

## BOOK REVIEWS

Cameron Altaras and Carol Penner, eds. *Resistance: Confronting Violence, Power, and Abuse within Peace Churches*. Elkhart, IN: Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, 2022.

*Resistance* names its purpose as both offering readers accounts of destructive experiences that individuals have faced within the church and moving the conversation forward to the redemptive power that is possible within church communities if these areas of violence and abuse are addressed. The book is built as a collection of individual testimonies that, through their specificity, contribute to the broader conversation of the systemic violence taking place within the Anabaptist church. According to the editors these experiences are not random acts of violence but are examples of how the very “theology of a historical peace church was weaponized in the hands of the perpetrators” (6). The collection is organized topically, beginning by addressing colonialism, racism, and heterosexism as distinct systems that have been supported in the Anabaptist church. After using the beginning stories to highlight how these systems have become embedded within the church, part two continues with testimonies that highlight the way these systems intersect with areas of abuse and harm. Throughout the individual testimonies, the reader is shown the reality of how these violent forces have woven themselves into the fabric of the church. However, the book also includes demands, ideas, and examples for how the Anabaptist tradition can begin to extract itself from these patterns. It is a reminder of the power held by this church tradition to bear witness, find healing, and grow towards the truer image of the community of Christ it is called to be.

A powerful part of the execution of this book is the way the structure integrates some of the teachings contained within the stories. A theme in many of the stories is the way that silence has been a major contributor to the Anabaptist church’s upholding of structures of violence supported by theological

convictions. One of the unavoidable gaps this book faces is the omission of accounts from those who do not yet feel safe to share their stories. Despite this book's commitment to undoing the silencing and erasure that occurs around topics of violence and abuse within the church, among those who initially submitted writings, some had to withdraw for fear of having their identity deciphered through their story and risking further violence at the hands of their church community. While the book itself provides a platform within the church for these stories to be heard, it is also powerful to have the absence of stories highlighted within this project. Another structural choice made by the editors was the decision to include stories showing the active role the Anabaptist church has taken in the destruction of Indigenous people. By doing this at the outset of the book, the editors have imbued it with an acknowledgement not simply of a land claim but of a relational imperative of reconciliation when faced with the continued harms taking place at the hands of the church today.

While the book is an important read for any individual within the Anabaptist church, it also has the potential to speak to the community of the church both on a large and small scale. *Resistance* reveals the ways that the culture and theology of unquestioned Anabaptist principles and teachings have continually inflicted harm, and thus demands that the church better itself. The works shared in this book need to be considered not just in the private homes of readers, but within the conversations and teachings of a group. The amount of material covered in *Resistance* is vast, and the bonds between Anabaptist traditions and a culture of violence are multifaceted and hidden. However, where previously the church has frozen up at the daunting task of facing past and present abuses, these stories offer the opportunity to unmask and confront the spaces where harm festers. They provide enlightening perspectives on well-worn scriptures that could awaken Bible studies and sermons to the way these beloved texts in the Anabaptist tradition have been weaponized against the vulnerable or have centered the privileged. These stories have been shared so that all those not yet able to speak to their experience can be heard around the council meeting table when policies are being drawn around safe church policies. These stories are hard, but they are ours. As an Anabaptist church, we are bound as a community to witness these testimonies as the beginning of a conversation about how we will confront the

violence among us and work together towards becoming a church of peace.

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Ens, Sarah. *Flyway*. Winnipeg, MB: Turnstone Press, 2022.

Manitoba poet Sarah Ens's most recent work, *Flyway*, is a meditation on questions of inheritance, generational trauma, and what it means to attend to the places we call home. Written as a long poem, *Flyway* attends to stories of human and ecological upheaval, and traces the ways in which our ancestral stories are intimately connected to our understandings of the environments we call home. The collection comprises five sections in which Ens creatively reimagines the story of her Oma Anni's displacement within the Russian empire in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and her family's eventual resettlement on the Canadian prairies.

Alongside her Oma's migration story, Ens charts the migratory flight patterns of grassland birds and laments their slowly disappearing populations from the tall grass prairie ecosystems of Manitoba. In an interview with writer Nathaniel Moore about *Flyway*, Ens comments, "Poetry can connect two seemingly disparate things—my Oma's forced migration from Ukraine during WWII and the destruction of the tallgrass prairie, for example—and a long poem form can extend, complicate, and follow those connections in ways I find exciting."

*Flyway's* central theme is that of inheritance, and this idea is woven into both the story and the long poem structure, in which Ens includes quotes from other Canadian nature poets like Don McKay and Tim Lilburn, as well as scriptural references and fragments pulled from letters and diary entries from Ens's ancestors. The poem's five sections alternate between the story of the migration of Ens's grandmothers (Flight, Un / Settling), and psalm-like meditations (Tallgrass Psalmody Parts One, Two, and Three). The meditations are written from the writer's perspective, as she observes the unsettled grasslands and the complexities that come with inheriting a home that was not originally her own. The psalmody that begins "How do you unfold bones for flight?" (16) stood out for me in its poignant imagery: