



DISAGREEABLE, BEER-SOAKED, AXE-MEN, AND SNOBS:

BY MATTHEW CORDELLA-BONTRAGER

VOL. 51 | NO. 12
A CMC PUBLICATION

The Reformers God Used to Change the Course of the Church

A friend at Rosedale Bible College once took an “Anabaptist heritage tour” in Switzerland. The guide would pause at a site of historical interest, recounting the heroic exploits of an Anabaptist martyr. But he concluded each presentation by commenting: “You wouldn’t have liked him very much.”

I find much to admire in the 16th-century Anabaptists, willing to suffer torture and death for their convictions. Among these convictions, many separated themselves from “the sword.” They understood that the government has an important calling from God: to wield the sword in the punishment of the wicked, for the protection of the good. But they also believed that the church has a distinct calling of surpassing importance, graciously given by God in Jesus the Son, embraced and enacted only through the Holy Spirit.

All of the Reformers were likeable and unlikeable, admirable and not, in complex and complicated ways... people like you and me.

In answer to this calling, early Anabaptists committed themselves to returning good for evil: to meet insult and injury with scandalous generosity and love. This was not the application of an abstract social ethic, but a function of their commitment to Christian discipleship in the particulars. By extending costly love to their enemies, they understood themselves as following the pattern set down by Jesus who, for the sake of his enemies, offered himself as an atoning sacrifice. They embodied the proclamation that God had shown his love for sinners in the cross of Jesus Christ.

These early Anabaptists lived and died with confidence in the resurrection, trusting that God would vindicate their humble

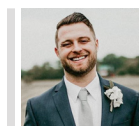
offerings just as he vindicated the crucified body of Jesus. They eagerly anticipated the day when the crucified-and-glorified Jesus would return to bring an end to wickedness, establishing the New Creation in full, bringing the sword to complete obsolescence.

What the Swiss tour guide understood, and what hagiographies seldom acknowledge, is that these enemy-loving Anabaptists were simultaneously very disagreeable people. They disagreed openly even with parties who would slice out their tongues, tear their flesh with hot tongs, and burn them at the stake. Unsurprisingly, they were also sometimes disagreeable to one another. Even if we find the early Anabaptists admirable, we need not find them likeable.

Of course, the big “magisterial Reformers” (who sometimes burned and drowned the radicals) were also plenty disagreeable. But over the past year, I have found them considerably more likeable (and a bit more admirable) than I had previously thought.

Anybody who says they’d rather eat gruel in a cave with the Anabaptists than feast with Luther at a “table talk” is either extremely sanctified or lying through their teeth (“I beg you to blow your nose a bit, to make your head lighter and your brain clearer”). Bracketing my commitment to enemy-love, there’s something admirable about Chaplain Zwingli charging

cont’d on page 5



Matthew attends Shiloh Mennonite Church and serves on the faculty at Rosedale Bible College. A Ph.D. student in systematic theology and Reformation studies, he lives in Mechanicsburg, Ohio, with his wife Rachel and two children.



Peace ON EARTH

BY BRIAN HERSHBERGER



Something about Christmas invokes a longing for peace; the carols we sing, the candlelight, the ambiance. This shouldn't surprise us. The connection of peace with Christmas goes back to the very first Christmas. The angels appeared to the shepherds to announce the birth of Jesus, and they concluded their announcement with the words, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests" (Luke 2:14 NIV).

Actually, the connection between Christmas and peace goes back even further in that the prophecies that foretold the coming of the Savior have the theme of peace woven throughout them. Isaiah 8 speaks of the distress of God's people being under the hand of Assyria. Chapter 9 prophesies the coming of a Messiah. "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end" (Isa. 9:6-7a).

These past two years we have experienced in numerous ways the absence of peace in our broken world. Sadly, the turmoil and strife have even found their way into our families and churches. Like the world around us, we ache with longing for peace. Where we go astray is when we seek peace in the same way and through the same means as the world seeks it. The world sees peace as primarily external: the absence of opposition and the existence of good fortune. The means employed by the world to obtain its definition of peace are all too often antithetical to the lifestyle of a sincere follower of Jesus.

The Prince of Peace offers something different. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27). Through the unexpected means of laying down his life for us, Jesus brought true peace, deep peace, lasting peace to anyone who will receive it.

What does the peace that Jesus offers look like? The word "peace" appears over 400 times in Scripture. In the Old Testament, the word *shalom* is used. According to *Strong's Concordance*, *shalom* conveys a wide range of nuances: fulfillment, completion, maturity, soundness, wholeness, harmony, tranquility, security, well-being, welfare, friendship,

agreement, success and prosperity. The New Testament use of the word peace remains firmly based in the Hebrew traditions of *shalom*. So when Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you," he was saying a lot!

As great an attempt as it is, Strong's list of descriptive words can't fully convey the depths of the peace that is ours in Jesus. As the apostle Paul said, "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:7). One way God's peace transcends our understanding is that his peace is not dependent on external circumstances.

In 1873, Horatio Spafford and his wife decided to take their four daughters to England for school. Just before the boat was to leave, Horatio got called away on business. He sent his wife and daughters ahead, intending to follow them on the next boat. In the middle of the ocean, the ship that Horatio's family was on collided with another ship and sank to the bottom taking most of its passengers to their death. Mrs. Spafford was rescued, but all four girls were lost in the sea. Mrs. Spafford sent a telegram to her husband, "Saved, alone."

As Horatio traveled to England to be with his wife, sorrow and sadness weighed heavily on him. But God did not abandon him, nor did he abandon God. The bright light of God's peace shone through the clouds of darkness and despair, and Horatio Spafford penned the words to the song "It Is Well With My Soul."

***"When peace like a river attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul."***

This Christmas seek the peace of God that transcends all understanding. It is his gift to you! 📖



Brian, executive director of CMC, is married to Sharla and lives in Marysville, Ohio. Brian and Sharla have four adult children of whom three are married.



How We Do Change

BY JEREMY MILLER

I came of age at the tail end of the era when most CMC churches had a written set of lifestyle standards for church members. While many contemporary CMC churches have stated expectations about loving, forgiving, and serving each other, 30 years ago the expectations were more explicit. For instance, men in our church didn't wear ties or shorts, women wore dresses, and families didn't have TVs in their homes. While many CMC churches left that era at various points over the last 50 years, many of us remember when these kinds of expectations were normative.

Several memories from that era have stuck with me. I remember the feeling of subdued joy among the women when they would no longer be required to wear only dresses but could now wear skirts and blouses. I remember bleary-eyed nights, feasting through the night on a school friend's TV and video games, determined to milk every precious moment of TV time I could pilfer. Then there was the time I wanted to wear a tie to a formal event but was not allowed because my parents said, "The church hasn't decided to do that yet."

In the current climate of intense discussion around religious and civil liberty, figuring out how much of our lives belong to the rest of the body of Christ can be intensely challenging.

Of course, one of the thorny challenges from that era was how change to these community expectations came about. Change often occurred subtly, as though by default. When a large enough contingent of people decided to live differently, expectations for the church were changed. For example, I remember hearing rumors that various church members had TVs. Eventually the church's lifestyle standards regarding TVs had to be changed if they were going to continue carrying authority with the group.

We might be tempted to look back and scoff at these earlier attempts of our church communities to work at living together in an agreed upon way. Yet even if a church community no longer speaks into questions of dress and television, we are forced to work out other shared commitments. For instance, what do we believe about divorce and remarriage, the roles of women in church, and how COVID is handled? All these

controversial issues require a church to hold some kind of consensus about the expectations of the community.

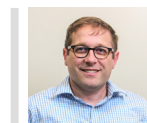
In the current climate of intense discussion around religious and civil liberty, figuring out how much of our lives belong to the rest of the body of Christ can be intensely challenging. This challenge is reflected not only at the local level, but conference-wide. How tightly do we hold sister CMC churches to our shared *Statement of Theology* and our *Statement of Practice*? What level of agreement is necessary for us to have enough shape and form to effectively move together?

Years ago, CMC's annual "conference" was not understood as a noun, but rather as a verb. Churches came to "conference" together, to "confer" and decide what shape the church should take to best represent Christ's kingdom. They believed there was strength in shared commitments, beliefs, and practices.

We are still "conferring" about how to best live out our shared commitments. In my time as a CMC pastor, we have debated the question of divorce and remarriage and whether the Bible permits a divorced person to pastor a church. These questions and the careful debate surrounding them are very important to the life of the church. Even so it is not uncommon to hear some advocate that individual Christians and churches should be permitted to make their own decisions without the "control" of or accountability to a larger conference or denomination.

While it's appealing to avoid dealing with the "crazy folks" who just don't get it, no church can function if its members don't share common commitments. This is true for families, businesses, organizations, and CMC more broadly.

Significant challenges exist for the broader church in a secular culture. We must continue to develop a robust and engaged group of disciples that is willing to wrestle hard together and mutually submit to one another. I continue to appreciate the opportunity to process difficult and important questions in the part of Christ's body we call CMC. Let's continue "conferencing" around challenging issues facing the contemporary church. We need each other! 🙏



Jeremy lives in Rosedale, Ohio, with his wife Sarah and their four children. He is president of Rosedale Bible College and is committed to its mission to prepare Kingdom workers.



Unconventional Outreach

BY ROSEDALE INTERNATIONAL

At Rosedale International, we've begun to consider how to encourage unconventional or local outreach. What steps can a person take if they are called to local missions? What about believers who want to take their career overseas, or are looking for a new beginning after retirement? We do not have fully formed answers to these questions, but we're here to start a conversation about what could be next. We invite you to join us as we consider our mission to mature and multiply.

Your profession can be a vehicle for missions.

As our world grows more connected, we continue to find new models for ministry. With millions of people now working remotely, living near your place of employment is no longer a strict necessity. In this globalized world, it is not inconceivable that a long-term worker could be employed by a company in the United States while serving in North Africa. A former *global nomad*, Caleb, explains that "working remotely allows people to credential themselves in professional ways and do ministry wherever they feel called. It does away with the support-raising aspect of missions, and opens options for people to move to places in legitimate ways."

Increased ability to travel continues to open opportunity for short-term missions as well. Recently, long-term workers have shared a need for mature believers to support teams through their profession. Have you been trained as a carpenter, a teacher, or a healthcare worker? Your profession can be a vehicle for missions. In a different vein, several RI workers have expressed a desire for retired believers to join their teams. As grandparents-of-a-sort, an older couple would meet the familial and emotional needs of a worker family in a way that only "grandparents" can.

Some of us, however, are not called to overseas missions. How can we advance the kingdom while remaining local? Hosting international students is one way forward. Jessica, who has been involved in this type of outreach for years, welcomes

international students into her home, invites them to church, and plans weekend trips for student groups. She wants to see others join her—and she knows this looks different for everyone. Maybe you have an empty bedroom; maybe you simply have a free afternoon for coffee. Either way, it's a chance to build relationships. "God has transported people from restricted access countries and essentially planted them in our backyards! Those who come to Christ will carry the good news to their family and friends when they return to their home countries."

If you are interested in engaging international students, Jessica suggests contacting your nearest university, or connecting with local ministries to international students. She's also happy to answer your questions personally! You can receive her contact information from colleen@rosedaleinternational.org.

Perhaps you are not drawn to international students, but want to reach out to your neighbors down the street or in a larger city. We're working to develop this type of local ministry in Shepard, the community where the Rosedale International Center is located.

This year, a group of staff and interns began meeting to learn about simple church methods and discipleship through relationships. Through prayer walks, community events, and involvement in the local school, this group has built relationships with RI's neighbors. The hope is to eventually see house churches emerge. We invite you to explore what this outreach model could look like in your own community.

The ideas shared here are not fully formed, but rather soft clay that needs to be shaped. It's the end of the year—often a time to evaluate where we have been and where we are going. What is God leading you towards in 2022 as we consider our mission to mature and multiply, both locally and globally? 🌐

cont'd from page 1

into the fray alongside his men, brandishing his battle-axe like a 16th-century Gimli. But the patrician Calvin, who corrects a grateful Protestant refugee in Geneva for daring to call him "brother" ("Surely, you mean 'Monsieur Calvin'"), has always been harder for me to like.

That's why this passage has stuck with me:

It is strange to realize that for most of his life Calvin's house was full of young children. No doubt the womenfolk protected both him and the children from one another, but at any rate, he passed his life, not in the seclusion of a monastery or in humanistic quiet but in the midst of the pleasures and worries of domesticity. The *Institutes* was not written in an ivory tower but against the background of teething troubles (T.H.L. Parker, *Portrait of Calvin*, 80.).

Calvin's house at 11 Rue des Chanoines in Geneva was very full. Calvin's only child, Jacques, died in infancy; he outlived his wife, Idelette, by fifteen years. But Idelette had been a widow (of a one-time Anabaptist!) and Calvin cared for her two surviving children as a father. Calvin's brother, Antoine, also moved into 11 Rue des Chanoines, bringing with him a wife and eight children.

Since I've started writing this, Ezra and Naomi have put on a show for me with a tambourine and a xylophone. Naomi has



requested fairy wings and a tutu, then asked for help taking them off, then for help putting them back on again. I've retrieved and washed a half-eaten apple that rolled under the couch. Ezra burst into anguished

screams because Rachel wouldn't let him touch the fire on our stovetop; then he stood next to me on the bench, eating the couch-apple. There have been two bathroom emergencies.

I hope that I drink less beer than Luther, chop people in half less often than Zwingli, and act like less of a snob than Calvin. I'd rather be disagreeable like Michael Sattler, who was absolute in his insistence on following Jesus in cross-shaped love. But all of the Reformers were likeable and unlikeable, admirable and not, in complex and complicated ways. They were, in other words, people like you and me.

Whether magisterial or radical, the Reformers participated in a movement that took unprecedented interest in the lives of people who lacked a "religious vocation" (still so called among Catholics). During the Reformation, serious theological resources left the monastery and the university (which overlapped) to take up new residence in the home and the local church. Partly in response, the Catholic Reformation began to pay new kinds of attention to the spiritual lives of Roman Catholic laity (see, e.g., Ignatius of Loyola, who overlapped with Calvin at the Collège de Montaigu).

I'm certainly not writing the *Institutes*, but as I prepare materials for RBC and pursue my own studies, I feel kinship with the Calvin who writes to the accompaniment of teething babies. We both are beneficiaries of a profound recognition that God calls and uses the beer-soaked and bombastic, the axe-men, the snobs, the rigid rule-followers, and especially the disagreeable for his glory; that there is a certain hope for us, by the grace of God, to become instead the righteous people that he has declared us to be in Christ.

I consider that good news. 🙏

Header Image:
The Reformation renewed the church's theological interest in family life. Protestant art reflected this interest by depicting "secular" topics, including domestic scenes. Here, a mother picks lice out of her daughter's hair.

de Hooch, Pieter. *A Mother Delousing her Child's Hair*. 1660-1661. Rijksmuseum Amsterdam. <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/SK-C-149>.