Book Reviews

Artists, Citizens, and Philosophers: Seeking the Peace of the City. Duane K. Friesen. Scottdale, PA and Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2000.

Duane Friesen is to be commended for sketching in this book what he calls an Anabaptist/Mennonite "theology of culture in its multi-faceted dimensions" (15). The Anabaptist/Mennonite tradition has often understood itself as living and working within an alien pagan world that is to be avoided as much as possible by faithful Christians who have bound themselves together in covenant as disciples of Jesus, seeking to lead transformed lives in keeping with his radical teachings about loving not only neighbors but also enemies. The persecution Mennonites endured from their origins in the sixteenth century helped to increase their suspicions of the outside world over against which they defined themselves; and their continuing to live in close geographical propinquity with each other in the next centuries – as they moved from country to country to protect their faith under stress of ongoing persecution – only furthered their strong sense of solidarity and of the rightness of their distinctive understanding of Christian faith and life. In consequence, throughout much of their history Mennonites have not played particularly active roles in the wider cultures of the societies of which they were part.

At least in North America, however, much of this changed in the last century, as Mennonites increasingly moved out of their rural communities into the city. Many of us became college and university trained professionals in the modern societies in which we live; and we found much in this world outside our traditional communities that we appreciated and deeply valued, and came to respect and love. But the theological traditions we inherited – with their deep suspicion of everything non-Mennonite – have not, for the most part, given us adequate resources for understanding and interpreting these new circumstances. Many permanently leave the Mennonite faith; others attempt to maintain some vestiges of the older traditions but find it difficult to persuade their children, who grow up and become socialized in largely non-Mennonite environments, to take the traditional faith seriously. We Mennonites today desperately need a *theology of culture* that enables us to see, on the one hand,

what is truly of importance in the traditions we have inherited; and what, on the other hand, we can properly and confidently adopt, enjoy, and integrate – from the (hitherto) outside cultural world – into our lives and our faith. It is to that central felt need of today's North American Mennonites that Friesen's book is addressed.

How well does the book succeed? I can take up here only a few issues in the complex argument that Friesen offers. The motto of the book, articulating its basic theme, is drawn from Jeremiah 29:7: "seek the welfare [shalom] of the city where I have sent you into exile, . . . for in its welfare you will find your welfare" (quoted on page 2, and mentioned frequently). Biblical background (and authority?) for the position Friesen wishes to take is supplied in Chapter 1, entitled "Christians as Citizens and Aliens" – a not too promising, but typically Mennonite, dualistic formulation. His intention is "to show how one can develop a positive social ethic and theology of culture by drawing upon the 'alternative culture' tradition of the Bible and church history" (33). This is a tall order: one wonders right away whether social and cultural conceptions and practices drawn from the ancient biblical and patristic world can provide much effective guidance in understanding the enormously complex culture of modernity. The task of the book will be to show how "the model of resident aliens" (42) can be incarnated in today's world.

Friesen believes (rightly) that this approach goes directly counter to the presuppositions of much widely accepted theological reflection on sociocultural issues, so in his second chapter he examines some central ideas of two highly influential writers on these matters: Ernst Troeltsch (especially *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches)* and H. Richard Niebuhr (especially *Christ and Culture*). Drawing on his doctoral dissertation as well as the work of John Howard Yoder, Glen Stassen, Walter Wink, and others (including Stanley Hauerwas, whom he strongly criticizes), Friesen argues that Troeltsch's category of the "sect" (as opposed to the mainline "church") and Niebuhr's placement of Mennonites among those who take a "Christ against Culture" position are seriously misleading due to their "Constantinian" assumptions. He maintains that such approaches cannot be the basis for developing a contemporary Anabaptist theology of culture. In the rest of Part One he attempts to sketch "a vision of the church that is an alternative to [such] Christendom models" (34), a model based on an "alternative vision of life" (36) – not an

alternative that would completely displace the wider culture but one that would truly enhance its welfare. Though more than half the book is devoted to developing and sketching this conception of the church, Friesen really does not succeed in making clear (in my opinion) how such an "alternative society" or "alternative culture" can grow up and survive in today's electronic urban world in which everyone is bombarded twenty-four hours a day with the values and meanings (many of them quite crude) of the wider culture. One cannot but wonder whether Friesen's whole program may not be based too largely on a nostalgic vision of the good old days when Mennonites really could live in – and could decisively socialize their children into – the "alternative" culture and life of their rural communities.

It is not until page 169, with Part Two, that Friesen really gets around to sketching his theology of the wider culture. These three last chapters take up the "Artistic Imagination" (Ch. 6), the "Dynamics of Dual Citizenship," (Ch. 7), and "Philosophers...and Human Wisdom" (Ch. 8). Of these, the chapter on dual citizenship is most important, for it tries to work out the way in which the church with its "alternative culture" can be "a model for society" (224). Despite his extensive discussion of politics, community service, vocation, justice, etc., one continues to wonder how the church, conceived here as a virtually alternative society with quite distinctive values and purposes, could ever be a model for the wider society in which it finds itself. "To be a Christian," he maintains, "means to confess Jesus Christ as the light . . . that . . . 'lights up' the entire universe" (269); "Christ is the light that illumines all other truth. . . . [A] christological perspective includes all truth, including the insights of the religions other than Christianity" (257). With this sort of all-enveloping claim defining its basic stance, it is hard to see how the church could be a model for anything other than some kind of *theocracy* seeking to rule the world. Friesen certainly does not intend this, and in fact he states, in his discussion of religious pluralism, that we "should respect difference and not attempt to absorb the other into our own perspective" (262). But having said that, he immediately undercuts it by stating that "Genuine faith entails commitment to . . . [t]he universal claims of Christianity" (ibid.).

The other two chapters of Part 2 (6 and 8) are rather sketchy. The one on art takes up what is a key subject for every theology of culture; but so much of the text is given over to brief discussions of other writers (who do not

always agree with each other) that it is difficult to discern and assess what Friesen's own view of the arts actually is, and precisely how his argument runs. The chapter on "wisdom" misleadingly announces in its title (like that of the book itself) that it will be dealing with "philosophers," but there is really no discussion here either of particular philosophers or of the important place held by the philosophical tradition in western culture. Instead, the chapter sets its tone by beginning with the biblical "wisdom tradition" – something very different from the philosophy practiced in the West for well over two millenia – and then moves on to consider the problem of religious pluralism. It is in this context, surprisingly, that Friesen takes up science (in the brief space of 7 pages), since our "relationship to science is similar to our relationship to other religious traditions" (278). He seems not to recognize that science – far from being another quasi-religious option more or less "external" to today's Christian existence – is one of our most pervasive and dominating institutions, with tentacles moving into virtually all the thinking and action of everyone living in the modern world. Technology, another institution that has utterly transformed all our lives and now seemingly becoming a veritable Frankenstein monster completely free from human control, is not discussed at all. These would seem to be rather important lacunae in a book purporting to present a theology of today's North American culture.

So we have here a first try at "An Anabaptist Theology of Culture," as one of the book's subtitles puts it. It is good to see a Mennonite theologian take up this exceedingly significant subject, a subject crucial for all of today's Mennonites if we are to survive as a distinctive Christian movement. Discussion of a number of major problems is presented here with important suggestions about how they might be addressed, and for that we should all be grateful. This book opens the door sufficiently to enable us Mennonites to see that thinking constructively about the wider culture in which we live today is a task that must be taken up by our theologians and other thoughtful persons, if our communities are to find their way in the modern world. That way can and should be, as Friesen rightly argues, one that will enable us to contribute significantly to "the welfare of the city" in which we find ourselves today.

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D. H. Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition and Renewing Evangelicalism: A Primer for Suspicious Protestants.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.

If the Bible is the sole authority for Christian life and thought, why hold to a belief in the Trinity, a term which is first attested to only late in the second century? Why insist on the doctrine of the fully human and fully divine Christ as formulated in AD 451? Why accept the authority of the New Testament, since the form in which we have it today was only accepted as canon some three centuries after the writing of its contents? Although he does not raise the questions quite so bluntly, such are the issues faced by Daniel Williams of Loyola University (Chicago) in his most recent study. Williams comes to his task with the fullest qualifications: as a Baptist pastor, he formulates the problem from within his own religious context, but he does so rooted as well in the soil of the early Church – a patristics scholar, he has earlier published a study on *Ambrose of Milan and the End of the Nicene-Arian Conflicts* (Oxford, 1995). How applicable Williams's questions are for Mennonites is clear in his fourth chapter on the "corruption" of the early Church, in which the author argues against John Howard Yoder's commitment to the so-called "Constantinian Fall of the Church" in the early fourth century, using the work of another Mennonite theologian, A. James Reimer, to support his case (122-27).

Noting the increasingly "ahistorical and atheological condition" of Evangelicalism and the resulting crisis facing the movement even as "there are grounds for claiming that evangelicalism holds the key to the future of western Christendom" (23), Williams calls Evangelical churches to remember the Tradition (his capital "T" never extending beyond the Council of Chalcedon in 451). He outlines the formation and development of that Tradition to the Constantinian era, then reviews the rise of the theory of a Constantinian fall, before offering a revised (from the Evangelical point of view) interpretation of the role of Church Councils and the Creeds in the perpetuation of the Christian Tradition in the fourth and later centuries. He concludes with a chapter on the linkage between Scripture and the patristic tradition by early Protestant Reformers, including a section on the Anabaptists. In the Epilogue and two appendices Williams advances his challenges to contemporary churches. There he argues that the renewal of Evangelicalism (and the Free Church tradition at large) is linked to the retrieval of the patristic tradition, to a renewed

consciousness that all Christians are "catholics" within the universal Church and that "*sola scriptura* cannot be rightly and responsibly handled without reference to the historic Tradition of the church" (234).

Williams's argument reflects a growing interest within Evangelicalism. For long there has been a shift of members of that community to Canterbury and to Eastern Orthodoxy, and recently the vocal minority of more fundamentalist converts to Roman Catholicism. But Williams's work is structured within a less individual concern, fitting, with theological treatments such as that of Miroslav Volf in *After our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Eerdmans, 1998) and with the ecumenical dialogues reflected in *Roman Catholicism: Evangelical Protestants Examine What Divides and Unites Us* (Moody Press, 1995), *Reclaiming the Great Tradition: Evangelicals, Catholics, and Orthodox in Dialogue* (Intervarsity Press, 1997), and the fine collection edited by Thomas P. Rausch, *Catholics and Evangelicals: Do they Share a Common Future?* (Intervarsity Press, 2000). All these discussions are particularly stimulating and important for Mennonites, now engaged in a Vatican-Mennonite dialogue.

At the root of his book, however, Williams cannot avoid the challenge as posited in Cardinal Newman's adage: "To be deep in history is to cease to be a Protestant." The major difficulty for Williams is the curtailment of Tradition to the pre-Chalcedonian period – to Antiquity. In this his approach is reminiscent of the Anglican Old High Churchmen and their wayward step-children, the Tractarians who, wishing to maintain continuity as a third branch of the Church Catholic and able to argue that they maintained apostolic succession (unlike Williams's Baptist tradition or the Anabaptist tradition), were nevertheless faced with Newman's argument in his *Development of Christian Doctrine*. That argument might be summarized in our own time by asking: If there is development in the New Testament tradition from the undisputed letters of Paul to the "early Catholicism" of the Pastoral Epistles, from the New Testament to the Epistles of Ignatius, from Ignatius through Nicea to Chalcedon, why close development with Constantine (and thereby reject the full doctrine of the Trinity and the Chalcedonian formula on the person of Christ, indeed the canon of Scripture itself) or with Chalcedon, for that matter?

And for Williams perhaps an even more critical question remains: If *sola scriptura* "cannot be rightly handled" except "in reference to the historic

[patristic] Tradition of the church," how is one to understand the other distinctive and central Protestant doctrine, *sola fide*, let alone Free Church doctrines touching sacramental grace, ecclesial voluntarism, the egalitarian "priesthood" of all believers, and others for which it would be difficult to demonstrate the clear support of Antiquity?

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Leo Driedger, *Mennonites in the Global Village.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000.

We can trust Leo Driedger to keep our awareness of the state of Mennonite society current. This volume, together with *Anabaptists Four Centuries Later* (1975) and *The Mennonite Mosaic* (1991), establishes a significant library for the comparative analysis of Mennonite society and identity. This is a significant gift to Mennonite communities; the way into the future is marked by such self-awareness. It is a contribution to the broader study of Mennonites and may prove fruitful for the study of society in general.

Mennonites in the Global Village has two parts. The first six chapters assess changes that have occurred among Mennonites since the publication of *Anabaptists Four Centuries Later*, taking stock at the turn of a millennium. These chapters rehearse and work out some of the finer details of *The Mennonite Mosaic*, testing the data gathered there against some themes that resonate with a post-modern or global agenda. Driedger documents the continued urbanization and professionalization of Mennonites, identifying a potential tension between professional enclave and religious identity. He revisits Old Colony Mennonites in Saskatchewan, noting changes due to the influence of modern and postmodern forces. Villages identifiable earlier by their rural values and culture took on the guise of urban suburbs. He observes a shift from local to global village values, together with an increase in access to a variety of media. These changes were especially evident among younger, upwardly mobile, educated urban Mennonites. Driedger works out the politics of homemaking through a discussion of the issue of abortion, noting that

Mennonites have been more opposed to abortion than has society in general and that pro-choice sympathies among Mennonites are more likely to appear among people with higher levels of education.

Driedger uses the final four chapters to lay out future trajectories of identity for contemporary Mennonites. He describes the following transitions: shifts from an ideologically to relationally based identity for young Mennonites; a dialectic between the religious and marketplace needs that educational institutions serve; an opening within churches to the possibility of leadership by women; and shifts from passive to active expression of the Anabaptist peace witness, together with minimization of the peace witness among more conservative Mennonites.

Driedger's strength, especially evident in these final chapters, is the working, re-working, and integrating of research from a variety of sources. He tests observations about Mennonite youth within the context of the significant work of Reginald Bibby and Don Posterski on Canadian youth. Paul Toews's historical work provides a backdrop for his consideration of educational institutions. Driedger's description of the emergence of the leadership of women in the Mennonite church depends on Renee Sauder's research, and J.R. Burkholder's pluralistic peace typology provides a strong basis to assess change in the Anabaptist peace witness.

Driedger depends upon the reader to process the theoretical background and the questions raised by his survey of postmodern Mennonite life. The stage is set by Driedger's schematic summary of postmodern society and a brief, global demography of Mennonites in chapter 1. Further theoretical questions might be anticipated on the basis of his historical review of the rural and urban configurations of Anabaptist communities from the sixteenth century onwards. Peter Berger's 'sacred canopy' and Robert Bellah's 'individual types' continue to be pivotal for Driedger and are the point at which theoretical arguments might be begun. The reader, however, will have to have a background in postmodern theory and philosophy to develop these conversations more fully and to understand postmodern experience more completely. Chapter 3 illustrates this quite well. Driedger provides examples of individuals in Mennonite communities and organizations which fit Bellah's typology. While he successfully convinces us that individualism exists among Mennonites, the deeper question of the nature and role of the individual within a community

remains to be answered. The chapter ends as this theoretical task is engaged. This is unfortunate, because the question of the individual is a critical issue within postmodernism, and a primary and formative element within such a voluntaristic religious group as Mennonites.

This experience is replicated in the book's abrupt conclusion. Driedger suggests that the Mennonite experience of postmodernity has parallels in the pre-modern beginnings of Anabaptism, understanding both as revolutionary struggle. This observation in the book's final paragraph begs a further chapter. Is the notion of "sacred canopy," useful in sociological analysis of Mennonites for so long, able to stretch far enough to cover the theoretical implications of this affinity, and is it translucent enough to explore the individual and corporate nature of community life in postmodern society? Revolutionary times may call for a revolution in our theoretical understanding. A good companion to this work would be a further development of theoretical capital. It would deepen our understanding of Mennonite life and help us grasp the contribution that the study of Mennonites makes to the understanding of society in general.

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Jean Janzen, *Tasting the Dust*. Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2000

The title of Jean Janzen's fifth collection of poetry, *Tasting the Dust*, reminds me of a night I spent in a leaky southwestern motel during a dust storm. Tasting that dust was elemental, mysterious, and a little unsettling. Reading Janzen's poems elicits some similar sensations for me.

Her poems are grouped around four "windows" of direction – south, north, east, west. Each section is introduced by a poem in response to four Vermeer paintings of interiors, each with a woman in some household activity. A wonderful conceit, this structure provides ways of looking at our contained lives through the suffusion of varied yet specific light. The poems, ranging in settings from the poet's home in California to exotic places like Baku, are riffs on the incarnation experienced.

These incarnate poems begin with the imagery of dust and mountains in the area of the poet's home, where "it takes dynamite to plant an orange

tree." I find most captivating this section celebrating both the upheaval and stasis of nature. In arresting motion Janzen looks at the rotting oranges under the tree, the astringent pomegranate to be tasted, the mountain's snow water to be drunk.

Some poems of the north may be reflective of Janzen's early life in Canada. Full of memories of brothers, sisters, and parents, she alludes to "markings" – those childhood treasures kept in school booklets, those desires to please the elders' request for perfection, those memories of the bear at the tent.

Then there are the painting "readings," the author's reflections on Europe, the east. The great canvasses depicting events in the life of Christ are read from an imagined moment of captured motion. Some of these poems touch on the poet's familial history of torture in Europe. Some were written during her months spent there after winning the prestigious Creative Writing Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Finally, the poems of the west return to the meaning of those dear to us at home – the elemental things that taste like grit, the mysterious unseen that remains open to the senses, the forces moving ground that scare us a little. The touching poem of married love ("Tasting the Dust"), the physician husband "curing himself with soil" in his garden, concludes:

> the story of dust, an origin
> so deep and dense, it rose
> like fire to make the mountain,
>
> a narrative of tumble
> and breakage from its sides, . . .
> The mountain offering itself . . .
> for his spade, his touch,
> to make of it a shape and fragrance,
> to taste the center of this earth. (66,67)

Reading these rich poems that converse with us will reward both the inveterate and casual poetry reader. We all know the nuisance of dust; the transforming properties of these particles are ours, too. The poet suggests the cultivation of an other-worldly soil, dynamiting for the planting of fruit if necessary.

Sarah Klassen, *Simone Weil: Songs of Hunger and Love*. Toronto: Wolsak & Wynn, 1999.

What an eloquent voice Simone Weil has been given in the poet Sarah Klassen! Earnest, pleading for understanding, the Weil/Klassen persona in each poem enthralls the reader with an otherwise difficult theme: suffering and martyrdom. Because of this beautiful poetry we are led to consider the meaning of a desire to suffer for others.

No doubt Weil would have agreed with Victor Frankl that "meaning precedes being." She seems to have been born with this mission for meaning. In "Hunger I" the explanation begins:

> I was born hungry.
> . . . How should they have known,
> my mother, my kind father:
> their joined flesh, satisfied,
> could generate voraciousness,
> spawn such unseemly thirst and this
> unearthly appetite. (12)

Part I ("Hunger") of this three-part collection elaborates on this unearthly appetite: Weil's precocious childhood; her adolescent sensitivity toward the poor who have been harmed; and her resolve in young adulthood "to eat nothing but God whom I wanted to swallow whole" (19). Part II ("God exists because I desire him") embodies her work as an activist showing solidarity with coal miners, machinists, potato diggers, fisherfolk. Part III ("We can only cry out") delves into the mystery of suffering with images of Christ's passion, Lear's loneliness, and allusions to earlier mystics such as the anonymous writer of *The Cloud of the Unknowing*.

For the most part, the voice speaks in the past tense, which serves to deliver biographical facts in an offhand manner, heightening interest in Weil's desire for a more perfect life. Born in Paris to a privileged life, Weil became a philosopher, social activist, mystic, and writer. She taught, but interspersed her intellectual life with stints of manual labor. She developed a mystical feeling for the Catholic faith, but a strong aversion to organized religion and therefore was never baptized. Partly Jewish, she escaped to the U.S. in 1942 only to

return to London, where a year later at age 34 she died of a hunger strike, suffering with and for her French compatriots.

I remember a conversation several years ago with Sarah Klassen when she first offered some of these poems to publishers and was surprised to find a keen interest in Weil. I'm not surprised. The spare, haunting beauty of the Weil poems leads us to look at other times and places, to refugees, misfits, and uncompromising disciples we have known. The poems allude to the strangely ordinary ("I'm sounding so much like my mother. . . ." – "Lyrics from a lycee 3. The teacher," 22) as well as the great mystery ("The unmistakable/ breath-taking wingbeat of grace," 80).

I find the meditative "Pensees" powerful. The poem's pulsing desire to be the hands and feet of God carries a tone of pathos and spent energy. Yet the question remains whether activity can ever reach the model of divine love:

> Someone is leaping and leaping in the air
> each time a little higher. This is not
> the way to God. Nor can imagination
> fill the emptiness, command growth of wings,
> defy gravity. (51)

The author's restraint from overt criticism of her subject (Weil) strengthens these poems. Only a hint of personal realism appears in one of the quotations used before them: "There is no great genius without some touch of madness" (Seneca). We are left with the irony that one so hungry refuses to eat, and that points us to consider the multiple meanings of hunger.

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Susan Biesecker-Mast and Gerald Biesecker-Mast, eds. *Anabaptists and Postmodernity*. Telford, PA: Pandora Press U.S., 2000; J. Denny Weaver, *Anabaptist Theology in Face of Postmodernity: A Proposal for the Third Millennium*. Telford, PA: Pandora Press U.S., 2000.

These two books are the first contributions to the C. Henry Smith Series co-sponsored by the Mennonite Historical Society and Bluffton College.

Anabaptists and Postmodernity is a collection of papers selected from presentations made at a conference of the same name held at Bluffton College in 1998. In the introduction, Susan Biesecker-Mast provides the context for the disparate papers, emphasizing the significance of difference for understanding the relationship between Anabaptism and postmodernity. The essays are helpfully divided into seven groups along the general themes of theory, literature, church polity, worship, religious and social identity, peace/pacifism, and culture. If the reader is looking for either a sustained discussion of a few issues or clarity concerning Anabaptism or postmodernity, the book's diversity is a weakness. However, Biesecker-Mast indicates in her introduction that differences and gaps are where the reader should be looking.

If the introduction sets the context for differences, the first essay by Stanley Hauerwas, entitled "The Christian Difference" tries to clarify the difference between Christianity and postmodernism. According to Hauerwas, postmodernity is the consequence of the historical Church's inability to articulate God's truth and therefore to be faithful. The shift from knowing God through Scripture to knowing God through nature has resulted in a world where people have many different choices and no Truth. Hauerwas describes postmodernity with the analogy of global capitalism, where the market offers up a wide variety of commodities guided largely by the pressure of innovation. Under the burden of the consequences of its faithlessness, Hauerwas concludes that the Church must find a way not only to survive postmodernity but also to flourish.

However, this is not the last word on the relationship between Christianity and postmodernism. In fact, the last word, in this book, offers a fairly optimistic reading of postmodernism and its possibilities for Anabaptism. J. Lawrence Burkholder, in his essay "Following Christ in a Postmodern World," sees postmodernism as "a plea for freedom to be one's own authentic self" (410). While this freedom might have negative expressions, it also offers to Anabaptist-Mennonites the possibility of seeing sacrificial service as an exercise of freedom. The postmodern critique opens up a kind of discipleship that moves beyond obligations and commands to one that is relational. This discipleship does not ignore history and tradition but attempts to appropriate it in an authentically free spirit.

Between the rejection and cautious acceptance of postmodernity for Anabaptists, there is a great deal more. Peter Blum, in his essay "Foucault, Genealogy, Anabaptism," points out the shared commitment to particularity in Michel Foucault and John H. Yoder. Thomas Finger, in "Universal Truths," attacks this same commitment for its failure to acknowledge the importance of universals. A fascinating contrast is established between John Roth's description of the struggles of South German Mennonites as a marginal community entering into modernity in "Context, Conflict, and Community" and Hildi Froese Tiessen's description of the struggles of Mennonite writers as a marginal group within the Mennonite community. One other essay worth noting is that of Chris Huebner, "Christian Pacifism as Friendship with God," which brings together the writings of Derrida, MacIntyre, and Milbank to explore the nature of friendship and God. Indeed, the mix of approaches ranging from the liturgical to the sociological provides additional layers of meaning to the individual essays, and makes this collection more than the sum of its parts.

Anabaptist Theology in Face of Postmodernity: A Proposal for the Third Millennium by J. Denny Weaver, connects with the more optimistic views of postmodernity in *Anabaptists and Postmodernity*, focusing on the opportunity Mennonites now have for developing a theology genuinely rooted in pacifism. Weaver sees postmodernity as the demise of Christendom and, with it, the notion of a theology-in-general making room for an Anabaptist theology.

> A particular theology for Mennonites as a peace church can now assert its version of truth on a logically equal footing with the theology of Christendom. The context of postmodernity thus offers Mennonites an opportunity virtually unprecedented since the early church: a chance to articulate and receive a hearing for a theology shaped specifically by the nonviolence of Jesus. (21)

According to Weaver, all theology is particular, and what Mennonites ought to be doing is writing a theology that is self-consciously rooted in what is characteristically Anabaptist, namely, the conviction that Jesus lived and taught a life of nonviolence. The book is, then, an extended description of Mennonite particularity and postmodernity as the context for the possibility of an authentically Anabaptist theology.

The particularity of Mennonite theology is approached in three different ways by Weaver. In the first chapter, he argues that cultural differences have led Mennonites in Canada and the United States to do theology differently. He contends that the United States has a civil religion rooted in an originary myth that grounds freedom in war and violence, whereas Canada has no such unifying myth but rather multiple stories of the English and French. The traditional metaphor of identity in the United States was that of the melting pot, which discouraged cultural particularity, while in Canada it was the mosaic, which encouraged multiculturalism. According to Weaver, these national characteristics have had an important role in how Mennonites have done theology. For Mennonites in the United States, being faithful has often lead to a general theological challenge to Christendom as a whole. But Canadian Mennonites, according to Weaver, have felt no such need to make grandiose challenges to the state or Christendom.

Chapters two, three, and four comprise the most valuable parts of the book. Here, Weaver examines Mennonite theological work from the twentieth, nineteenth, and sixteenth centuries respectively, arguing that there is a discernible Anabaptist theology distinguishable from the rest of Christian theology. While the argument is ultimately faulty, this does not take anything away from the valuable historical work Weaver has done in organizing the theological work of so many Anabaptist thinkers. What I found most interesting was the section on Mennonite theology in the nineteenth century, a period of time to which Mennonites have most often referred for historical purposes but which clearly had theological importance.

Chapter five is probably the least satisfactory. Here Weaver attempts to make connections between Mennonite theology and Black and Womanist theologies. The link he makes is the common conviction that theology must be ethical while traditional Christian theology has too often accommodated violence. As Weaver has spent the previous chapters emphasizing the particularity of Mennonite theology, this attempt to generalize is jarring. Too often he has to acknowledge that, while there are some shared convictions on the issue of nonviolence, there are striking differences, leading one to wonder whether these theologies function as tokens in his argument or as genuinely particular theologies.

The problem with this book lies not in the message but in the form Weaver uses to deliver it. He fails to make the connection between how Mennonites have historically done theology and how they ought to do theology. He attempts to make this connection by emphasizing the particularity of Mennonite thinking, but this is to focus on the finger instead of on the finger pointing at something. It is true that Mennonites have culturally and historically held to the normative belief that Jesus taught the rejection of violence, but it is not true that what makes this belief normative is Mennonite particularity. A theology that rejects the doctrines of Christendom because it has historically accommodated violence ignores the fact that all Christian theology aims at the same truth. Anabaptist and Mennonite theology through the centuries has its own particular character, but it still shares the same object of concern as that of Christendom. Mennonite theologians can enter into dialogue with black and womanist theologians because they share the same concern for faithfulness. Weaver fails to appreciate the fact that particularity complements commonality, an insight of postmodernism. In the end, he overplays the particular at the expense of what all Christians hold in common, thereby sacrificing the unity of Christ's body. Ultimately, Mennonites are to pursue nonviolence, not because of our history or cultural backgrounds, but because this is what Christ has called us to do.

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