Paul G. Doersken and Karl Koop, eds. *The Church Made Strange for the Nations: Essays in Ecclesiology and Political Theology*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011.

The fifteen essays in this volume are remarkably coherent. They all address the question, as the editors say in their introduction, of how "the church's peculiar and strange locatedness" affects the form of its corporate witness, particularly in the political sphere (vii). To put it in more familiar terms, they reflect on what it means for the church to be "in but not of the world." That question, of course, has always been at the heart of Mennonite theology. Yet these essays also cohere around an unexpected answer. Instead of a more traditional Mennonite emphasis on the church as a model of alternative ethical practice, they argue that the church's "strangeness" is disruptive, paradoxical, and mysterious—even mystical.

A church whose difference consists only in nonconformist traditions or institutions is simply "not strange enough," as Chris Huebner says (152). What marks the church as truly strange, rather, is its willingness to relinquish mastery over the world and even over itself. Though the essays vary widely in subject and style, they almost all agree in this: the church should give up trying to control history or political institutions (Alain Epp Weaver, J. Alexander Sider, Arnold Neufeld-Fast), its own practices or structures (P. Travis Kroeker, Joseph Wiebe, Irma Fast Dueck, Cheryl Pauls, Chris K. Huebner), or its fundamental identity (Sheila Klassen-Wiebe, Jane Barter Moulaison). As Travis Kroeker puts it, "the church is not called to point to itself, its structures, its teachings, its traditions, but rather to bear sacrificial witness to the passage of God in the world that is ever passing away" (93). Giving up control means opening ourselves to the surprising, unsettling guidance of the Spirit.

Under the influence of John Howard Yoder, the refusal to take the reins of history has become a commonplace in recent Mennonite theology. Yet these authors have radicalized that refusal and made it the core of Christian witness. Yoder meant it primarily as undergirding a commitment to nonviolence: Christians should not try to force things to come out our way, but entrust ourselves to the way of Jesus. These authors mean much more than that. Joseph Wiebe, for example, argues through a reading

of Sophocles' *Antigone* that even the attempt to maintain a consistent community ethic will "reproduce Creon's control of humanity" (110). He prefers Antigone's faithful lament, which disrupts all tradition. At the end of his essay, Wiebe even disrupts his own admiration of Antigone. Holding onto any kind of stability, even the stable practice of lament or self-critique, means abandoning the church's strangeness.

There is much to commend this recent turn. It undermines the temptation to put too much faith in an institutional or traditional identity, or in a cultural common sense—a lesson the volume's two main dissenters from this overall trend, A. James Reimer and Waldemar Janzen, would have done well to heed. But the relentless focus on disruption and paradox means that, though ostensibly discussing politics and church life, the authors rarely come anywhere near a concrete proposal for action. Alain Epp Weaver's essay on a theology of exile—one of the volume's best—does finally advocate a "binational future of mutuality in Israel-Palestine" (33), and Helmut Harder's commentary on recent Mennonite-Catholic dialogue recommends an ecumenical peacebuilding effort. In both cases, attention to a usually-unacknowledged figure (the refugee for Weaver, the Catholic for Harder) gives rise to a surprising but recognizable call to action. In that, however, they are unfortunately the exception. In its attempt to unsettle Mennonite communities and traditions, Mennonite theology cannot give up its traditional concern for clear and active witness in the world.

As an edited collection, the volume is excellent. However, the closing essay by Stanley Hauerwas did not, in my opinion, fit the book's tenor or purpose; and the categories the editors used to divide the essays in their introduction were not particularly illuminating. But those are minor complaints. While the authors are in conversation with each other as academic theologians, many also write in a style that is accessible to students. (Sheila Klassen-Wiebe's essay on the Johannine meaning of being "in but not of the world" would be especially useful in the classroom.) And the volume itself ably demonstrates the wide influence of Harry Huebner, the Canadian Mennonite theologian in whose honor it was published, while pushing the boundaries of constructive theological work.

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