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Healing Haunted Histories: A Settler Discipleship of Decolonization

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Book Review

Healing Haunted Histories: A Settler Discipleship of Decolonization.

Elaine Enns and Ched Myers.

Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2021.

The latest work by Enns and Myers is a well-researched, poetic volume daring to address Indigenous displacement, racism, colonialism, and restorative solidarity. Using her own narrative as a white person, Enns traces trauma and displacement through her own white Mennonite heritage that ultimately contributed to Indigenous oppression and displacement on Turtle Island. It is emotionally honest and yet thoroughly pragmatic.

Myers offers deep exegetical insight that parallels Enns's personal memoir, grounding the entire work in both theology and real life. His critical examination of Scripture offers the reader a chance to gain new perspectives on commonly shared Jesus stories that depict a view of God's kin-dom infused with healing, justice, and wholeness.

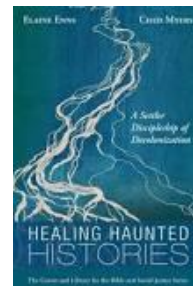
Enns's lived experience ushers these theological interludes into contemporary life. The movement of her family from Europe to North America, from Prussia to Saskatchewan's prairie, is one that contains refrains common in many of our own settler families. She holds it up and allows us to see our own reflections therein.

We, as readers, are invited at every stage of the book both to reflection on our own stories and to forms of action that nurture what the authors have termed *response-ability* (p. 46)—our movement away from shame towards healthy guilt, and responding in ways of restoration. We are called to learn about and to reflect upon our *landlines* (the term used by the authors to discuss the spaces we have inhabited and are currently inhabiting), our *bloodlines* (the term used by the authors to discuss our family lineages), and our *songlines*—those faith traditions and cultural practices that have inspired our justice work (p. 14).

Part of this invitation is engaging the difficult task of retelling the trauma of our own family histories—many traumas that we know quite well and other traumas that we perhaps have only whispered about. As settler families, we found opportunity for expansion and new life here in North America—new life that helped us cope with our own family traumas of oppression and displacement. Yet our new life was ongoing injustice and death for local Indigenous peoples, perpetuating deep, systemic trauma and genocide for tribes and nations already here. Dismantling this myth of innocence is a critical part of our response-ability journeys.

Instead of awareness of our settler selves as guests on these lands—including awareness of the systems and ways of life of the peoples already residing here—response-ability was deferred again and again, allowing for systemic injustice to begin, flourish, and continue. For this history and culture of injustice to be addressed, part of our hard work is to come to terms with how we, as white people, have flourished at the expense—and lives—of Indigenous peoples, cultures, languages, and lands.

Alongside this critical and reflective work of our own histories, we must also engage in the multi-faceted work of restorative solidarity with the Indigenous peoples who have inhabited these lands for millennia (p. 295). From listening to acts of service to proclamation, our path of discipleship requires intentional healing action coupled with ongoing inner work.



One without the other will result in little substantial transformation. As white people, we need to commit to the interior growth of ourselves, for we will certainly encounter pitfalls and mistakes along the way. Conversely, we cannot allow ourselves to be submerged in shame and blame, hiding away from the work of community and life. Action must coincide with interior learning and reflection.

Healing Haunted Histories is the call to decolonizing discipleship offered by the authors—paths they themselves are treading and have already trod. It is more a way of life than a step program, grounded in the footsteps of Jesus and in shared space and community with Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island. The authors take time to address head knowledge, heart knowledge, and practical actions of these growing bodies of knowledge.

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