

# **The Gifts of an Extended Theological Table: World Community Cookbooks as Organic Theology**

written by Malinda Elizabeth Berry for

*A Table of Sharing:*

*Mennonite Central Committee and the Expanding Networks of Mennonite Identity*

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## **ABSTRACT**

This essay is about Mennonite Central Committee's World Community Cookbook series comprised of *More-with-Less Cookbook* (known more commonly as *More-with-Less*), *Extending the Table*, and *Simply in Season*. It makes an argument for reading the three books, especially the first volume, as organic constructive/systematic theology and MCC, through the pioneering work of Doris Janzen Longacre, as an organization that does theology organically.

## **ESSAY**

As cultural artifacts, cookbooks help subgroups define themselves within and even over-and-against dominant culture. The shelves of Mennonite kitchens are stacked with such artifacts. Behind each recipe there is a story, and many collections of recipes commemorate significant moments and groups of people: the fiftieth anniversary of a congregation, an extended family, or a community organization. Yet, as recent articles about Mennonite cookbooks by Matthew Bailey-Dick and Rebekah Trollinger observe, in our theologizing we have neglected to turn to these cultural artifacts as theological and ethical resources. Perhaps, as Bailey-Dick suggests, our neglect of these theological resources is based on the way we too often focus on the sociological conflation of culture and faith rather than exploring how "the cookbook...stands as a witness to the Gospel and a mission partner for God's work in the world."<sup>1</sup> I will take this perspective and focus on two of the eight observations about "cookbook discourse" Bailey-Dick's essay develops, namely simple living and the globalization of Mennonites, by giving most of my attention to the theme of simple living as an example of a theological commitment Mennonite Central Committee calls its constituent denominations to

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Bailey-Dick, "The Kitchenhood of All Believers: A Journey into the Discourse of Mennonite Cookbooks," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 79, no. 2 (April 2005): 153-178. See also Rebekah Trollinger, "Mennonite Cookbooks and the Pleasures of Habit," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 81, no. 4 (October 2007): 531-47.

make in light of the global partnerships that form the basis of its organizational identity.

I am part of what we might think of as the “More-with-Less Generation” of Mennonites. With her trusty copy of *More-with-Less Cookbook* in hand, my mother chose to trade full-time work as a college professor for full-time homemaking during her first decade of motherhood. She and my father had heard and studied the good news as interpreted and shared by Doris Janzen Longacre and the many people who contributed anecdotes, poetry, and prose (not to mention recipes!) to the cookbook and two additional books for taking *More-with-Less* beyond the kitchen, *Living More with Less* edited by Longacre and *Living More With Less: Study/Action Guide* edited by Delores Histan Friesen.<sup>2</sup> Choosing the pattern I wanted for my cloth napkin, sneaking a pinch of bread dough from the weekly baking, and helping my parents during their monthly shift at the Co-op are all childhood memories I carry with me from the way our family lived more with less. My generation and I were nurtured by Christians who believed that they had a responsibility to live in the world in an unencumbered way. Not until I began to rub shoulders with others outside my denominational faith community did I begin to realize how much my view of North American culture had been shaped *directly* by Longacre’s *More-with-Less* and *indirectly* by John Howard Yoder’s *The Politics of Jesus*!<sup>3</sup> In shaping a generation, Longacre also shaped Anabaptist and Mennonite God-talk, discipleship, and congregational life. In making a case for theological speech and ethical formation at home in light of what happens far away, Longacre and MCC set the stage for thinking about peace theology both in terms of international relations and community-building table fellowship. However we must remember that our cookbook discourse is not confined to private conversation around the

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<sup>2</sup> Doris Janzen Longacre, *Living More with Less* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1980); and Delores Histan Friesen, *Living More with Less: Study/Action Guide* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1981).

<sup>3</sup> While I am sure it could be argued that Longacre’s work was likely influenced by Yoder considering that she had studied at Goshen Biblical Seminary after graduating from Goshen College in 1961, my point is that her work, in its practicality, simplicity, and spirituality had just as much, if not more impact of those of us who were babes in arms as *The Politics of Jesus* began to appear on course syllabi and library shelves. Furthermore, arguably as many people, if not more, have come into the Mennonite fold via *More-with-Less* than via *The Politics of Jesus*. The two groundbreaking books can, of course, be viewed as complementary. For example, in the twenty-fifth anniversary edition of *More-with-Less*, June Mears Driedger explains that her entree into Anabaptism and Mennonitism came through both books. See Doris Janzen Longacre, *More-with-Less Cookbook* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2000), 199.

dinner table.

The many other voices and bodies taking part in “our” conversation and “our” food became very real to me one morning when I attended a chapel service at Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York. I noticed on the order of worship that the day’s theme was “*Extending the Table*,” which made me think of the beloved cookbook by that name.<sup>4</sup> As it turned out, this phrasing was more than mere coincidence. The worship leader, a professor visiting from Yale Divinity School, had chosen all the words for worship that day from the *Extending the Table* cookbook edited by Joetta Handrich Schlabach as an MCC project published by Herald Press. That experience revealed to me that this MCC tradition of cookbooks, a tradition to which I and others who have cooked and eaten those cookbooks’ recipes belong, is not just a cultural and culinary tradition. Indeed, these books are also theological and ethical resources. But how are *More-with-Less*, *Extending the Table*, and *Simply in Season* theological resources?<sup>5</sup> I will answer that question by making a two-part argument. First, as Mennonite Central Committee’s constituents who have made these cookbooks possible by contributing and using their recipes, we should understand ourselves as contributing to a trilogy of Anabaptist constructive, organic theology. Second, the organic theology contained in the World Community Cookbook series contributes to the theology and ethics of simple living, a social movement that connects the politics of daily living with a concern for authentic connection with people rather than with things.

### **The Task of Systematic/Constructive Theology**

The term systematic theology usually conjures up examples of voluminous works of excruciating theological detail like Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Theologica* or Karl Barth’s *Church*

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<sup>4</sup> My affinity for *Extending the Table* comes from the two-fold introduction I had to the book. First, I have a vivid memory of a chapel presentation Joetta Handrich Schlabach made about the project while I was a student at Bethany Christian High School during the 1988-89 school year that left me with a sense that this was much more than a cookbook. Second, for several months my mother, a college friend of Doris Janzen Longacre and a *More-with-Less* fan, introduced dishes from the cookbook into our family’s diet.

<sup>5</sup> Doris Janzen Longacre, *More-with-Less Cookbook* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998); Joetta Handrich Schlabach and Kristina Mast Burnett, *Extending the Table: A World Community Cookbook* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1991); and Mary Beth Lind and Cathleen Hockman-Wert, *Simply in Season: A World Community Cookbook* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2005).

*Dogmatics.* Cookbooks never appear in the mind's eye when someone says, "systematic theology," and yet I believe the term is applicable to the World Community Cookbook Series, albeit in unconventional—or to state it more positively, organic—ways.

A primary feature of conventional systematic theology follows from its primary task: offering a clear and coherent accounting of Christian faith using traditional doctrinal categories like revelation, scripture, providence, christology, pneumatology, ecclesiology, and so forth. In recent years, theologians have begun referring to systematic theology as "constructive theology" to reflect the fact that this branch of academic theology is not defined solely by its use of doctrinal categories. Following in the tradition of pioneering German theologian Friederich Schleiermacher (1768 – 1834), a constructive approach to systematics focuses on several foundational principles or claims and then builds a theological system by demonstrating the centrality of those principles to correlating doctrines. For example, rather than writing a book detailing the historical and rhetorical inter-relatedness of doctrines about the incarnation, christology, and ecclesiology, a theologian taking a more constructive approach to these themes might begin by describing a group of knitters in a local congregation who make prayer shawls. Using the knitters' words to describe how they feel connected to Jesus' expressions of compassion as they knit, the theologian would explain how and why theological coherence can be found between the knitters' testimonies about their experience and these doctrines. The theologians' constructive task is to explore and explain how and why it makes sense that knitting shawls can become a form of Christian ministry, expressing our hopes for healing in Jesus' name.

As a theologian, I can testify to the intellectually and even aesthetically satisfying quality of cogently cataloged theological concepts, the hallmark of systematic theologies. And yet, an inevitable criticism of such theologizing surfaces: conventional systematic/constructive theology can easily become more of an academic exercise and more spiritually nourishing for professional theologians than for "people in the pew." While I am sympathetic to this concern, I do not believe that this divide is inevitable. Because authentic spirituality is a vital part of one's

faith, spirituality should also be theologically informed. Without a meaningful connection between systematic/constructive theology and spirituality, even our most earnest expressions of Christian faith run the risk of being distorted. Like the example I gave about the knitting group, academic theology in its systematic/constructive form helps keep our thinking clear. So the question is this: How do we connect the insights, experiences, and concerns of all our faith communities' members with the practices of theological reflection as faith seeks understanding?

In light of these questions, I believe that conventional forms and modes of theologizing can learn from the more organic model for theological reflection prominent among Latin American Christian communities in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>6</sup> Before I summarize the Latin American model, an explanation of how I am using the terms “conventional” and “organic” is in order.

### **Conventional Versus Organic Theology**

In this age of environmental crisis, the words “green” and “organic” are ubiquitous, and we must be discerning about how we use these terms. As I use organic (and the interchangeable term “homegrown”) in the remainder of this essay, I will be employing it in its broad definitions—I am not just referring to a rating or label placed on products that conform to the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s organic guidelines and standards. While a chemist dealing with (in)organic compounds would nuance this more, at a basic level, something that is “organic” is a carbon-based organism that lives, dies, and decays. Beyond this basic definition, we are familiar with the generic use of organic in terms of foods and products manufactured without chemical fertilizers, pesticides, or synthetic materials (i.e., USDA ratings). But organic also describes the relationship among different bits and pieces that somehow combine in a harmonious way: the disparate parts, once they join together, clearly form a unified whole. An example of organic in this sense might be a jigsaw puzzle or the ingredients that a cook

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<sup>6</sup> While liberation theology led to a mighty sea change within Christian theology in its demand for practical and livable theology from the society’s underside where Christians did not write dissertations because they were spending their days trying to meet their daily needs, it has also become a bit of a historical movement in light of both the dissolution of eastern European and Soviet-style-communism and the rise of Pentecostalism around the world.

combines to make apple crisp (see *More-with-Less*, pages 270 ff for the recipe). Whether by design or through discovery, the pieces and ingredients fit together in deeply satisfying ways.

Similarly, organic theologizing is a kind of God-talk that emerges from the living, breathing, organic grassroots of a faith community. Ordinary people produce this God-talk when they speak from the heart and reflect on the everydayness of faith lived out in their corner of the world, what some Latin American theologians refer to as *lo cotidiano*.<sup>7</sup> In other words, this is theological speech that has not been treated with chemical fertilizers or pesticides. While it may be informed by sources like the Apostle's Creed or the Schleithem Confession, organic theologizing does not begin with the assumption that it must conform to those sources. Organic God-talk describes the natural and essential aspects of faith which have not been engineered to be pest resistant and heresy-proof so there are more "imperfections" than meticulously cultivated God-talk grown in the academy. But the "imperfections" of organically grown theologizing are not really imperfections. *The purpose of organic theology and homegrown God-talk is to help communities take stock of their shared experiences and consider what kind of fruit they are producing, rather than viewing church as a place where we shop for unblemished fruits and vegetables plucked from the produce isles without getting our hands dirty.* What is your disposition when you behold the biggest, shiniest, reddest apples; the handiest bag of mini carrots (cleaned, cut, and ready to eat); or the firmest "vine-ripened" tomatoes this side of the border?

My advocacy for organic theology is based on my own conversion to the importance of homegrown God-talk through Delores Williams' doctoral seminars which I attended during my coursework at Union. Williams described the organic approach to theology analogically as she advocated for its authenticity vis-à-vis conventional theology. Her analogy takes us back to the produce section of the grocery store I described above. Imagine that you are standing among crates, baskets, and refrigerated displays of vegetables and fruits. From peas to potatoes and apples to oranges, you read the signs telling you that you have the option of conventional

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<sup>7</sup> Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 66ff.; and Daniel H Levine, *Popular Voices in Latin American Catholicism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 317.

produce or locally-grown, organic produce. The question facing you is this: do you want the chemically altered and manipulated fruit or vegetable—the one upon which chemical warfare has been waged so that it could make the 2,000-mile journey to the display in front of you without looking worse for wear? Do you want the apple that was grown two miles from where you are standing because it ripened on the branch and never met a wax dip because it did not need to survive a trip from the Pacific Northwest to the center of Ohio where you are shopping? Which of the two is closer to the true essence of what God created an apple to be: the conventional or the homegrown version?

Williams identifies a corollary between this culinary and nutritional choice and the dynamics around theologizing. Scientists, with good intentions, have tinkered with the genetics of conventional apple seeds to make their produce more pest-resistant, juicier, bigger, bruise-resistant, and able to withstand miles of transport from field to processing plant to grocery store to table. If you have ever planted a garden in your own backyard or plucked a piece of fruit from a neighbor's tree you will know that there are real differences between the homegrown version of fruits and vegetables and what awaits you in the produce section of Walmart, Meijer, Kroger, Food Lion, Safeway, or even Whole Foods. Like those scientists, we theologians with our good intentions have also tinkered with Christian doctrine to maintain church teachings' heresy-resistant and heterodox-immune qualities, often with a healthy dose of male-centered biases. What we did not pay attention to is that our conventional varieties of doctrine have taken on the characteristics of ideals—what our christology *should* look and sound like—rather than cultivating christologies that *are*.

As Christians, many of us have treated church like a box store where we can go one-stop-shopping and get the most bang for our buck. Rather than teaching each other how to tend, prune, and harvest the apples in our local orchards—that is to speak authentically about Christ—we leave it up to others to do the cultivating of our literal and figurative food. We do not ask questions or wonder about the differences among Fujis, Jonathans, Honeycrisps, and Galas or high christology, low christology, and liberation christology.

To summarize, while there are a variety of ways to systematize basic Christian beliefs and construct a persuasive outline of our faith, I believe it is important that we make deliberate choices about the resources we use as we develop our theology. If we rely solely on conventional ways of doing theology, then we risk losing touch with the authentic, homegrown experiences of Christian faith that grow in the soil of *our* everyday living, not only what tradition has authorized as “safe.” The value of organic God-talk is that by its very nature, it has been cultivated in our own backyards and neighborhoods, the places where God is present with us as we discern how what we experience fits together with our confession of faith.

### **Latin American Liberation Theology as Organic Theology**

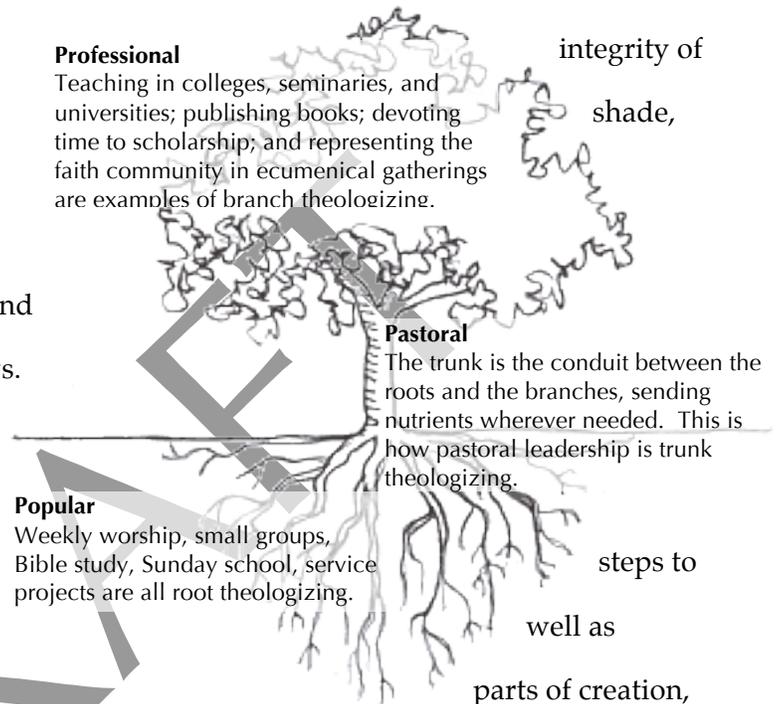
In their introduction to liberation theology from Latin America, the brothers Clodovis and Leonardo Boff explain that while “the term ‘liberation theology’ conjures up the names of its best-known exponents...liberation theology is a cultural and ecclesial phenomenon by no means restricted to a few professional theologians.” They add, “It is a way of thinking that embraces most of the membership of the church, especially in the Third World.”<sup>8</sup> This last affirmation certainly resonates with MCC’s commitment to global partnerships, antiracism work, and domestic legislative lobbying efforts, understanding that North Americans’ view of the church must be shaped by the worldwide communion of Anabaptists through bodies like Mennonite World Conference and the World Council of Churches. Indeed, through partnerships with Latin American Anabaptists throughout the decades, North American Mennonites have continued to ask critical questions about where and how justice-oriented social analysis impacts peace theology. In addition to this resonance with a globalized ecclesiology, the three levels of theologizing within the church the Boffs describe using the metaphor of a tree gives us a way of “rooting” academic theological discourse and reflection in the church.

The three levels of theological reflection correspond to three modes or levels of

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<sup>8</sup> Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 11.

discourse, practice, and method simultaneously at work in the church, namely, the popular, pastoral, and professional modes (Figure 1). Moving their model of church from the abstract to the metaphorical and analogical, the Boffs observe that “liberation theology could be compared to a tree.” When I look at a tree, whether it is a sapling or hundreds of years old, I am amazed by both the complexity and simplicity of a tree’s life. Roots, trunk, and branches all work together to maintain the health and integrity of this organism even as it provides food, shade, and shelter to other creatures in its ecosystem. One of the church’s major responsibilities is to maintain the health and integrity of its witness to God’s good news. By integrating popular, pastoral, and professional voices, experiences, and reflection the faith community takes produce healthy, nourishing fruit as adequate shade and shelter for other parts of creation, evidence of the tree’s strength and vigor.



**Fig. 1: The Theological Tree**

The tree metaphor is not coincidental for the Boffs. Working with Antonio Gramsci’s concept of the organic intellectual, the Boffs explain: “Those who see only professional theologians at work in [liberation theology] see only the branches of the tree. They fail to see the trunk...let alone the roots beneath the soil that hold the whole tree—trunk and branches—in place.”<sup>9</sup> In other words, professional theologians who have committed to pursuing their scholarship within the liberationist tradition have also committed to being organically linked to the network of roots that nurtured them, thereby participating in a collective struggle to interpret and live out Christian faith and practices when confronted with sin and evil in the

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 14, 19.

form of systemic, socio-economic inequality and oppression.<sup>10</sup>

It is not hard to see what liberation theology is when one starts at its roots—that is, by examining what the base communities do when they read the Bible and compare it with the oppression and longing for liberation in their own lives. But this is just what professional liberation theology is doing: it is simply doing it in a more sophisticated way. On the middle level, pastoral theology uses a language and approach that draw on both the ground level (concreteness, communicability, etc.) and the scholarly level (critical, systematic analysis and synthesis).<sup>11</sup>

While the three levels are easily distinguished based on the tasks, educational levels, and roles different individuals fill, the Boffs are quick to point out that integration happens at every level. Professionally trained theologians are still teaching Sunday school to elementary school-aged children. Business owners compose hymns and write prayers for their faith communities. Retirees take seminary classes. Or in the case of the World Community Cookbook series, a home economist and dietitian who took some seminary classes authored an integrated, comprehensive curriculum for responding theologically and ethically as the church to the world food crisis that broke open in the 1970s and continues on to this day.<sup>12</sup>

### **Doris Janzen Longacre as Organic Theologian: The Principles and Standards of More-with-Less**

Like the integrating and collaborative approach of the liberationist model above, *More-with-Less*, *Extending the Table*, and *Simply in Season* gather together theological reflections from all three levels: root, trunk, and branches. Anabaptist organic theology, as we have created it communally through this trilogy, is less concerned with producing conventional fruit compared to the scholarly endeavors of professional, branch theologians like me. And yet, the people who have overseen the book projects that we often think of simply as cultural artifacts are women who have integrated “faith and reason” in ways that allow their particular educational and professional backgrounds to empower them to speak and feed their community as theologians and ethicists, giving sustenance to all who would both listen and eat. In being the catalyst for such an organic theological method, MCC has chosen to shape theology in a way that opens

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<sup>10</sup> Think of the forces of sin and oppression as diseases, fungi, or other pests that threaten the tree’s life and well-being.

<sup>11</sup> Boff and Boff, 14.

<sup>12</sup> While terminology used by the UN and other humanitarian organizations has shifted from “food crisis” and “hunger” to “food security” and “food access,” many of the issues remain the same.

pathways for conversation and community-building within and beyond MCC's constituency and supporting denominations. Doris Janzen Longacre has been one of the most powerful theological figures in blazing those trails, starting those conversations, naming those activities that connect us to each other, and inviting others to join us.

Longacre's baptism into the prophetic ministry of teaching her faith community about simple living and global food issues was a product of many factors. In addition to her roles as parent and spouse, Longacre trained as a dietitian, studied at seminary, and worked with MCC in Vietnam and Indonesia. In keeping with the uneasiness that prophecy can create, when the idea for this particular cookbook arose, so did deep ambivalence. Because MCC was not in the business of book publishing, it approached Herald Press, the publishing house of the Mennonite Church.

Project participants recall that Herald Press was somewhat reluctant to take on the *More-with-Less Cookbook* because in its experience, cookbooks without a cake on the front did not sell. The *More-with-Less* was most certainly *not* going to be a cookbook that featured cakes! Herald Press accordingly limited the number of first-run copies to 1,000. Despite concerns about book sales and profitability, MCC stood by its commission to respond to the world's food crisis with Ken Hiebert's interpretation of MCC's logo using Swiss cheese, black-eyed peas, and wheat on the book's cover.<sup>13</sup> The "suggestions by Mennonites on how to eat better and consume less of the world's limited food resources" expanded like the yeast in a loaf of Honey Whole Wheat bread (see *More-with-Less* page 57). This yeast-like expansion continued four years later, with Herald Press adding *Living More with Less* to the bookshelf, a supplementary volume to the cookbook containing simple living suggestions related to money, clothing, housekeeping, transportation, celebrations, recreation, and more. Taken together, the two volumes both reflected and spurred on simple living as a robust movement and expression of Christian faith.

Describing Mennonites as good cooks who also care about the world's hungry in the

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<sup>13</sup> My personal copy of *More-with-Less* indicates that in 1998, the cookbook had gone through forty-five printings, including six runs in 1979 alone. Herald Press data shows that the *More-with-Less Cookbook* has sold 865,000 copies. Levi Miller, e-mail message to author, July 23, 2009.

preface to *More-with-Less*, Longacre deftly recasts this cultural heritage in spiritual terms: “We are looking for ways to live more simply and joyfully, ways that grow out of our tradition but take their shape from living faith and the demands of our hungry world.”<sup>14</sup> Part 1 of *Living More with Less* provides us with Longacre’s biblical, theological, and ethical foundations for putting our new consciousness about the world into action. She outlines five principles or standards that guide our theological reflection:

1. Do justice;
2. Learn from the world community;
3. Cherish the natural order;
4. Nurture people;
5. Nonconform freely.<sup>15</sup>

While these principles seem obvious to many, the next question Longacre addressed added considerable complexity, asking how these theological norms become concrete action. When MCC asked its constituent households to eat and spend ten percent less in food resources than what North Americans were averaging, there was a response of “holy frustration”: “‘We want to use less,’ they say. ‘How do we begin? How do we maintain motivation in our affluent society?’”<sup>16</sup> This desire to turn away from rampant consumerism allowed Longacre to take an innovative approach to compiling the cookbook. As Mary Emma Showalter Eby, author of the beloved *Mennonite Community Cookbook*, observes in the introduction to *More-with-Less*: “This cookbook will appeal most to young homemakers whose lifestyles are more open to change, and whose desire for variety and creativity will lend enchantment for trying new recipes.” She adds: “Perhaps this is as it should be since they are most responsible for the food habits of the next generation.”<sup>17</sup> Eby’s observation is radical in the sense of “relating to the root.” Beginning with the basic unit of our social fabric, the household, MCC called Mennonites—and many others—to live a connected life from our roots, through the trunk, and into our branches.

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<sup>14</sup> Longacre, *More-with-Less Cookbook*, 7.

<sup>15</sup> Longacre, *Living More with Less*, 21ff. While Longacre describes these “life standards” as her alternative way of speaking about “lifestyle,” I am using the term standard interchangeably with principle. As Longacre writes, “Standard is a word that fits a way of life governed by more than fleeting taste. It is permanent and firm without being as tight as ‘rules’” (16).

<sup>16</sup> Longacre, *More-with-Less Cookbook*, 6.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

As she prepared the content of the cookbook and its companion, Longacre understood herself to be blending prophetic witness and pastoral concern for her neighbors around the world. The work of justice is an inescapable foundation of Christian faith, for when we do justice, we show that we love kindness and invite God's love to abide in us (Micah 6:8; 1 John 3:17). Delivering a prophetic message to North Americans, Longacre's words proclaim that eating differently becomes a political act, but also stresses that such political acts bring rewards as well. In the spirit of invitation, she writes:

[C]onserving resources at home and taking on economic and political issues...are as inseparable as the yolk and white of a scrambled egg. It never works to say, "I'll stop using paper towels and driving a big car, but I won't take this world hunger thing past my own doorpost." Once an egg yolk breaks into the white, there's no way to remove every tiny gold fleck. Just so, once you walk into a supermarket or pull up to a gas pump, you are part of the economic and political sphere. Certainly your influence is small. But whether you conserve or waste, it is real. *Many* people using or not using affects things in a *big* way. Gathering up the fragments of our waste—recycling, conserving, sharing—is a logical and authentic beginning. Such actions are the firstfruits of the harvest of justice. They are the promise of more to come.<sup>18</sup>

Page after page, Longacre focuses her readers' attention on the entire globe as a reminder that God does not live in North America. In this way, she locates Anabaptists' theological tree in a broader orchard: ours is not the only faith community God cultivates so that it might bear good fruit. How do we "learn from the world community"? We can remember that affluence is not a form of intelligence or spiritual wisdom—having an abundance of financial resources does not make us wise. Citing Jesus' parable about the rich man and Lazarus, Longacre suggests that Lazarus acted as a missionary to the affluent, not the other way around. Responding to voices calling for liberation, Longacre stresses that "The best reason for listening to and learning from the poor is that this is one way God is revealed to us." She uses this organic theological insight to nourish our theological speech. "If we cannot learn from the poor [in our country and beyond]," she implores, "why should we claim to follow one born in a barn and executed with thieves?"<sup>19</sup>

When we consider the meek and humble state of God's incarnation *and* God's awesome

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<sup>18</sup> Longacre, *Living More with Less*, 26-27.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

act of calling the cosmos into existence, we can see that God values nurture over exploitation, meaningfulness over meaninglessness. Asking how our actions bare out the hopes and desires we have for our loved ones and ourselves helps us nurture people. Longacre connects this care for one another with God's project of redemption that impacts all of creation. Isaiah 55 provides us with a vision of what the Earth will gain when we "eat what is good": the trees will clap their hands as the mountains and hills are alive with the sound of music. The covenant God makes with us is for all of creation: accordingly, we accept God's promises on behalf of the natural order. This means that we *represent* God's will and rule, not that we *are* God. Longacre's belief that we must reject notions of "dominion over creation" as "sovereignty over creation" led her to conclude that "faithful care of what actually belongs to God is the only biblical perspective," is a claim which seems obvious today. But she wrote these words thirty years ago, before green had become a trendy color and before cherishing the natural order transformed into an imperative.

The fifth principle of *Living More with Less*—nonconform freely—brings Longacre into the thorny territory of a loaded theological concept, as she works to reclaim and perhaps redeem Paul's advice to the Roman church: "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."<sup>20</sup> At the heart of nonconformity is the need for us Christians to avoid being defined by the priorities of broader culture that do not renew us or our communities. Longacre explains that nonconformity presents us with the option of a lifestyle based on simplicity and freedom compared to the enslaving forces of materialism and over-consumption: "simplicity is not restriction, sacrifice, or denial. It is emancipation. We are back to more with less."<sup>21</sup> From generation to generation, the external signs of nonconformity will look different because of the sociological shifts that take place in our lives. Regardless of our need to discern how we express our commitment to nonconformity, we will always need

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<sup>20</sup> Romans 12:2 (KJV).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

company: “If you head into unfamiliar woods, you had better find companions first; if you want to buck traffic, organize a convoy. To nonconform freely, we must strengthen each other.”<sup>22</sup>

### **From the Roots into the Branches**

Organic theology that integrates justice, global consciousness, ecological awareness, nurture, and nonconformity has a great deal in common with Latin American liberation theology which always begins with the immediacy of context. To those who wonder where liberation theology is found, the Boffs write, “You will find it at the base. It is linked with a specific community and forms a vital part of it. Its service is in the theological enlightenment of the community on its pilgrim way.” In this dynamic, the Boffs explain, liberation theologians are to be “vehicles of the Spirit” as they help their communities interpret God’s good news in the face of society’s oppressive systems and among its poorest people.<sup>23</sup> Longacre’s interdisciplinary approach to theologizing clearly reflects the methods of liberation theology. As I have studied her work, I think the method and spirituality she articulates is truly prophetic and demands earnestness. Such earnestness can become wearisome even as it is necessary in the face of intensified cultural assimilation and economic patterns that are changing MCC’s constituency. Even so, what Longacre began through organic theologizing with *More-with-Less* and *Living More with Less* is still nourishing those of us who are her contemporaries, those of us who were raised with these values, and those of us whose introduction to Anabaptism came through the cookbook. As a series the cookbooks offer us a model for thinking critically about the alternative witness to and within culture that we can and do offer as Anabaptists. The theological resources within Longacre’s work can, I contend, be discerned through a consideration of how one of her theological contemporaries, Duane Friesen, has, I think, carried forward her work in the decades since the cookbook’s original publication.

In 2000, Friesen published his book *Artists, Citizens, Philosophers: Seeking the Peace of the City—An Anabaptist Theology of Culture*, and in it he offers a constructive analysis of culture that

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>23</sup> Boff and Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, 19.

identifies the importance of engaging community and culture around the five life standards of *Living More with Less*. Friesen's branch theologizing in this vein becomes another tool to help us consider how our Anabaptism might help us move more deeply into reading our context.

While he is offering us an examination of culture and belief from the branches of the theological tree by using other branch theologians like Yoder, Gordon Kaufman, and others, Friesen is clear that like Longacre, his vision of and for cultural engagement begins with cognitive dissonance at the root level.

[T]heological reflection is generated and energized by the experience of deep conflicts that lie at the core of my being, tensions I find hard to put into words.... I am driven by a "fire in my bones" to be faithful to a vision of life that was passed on to me through my Mennonite heritage. This heritage passed on the conviction that at the center of the Christian life is the call to discipleship, the call to follow the way of Jesus Christ and to embody that way of life in an alternative community: the church.... I believe we need an orientation to life—a place to stand—that will make us an alien in our own country. At the same time we need to be aware of the relativity of that place where we stand that makes us no different than any of our fellow citizens.<sup>24</sup>

Both Friesen and Longacre respond to dissonant patterns that echo each other. They also find resolution in similar ways, demonstrating what Anabaptist organic theologizing looks like. For Friesen, we need to interpret the meaning of Christian faith in ways that connect the dots between biblical pacifism and public responsibility.<sup>25</sup> Likewise, for Longacre the resource conservation she advocates is not an end in itself, based on scientific and sociological data. Instead, she claims: "Our knowledge of others' needs and our guilt must resolve itself into a lasting attentiveness. This means being mindful, conscious, aware, so that never again can one make a decision about buying and using without thinking of the poor."<sup>26</sup> Both authors share a

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<sup>24</sup> Duane K Friesen, *Artists, Citizens, Philosophers: Seeking the Peace of the City—An Anabaptist Theology of Culture* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2000), 64-65. Beginning the process of theological reflection with cognitive dissonance is an age-old practice. The movement within theology for us to "own our context" invites theologians to name their dissonance. The term "cognitive dissonance" comes from Leon Festinger's work in psychology during the 1950s. The internal conflict we experience when something that challenges our view of reality that in turn moves us to find a place of resolution is how dissonance informs theological reflection. Greer Anne Wenh-In Ng, "Cognitive Dissonance," in *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, ed. Letty M. Russell and J. Shannon Clarkson (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 49. We come face to face with the chasm between the way the world is and sense of what God intends for creation. The theological task that responds to this dissonance is two-fold: How do we explain why things are the way they are and then describe our vision for a better alternative?

<sup>25</sup> Friesen, *Artists, Citizens, Philosophers*, 14.

<sup>26</sup> Longacre, *Living More with Less*, 25-26.

vision of community that is paying attention and responding to the world both in its brokenness and in its joy.

Using the language of “focal practices,” Friesen describes how communities he has been part of have oriented their common life in accordance with God’s *shalom*. “Focal practices,” he explains, “are ways in which Christians embody or put into practice the virtues, those qualities of character that [identify] a Christian way of life.” Interpreting this concept in organic terms, when such practices begin in the roots and their meaning and significance become more pronounced, trunk-level theologizing names these activities for the community, turning embedded habits into deliberate practices. In the branches, focal practices are theologized further raising the community’s consciousness about how its practices reflect identity and make meaning within broader culture. There are four kinds of practices that Friesen calls to our attention. First are “rituals of moral formation” such as baptism, communion, sabbath, prayer, and singing. Second are “process practices” that include dialogical discernment, reconciliation, and recognizing community members’ gifts. Third are “pastoral care practices” that invite us to reflect on how our metaphorical view of community impacts our discipleship: household, body, sanctuary, healing balm, and so forth. Fourth, the “practices of service to the wider community” involve our conception of the church’s mission related to the world’s needs at the macro level and hospitality at the micro level, particularly by tending to both the symptoms of and larger structural dynamics that create injustice.

Offering my own reflection on the way *Living More with Less* and *Artists, Citizens, Philosophers* dovetail, I find that no leap is required to connect the focal practices common among Anabaptist communities around moral formation, process, pastoral care, and service to the standards of *Living More-with-Less*. Nor is it a leap to note that Longacre’s and Friesen’s theological integration of context and community both pay special attention to the ways that “economic” patterns and systems help or hurt this response to God and all that is around us. Here I mean “economic” in a broad sense: the English term “economic” comes from the Greek roots *oikos* (house) and *nomos* (custom or law) that form the word *oikonomia*, which refers to the

customs and management of households—what we might think of as “homemaking.” In other words, doing justice, learning from the world community, nurturing people, cherishing the natural order, and nonconforming freely are part of our “household code” as Christians. In this age of globalization, when our world is both a vibrant village marketplace and a groaning ecosystem, such a household code is more necessary than ever.<sup>27</sup>

### **Bearing Good Organic Fruit Means Imperfections**

All of these practices speak with just as much evangelical spirit and fervor as a preacher at a tent revival. The experience of meeting fellow pilgrims whose spiritual autobiographies include the good news of simplicity and nonconformity as preached and interpreted by Longacre is not, many of us can attest, uncommon. Consider, for example, the testimony of David and Gail Heusinkveld about the transformative effect of the gospel according to *More-with-Less* in their lives:

When Gail and I were in college together I was a religious studies major, and part of those studies included church history. I found that the one group in church history I agreed with (or resonated with) most was the Anabaptists. However I knew nothing of the Mennonite Church and assumed I needed to be like the Amish, horse and buggy and all that....

After Gail and I were married a friend gave us a copy of the *More-with-Less*. We liked the recipes, but most of all we were taken by the approach to life woven through the cookbook. It seemed to blend the way a Christian lives more completely with what a Christian believes more completely and thoughtfully than anything we had seen before. Meals were one expression of Christian commitment, and we realized there were more ways of being Anabaptist than “horse and buggy.” We decided to check out the Mennonite Church.

You should know we attended a Mennonite Church for a few years, then left because of the cultural barriers (we did not have a Mennonite name, we had no relatives who went to [Mennonite colleges], etc.). It was not always easy, and only after some major life events did we return to the congregation and become members. You should also know that today you would find some convenience foods in our house, so the ideas in the *More-with-Less* [are] not something we have been zealous about. But we first entered the doors of a Mennonite Church because of the *More-with-Less*, and we are still in the Mennonite Church in part because of how Mennonites connect faith and life.<sup>28</sup>

One of the things I appreciate about David’s candor is the way he names the tensions between sociological dynamics surrounding ethnicity and culture, on the one hand, and theological-

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<sup>27</sup> This portion of my essay dealing with the languages of economics and household codes comes from a piece I have written for the thirtieth anniversary edition of *Living More with Less* currently in production and edited by Valerie Weaver-Zercher.

<sup>28</sup> David Heusinkveld, e-mail message to author, July 9, 2009.

ethical projects of community formation, tensions which characterize every Mennonite faith community. In the closing sentence of his message, Heusinkveld does not use the pronoun “we” in conjunction with “Mennonites,” indicating that the tension remains for him. Some of us flee the close(d)ness of ethnically bounded communities and congregations. Some of us recreate them in large cities. Some of us live in them as part of a commitment to “stay put.”<sup>29</sup> Our awareness of the tension and how we respond to it are critical. Longacre calls us to think of both our homes and tables as places where God is redeeming relationships because none of us is perfect.<sup>30</sup>

### **One Cookbook Becomes Three: More than One Expert**

A fight with cancer lasting just over three years ended Longacre’s life in 1979. Theologian Ron Sider gratefully acknowledged Longacre’s life and witness in his introduction to *Living More with Less*, the manuscript of which Longacre was working on when she died. Sider writes, “Doris deeply affected the lives of hundreds of thousands of people around the world with her widely influential *More-with-Less*. *Living More with Less* is her last gift to the church, the poor, and the Lord she served.” But, her husband Paul, noted, just as Doris’ manuscript was unfinished, so too is the work of simple living through responsible eating and living practices, adding, “The fact that others had to bring the book to completion is also symbolic. No one person is a final expert on the subject. We need help from each other.”<sup>31</sup> I hear in his words a challenge and hope that all of us who identify with MCC will accept our share in the “More-with-Less” legacy. With the appearance of *Extending the Table*, which gathered together “recipes and stories in the spirit of *More-with-Less*” (1991), with *Simply in Season’s* “recipes that celebrate fresh, local foods [also] in the spirit of *More-with-Less*” (2005), I feel certain that both the cookbook discourse and theological perspective on food that Longacre introduced into our faith communities is still at work as we continue to explore new pathways

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<sup>29</sup> This phrase comes from essayist Scott Russell Sanders’ reflections his choice to stand against societal trends related to mobility and put down roots and call a place and community home. See Scott Russell Sanders, *Staying Put: Making a Home in a Restless World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).

<sup>30</sup> Longacre, *Living More with Less*, 56.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 7, 11-12.

of understanding God more fully.

All three cookbooks work together theologically. As a series, the World Community Cookbooks operate with a set of very Anabaptist presuppositions about our theological identity as human beings. To be human means that we are able to recognize our own sinfulness in the way we neglect the deep connections among all life on the planet; accordingly, we have a responsibility to cherish the natural order. To be human also means that we have the chance to share in the triune God's promise of reconciliation which ends all enmity. Unlike other theological traditions that have shaped what we think of as mainline Christianity in North America, Anabaptism developed an understanding of our individual participation in the church that did not hold to a conventional doctrine of original sin.<sup>32</sup> The Creator's grace works in our hearts as an agent of rebirth. As new men and women in Jesus Christ, we are freed to live as his disciples. As new women and men, we testify to the Spirit's power as she leads us to discern how we live most faithfully, freely, and simply as Christians when we are conscious of the world as a community.

Our discerning attentiveness to the Spirit's movement through "the priesthood of all believers" shakes up our complacency and opens us beyond ourselves. It is why MCC's organizational identity has steadily moved to an increasing decentralized structure. It is why the World Community Cookbooks are more than a collection of recipes.

As Bailey-Dick helpfully points out, much of Mennonite cookbook discourse has a leveling effect compared to the academic discourse that we often rely on to aid us in our interpretation and definition of communal identity. He argues that "everyone has to eat and

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<sup>32</sup> Specifically on this point Pilgram Marpeck contributed the notion of the counter-inheritance (*Gegenerb*). Marpeck did not believe that human beings lost their essential goodness when God expelled Adam and Eve from Eden. Rather, we have access to that goodness through redemption and our assurance of redemption is what constitutes this counter-inheritance which is in turn manifested by Christian love nurtured through discipleship (*Nachfolge*). This emphasis on recognizing sinfulness became the basis for Anabaptists' rejection of infant baptism. If original/human sin is not equated with our nature but with the self-conscious choice for evil rather than good, then redemption comes through baptism because baptism marks the choice to crucify sin and experience resurrection life in Christ. Given Marpeck's belief in *Gegenerb*, it is no surprise that he also disagreed with Protestant views of original sin and human nature that focused heavily on human depravity. While Anabaptists read the Bible in a way that readily accepted and acknowledged God's gifting human beings with free will, they could not accept the arguments for viewing human nature as inextricably bound to a defective will.

since everyone has direct access to the forms and functions of Mennonite cookery, a sort of 'kitchenhood of all believers' emerges in which all those participating have the chance to become involved in the maintenance and renovation of boundaries vis-à-vis Mennonite culture and theology."<sup>33</sup> Translated another way, our theological tradition as North American Anabaptists lends itself to an organic approach to dealing with basic questions about the meaning of Christian faith. When we follow Longacre's lead and begin to understand ourselves as vital parts of the church's work of proclaiming the good news about the freedom that comes through socially engaged Christian discipleship, we return to the root, the source of all life, and the psalmist's affirmation: everyone eats and so everyone has a place at the welcome table to taste and see that God is good.<sup>34</sup>

#### **From *More-with-Less* to *Extending the Table***

Published in 1991, fifteen years after *More-with-Less*, *Extending the Table* appeared as the sequel. This time, however, it was Herald Press that approached MCC about collaborating on another cookbook. Joetta Handrich Schlabach served as project editor given her background of a home economics degree, an MA in family economics and management, an MCC voluntary service assignment with the Food and Hunger Concerns Office in Akron, Pennsylvania, and a second MCC assignment in Nicaragua and Honduras. Having helped MCC promote both *Living More with Less* and the action/study guide, Schlabach was steeped in the questions and issues Longacre raised in her work: eating lower on the food chain, paying attention to the quantity of food we eat in North America, and simply using fewer resources to meet our dietary needs.

Schlabach noted that one of the criticisms of *More-with-Less* both then and now is that Longacre and the many contributors were being too preachy about simple living. But sometimes we need exhortatory sermons. I would also add that prophetic preaching, whether

<sup>33</sup> Bailey-Dick, "The Kitchenhood of All Believers," 163.

<sup>34</sup> In another example of organic theologizing that resonates strongly with Longacre's work, June Alliman Yoder, Marlene Kropf, and Rebecca Slough build an Anabaptist paradigm of worship around the metaphor of meal preparation based in part on Psalm 34:8 in their book, *Preparing Sunday Dinner: A Collaborative Approach to Worship and Preaching* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2005).

written or spoken, is a gift because regardless of how we receive its truth—by resisting mightily or experiencing conversion—the message changes us by working on our consciousness.

Hardened hearts and righteous hearts sit side by side at church fellowship meals.

Encouraged by Herald Press' vision for an international cookbook, MCC developed the project in a way that maintained its commitment to all the standards of its predecessor but gave special attention to the second principle: learning from the world community. As voices from around the world shared their wisdom and experiences, a new message was also emerging for MCC. *Extending the Table*, Schlabach explained, became a way for MCC's constituents to better understand how, as North Americans, we are connected to the world community through MCC. Schlabach today notes that in our eagerness to share the resources *we* have with the poor, we have forgotten that the *world* is full of resources.<sup>35</sup>

By stressing the resources that exist among the world's peoples, Schlabach recasts the moral dimension of the practice of eating meals: mealtime becomes a site of moral formation in which we North American Christians may open ourselves to connections with sisters and brothers around the globe.

By reducing food to good, bad, fast, and affordable, people lose sight of the fact that food is first of all sacred—a precious gift of the earth to be enjoyed with others and shared by all. The intention of this book is to take us to the tables of people for whom food is the staff of life. This collection of recipes and stories invites us to sit with people we have never met, taste the flavors of their food, feel the warmth of their friendship, and learn from their experiences.<sup>36</sup>

The organic theology of *Extending the Table* begins with the book's title, and intensifies through the storytelling that accompanies the recipes.

Over and over again, the practice of hospitality shines through in the stories of MCC workers and other contributors as they have experienced life in other cultures. Some of the most authentic expressions of hospitality are manifested in humility and simplicity. In this

<sup>35</sup> Joetta Handrich Schlabach, interview by author, July 2, 2009.

<sup>36</sup> Schlabach and Burnett, *Extending the Table*, 20. The writing-photography team of Faith D'Alusio and Peter Menzel have recently documented this continuing trend in their intriguing book that explores how families around the world spend their money on food: Peter Menzel and Faith D'Alusio, *Hungry Planet: What the World Eats*, photo, Peter Menzel (Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press, 2005)..

way, hospitality is markedly different from entertaining. When I read Longacre's caution that too quickly "serving guests becomes an ego trip, rather than a relaxed meeting of friends around that most common everyday experience of sharing food," I cry, "Amen!" in recognition of my own failing and admission that I have learned to confuse hospitality with entertaining from my mother even as we both aspire to keep things simple. This is one of the reasons why Schlabach and her collaborators worked to keep *Extending the Table* from being a collection of international gourmet recipes. Simple living in a global sense is about sharing the food—its abundance and scarcity—of *every day* living throughout the world. In the third section of *Extending the Table*, Schlabach weaves together half-a-dozen stories about bread from the Hebrew Bible, the Christian Testament, modern-day Turkey, El Salvador, and the West Bank. Compared to these stories, "the bread aisles of modern supermarkets where factory-made bread lies in sterile wrap" are poor indeed! Are we North Americans ready and willing to re-learn from our world community the deep and abiding truths of Christian faith through their bread-making practices and rituals, practices suffused with "the suffering of crushed grain, the hope of rising bread, and the liberation and reconciliation of broken bread shared with others"?<sup>37</sup> Again, Christian faith, through the practice of hospitality, which is not reducible to entertaining, comes into focus as eucharist, as the thanksgiving of table fellowship. The difference, which prevents the collapse of hospitality into entertainment, is in valuing what everyone around the table receives from God rather than providing others with the ultimate dining experience.

#### **A New *More-with-Less* for a New Generation**

Cathleen Hockman-Wert, co-editor of *Simply in Season* with Mary-Beth Lind, takes a similar view of food and the spirituality of our eating practices. In a 2008 article titled "Preaching the Good News with Our Mouths Full," Hockman-Wert describes herself as a food evangelist passionate for sharing the good news about basing our diet on "local, sustainably

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<sup>37</sup> Schlabach and Burnett, *Extending the Table*, 45-46.

grown, and fairly traded food.”<sup>38</sup> This article also serves as a constructive theological statement that binds *Simply in Season* to *More-with-Less* and *Extending the Table*.<sup>39</sup> With her message focusing on food’s spiritual significance and sacramental qualities, Hockman-Wert advances four theological claims about food:

1. Food is God’s first gift to humans and other animals;
2. Food is a moral issue because not all foods are morally neutral;
3. Food is a gift for everyone throughout the world; and
4. Eating and shopping for food are spiritual disciplines.

Having also been morally formed by the standards and principles of Longacre’s organic theology in *More-with-Less* and *Living More with Less*, Hockman-Wert’s commitment to theological reflection about food inspired her involvement with the World Community Cookbook series and fueled her desire to update *More-with-Less* to reflect the globalization of our North American eating practices. In the proposal that Hockman-Wert and Lind drafted for MCC, they explain their goals for *Simply in Season*:

Our concept for a new book fits into the tradition established by *More-with-Less* and *Extending the Table*: a tradition of gently, joyfully inviting people to understand the connections between the food on their tables and their global neighbors. Our focus builds on this tradition by also describing how our food choices impact our local neighbors and food security as well as the environment, drawing readers into economic justice and creation care issues already being discussed in MCC programs and publications.

In their prospectus, Lind and Hockman-Wert describe their target audience as MCC’s constituency which has become incredibly diverse over the past several decades (moving far beyond Mennonites’ Swiss, Dutch, and German ethnic lineages) as well as “anyone seeking meaning in their daily living.” In speaking to this wide audience, the editors of *Simply in Season* had three goals:

1. To show the benefits of eating local, seasonal food and how eating this way promotes economic, environmental, communal, nutritional, and spiritual health.
2. To provide simple, tested, whole food recipes which help readers know how to use local, seasonal foods.

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<sup>38</sup> Cathleen Hockman-Wert, “Preaching the Good News with Our Mouths Full,” *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 69-75.

<sup>39</sup> One noticeable difference between *Simply in Season* and its companions is the editors’ choice to keep editorial commentary to a minimum with just a two-page preface limiting the organic theologizing to contributors’ short stories and reflections.

3. To offer hope, encouragement, and guidance to people seeking meaning in their lives [because] the choices we make about our food have spiritual implications as we rediscover our connections with God, with nature, and with those who produce our food.<sup>40</sup>

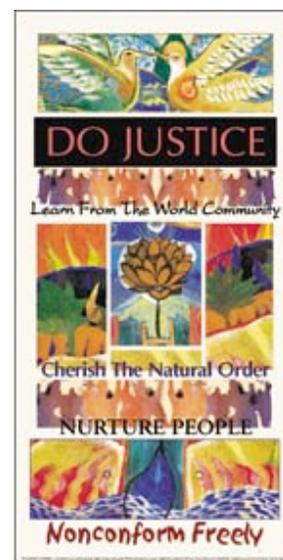
While the editors were intent on keeping the practices related to simple living in view, they also sought to counter a message which ran through *More-with-Less* as an undercurrent, a message that sometimes equated inexpensiveness with moral superiority. We have to be cautious about this equation, Hockman-Wert explains: “I felt that [*More-with-Less*] emphasis on spending less could be taken too far, putting people/myself into a ‘cheaper is always better’ mindset, without looking at the bigger picture...of why our food is so cheap and what that means for the environment and other people.” In this sense, *Simply in Season* is “a pendulum swing back the other direction, to invite people to consider spending more for some foods.” She adds, “It’s all still the same discussion of how our everyday actions reflect our values, in the particular time and place in which we live.”<sup>41</sup>

This emphasis on what is local while being mindful of the global takes us back to the value of what is homegrown. The trick is to remember that our North American backyards are not the only places where people are looking for faithful ways to understand the moral complexities of food and the life it nurtures. After all, Hockman-Wert points out, the main message of *More-with-Less* was for us to step and back and see our food in the larger context of God’s world and our faith.

The depth of the community ethic at the heart of *More-with-Less* and *Living More with Less* is part of what has made simple living in this mode a movement. Several years ago, as I was perusing a catalog from Syracuse Cultural Workers (SCW), a peace and justice publisher based in Syracuse, New York, I noticed the artwork and text of a poster entitled “Do Justice” and uttered an audible “Wow!” when I noticed the text was

<sup>40</sup> Cathleen Hockman-Wert, e-mail message to author, July 3, 2009.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.



**Figure 2: “Do Justice”  
by Syracuse Cultural**

attributed to Doris Janzen Longacre. To see that the principles of doing justice, learning from the world community, cherishing the natural order, nurturing people, and nonconforming freely had caught the attention of a group of people beyond MCC's constituency both intrigued me and made me smile. Capturing the spirit of the More-with-Less mode of simple living in visual form, SCW's creative team reflected back to me the things my faith community has taught me to value reminding me of the revolutionary quality of this tradition of organic theologizing that I have inherited through Doris Janzen Longacre's work for MCC.

Intrigued by the poster (Figure 2), I contacted SCW's associate publisher Donna Tarbania to ask about how the poster had come to be about.<sup>42</sup> As SCW's Creative Team began discussing the ideas and images they wanted to offer the public, they found themselves mulling over globalization, food issues, the fair trade movement, questions about what justice looks like in both national and international settings, and living simply. Many book catalogs cross her desk, but from amongst all the titles, Longacre's books had caught Tarbania's attention.

SCW seeks to spread the message that despite the growth of multinational corporations, what really matters is the preservation of local communities; for Tarbania, this mission connected with how Mennonites have been theologizing the larger culture in which we find ourselves. Tarbania noticed that Longacre's theological and cultural analysis had the depth and form that SCW was looking for. After all, Tarbania observes, if it is going to be more than a design aesthetic or fashion trend, simplicity needs an underlying purpose and ethic. In this way, the World Community Cookbooks are tools for shaping identity and even creating nonviolent social change. But more importantly, they are resources for cultivating theological reflection and spiritual wholeness in all kinds of communities. The question is: Are we as Anabaptists ready to use them that way on a broader scale?

## Conclusion

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<sup>42</sup> Donna Tarbania, interview by author, June 24, 2009.

**Figure 3: The Design Evolution of the World Community Cookbooks.** All three cookbooks are now printed in hardback, spiral-bound editions that retail for \$24.99 and paperback editions that retail for \$16.99 USD.



Whatever answers we generate in response to this question, we must contend with the stereotypes and baggage each of us has about simple living as well as the need for self-critique of our communities. Some of us cringe at the sight of granola. Some of us have experienced the meanness of poverty. Some of us resent the meanness of our parents' frugality. Some of us are frustrated by others' confusion of our choice for simplicity with a political agenda. Some of us do not want to be different from our neighbors. And yet we are all familiar with the stereotypes others have of *us* Mennonites, Brethren, and Amish as "plain and simple folk." The truth is today many of us are urban sophisticates and suburban "muppies." Students on our college and university campuses and in our high schools conform to fashion, technology, and other social trends. Just because you are Amish does not mean you are forbidden from having access to cell phones and fax machines. Placing the first editions of *More-with-Less*, *Extending the Table*, and *Simply in Season* alongside each other and their redesigned versions tells the story of our communal transformation from what I shorthand as "rural simplicity" to "cosmopolitan simplicity" (Figure 3). Even our MCC relief sales present us with layers of contradiction. Not only are we stuffing ourselves to feed others, but we are buying more things when MCC asks us to live with less. To raise money to support an organization that we celebrate for being cosmopolitan as it urges us to pay attention to globalization and international relations, we serve ourselves and our neighbors dishes high on the food chain and steeped in ethnocentric nostalgia. We must ask ourselves yet another question: How does simplicity and sustainability translate into discipleship today, over thirty years after MCC invited us to embrace the freedom

of simplicity and nonconformity as globally-minded Christians?

Authentic Christian experience and discipleship are by definition organic and homegrown because they cannot be created in a lab, grown miles away, and then bought and consumed at bargain prices. As MCC's World Community Cookbooks remind us, it is a gift to be conscious of what we eat, where we shop, and the stories that accompany our food allowing us to feast on the bread of life even as we butter a slice of Pilgrim's Bread. Need the recipe? See *More-with-Less*, page 58.

DRAFT