

Benjamin W. Goossen. *Chosen Nation: Mennonites and Germany in a Global Era*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2017.

In this seminal work, Benjamin Goossen explores the intersections of nationality, nationalism, collectivism, ethnicity, and religion among Mennonites in modern Germany and abroad. Rejecting “traditional definitions of both religion and nationality . . . capable of generating uniform communities,” he argues that “socially constructed and historically situated, religious and national cosmologies are negotiated at each moment.” He exposes how these “evolving relationships” led some Mennonites down the dark path of racism, antisemitism, war, and genocide (5). Goossen ruptures the familiar historical narrative of Mennonite martyrdom and victimhood, and challenges Mennonites to examine their pasts anew.

In the 19th century, German Mennonites confronted the core tenets of modern nationhood that inextricably linked citizenship and belonging to militarism and military service. Only a small number found they could not reconcile a peace witness with nationalist ideology and emigrated abroad; most embraced nationalism, renounced pacifism, and served in World War I. The impact on German Mennonite communities of Germany’s defeat in 1918 was perhaps more significant than the war itself, since Germany’s loss of land under the Treaty of Versailles greatly reduced the Mennonite population. For many Mennonites, loss of their German statehood brought into sharp relief the malleable nature of nation and nationalism. The treaty’s negative effects may explain why in 1933 they generally welcomed Hitler, who peddled hatred of Versailles, Bolshevism, and Jews alongside Pan-German expansionism.

Race and Mennonites’ agency in the Third Reich are central in Goossen’s analysis. In particular, Mennonites in the conquered East became quintessential “ethnic Germans” whose impeccable Aryan lineage made them ideal settlers of Hitler’s brutal racial empire. The author argues convincingly that they were not passive recipients of Nazi racism but its agents. He concludes that “without support from within the confession itself, Mennonitism would likely never have emerged as a scientific rubric of racial classification. Only through the efforts of pastors, genealogists, and aid workers did the notion of a ‘racial church’ . . . gain salience among

congregations in Germany and beyond, as well as among a wider non-Mennonite public” (145). In fact, “Mennonite activists’ most successful strategy for courting Nazi patronage lay in the idea of the racial church,” since Nazi researchers usually posited that Mennonites were more Aryan than the average German (131). In this discourse, Mennonites came to be seen as “anti-Jews”—racially superior, agrarian, productive, rooted—vis-à-vis Jews and their purported racial inferiority, degeneracy, and parasitic homelessness.

Close association with Aryanism and anti-Jewishness drew many Mennonites “into the machinery of an anti-Semitic and increasingly genocidal regime” (145). Individual Mennonites such as Otto Andres, lieutenant governor of Danzig-West Prussia, took official roles in Hitler’s genocidal regime in the East. Some Mennonites joined Nazi murder squads. Here Goossen wrestles with the question of Mennonite identity, since many of these men’s ties to Mennonitism were tenuous at best. He does not offer a clear definition of “Mennonite” or “Mennonitism” but concludes that contemporaries would have understood Mennonite soldiers, policemen, and presumably killers to be indeed Mennonites, which was “widely considered an ethnic as well as a religious appellation” (159). In contrast, there are no doubts about Benjamin Unruh’s credentials. The official MCC representative in Germany since 1936, Unruh, who was fully aware of the mass murder of Jews, collaborated closely with Heinrich Himmler to benefit Mennonite congregations in the East.

Goossen’s erudite analysis of Mennonites’ complicity in Hitler’s racism and genocide will, I hope, set new directions in research. The author highlights the need for further examination of the legacy of antisemitism in Mennonite faith and tradition. Privileging situational factors, he argues that Mennonite antisemitism was mainly the product of grave political, social, economic realities of the 20th century. Before that, although “everyday” antisemitic prejudices were common among German Mennonites, “they rarely indulged in extreme denunciations” (137). Stressing the toxic interplay of ideology, historical antisemitism, and situational factors in the Holocaust, other scholars have successfully challenged this approach. Goossen only alludes to the complex historical roots of Mennonites’ antisemitism in his discussion of the Weierhof School in the German Palatinate. In 1936 the

Nazis transformed this school into an elite training academy because it was “Jew-free” (126); in 1890 the school’s Mennonite board had expelled all Jewish students.

I hope that scholars will add to Goosen’s important work with additional research and case studies that could illuminate, for instance, why Mennonite communities near Danzig assisted in constructing, maintaining, and operating Stutthof concentration camp, where some 60,000 inmates perished. Confronting this past is not easy—and “how present-day Mennonites will confront the legacies of their pasts [is] yet to be seen” (212).

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P. Travis Kroeker. *Messianic Political Theology and Diaspora Ethics: Essays in Exile*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017.

A good many essay collections, especially those that gather material written over a span of decades, suffer from a profound disjointedness. Not so this volume. Quite the contrary, in fact, because as one reads through *Messianic Political Theology and Diaspora Ethics* a kind of organic coherence emerges. Taken together, the fifteen essays articulate a powerful, nuanced vision of a political messianism rooted primarily in the Pauline, Augustinian, and Anabaptist traditions in conversation with a wide range of philosophical and literary figures from Plato to Giorgio Agamben and Fyodor Dostoevsky to Wendell Berry.

At least one way to read these essays is through Kroeker’s acknowledgement that his approach aligns with that of Anabaptist historian Robert Friedman, for whom “theology is properly ‘existential theology’” (83). The precarious attempt to hold faith and life together in various ways arguably permeates all these essays. In the face of a world often enthralled with sovereignty, mastery, and possession, Kroeker suggests that we need “an account of spiritual causality, if I may put it this way, in the language of poetic, dramatic experience, a return to our personhood—which is