and were thus overpowered by the *maintenance* gifts of pastors and teachers. How would you describe your own denomination and/or local faith community? Have "maintenance" gifts triumphed over "missional" or is there a healthy balance between the two?

For further reading

◆ BAUMAN, Dale, *Are We Really Following Jesus If We Aren't Telling Others Why?* [in the Mission Insight series, No. 11] (Elkhart, Ind.: Mennonite Board of Missions, 2000).

◆ FROST, Michael, and HIRSCH, Alan, *The Shaping of Things to Come* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004).

◆ KRABILL, James R., *Is It Insensitive to Share Your Faith?* (Intercourse, Pa.: Good Books, 2005).

◆ KREIDER, Alan, *The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom: Christian Mission and Modern Culture* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1999).

◆ LONG, Thomas G., *Testimony: Talking Ourselves into Being Christian* (San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass, 2004).

◆ MURRAY, Stuart, and WILKINSON-HAYES, Anne, *Hope from the Margins* (Cambridge, U.K.: Grove Books, 2000).

◆ SHENK, Wilbert, ed., *Anabaptism and Mission* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1984).

◆ SHENK, Wilbert, and PENNER, Peter F., eds., *Anabaptism and Mission* (Schwarzenfeld, Germany: Neufeld Verlag, 2007).

◆ SNYDER, C. Arnold, and HECHT, Linda A. Huebert, eds., *Profiles of Anabaptist Women: Sixteenth-Century Reforming Pioneers* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1996).

◆ WENGER, A. Grace, and JACKSON, Dave and Neta, *Witness: Empowering the Church through Worship, Community and Mission* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1989).

◆ For additional reports and stories, choose from among the 3,250 entries in BAUMAN, Chad Mullet, and KRABILL, James R., *Anabaptism and Mission: A Bibliography, 1859-2000* (Elkhart, Ind.: Mennonite Mission Network, 2002).

The *Missio Dei* series

No. 1 Calvin E. Shenk, *Understanding Islam: A Christian Reflection on the Faith of our Muslim Neighbors (*2002*)*.

No. 2 James R. Krabill, *Does Your Church "Smell" Like Mission? Reflections on Becoming a Missional Church (*2003*)*.

No. 3 Donna Kampen Entz, *From Kansas To Kenedougou ... And Back Again (*2004*).*

No. 4 Alan Kreider, *Peace Church, Mission Church: Friends or Foes?* (2004).

No. 5 Peter Graber, *Money and Mission: A Discernment Guide for Congregations* (2004).

No. 6 Craig Pelkey-Landes, *Purpose Driven Mennonites* (2004).

No. 7 James R. Krabill and Stuart W. Showalter, editors, *Students Talk About Service* (2004).

No. 8 Lynda Hollinger-Janzen, *"A New Day in Mission:" Irene Weaver Reflects on Her Century of Ministry* (2005).

No. 9 Delbert Erb and Linda Shelly, *The Patagonia Story: Congregations in Argentina and Illinois Link "Arm-in-Arm" for Mission* (2005).*

No. 10 *Together in Mission: Core Beliefs, Values and Commitments of Mennonite Mission Network* (2006).*

No. 11 James R. Krabill, editor, *What I Learned from the African Church: Twenty-Two Students Reflect on a Life-Changing Experience* (2006).*

No. 12 Ryan Miller and Ann Graham Price, editors, *Together, Sharing All of Christ with All of Creation* (2006).*

No. 13 Michael J. Sherrill, editor, *On Becoming A Missional Church in Japan* (2007).*

No. 14 Alicia Horst and Tim Showalter, editors, *BikeMovement: A Mennonite Young Adult Perspective on Church* (2007).*

No. 15 Jackie Wyse, *Digging for Treasure in Your Own Backyard: Reflections on Missional Experiments in the Netherlands* (2007).*

No. 16 Alan Kreider, *Tongue screws and testimony* (2008).*

*Available in Spanish.

Tongue screws and testimony

Alan Kreider

In the 1570s, European authorities were so intent on silencing Anabaptist believers in their witness that they devised a metal screw to clamp down their tongues, thus inhibiting speech or rendering it unintelligible or foolish-sounding to anyone who might still choose to listen.

Few Anglo Mennonites living in today's Western world experience this kind of repressive response to their witness. Yet all too often, according to Alan Kreider, Mennonites struggle to share their faith and choose silence over verbal witness, as if the tongue screws were still in place doing their job.

The author spells out in this booklet why that is, and then suggests concrete ways to move Mennonites and other Christians in the direction of a more confident, joyful approach to living and sharing "the hope that is within them."

This essay was originally presented during Pastors Week at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, January 2008. It is reproduced here for wider distribution based on the lively conversation it stimulated then and the many requests received for the piece following that event.

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