



# Newsletter

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# Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela:

## A Man of many names

~ Karen and Andrew Suderman (Pilgrims in Pietermaritzburg)

**To be free is not merely to cast off one's chains but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others. ~ Nelson Mandela**

Last night South Africa, and the world, lost an icon. After a long, amazing, torturous, exemplary and incredible life Nelson Mandela passed away. I can't tell if it is because it is Friday, December or the loss of the man who is called the Father of the Nation that there seems to be a hush in the air today.

I find myself weeping. How can this be? I didn't know him personally, and yet his death affects us all. Mandela provided an example to South Africa and the

world of what it is to live a life that pursues the justice and wellbeing of all. He demonstrated rationality, forgiveness and reconciliation at a time that seemed to warrant irrationality, mercilessness and violence. He inspired and inspires us to act in a similar way.

Most of the world knows him as Nelson Mandela. But this is only one name among many that he had. Some of these names seemed to be prophetic, pointing to the man he'd become and the life he would lead.

At birth his father gave him the isiXhosa name Rolihlahla. This literally means "pulling the branch of a tree" but the word is a colloquialism that means "troublemaker" or "one who disturbs the established order".

Mandela was given the name Nelson when he started school. The teachers, who were British, could not pronounce isiXhosa names and customarily gave "Christian" names to their Xhosa students.

When he reached manhood he received the name Dalibhunga, which means "creator or founder of the council" or "convener of the dialogue".

Mandela is often called Madiba. This is name of his clan. It is not only his surname, it points to his ancestry. To call someone by their clan name is considered to be very polite. (This information came from the Nelson Mandela Foundation website. To see the full article go to <http://www.nelsonmandela.org/content/page/names>.)

Each of these names is a tall order, yet he seemed to embody these titles with resolve and dignity. As Mandela lived up to his names he, alongside others, helped to expose apartheid for what it was, helped



to dismantle its grasp, and helped to begin the process of overcoming the painful wounds it left in its wake. He proved to be a midwife in the birth of a new South Africa. And yet, there are many more things that require the same persistence and tenacity in bringing about true justice, true reconciliation, and true peace.

Let us remember and pray for Nelson Rolihlahla Dalibhunga Mandela, his family and friends, South Africa, and the world as they and we grieve the passing of “the Father of the nation” and the man who has inspired much work in bringing people of all races and backgrounds together.

Madiba -- may we continue to live up to the spirit and the challenge of your many names.

**What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others that will determine the significance of the life we lead.**

~ Nelson Mandela



## **Mandela as Messiah**

~ John de Gruchy (Pilgrim in Hermanus)

The world seemed very different when I awoke last Friday morning and heard the news "Mandela is dead." I first heard about it in an e-mail from a friend in Canada who, so he told me, saw the headline while reading an article I had written in 1994 at the time Mandela was inaugurated as President of the new South Africa. He reminded me of what I had said at the time:

*At the centre of it all was the national icon—a prisoner become president, a man of stature and humility who, like few contemporary world leaders, including those who had come to pay him homage, commanded the respect of all and the love of many.*

It is now almost twenty years later, twenty years after apartheid was officially consigned to the dustbin of history, twenty years of living as if on a roller coaster, with high moments of great excitement and achievement, and low moments when we feared that all our hopes were being dashed. But always somewhere at the centre though increasingly in the background was the prisoner who became president, the towering figure of the man who had, for too brief a time, led our country out of the wilderness into a land full of promise. Now he is dead and the world that came to pay him homage when he became president, has returned in even greater numbers to pay their last respects. His death came as no surprise but it was still a shock to the system, for it signalled the end of an era, but much more, the end of a life that has become an icon or symbol of true greatness, of humble leadership, of justice and reconciliation.

Some are even referring to Mandela as a messiah sent by God to deliver us from bondage! In fact, I think this is what President Obama was telling us at the Memorial Service on Tuesday. Today, as we listen again to the story of John the Baptist preparing us to celebrate the coming of Jesus into the world as the true Messiah, I want to ask whether it is appropriate to talk of Mandela also in these terms.

The term Messiah is for us Christians so exclusively associated with Jesus that it is difficult to think of anyone else in these terms. So we cannot use the word lightly or thoughtlessly when we speak of him in this way. In the Bible the word "Messiah" means "the Lord's anointed." In the Old Testament it is often used to describe those chosen by God to fulfil his purpose of liberation and redemption -- like Moses who led the slaves out of the bondage of Egypt to the new land of promise. But many others in the Old Testament are referred to as those anointed by God, whether prophets like Elijah or Kings like David, and even Cyrus, the pagan Persian king who allowed the Jewish exiles to return from captivity and rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, was called the Lord's anointed or messiah. So I do not think it is inappropriate to refer to Nelson Mandela as a messianic figure whom God raised up to lead our country from the bondage of apartheid into a new day of freedom.

But it is also dangerous to speak of any leader as a messiah, especially those who make such pretentious claims. Adolf Hitler immediately comes to mind as the great false messiah of the twentieth century, though he is only one of many others who have been instrumental in crimes against humanity. There are too many would-be messiahs active in the world today! Jesus warned his followers about "false Messiahs," leaders who claim to be God's anointed ones, but who actually lead peoples and nations along paths of destruction. "Beware that no one leads you astray," Jesus said, "for many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Messiah!' and will lead many astray" (Matthew 24:1-8). Jesus himself was even cautious in being heralded as the Messiah. So we should beware of leaders whether political or religious who make boastful claims to be the servants of God but who in the end take us and the world down paths that lead us away from the truth, away from justice, and too often into destruction.

But that was not Mandela's way, and therein lies his greatness. He would never have claimed the title of Messiah for himself, or thought of himself in that way. He lived and acted with the kind of humility, compassion and self-service that allows us to refer to him as a messianic figure, a true liberator, an agent of God's justice, peace and reconciliation, someone who, through his life, words and deeds, points towards Jesus and not to himself as the true Messiah.

During Advent we are reminded of the words of the prophets like John the Baptist who foretold the coming of the true Messiah and in doing so described the character of such a Messiah and what he would do. And then in the fullness of time the shepherds heard the sound of the angels: "Do not be afraid; for see -- I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people; to you is born this day in the city of David a saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord." (Luke 2:10-11) The birth of the true Messiah brings great joy to people, it takes away their fears and gives them fresh hope and courage, pointing to a future that will usher in justice and peace for all. This is what Mandela has done for us and in doing so he helps us understand better what it means to proclaim Jesus as Messiah and Lord. For Jesus came that we might be set free and come to know life in all the fullness God wants to give us. This is why we celebrate and give thanks today for Mandela's life and legacy, the father of our nation and express such joy amid our sadness.

*John W. de Gruchy is Emeritus Professor of Christian Studies, University of Cape Town and Extraordinary Professor at the University of Stellenbosch. This is a weekly meditation given at the Eucharist service at [Volmoed Christian Community Centre, Hermanus.](#)*

# Threads of Christian History

~ Joe Sawatzky (Pilgrim in Mthatha)

At Bethany Bible School, I used pictures to teach on the history of Christianity. By comparing and contrasting the images in the pictures, a portrait emerged of God's will for Christian living.



The first story, represented here by *the Christian Martyrs' Last Prayer*, was of Perpetua, a young North African mother who was killed for her faith around the year 200. In the painting, we see a group of Christians gathered in a Roman stadium, awaiting death from the terrible beasts emerging from below. Perpetua was a member of such a group of Christian friends who had been apprehended by the authorities and refused to recant their faith. While in prison, she was strengthened for her suffering by visions of heaven. Before being ripped apart by the beasts, Perpetua and her fellow Christians exchanged the "kiss of peace", the sign of their unity in Christ and their last witness before the bloodthirsty crowd.

The second story was of Constantine I, who in the year 312 defeated his rival Maxentius for supremacy of the Roman Empire. On the eve of battle, the young military commander saw a fiery cross in the sky, accompanied by the command, "by this sign, conquer." Constantine attributed his victory to the sign and, in 313, issued the Edict of Milan which declared Christianity a legal religion.



The third vignette from Christian history was of the Crusades, the series of "holy wars" fought across the first three centuries of the second Christian millenium that European Christians waged against Muslims in order to win back the city of Jerusalem.



The fourth story was of the sixteenth-century Anabaptist martyr Dirk Willems, who was rewarded with a gruesome death for an act of astonishing Christ-like mercy: rescuing his drowning enemy from a frigid lake. Detained for his faith, Dirk escaped from prison and ran across a frozen moat to apparent freedom. His pursuer was not so fortunate; the same ice that upheld Dirk broke under the weight of his enemy. Dirk



turned back to rescue the man, who promptly returned him to prison. Dirk was burned at the stake days later.

Having heard all these stories and studied their images, we discerned as a group two primary actions of Christians down through the ages. Christians have been killed, and they have killed their enemies. In killing, Christians merely mimic the actions of their enemies. In the picture of the Crusades, for example, I was able to clearly show that the only difference between the Christians and their enemies was in the sign of the cross adorning the Christians' armor. Otherwise, the behavior of Christians bears no difference from the behavior of their enemies; each group seeks to kill the other with the sword. So too Constantine, the first "Christian" king, lines up against his enemies much as they line up against him. By contrast, the Christians in the Roman stadium, and Dirk Willems, accepted death rather than do their enemies harm. Their witness was one with Jesus, who offered peace to his enemies even unto death on a cross.

So I asked the students, "Who are the real Christians?" They did not hesitate to point out Perpetua and Dirk.

# Coming and Going...

MCC SwaLeSA's 2012-2013 [YAMENers](#) flew to Cambodia for reentry sessions and our [SALTers](#) travelled back to the United States arriving Friday July 19. After reentry, our 2012-2013 volunteers will be going to their homes in Canada, Cambodia, the United States and Zambia. Blessings to you all – we'll miss you!

MCC SwaLeSA's 2012-2013 [IVEPers](#) have returned! All the best as you become reacquainted with your communities in Lesotho and Swaziland!

Your thoughts and prayers are appreciated as our new SALTers, YAMENers and IVEPers prepare for their service terms. They will be having a joint

orientation in the United States from 13-21 August and will be placed in their 11 month assignments in South Africa and Canada following the orientation. We wish them all the best with their preparations!

MCC Swaziland, Lesotho and South Africa is interested in maintaining connections with former IVEP participants. If you previously participated in IVEP, or if you know someone who did, please contact Suzanne Braun, Connecting Peoples Coordinator for MCC South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland at [connecting\\_peoples\\_coordinator@southafrica.mcc.org](mailto:connecting_peoples_coordinator@southafrica.mcc.org).



## Welcome Radical Journey Volunteers

ANiSA is happy to welcome three new volunteers with the Radical Journey program. Emily Epp, Lydia Stoll and Brianna Derstein arrived on September 5 and will be living and serving in Pietermaritzburg for the next 10 months.

Run by Mennonite Mission Network out of the United States, [Radical Journey](#) is a one-year formational experience in cross-cultural learning and service for young adults who desire to see where God is at work and to imagine ways to join in God's work.

*Here's hoping you have a very  
Merry Christmas!!!  
And a wonderful holiday  
season!*

# Anabaptists Revolutionizing the Doctrine of Discovery: Part Three ~Allen Goddard (Pilgrim in Pietermaritzburg)

In Part I of this essay we looked at the complicity of Christians in the social, political and environmental destruction that have been part of our shared participation in the myth of “The Age of Discovery”. In Part II we looked at how this myth has perpetuated itself, proliferating ever new manifestations of a “Doctrine of Discovery”, from rapidly increasing forest logging and fossil fuel prospecting, to a new colonization of Africa and South America in the form of colossal land grabs and unscrupulous mineral extraction by a clique among the world’s most economically powerful included at the Davos summit each year, together with wealthy independent tycoons and corrupt government officials.

The consequences of the unprecedented greed in these new mutations of the Doctrine of Discovery are increasingly destructive. One of the most serious results has been the collapse of climate negotiations by world leaders in the United Nations Conference of the Parties, after 20 years of annual meetings, so that no binding agreement will now be reached to reduce ballooning global carbon emissions. Why is this serious? The science of global warming demonstrates that should the increase in average temperatures on Earth continue at current rates, the world faces an imminent switchover from one century of climate change to a wholly unpredictable era of climate chaos, caused by the present collapse of Earth’s delicate climate systems. Our predicament matches the predicament of Daniel at Belshazzar’s feast, when writing appeared on a wall.

While “green economists”, technocrats and politicians conspire, using increasingly extreme and destructive technologies in the name of “sustainable development”, to extract yet more profit for themselves from creation’s final stores of wealth, we face a situation as challenging as that faced by Noah, or Joshua, or Hezekiah. We ask similar questions to those which Daniel,

Jeremiah, Hosea or the Apostle Peter pondered, or momentarily voiced, when they looked into the eye of the storm that was God’s inescapable and justified wrath: Will *we* survive this? Will *we* be like God’s remnant communities during the times of Elijah and Jeremiah, who hold onto God in the crumbling of *our* world as we know it? Will we be saved in the moment of trial because we have been remade in our identity like Abraham or Nehemiah or Stephen of Jerusalem? Will we be offered a lifeline, like Noah, to set out with a hope we never had before, to live life counter-culturally, in a solidarity that is grounded on the upside-down realities of God’s love?

The toughest questions in the Bible which search for grace and God’s presence in the face of unprecedented structural violence and powerful greed have been lived out many times over in the Anabaptist tradition, and are questions explored increasingly by many who want to learn from the stories and theologies of Anabaptists. In what remains of this essay we will show how two Christian practices which are essential in the Anabaptist tradition, can and will revolutionize the Doctrine of Discovery, if they are practiced widely enough, because they both oppose any Belshazzar-type-orgy laid on by the powerful and greedy at the expense of the masses of the poor.

First, Anabaptists take seriously the restitutorial aspect of baptismal identity, a Zaccheus-like response to Christ’s love that practises restitution for past wrongs. Repentance or *metanoia*, the biblical response to Christ’s saving love, is assumed to be a first response to the Gospel in every Christian tradition, however, repentance is too often spiritualized as an individualistic inner disposition that is to be “confessed” verbally. The Anabaptist tradition understands the spiritual reality of *metanoia* as first and foremost a practice in community, and practising restitution has been assimilated into the identity and spirituality of Anabaptists over five centuries.

In South Africa this restitutorial dimension of being a follower of Christ could work out practically as follows: Wealthy Christians who have encountered Christ's love and forgiveness are set free in day to day life to find ways of practically restoring to the poor and oppressed dignity and hope, for example through land restitution that includes skills-transfer in meaningful partnerships between wealthy farmers and emergent farmers, or through paying counter-culturally fair daily wages to workers, or through committing part of a household income to educating an orphan in close proximity to the household. These are restitutorial responses to the residual structural violence of Apartheid, a violence that continues in so many ways. The restitutorial identity and spirituality we speak of can only be genuine if it is a loving and free response; we have been set free to enter new relationships with the poor and oppressed, to create new life-chances together, as a freewill offering, responding to the love of Christ. For Anabaptists, this concrete expression of repentance is the very essence of our motivation to make peace practical from day to day.

The Anabaptist tradition of doing restitution implies giving back or making right or healing what was wounded before. This spirituality of making restitution simple and practical without counting the cost, is the most important resource the world needs to undo the Doctrine of Discovery and its increasingly devastating legacy. Consider the following scenario: If Pope Francis I and his Curia in Rome could rescind the Papal Bulls that gave legal backing to the "discovery" and conquest of the "New World" five hundred years ago; if they could apologize officially to the descendants of peoples who died in the genocides of the conquest; and if they could commit the moral agency of the Roman Catholic Church to rescinding all laws in all countries whose constitutions or land tenure systems have legal foundations in the Doctrine of Discovery, the rights of oppressed First Nations and forest peoples all over the world could be greatly advanced.

Consider another possibility: If the Church of England could make a formal apology to the First Nations of North America for appealing to the precedent of those same Papal Bulls, in endorsing Elizabeth I's charter of Jean Cabot to make new "discoveries", and to the Irish people for giving the church's blessing to the "Plantation of Ulster"; if there could be a loving commitment to work with sister churches in the communion, to make symbolic reparation and land restitution, remaining issues around land justice, and forgiveness by First Nations in Canada and the United States and by the Irish People, could be revolutionized, and whole nations could move closer to true reconciliation, freedom from unrecognized guilt, and healing.

A second resource from the Anabaptist tradition which is a dread enemy to the violence of greed and consumerism in today's forms of the Doctrine of Discovery, is the practice of living simply – in Mahatma Gandhi's words - living simply so that others may simply live – and living more in sync with nature. Growing, waiting, making, sharing, repairing, recycling and choosing purchases off the shop shelves and off the car sales-floor, for the good of the earth and not at the expense of the poor, rather than for price, prestige and convenience, each threaten the survival of new forms of the Doctrine of Discovery. If every community of Christians could make restitution more visible in their own context, and commit more intentionally to challenging the consumer culture in which we live, the powerful forces working round the clock to open up for themselves new "frontiers of discovery", could be peacefully taken captive to Christ.

In conclusion, we have seen how two Anabaptist resources, whole communities living restitutorially and whole communities practicing a radically simpler life, revolutionize the destructive effects of the Doctrine of Discovery. Communities that make restitution happen for the disadvantaged poor, and that live with more respect for the limits of nature, are ordinary people achieving justice and peace together, as simple realities of day-to-day living.



A much wider practice of these Anabaptist traditions and related ways of simply doing justice will certainly have more global effects. In June 2013 Oxfam made a public call to multinational companies to restructure their salary scales so that CEOs' take-home pay could be substantially reduced, in order for the lowest paid members of companies to have a better life. If Christians all over the world would implement this call themselves, as one more expression of restitutorial spirituality, in the way we do economics in the home and in local community organizations, we could bring loving pressure to bear

on all leaders in all spheres of work in our congregations, to simply and quickly create a more justly structured economic system. Through a new counter-culture of restitution and simplicity the gaping inequalities caused by the invited guests at the Belshazzar orgy can be reconciled, Earth's rainforests may be saved from final destruction, the onset of climate chaos might still be averted, and a way to invite God's blessing at a feast of joy, instead of God's writing on the wall, may still be found, for a hopeful, fruitful future.

## Get Involved with ANiSA

Interested in becoming more involved with ANiSA? Here are some ideas how...

- Inform us of trainings, workshops, courses or other events happening in your area.
- Volunteer with the Peace Library
- Help with translation of resources
- Organize ANiSA Dialogues in your area
- Send us your thoughts, musings, stories and blogposts.

Contact Andrew Suderman at [aksuderman@gmail.com](mailto:aksuderman@gmail.com) for more information

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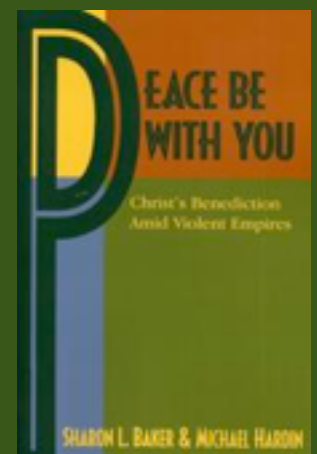
#### Peace Be With You: Christ's Benediction Amid Violent Empires

By: Sharon L. Baker; Michael Hardin Editors

Is it the church's role to sustain cultures and empires? Can the church both stand for justice and continue in the way of peace? This book offers proposals for those who want to carry forth Christ's benediction of peace.

Authors of these 14 chapters, in order of appearance: Brian McLaren, Craig A. Carter, Sharon L. Baker, Andy Alexis-Baker, Derek Alan Woodard-Lehman, Ted Grimsrud, Richard T. Hughes, B. Keith Putt, James F. S. Amstutz, Anthony Siegrist, Jean F. Risley, David B. Miller, Reta Halteman Finger, Jonathan Sauder

R 125 (Remember, ANiSA Pilgrims receive 10% off!)



# The Naked Christian: Reflections on ANISA Conference

~ John de Gruchy (Pilgrim in Hermanus)

In October Volmoed hosted a conference organised by the Anabaptist Network in South Africa (ANISA). Amongst the books for sale during the conference was one entitled "The Naked Anabaptist" by Stuart Murray which I was tempted to buy just for the title! But lest you think that Anabaptists are some nudist sect and that Volmoed is turning into a nudist colony catered for by a "naked chef," I thought that I should say something about the Anabaptists for those who do not know who they are and what they stand for. So like the author of "The Naked Anabaptist," or the TV programme "The Naked Scientist," let me give you the bare and unembellished facts.

At the time of the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century there were three main movements seeking to reform the Catholic Church. The first was associated with Martin Luther in Germany; the second with Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin in Switzerland, and the third and most radical was nicknamed Anabaptist by its opponents. The term means "re-baptised" because the movement began when several Catholics, amongst

them a few ex-monks, rejected infant baptism and, though none were ordained, baptised each other as a sign of their faith and commitment to follow Jesus according to the gospel rather than Church tradition. In doing so, and in contrast to the other Reformers, they turned their backs on Christendom, an amalgam of Church and State that had existed since Emperor Constantine in the 4th century. They were not going to wait for the approval of the magistrates or princes before reforming the Church. This challenge to political and religious power was too much for the authorities who feared that social order would be seriously undermined. So the movement was



brutally repressed, resulting in the martyrdom of many, but also the expansion of Anabaptism across Europe.

Gaining support largely amongst peasants and the poor, the Anabaptists emphasized the need for every Christian to be a committed disciple of Jesus, spoke of the church as an alternative community of believers in which there was no hierarchy but where all were priests, and called on all Christians to live according to the Sermon on the Mount and therefore to renounce violence and pursue peace. These are the bare facts about the Anabaptists, though the whole story is more complex, for the movement fragmented into different groups, the Amish amongst them, and some were eventually organised into denominations such as the Mennonites, named after Menno Simons who gave the movement structure and direction in Holland. Today the Mennonites are a world-wide Church family of roughly 1.8 million though there is no Mennonite church as such in South Africa. But Anabaptism itself is not a denomination, it is a vision of being the Church and being a Christian; it is, if you like, naked Christianity, Christianity without embellishment.

Whether one agrees with everything that the original Anabaptists stood for, Christians in many denominations today would agree with much for which they affirmed without necessarily calling themselves Anabaptists, or joining a Mennonite congregation. In fact, in recent times Catholics and Protestants alike have apologized to the descendents of the Anabaptists for the way in which they persecuted them. Mennonites are also in ecumenical dialogue with many of the mainline Churches, including the Roman Catholic. And it is noteworthy that Pope Francis in calling on Catholics and other Christians to practice a more modest life-style of discipleship, echoes the early Anabaptist criticism of the ostentatious life-style of

bishops and popes in their day. Like St. Francis of Assisi, the Anabaptists sought to live according to Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. And that, after all, is one of the most radical of all the foundational documents of Christian faith. "Preach the gospel," said St. Francis, "and where necessary use words."

Much could be said about the Anabaptist understanding of being the Church and being Christian that is highly relevant today. For example, the Anabaptist advocacy of a simple life-style is of fundamental importance in bearing a Christian witness against the consumerism that characterizes our world with all its disastrous results for millions of people trapped in poverty, as well as for the environment itself. As a Mennonite cook-book, which Isobel has used for many years, puts it, we have to learn to do more with less, or live more simply so that others can simply live. Equally fundamental is the need for Christians to resist violence as a way to resolve conflicts, to be numbered amongst the peace-makers of the world, and therefore to work for justice and reconciliation, to forgive and restore rather than destroy enemies. We should also affirm with naked Anabaptism the need to avoid being ostentatious. That is, not to parade our piety, but to live humbly as the servants of Jesus who did not come to be served, but to serve and give his life for the sake of the world. How often in the gospels Jesus calls on his followers not to claim privilege or seek power, but to live humbly, faithfully, and compassionately. The problem is that too much Christianity follows the way of the world in hankering after power and influence, status and fine appearance, rather than espousing the way of the naked Christ hanging on the cross.



The way of Christ and therefore the way of the disciple of Christ is the way of the cross. This may look like weakness, but it is in fact the embodiment of God's power. God's way of working in the world is through self-emptying love. Looking back on the Anabaptist conference at Volmoed, I think it was the understanding of God as self-emptying love embodied in Jesus and its implications for being the Church and being Christian in the world today that, in the end, became the focal point for our discussion. We were reminded that George Ellis, the UCT scientist and cosmologist, has spoken of this divine self-emptying love as that which lies at the heart of the universe and, as such, is fundamental to the way in which we should all live in the world irrespective of denomination or religion. How to do so is the big question, but not to do so can only lead to further wars and violence, and the degradation and destruction of the planet. We can learn much from those Anabaptists who, like St. Francis of Assisi and others before and since, took seriously Jesus' life as well as his words as the naked truth:

"You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

*John W. de Gruchy is Emeritus Professor of Christian Studies, University of Cape Town and Extraordinary Professor at the University of Stellenbosch. This is a weekly meditation given at the Eucharist service at [Volmoed Christian Community Centre](#), Hermanus.*

# Identity

~ Wayne Eaves (Pilgrim in Cape Town)

I recently started doing some open water swimming, nothing too serious, it helps feed my addiction to water. The solitude and the repetition help me center myself, they draw me back from the thoughts and pressures of working in the faith based NGO sector. In some ways, open water – oceans, dams, rivers have formed my identity, maybe it's a tribal thing.

Recently I was privileged enough to sit in a dialogue discussing what revenge and forgiveness looks like in South Africa. Now having lived in a world that is increasingly politically correct, I have gotten out of discussing colour and regarding it as acceptable. So to sit in a group talking about revenge and forgiveness and to have colour coming out as a distinct boundary marker was jarring. To hear people of colour talking about the collective need to regain identity without the fear or need to include other people groups was a struggle. I am a middle class white man, raised in a culture of fear, surely this type of exclusive thinking can only mean revolution?

But what if this is exactly what we need? What if we need to acknowledge our whiteness, our blackness, our colouredness, to enable us to collectively move forward? What if the true gift of forgiveness in South Africa looks like people of different colours and cultures retreating into their own spaces to discover their community identities, away from the traumas of the past and the present? What if we were to truly imagine a community that had been previously disadvantaged and downtrodden by the evils of Apartheid being able to lament those times and to truly lament the failures of the New South Africa with its thousands of false dawns and promises?

I have spent the time since this dialogue, meditating on Psalm 88, a Psalm of lament, a Psalm with no resolution, a song that almost seems apt within South Africa today. Where are we going and why are we here as a nation? What are the purposes of our diversity if they are not to be embraced? How can we speak of a collective conscience when the diverse consciences that rest within our society are not at peace within themselves? Is this all meaningless, do we allow ourselves to slip into anarchy?

We need to determine what it means to be our respective cultures, what our roles are within this country as we move forward. As Christians we are equally challenged, we are called to be Christ within our society, those that bring the very essence of Shalom into the greater world, importantly beyond the borders of the sanctuaries we have created, that are often prohibitive to transformational discourse. Over the course of the dialogue I was reminded that much like Psalm 88 to many people who have suffered violence, the church has not been a place of forgiveness but rather a place where “You have caused my beloved and my friend to shun me; my companions have become darkness.”

However in the midst of this notion of no resolution something profoundly beautiful transpired, inspired in part by the work of Ched Myers, a Christian theologian who regularly dismantles the essence of the economics of the Christian faith. What if in the midst of violence, forgiveness is found not in the sanctuary but rather in the darkness. What if we learn to embrace our identity through being in the darkness? Fr Richard Rohr suggests that when we learn to embrace our own inner darkness we are more fully aware and more fully part of the divine, as we have learned to embrace the complexity of our natures rather than attempting to tame or subdue it.

# Sketches of Early Anabaptists: Conrad Grebel

~ Karen Suderman (Pilgrim in Pietermaritzburg)

**Name:** Conrad Grebel

**Birth Date:** 1498

**Death Date:** 1526

**Biography:** Born in Grüningen in the Canton of Zurich in 1498, Grebel moved with his family to Zurich around 1513. He was the son of a merchant and very well educated.

He became a follower of Ulrich Zwingli during the Reformation in Zurich, but ultimately broke with Zwingli over issues of abolishment of Mass and infant baptism.

On the night of January 21, 1525 Grebel performed the first adult baptism at the home of Felix Mantz, thus sparking the beginning of what became known as the Anabaptist Movement or the Radical Reformation.

**Most Notably:** Grebel can be regarded as the father of Anabaptism due to his bold action of rebaptism in 1525.



*Conrad Grebel*

For more information visit the [Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online](#) click [here](#) for the full article.

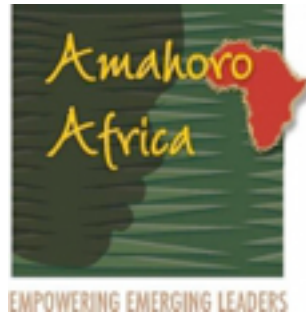
Within the works of Ched Myers he often dismantles the parable of the talents, he argues that the slave who buries his money is in fact the hero of the story, he is the one who understands that money has no real value, other to cause us to become slaves to a system of domination, real value is found in the earth, in people not being exploited but being allowed to embrace life beyond normal boundaries. I find this so refreshing; imagine we learnt how to tell the stories of our cultures differently removed from the boundaries and rules of societal norms.

What if we learned to dismantle the domination systems that have told us how to view issues such as race, violence and forgiveness, and then learn to retell our community stories? Much like parables allowing for an interpretation that brings life, not one that instills fear and provokes the establishment of boundaries that prevents us from being the Shalom of Christ to the world.

Back to swimming. I mentioned my open water passion for a reason; we all have something that we believe makes us unique, but even within that we seek acceptance from others. Identity is much like this; we need to find the others like us, to communicate properly with them, to tell stories that paint pictures of a world that has hope, a world where violence is not the norm and forgiveness is a given.

In this light this quote from Ched Myers maybe sums up what our stories and parables in our age could and should look like, “Only by bringing the parables back down to earth can we encounter their power both to unmask the “real world” in its cruelty and presumption, and to proclaim the radical hope of God’s sovereignty, buried like a seed in the hard soil of our history.” Hope is not a commodity; it is a right.

# Reflections on Amahoro Uganda 2013



## Telling Our Stories of Violence

~ Marlyn Faure (Pilgrim in Cape Town)

This was my first time going to a different country. I was excited to see this land. Our flight was delayed so I was even more anxious to get there. As the plane touched the Ugandan air-strip the sun was setting. It felt like I was in scene from *Out of Africa* – except now the scars of colonial rule were much more evident. As we disembarked from the plane, I noticed army officials carrying large guns. I felt my body tense up – the same feeling I get when waiting, next the heavily armed guard, for the ATM machine to be re-filled. While I thought it was unusual that this was one of first sights you see as you enter the country, I later discovered that the country had experienced a terrorist attack and was forced to increase security measures.

As we approached the large gate of the environmental centre we were staying at for the first night, another guard appeared, with a large rifle in hand. I was quite taken aback by these sights. I wondered what it must be like to grow up surrounded by the military with guns. I wondered what that must do to how you understand the world. Does it breed fear of a volatile state, where the only refuge is armed men and women? Or perhaps it instils safety, the feeling of being protected from an unknown and violent *other*?

I was attending an *Amahoro* gathering, a Burundian word for peace. Peace in the holistic sense – a kind of shalom. I wondered about peace in a nation with armed men just up road from our hotel. It seemed I

was stuck in a cheesy movie about Africa. I was simply observing ‘objectively’. I was not part of this story – I was simply here for a conference. I was not part of this violence. I kept wondering about how ‘these people’ must live. Standing on the sidelines, talking about what it means to be peacemakers in these situations. But my intentions betrayed me. How could I miss that when this kind of violence is so pervasive in my own country? While the military may not be patrolling street corners, I live in one of the most violent countries in the world.

Being a South African at the conference attended by people from mostly other African countries was an interesting experience. The structure of the conference allowed for two plenary sessions, one in the morning and one in the evening. The South African group was one of six countries that facilitated a session about their context in relation to the power and the Kingdom of God. People from other African countries were expecting to learn from how South Africa has successfully transitioned into a peaceful democracy and engaged in a reconciliation process that did not plummet into a civil war. They were shocked to hear that South Africa has one highest rates of violence against women, the biggest gaps between the rich and poor and a country where racism is alive and well. In the neighbourhood I live in, Hanover Park, gang violence became so bad that Helen Zille asked Jacob Zuma to deploy the army

to help maintain peace. This is the violence I have grown up in. Yes, South Africa is rich with other stories, but I had forgotten this one. While I was wondering what must be like to grow up seeing men carrying rifles as signs of safety, I had forgotten about the violence that was tearing my own community apart. I had not paid attention to how de-sensitized I had become to that violence.

I recently visited De Doorns, a farming community just outside of Cape Town. The area was peaceful – farm workers were making their way home ending another long day. But this was the sight of violent protests just last year. The horrific Marikana protests where 44 people were killed and recent violent service delivery protest delivery bears testimony to the violence that is embedded in this nation. But this story is not often told. The people at *Amahoro* had a peaceful picture of South Africa. Even I was fooled. I had forgotten that about the raging violence in own country.

But what does it mean to tell these stories? What would the point be of re-telling gruesome stories of blood and rage? Why simply begin a new story, centred on peace and love? What good can this kind of narrative bring to a world so pained already? I think we have a duty to tell of the violence. Our silence about these stories does not create peace. Instead it creates an illusion that the world is as it should be. While the people who suffer as a result of violence goes unnoticed and unaided. Telling these stories is about being in solidarity, being in solidarity with those who suffer because the world has yet to be put to right. Perhaps we can speak of peace only amidst violence.

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## Amahoro 2013 Reflections

~ Bonolo Makgale (Pilgrim in Cape Town)

Amahoro is a gathering of Christian leaders across the globe. Its a space that unites every nation regardless of race, culture, gender and status. Amahoro creates a space where everyone is welcome at a table of fellowship to share their ideas, their perception of God and how He feels about the world and humanity. The beauty about Amahoro is that it shapes our theology but not only shapes our theology but brings the theology in context. A theology that is relevant and contextual to the world around us. We live in a world that is in need of theology that will bring about transformation and its in spaces like Amahoro where we can engage and develop a healthy theology

The discussion for Amahoro 2013 was around the Kingdom of God and Politics. It was a space where we could reflect and engage about political realities of Africa and develop a theology that will bring hope, peace and justice in our nation. We had a very diverse group of leaders from South Africa, Uganda, Rwanda, DRC (Goma), Kenya, Canada and USA. Even in our diversity there was a great sense of unity, we shared meals, tears, laughter, freely shared our thoughts and our sense of spirituality.

I want to highlight a conversation that challenged me and left me with a heavy heart. We had a team from the DRC in Goma. Hearing of the injustice in Goma, and this time around not seeing these from the news but hearing from people who live through this daily was challenging. The war that left many children in this region orphaned, the abuse of women and children and the absolute poverty in the DRC regions left me broken. For a moment I was overwhelmed with a sense of hopelessness but I was comforted that we are sitting around a table of hope for Africa and each one of us around this table desire to be an agent of transformation. I had hope that there is a safe platform to engage in conversations and collectively trust God to bring peace and justice. The significance about this hope is that its an active hope, a hope that caused us to commit to being prophetic voices in our broken world and also be prophetic with our actions.

At the end of Amahoro I made a commitment to continue to honor God by loving humanity and advocating for peace and justice in the world around me. I committed myself to be a vessel to be used for peace, justice and equality. I committed myself to be an agent of transformation that will bring hope in my social context. In the words of Mahatma Gandhi - **"Be the change that you wish to see in the world."** My pursuit is to see my actions and speech reflect the heart of God about humanity and the world around me, and see the peace of God that surpasses human understanding reign in this world

Amahoro!!!



# Healthy Soil = Healthy Crops = Healthy Food

~ Lucas Klassen, MCC SwaLeSA Writing Intern

The rolling green hills of fertile sugarcane crops set the background for a conservation agriculture workshop at the El Olam Camp in Eston, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa in February 2013.

Attendees ranged from Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) service workers to those involved in MCC-funded programs, such as the Emthonjeni HIV/AIDS program near Johannesburg, Growing Nations Trust and Paballong HIV/AIDS Centre and crèche in Lesotho.

The workshop focused on “transformational development,” the idea of using Scripture as the basis for agriculture techniques that are good for the land. The emphasis is on food security, which refers to a sufficient amount of food for a farmer and his or her family to survive. The initial focus is primarily on small-scale farmers, with the long-term goal of the techniques being adopted by communities for food production and, ultimately, on a national scale.

“I’m engaged in order to contribute to food security and resilience for small-scale farmers,” said James Alty, the director of the workshop who, with his wife Joan, is serving as MCC’s Co-Representatives for Swaziland, Lesotho and South Africa. A key part of the workshop was to explain why healthy soils contribute to healthy crops, which in turn contribute to the production of healthy food.



The conservation agriculture workshop also provided ample opportunity for hands-on experience in the techniques presented, allowing attendees to learn the techniques and bring them back to their respective communities. After learning the theory of how to create a demonstration garden, attendees participated in the implementation of these practices on a 6x6 meter garden plot.

The beautiful setting was symbolic of the potential that conservation agriculture can unlock. Much of southern Africa is plagued by soil erosion due to poor farming practices, with most farmers unaware of why their current practices are contributing to it. Workshops such as this play an important role in raising awareness of the practices of conservation agriculture, which can ultimately increase crop yield and generate more food and income for the farmer.

With 15 attendees from throughout southern Africa, there is opportunity for this workshop to begin change in their areas of influence. Through the observance of demonstration gardens, surrounding communities will see the benefits of conservation agriculture, which will increase the likelihood of these techniques spreading into the community. When it comes to the benefits of conservation agriculture, seeing is believing.

## Gutsy Peacemakers



**Corrie Ten Boom (1892-1983)**

*When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the love itself*

Corrie Ten Boom and her family provided a sanctuary in their home in the Netherlands for Jews who were being persecuted during World War II. The family was turned in by an informant, arrested, and taken to concentration camps. Corrie was released from Ravensbruck a week before all the women her age were killed, but her father and sister died in the camps. After her release, she traveled the world telling her story. At a church service in Germany, she met a man she recognized as a Ravensbruck guard, who thanked her for the message she had given about God's forgiveness. Corrie felt her anger rising, but prayed that God would help her forgive her enemy. In God's strength, she was able to reach out her hand in forgiveness.

## Got Guts?

### **ANiSA would love to highlight Gutsy Peacemakers of South Africa!**

**Help us recognize Gutsy Peacemakers in South Africa both past and present. Tell us the name of the person, give a brief bio and highlight why you think they're gutsy peacemakers.**

**They may be featured in the next ANiSA Newsletter.**

**Send your suggestions to [kasuderman@gmail.com](mailto:kasuderman@gmail.com)**

## In the Books: The ANiSA Peace Library



### **New shipments of books to arrive**

We are grateful to receive more books to further develop our collection. Several boxes are due to arrive from Canada. As well, several boxes of books have been generously donated by Thomas Scarborough from Cape Town. We are very grateful to receive these gifts. Many thanks to those who were so generous in helping these books to arrive.

Keep watch in the coming months as these new books and resources are made available through the ANiSA Peace Library and Resource Centre.

Don't forget that we've got wonderful journals as well. Titles include *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, *Mission Focus Annual Review*, *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology*.

Books or journal articles can be accessed and made available to you by contacting the library at [kasuderman@gmail.com](mailto:kasuderman@gmail.com).

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We welcome your contributions of articles, events and updates to the quarterly ANiSA Newsletter.

Please send contributions to Karen Suderman at [kasuderman@gmail.com](mailto:kasuderman@gmail.com)

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