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## **Wormstädt, Knut V. M: Versöhnung erzählen. Eine prozesstheologische Untersuchung ökumenischer Versöhnungsbegegnungen mit den Mennonit\*innen.**

van Hoogstraten, Marius Matthijs

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**Wormstädt, Knut V. M.: *Versöhnung erzählen*.** Eine prozess-theologische Untersuchung ökumenischer Versöhnungsbegegnungen mit den Mennonit\*innen. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2022. 389 S. = Forschungen zur systematischen und ökumenischen Theologie, 173. Geb. EUR 120,00. ISBN 9783525567333.

Knut Wormstädt draws on process theology and particularly the work of philosopher Donna Haraway to interpret the sense of »reconciliation« in ecumenical dialogues between Mennonites on the one hand and Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed churches on the other. Typically, W. notes, this sense of reconciliation is understood along two axes: a »vertical« reconciliation between humanity and God which precedes and conditions the »lateral« dimension of inter-personal (or in this case inter-ecclesial) reconciliation. W.'s work, which is based on his doctoral dissertation, productively complicates this relationship, seeking ways of thinking about reconciliation that bring these axes together, seeing God's reconciling work and creaturely healing of hurt relationships as significantly intertwined.

The theme of reconciliation is significant in these ecumenical dialogues, not only because of the Mennonites' theological identity (in which peace is central), but particularly because of the growing significance of a »healing of memories« after the sixteenth-century persecution of the Mennonites' Anabaptist forebears by the churches of the magisterial reformation. Over the years the focus of these dialogues has shifted from the discussion of doctrinal differences (the status of which is less clear for Mennonites than for many other churches) toward the reconciliation of this difficult and violent history. Yet how can we understand this reconciliation theologically? For this, W. suggests, process theology – in which *being* is best understood as an open-ended *becoming* in entangled webs of complicated interdependency and divine-human cooperation – might be singularly suited.

After its introduction establishing main themes, terms and issues (chapter 1), the book proceeds in four core chapters, before closing with a set of theses. The first of these (chapter 2) introduces process thought, its (limited) Germanophone reception, and its potential for understanding the divine-human relationship and the church. Drawing on Catherine Keller and Marjorie Suchocki, W. envisions God's power as one of invitation and cooperation more than unilateral omnipotence, and sees the Church itself as a relational and non-exclusivist process of becoming.

In chapter 3, W. unfolds his understanding of the titular »narrating«. For W., narrating means imposing order and meaning onto events that are of themselves disorderly. This is necessary for the stabilization of identity, but the in- and exclusions thus produced remain haunted by an unruly remainder that resists narrativization. A more complete self-understanding requires facing such blind spots. In this chapter, we also find an illuminating passage on »provincializing reformation«, challenging the preeminence of the magisterial reformation in historical narrative, and an intriguing reading of Mennonite narration of their own persecution. Even convictions (such as doctrine) are ultimately a type of narration, W. notes, implicating the speaker as a trace of unruly events. W. argues a greater awareness of this might allow ecumenical dialogues to hold the tension of apparently incommensurable differences.

Chapter 4 then consists of readings of documents resulting from institutional ecumenical dialogues between Mennonites and churches of the magisterial reformation. This is the largest chapter by far (the size of chapters 2, 3, and 5 put together), and analyzes texts such as the Mennonite-Roman Catholic *Called Together to be*

*Peacemakers* (1998–2003), the Mennonite-Lutheran *Healing of Memories – Reconciliation in Christ* (2010), and the Mennonite-Reformed *Christ is our Peace* (2009). W. especially asks how these texts frame and interpret the narration of *history* (seeking a shared narration of past injustices, which W. stresses must remain open), *theology* (where mostly baptism and the church-state relation persist as sticking points, tellingly on the fault line between orthodoxy and orthopraxy), and *reconciliation* (where the model of a »healing of memories« becomes significant, if in different ways in different texts).

Chapter 5 then returns to the more ontological concerns of chapter 2, seeking metaphors to think what happens in these dialogues. Particularly the work of Donna Haraway now becomes important. W. settles on two metaphors in particular: First, an organic and unruly inflection of relationality (that is, life understood as »lived along lines«) named »tentacularity,« and second, an image of symbiosis from Haraway's *Camille Stories*. There, a future is imagined in which some humans take it upon themselves to enter a genetically modified symbiosis with monarch butterflies over the course of several generations, out of responsibility for what humanity has done to the nonhuman world in previous generations. In W.'s discussion of these, we also find the image of »compost«, alluding in colorful language to the way the guilt of the past may be processed and become fruitful.

Drawing on Keller, Michael Welker, and John Caputo, W. then brings this reading back to theology. Reconciliation emerges not in the first instance unilaterally along a vertical axis, but *as* and *in* the becoming of creaturely relationships, in an entangled, fragile, infinite interaction. As such the success of reconciliation is not guaranteed, and indeed these processes are not to be thought as teleological goals to be achieved, but as teeming and tentacular processes of »becoming-with«, in which divine action can only be discerned in retrospect. »At least as an anthropological experience, reconciliation does not irrupt into the world through the unilateral action of God, but is advanced fragmentarily in the inter-human, hoping that what is impossible with humans may be possible with God« (p. 366)

*Versöhnung Erzählen* is intriguing, creative, daring, erudite, and compelling. The combination of process thought and ecumenics is, to my knowledge, wholly novel, and the production of such a work in German offers a welcome engagement with a type of thinking rarely discussed in this language. With a work of this scope, it is perhaps inevitable that the reader is left wanting more at certain points. For example, a more elaborate conversation with Keller (of whom W. relies on a single work) might have broadened the passage between Haraway and theology. Further, readers looking for an extensive introduction to Haraway and process thought will find that W.'s priority lies more with his readings of ecumenical texts and his constructive endeavor.

In sum, W. not only offers a reading of ecumenical documents, he also invites their questioning. How does centralized institutional dialogue impose an order over the teeming and pluriform processes of ecclesial becoming? What would it mean to »provincialize« ecumenism? Further, W.'s metaphors are saturated with humanity's relatedness to the nonhuman world. Where is the nonhuman in ecumenism? What does it mean to seek ecclesial reconciliation in light of this more fundamental relatedness – how can inter-ecclesial reconciliation open up into inter-creaturely reconciliation?