Marika Rose. *Theology for the End of the World*. London, UK: SCM Press, 2023.

> *No revelation, however stark or horrible, seems enough to effect real change in the world we inhabit.*
> – Marika Rose

> *Desperation to stave off the worst at any cost turned out to be the path toward the very worst.*
> – Adam Kotsko

These two quotes, both in the introduction, set the scene and tone for Marika Rose's *Theology for the End of the World*. Perhaps beginning to wane just a little, apocalyptic theology remains popular and understandably so given the grand arc and damage of colonialism and capitalism. Could previous generations have imagined that the "success" of wealth and accumulation would turn out to lead to our complete undoing? And while the history is not completely clean and linear, Christianity has been the figure and foundation to many of the challenges we face today.

In an earlier review I wrote[1] comparing Philip Ziegler's *Militant Grace* and Thomas Lynch's *Apocalyptic Political Theology* Ziegler reflects what I call "confessional" apocalyptic theology which tends towards a more assured eschatology about what will happen at the end of the world, while Lynch reflects a more "contingent" or immanent theology that explores the internal dynamics of the situation without appeal to an external authority or any assumption as to the role of the church. I am tempted to say that Rose's work lands squarely in Lynch's stream. However, while Lynch does not tip his hand towards any confessional or ecclesial context, Rose does so. She affirms both that "Theology Can't be Saved" (the title of chapter 2) as well as the possibility of thinking "about what use we might make of Christianity…for the project of taking sides with God against the world" (11).

Rose begins as most apocalyptic accounts do with clarifying that "the world" is not the earth; the world refers to the existing order of things, the symbolic structures of power. It is the task of this book to unpack the way in which the church and its attendant theology have both shaped and remain entangled in the world and how we might respond.

Rose begins with a thoroughgoing pessimism. She argues that "Christi-

1 See *The Conrad Grebel Review* 39.2 (Spring 2021): 151-154.

anity" should be named as one of our sins. It is the name of myriad harms. This statement is not performed in the service of some "spiritual" truth that escapes religion, but simply names the condition we must sit with if we also wish to identify as Christian. This leads to an acceptance that "theology can't be saved." Christians and theologians have a knack for redeeming themselves in the end; it sort of seems baked into the theology! But this has led to endless shifting of blame for what went wrong. Rose attempts to put a stop to this process by claiming that "if we think that there's a good version [of Christianity] that we can work out, we'll never come to terms with…actually existing bad versions of Christianity" (43).

From here chapters unfold, wrestling with "actually existing bad versions of Christianity." The middle section of the book is an extended engagement with the Bible and the church's relationship with family, race, and economics. Each chapter demonstrates how neither the Bible nor Christian history should be understood as an unequivocally "good" approach to these matters, and that even progressive changes were often blind to unintended consequences.

In the final chapters, Rose offers suggestive responses to the situation. In keeping with her use of provocative titles, chapter 7, "God is Useless," outlines the rise of work as next to godliness in the modern age. Despite the massive production of wealth, employment has become more precarious and basic standards of living unattainable. Here the Kotsko quote beginning this review is appropriate. Despite our dramatic doctrines of creation, the fall, and redemption, modernity and the church remain fixated on the fear that what is bad will shackle the possibility of creative and substantial changes. This leads Rose to the next big question: "Why did God create the world in the first place?" To which she replies, we are created for joy. "It's not useful: it's just good" (158). The purpose-driven life valorizes use at the cost of curiosity, play, and ultimately love. Chapter 8 unpacks the fraught history of Christian ideas of slavery and freedom. She covers familiar terrain of Christian endorsements of slavery while connecting this to liberal and modern notions of individual freedom. Here "freedom" becomes the price for the individual to become fully responsible and therefore fully blameworthy. Freedom gives us the "choice" of a just purchase but not a just society.

So, how to seek the end of the world? For some of us it will mean divesting from the world as we are able in acts of dispossession. There are two sides to this. First, it means seeing that some have already been dispossessed by the world. For some, the apocalypse has really and truly already happened. We must learn to align our lives to such people and places. The second is to

recognize the dispossession within. From Paul to Augustine to Freud there is an acknowledgement that we are not even sovereign over ourselves. Such acts require faith.

This is a book the church should be reading. At times the language skews academic, but it is very accessible given the concepts and thinkers it engages. Above all, *Theology for the End of the World* lays down the challenge to be honest about our God, ourselves, and our world: a world regularly revealing its suffering, a world made worse by our fear of the worst, a world perhaps worth ending.

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Hildi Froese Tiessen, *On Mennonite/s Writing: Selected Essays*. Ed. Robert Zacharias. Winnipeg, MN: CMU Press, 2023.

Remarkably, this new collection of Hildi Tiessen's essays is the first book of her own writing to be published, despite her long and distinguished career as critic, editor, and tireless promoter of "Mennonite/s Writing," a phrase Tiessen coined for the landmark conference celebrating this then-nascent literature at (what was then) Conrad Grebel College in 1990. Tiessen's legendary generosity and crucial role in the flourishing of what is now a widely recognized and ever-expanding body of Mennonite literature in Canada and the U.S. has been widely recognized. Yet it has taken half a century for Tiessen to be convinced to publish a selection of her ground-breaking critical essays. Ably edited (and introduced) by fellow critic Robert Zacharias, himself among the best of the next generation of Canadian Mennonite critics, *On Mennonite/s Writing* is well worth the long wait.[2]

The essays gathered here, as Zacharias notes, reflect the growth of both creative writing by and about Mennonites and scholarly attention to that work, beginning with Rudy Wiebe's *Peace Shall Destroy Many* (1962), gener-

2 A disclaimer: Tiessen and I have been fellow travelers, conversation partners, and friends since even before that 1990 conference. My own work (both critical and creative) is given generous attention in some of her essays, and her critical work and organization of readings and conferences have been personally and professionally important to me. This review will not be objective, but I do hope it is fair.