Kenneth R. Chase and Alan Jacobs, eds. *Must Christianity Be Violent? Reflections on History, Practice, and Theology.* Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2003.

Given the war in Iraq waged under the banner of "God bless America" by a nation frequently identified as "Christian" with a president who professes himself "Christian," this book addresses one of the important theological questions of our era. In the introduction, editor Kenneth Chase frames the question in terms of "pragmatic" and "inherency" arguments. The pragmatic argument "links acts of violence with those who claim to be Christians" (10). The inherency argument has two themes. One is Christian insistence on defining good and evil and a God who punishes sets in motion forces that may make Christianity inherently "complicit with violence" (12). The second is sacrifice: "The Judeo-Christian logic requires that a living creature must lose its life for God's favor to be restored to a guilty human" (12).

The book's twelve chapters (plus two conversations), revised from presentations at a March 2000 conference at Wheaton College sponsored by the Center for Applied Christian Ethics, work with one or both of these themes. Essays treat the first crusade, the violence of the *Conquistadores* in Latin and South America, theological opposition to slavery, the motivations and actions of rescuers and opponents of the Nazi holocaust, suggestions for teaching US history from a nonviolent perspective, theological emphases that minimize violence by Christians, and just peacemaking practices that allow pacifists and just war advocates to cooperate without resolving their differences. Perhaps the most intense chapters present Stanley Hauerwas's argument that Jesus precedes the philosophy of pacifism and its application to John Milbank, who acknowledges that God's creation contained no original violence but claims that sin makes participation in violence inevitable, whether one abstains from or enters into conflict. The printed Hauerwas-Milbank conversation does not resolve their debate.

The book does not pose the question of Christianity and violence as sharply or as deeply as it might. In the historical arena – the pragmatic argument – beyond a brief mention in Mark Noll's essay, I would like to see a full chapter on violence done to Native Americans in the settlement of North America, beginning with the New England Puritans, parallel to the story of the *Conquistadores* in Latin America. To bring racism closer to home, it

would be profitable to read about earlier biblical and theological defenses of slavery and segregation in the US as a parallel to the condemnation of violence against Jews in Nazi Germany.

For the inherency argument, the challenge to Christianity is mitigated by limits the editors placed on the analysis of violence in theology. Discussion of the hot-button topic of atonement was circumscribed to include only defenses of the satisfaction theory (16-17). Thus editor Chase argues that if Jesus' death is sufficient for sin, then we should challenge the idea that killing is necessary to eliminate the last evil "such as Saddam Hussein or Osama bin Laden, or Al Qaeda" (124), and that the righteousness of God's final judgment means that Christians do not need to seek vengeance. Richard Mouw's defense of satisfaction atonement argues that it does not promote violence because "in sending Jesus to the cross," God used a "last resort" remedy for sin in which "the punishment is proportionate to the end being sought," analogous to the limited use of violence in just war theory; but in any case, Jesus' submission to unjust violence is not an example for Christians to follow because the "once-for-all theme in the Reformed understanding of atonement" gives it an "inimitability collorary" (165).

I applaud Chase's nonviolent application of satisfaction atonement, but both his and Mouw's arguments confirm the intrinsic violence of its imagery. Limiting the discussion to defenses of satisfaction both ignores the developing, wider argument whether God is properly understood as using or sanctioning violence, a divine violence intrinsic to satisfaction atonement, and avoids significant interaction with serious challenges to the violence of satisfaction atonement from black, feminist, womanist, and nonviolence-shaped theologies. Admitting these issues would raise the question of the "inherent" violence of Christianity to a higher level, and would bring additional biblical and nonviolent arguments into the discussion.

This volume makes a substantial contribution, but its answer will satisfy only some readers. It provides food for thought for those concerned about violence who wish to preserve the broad tradition of standard, primarily evangelical theology and an opening for justifiable war. For those desiring a fundamental reassessment of Christianity's relationship to violence, the book leaves important work yet to do.

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C. Arnold Snyder, ed. *Commoners and Community. Essays in Honour of Werner O. Packull*. Pandora Press, 2002.

To honor Werner Packull, with whom many associate the "polygenetic beginnings" thesis, now thirty years old, and more recently phrases like "between paradigms" and "demise of a normative vision," one should expect a Festschrift with the latest revisionary interpretation of sixteenth-century Anabaptism. The authors (Packull's colleagues and students) and the editor have delivered, and they have produced a richly rewarding book.

That the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition is and was fully Christian, not heretical as charged in the 1500s, is now widely assumed. There still are evangelists for Anabaptism seeking to persuade us of the superiority of the Anabaptist reformist agenda, many themselves converts from another tradition. Indeed, elements of such a defense of one's Reformation tradition are still widespread, yet much has changed in that regard. Historians now teach students to appreciate a broader and fuller Reformation agenda.

To take seriously the contextual influences that have changed us over time also includes tracking shifts in historiography. It remains a challenge to think of the Christian Tradition and of our smaller traditions as having a history of development, where neither a rediscovery of an elusive pristine beginning nor a celebration of our present reality as the result of unending progress can serve. This Festschrift provides a handy introduction to the sobriety now characteristic of Anabaptist studies.

At the zenith of Anabaptist studies (between 1960 and 1980), it was possible to claim statistical significance for Anabaptists in specific regions of Europe and, above all, to see them as forerunners of values now taken for granted in modernity. The modern assumptions of freedom of conscience, separation of church and state, and voluntarism in religion that Harold Bender described as "basic in American Protestantism and so essential to democracy" were "derived from the Anabaptists of the Reformation period, who for the first time clearly enunciated them and challenged the Christian world to follow them in practice" (*Anabaptist Vision,* 4). More recent scholarship makes such claims no longer meaningful, though they are still encountered in popular Mennonite writing. For example, theologian James Reimer cites Mennonite Islamic scholar David Shenk's embellishment of Bender, about Anabaptists

"blazing the way forward for the global commitments today to human rights, religious freedom and pluralistic culture" (122). Reimer is less certain that links to the modern democratic state should be celebrated so freely, given Hauerwas's claim that such a state "is intrinsically dependent on violence to sustain itself"; Reimer senses a dilemma for Mennonites in modernity.

Commoners and Community summarizes what scholars have now established. Arnold Snyder begins with a short outline of Packull's published contributions. Then follows a longer essay by Edmund Pries on Packull's biography. Snyder ends his introduction by further revising the polygenesis claim to say that internal connections between the two groups most studied in English – the Swiss and the South German – were stronger than their distinctions.

Although statistical record keeping came later, present research allows us to draw a more accurate picture of the Anabaptist communities. Until 1618 the majority of Anabaptists were artisans from the "middle elements of the population." Men were dominant, more so in the Biblicist groups, less so in the spiritualist groups. But among Anabaptist martyrs, women constituted about one third, a higher percentage than in most other martyr traditions. The best estimate now is that 2,000-2,500 Anabaptists suffered martyrdom in the Reformation era. This represented 40 to 50 percent of all martyrs, a sobering fact in another way. Recent research has also established that Protestant authorities more often spared the lives of dissenters than did Catholic authorities. From yet another angle, the relatively low numbers of martyrs caused the Dutch scholar Zijlstra to assert that Dutch Mennonite survival was due "to the stubborn resistance of local authorities to enforcement of the laws against heresy," the Dutch republic protecting Doopsgezinde after 1570.

Indeed, as we learn more about the survival and development story of the Dutch Mennonites during the Enlightenment, more questions emerge. Whereas one had relied on the claim of 160,000 Dutch Mennonites around 1700, with a steady loss of membership thereafter to the present, it now seems clear that between 1570 and 1670 Dutch Doopsgezinde membership remained constant around 60-65,000, though the general population was growing. During the eighteenth century, according to Michael Driedger, Dutch Mennonites were active as leaders and publicists for learned societies, social agencies, and reform groups. A seminary (though with only one professor

teaching) had been sponsored by the Lamist wing of the church since 1735 and continues to the present. Dutch Mennonites were active in the Enlightenment, editing journals, taking part in Free Mason societies, and being leaders in Pietism, as preachers, poets etc. A number of Mennonites were politically active and supportive of the Batavian Republic set up under Napoleon, many of whom were seminary students. Yet, "unlike many Dutch Mennonites, north German Mennonites [also participating in the Enlightenment and Pietism] remained politically obedient to the established powers" (120, n46). Why this is so is not easily answered, except for the obvious difference of political context for Dutch and north Germans.

Even the picture of the Swiss and south German Anabaptists as moving toward greater isolation from society and settling for apoliticism now requires adjustment. The unearthing of manuscripts from the end of the sixteenth century reveals an active "Marpeck group" among the Swiss Brethren, Marpeck's irenic and flexible style not having died out after all. In theologian Reimer's reading, the materials show less of the strict dualism of Schleitheim, "a more comprehensive reading of the Bible as a whole, using figurative and spiritualist hermeneutics; respect for individual conscience and opposition to coercive measures in matters of faith . . . support of the ban but with toleration of diversity within the church; greater flexibility in relating to government officials; and less readiness to damn those outside the perfection of Christ" (136).

This volume includes biographical and bibliographical surveys of Packull's remarkable achievement. The remaining twelve articles are grouped under Perspectives on Reformation and Tradition, and Perspectives on Anabaptist History. The latter section devotes attention to spiritualist themes in Anabaptism. Packull's first monograph identified mysticism as central to the early south German-Austrian Anabaptist movement; Snyder's essay on mysticism and spirituality notes the shift away from mysticism studies in the later 1970s and '80s, but his own research now sees Hubmaier providing, through his *Summa of the Entire Christian Life*, "one of the seminal works in all of Anabaptism" (200), in essence a systematic Swiss Anabaptist spirituality.

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Will Schirmer, *Reaching Beyond the Mennonite Comfort Zone: Exploring from the Inside Out.* Cascadia Publishing House, 2003.

Convinced Anabaptist Will Schirmer takes the Mennonite family lovingly to task for habits and attitudes of clannishness preventing congregations from successfully reaching and incorporating new people. After being part of the Mennonite church in southeastern Pennsylvania for more than twenty years, he shares many observations of "in-group" thinking and behavior that hold newcomers at arm's length, under such chapter headings as "What Non-Mennonites Don't Want to Hear." Some of these grievances are particular to Mennonites (attitudes like "Mennonites are the only Christians," or "The world is bad and you are worldly"), while some can be found in any close-knit group (behaviors like "private inside jokes and conversations").

The last three chapters focus on means to reach beyond the familiar, using stories of Mennonite churches taking deliberate steps to effectively engage the mission fields around them. Written for a lay audience, the book offers discussion questions at the end of each chapter for group study and application of "where the shoe fits."

Schirmer's chapter on "Nonconfrontation: A Way of Life or a Way Out?" is the most thoughtful and provocative of his anecdotal observations. He believes our theology of nonresistance has often promoted a culture of avoidance in dealing with inter-personal and congregational conflict, fostering patterns of denial, acknowledgement, and regret rather than healthy problem solving. He argues that Jesus left us with many healthy examples of confrontation and non-confrontation, and he appeals for a more active use of Jesus' process for confronting sinners (Matthew 18:15-17), emphasizing the importance of communication at every stage to win over sinners and confront our own fears and weaknesses.

The concluding chapters on "Reaching out Beyond the Familiar," "Getting to Know People and Meeting Their Needs," and "Getting Churches on Track with the Great Commission" are both inspiring and practical for any congregation seeking to grow beyond the status quo. The author critiques our culture's emphasis on comfort (the "easy chair" mentality) that has crept into our churches, erecting barriers to change such as familiarity, legalism, inward focus, self-preservation, and resting on laurels. He describes churches pursuing a course

of change in order to focus beyond themselves; they have pioneered shifts in leadership, worship, attitude, and congregational structure that can serve as models for others. The dynamics Schirmer describes could apply to many congregational settings outside the Mennonite fold, but they are relevant to community-minded Mennonites grappling with the dynamics of rapid cultural change.

Schirmer helpfully identifies the Mennonite fear of compromising the Gospel as key to resisting change in the church. He argues for changing ourselves and how we present the Gospel, but not for changing the content of our good news. He cites congregations that have successfully taught the peace position to newcomers without rejecting or judging them for coming in with different perspectives, and he urges gaining an understanding of the shifting worldviews – traditional, modern, and postmodern – found within our congregations and the society around us. He proposes Mennonites overcome their discomfort with traditional methods of evangelism by concentrating on getting to know people and meeting their needs – something that Mennonites, with their history of service, do quite naturally. In his final chapter, Schirmer affirms the missional focus of Mennonite Church USA and Canada, and describes processes of healing, vision development, and procurement of outside resources which can help congregations become welcoming and inclusive of seekers.

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Jane Rogers Vann, *Gathered Before God: Worship-Centered Church Renewal*. Westminster/John Knox, 2004.

Each word in Jane Rogers Vann's three-word title is essential to understanding her intention: (a) Gathered – Her book takes a corporate view of church renewal. Gathered before God are not only God's people corporately assembled, but the practices of those people – in worship and out – as a single expression of faithfulness. (b) Before – Placing every aspect of Christian living before God, Vann can describe worship as a morally demanding endeavor. "Before" may indeed be the one-word descriptor of church renewal – when all aspects of life are lived before God in expressions of faithful

praise. (c) God – "[T]he central purpose for the church is the worship of the triune God made known through the story of the people of Israel and in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ" (2).

Professor of Christian Education at Union Theological Seminary and Presbyterian School of Christian Education, Vann proposes a process of church renewal based on experiential learning theories. This combination – education and theology – is the book's warp and weft. The shuttle is the question, "How do we learn the Christian life from the experience of congregational life?" (2) If a collection of mature Christians is the sum of a church on its way to renewal, what shall its practices be? What characteristics will it bear? How do spiritual renewal and worship renewal enhance each other? Answers are furnished here both in a sturdy theology of the worshipping church and in stories of ten Presbyterian congregations embodying characteristics of worship-centered renewal.

Not only is "worship's integrity compromised every time it becomes an instrument used to support other programs," the programmatic church implicitly suggests that when people participate in those programs "their Christian lives will be faithfully formed" (6), and presumably the church will be renewed by way of such programming. But programs do not equate to vitality, nor participation to growth. *Gathered Before God* leads readers to imagine worship as a paradigm for the whole of Christian life and the organizational hub of all congregational life (9). This should come as both a challenge and a relief to those searching for new vitality.

In the first of two accessible parts, Vann lays the theoretical groundwork for congregational renewal. Renewal happens through learning, and learning occurs when experience is followed by reflection. In educational terms, we learn by doing and finding meaning in what we do. Theologically, we experience God by participating in activities that expect God's presence, and we learn from them when we take time to reflect upon them. Vann's three-to-one ratio of experience to reflective discipline might seem a bit lopsided, but she contends it represents "not a devaluing of experience in favor of reflection but a careful valuing of experience as the ground of all knowledge" (39).

Chapter three describes worship as the setting of concrete experience. Worship is the environment of *primary theology*, firsthand experience of God by God's gathered people in the midst of some really peculiar dynamics.

Secondary theology is the work of reflecting upon that encounter, and here Vann's unique offering of theory and story forms the book's core. Chapters four through six examine prayer, study, and mission as environments of reflective practice and practice. Congregational stories help the reader understand worship as primary experience, with the church's other functions organized around it as spaces for reflection and implementation. Part two is immensely practical.

One of this book's strongest attributes is the balance given to art and academics, education and theology, theory and narrative. It is also unique in its ability to talk to Protestants about ritual while cautioning against ritualization, to address moral formation without being moralistic, and to address mission without using worship mechanistically.

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