

## Foreword

The 2008 Bechtel Lectures on “The Mennonite Experience in Paraguay” comprise the core of this issue. Given at Conrad Grebel University College last March by Paraguayan-born Mennonite theologian and minister Alfred Neufeld, the two lectures will introduce many readers to the dynamic history and current involvements of Mennonite communities in that country. Neufeld chairs the coordinating committee for Mennonite World Conference (MWC) Assembly 15, which will meet in Paraguay this July.

An article by Sarah Johnson analyzes aspects of the “Shared Convictions” statement adopted by MWC in 2006 (and on which Alfred Neufeld has written a commentary, *What We Believe Together*). An article by Jon Hoover, “Islamic Monotheism and the Trinity,” expands the discussion of matters explored in recent CGR issues devoted to Mennonite-Muslim dialogue – see 24.1 (Winter 2006) and 21.3 (Fall 2003).

The book review section offers thoughtful assessments, by a wide range of reviewers, of eleven recent releases. Readers should note that the CGR website offers all book reviews we have published since 2006 and is regularly updated between print issues. (CGR print issues occasionally must focus only on article-length pieces, while book reviews go directly to the website and then appear in the next available print issue.)

Upcoming CGR issues will include papers from a San Diego symposium on J. Denny Weaver’s *The Nonviolent Atonement*, and a host of research articles and other items inviting readers’ close examination.

We invite submissions for consideration – and we are always happy to welcome new subscribers, of course.

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# 2008 BECHTEL LECTURES

## The Mennonite Experience in Paraguay

*Alfred Neufeld*

### I

## The Congregational and Theological Experience

### Introduction: Uniqueness of the Experience

Although Mennonites and heirs of the Anabaptist movement have always been spread over the globe by migration and by mission, the Mennonite experience in Paraguay is unique in a number of ways:

1. The Mennonites basically came as refugees – cultural refugees from Canada, political refugees from Russia.

2. They came to the Chaco, Paraguay's extensive wilderness region west of the Paraguay river, in an area characterized by a complete absence of the state.

3. They settled in a territory disputed by the nations of Bolivia and Paraguay, owned legally by a Spanish Argentinean corporation (Casado) but historically the habitat of the Enlhit native people, who weren't aware that several other institutions claimed ownership of their territory.

4. They started immigrating in 1927 under a unique law (Law 514) specially passed by the Paraguayan Parliament in 1921 for Mennonite immigration. This was the first law in Latin America dealing with people who refused to join the army and the military draft.

5. From Russia they brought the colony system and from the Soviets the *Raiffeisen-Genossenschaft* (co-operative) system, and introduced them into Paraguayan society.

6. Mennonites in Paraguay were the main concern and object of help in the first decades of MCC's and MEDA's existence.

7. They came with a rather confused mosaic of citizenships. The first

group arrived with Canadian national identity and passports; the second group with no citizenship at all; and the third group with German citizenship and experience with the *Wehrmacht*, though they were born in Russia.

8. Over the decades they developed from extreme poverty to become one of the wealthiest social groups in Paraguay; per capita income in their immigrant communities was at least ten times higher than the national average.

9. The Mennonite experience in Paraguay might be one of the most significant epochs in Mennonite history with respect to what John Howard Yoder called “mission by migration.”

10. With strong first generation Anabaptist-Mennonite churches within five native ethnic groups in the central Chaco, and about 100 local churches in the Spanish-Paraguayan cities and countryside, the Mennonite experience in Paraguay is multi-ethnic. The past meets the future. The ethnic immigrant stream will sooner or later be a “Mennonite minority.” MWC General Secretary Larry Miller observes that Paraguay is a microcosm of the new reality of the global Mennonite family.

## **A. The Congregations**

### *Congregations Coming from Canada*

Paraguay was “discovered” after World War I by conservative Canadian Mennonites who had come to Manitoba and Saskatchewan in the 1870s, leaving Russia because they were unwilling to adapt to Mennonite “modernism” in the Ukraine. Now they were willing to move again, because the government was restricting their freedom regarding private schools. Mennonite schools in Manitoba and Saskatchewan at that time depended very much on the German language, which was also used for church order (*Gemeindeordnung*) and catechetical instruction. There was also a suspicion that Canadian nationalism (expressed, for instance, by the presence of flags in school) and militarism could increase.<sup>1</sup>

Delegates sent by the churches, together with real estate agents Samuel McRoberts and Fred Engen, found “the promised land,” the Paraguayan Chaco, in 1920-21. The Paraguayan government with Manuel Gondra as President and Eusebio Ayala as Minister, as well as José Casado, a Spanish/Argentinean landowner of more than six million hectares in the Chaco, had

a strong political and economic interest in “the Mennonite project.” They were able to obtain from Parliament a special law, Law 514, which provided for six basic rights: free exercise of religion, private schools with religious orientation in the German language, exemption from military service in times of peace and war, simple affirmation of yes and no instead of swearing an oath, administration of their own matters of heritage, and freedom from taxation for the first ten years.<sup>2</sup>

In 1927, 266 families, a total of 1,753 people, left Canada and headed for Paraguay. One hundred seventy-seven families belonged to the Chortitzer Gemeinde, 53 to the Sommerfelder Gemeinde, and 36 to the Bergthaler Gemeinde. While 168 people died on the trip and 335 returned to Canada, 1,250 people did arrive in the central Chaco and founded the Menno colony.<sup>3</sup>

In the beginning, church leadership and settlement leadership were the same. The three different church directions soon merged into one church (Chortitzer), which in the 1970s would join the Conference of Mennonite Churches in Paraguay and South America. Church life has gone through a very dramatic change and renewal, so that today many representatives of this colony wonder if there had really been a good reason for their forebears to leave Canada because of faith issues.

#### *Congregations Coming from Russia*

A completely different odyssey was experienced by the second group, who came as refugees from Russia in 1930. Originally they all wanted to go to Canada after a dramatic flight to Moscow at the end of 1929 and a special “salvation day” on November 25, which allowed about 5,000 people to leave Russia, thanks to the intervention of the German government and the *Brüder in Not* (Brothers in Need) action directed by Benjamin H. Unruh. But Canada had changed its immigration policies in the late '20s, and the young MCC under the vigorous leadership of Harold S. Bender and Orrie Miller stepped in to find a way to bring the Russian Mennonites to Paraguay. Most of these people had lost everything, even their citizenship, but they had lived through the Mennonite renaissance of the previous decades, leading to material wealth and an openness toward higher education and toward Russian and modern European culture. They had also been part of a strong

church renewal movement, as expressed in the emergence of the Mennonite Brethren after 1860 and in reform movements within the Mennonite *Kirchgemeinde* as well as the *Evangelisch Mennonitische Bruderschaft–Allianzgemeinde*.

The “Russians” experienced much help and solidarity from the “Mennoleute,” who had already been there for three years, when they arrived in the central Chaco and founded the Fernheim colony. Since then, a fruitful inter-relationship has developed between these two groups, leading to considerable mutual assimilation in economics, education, church, and social life.

The Russian group had been much more exposed to European culture and non-Mennonite church life within the framework of the Evangelical Alliance, the pietistic and Moravian movements, and the theological seminaries in Hamburg, Berlin, and Basel. And they had spent half a year in refugee camps in Germany, feeling grateful to the German government that had “saved” them and was willing to confront “the Bolshevistic demons.” Different from the Menno colony, where the three church branches merged into one “colony church,” Fernheim from the beginning in 1930 resolved to continue with the three groups brought from Russia: *Kirchgemeinde* (Mennonite Church), the Mennonite Brethren Church, and *Evangelisch Mennonitische Bruderschaft–Allianzgemeinde*. Although B.H. Unruh and MCC had encouraged a merger into one church organization, they have retained the dynamics of these three historic branches but cooperate in a unique, mostly harmonious way within the so-called K.f.K (*Komitee für Kirchenangelegenheiten*) and *Gemeindekomitee*.

A different scenario marked the immigration of the Neuland-Volendam people, who came as Russian refugees after World War II. All of them had lived for at least twenty years under a communistic and atheistic regime, and they had witnessed the disintegration of Mennonite church life in the 1930s under Stalin. They had been part of the Mennonite exodus from Ukraine in 1943 toward the West under the custodianship of the *Wehrmacht*. But the men had mostly joined the German armed forces. Many had been killed. The survivors’ status as refugees was not secure; certainly Canada was not willing to take many of them. Again MCC, under the vigorous leadership of C.F. Klassen and Peter Dyck, stepped in and brought them to Paraguay.

These refugees had been exposed for five years to German culture and Nazi ideology, but they had also seen the breakdown of the whole Third Reich. Arriving in Paraguay in 1947 with horrible memories of the war, they founded the Neuland colony in the Chaco and the Volendam colony in East Paraguay. Women, children, and widows were the main protagonists of these settlements. For many of these settlers, church life and personal faith had gone through a severe crisis, but in both colonies they soon organized a major Mennonite congregation and a somewhat smaller Mennonite Brethren church. The Allianzgemeinde existed only in Fernheim.

*Transformation and Integration of Immigrant Congregational Life through Eight Decades*

I suggest that at least five integrating forces have transformed the Mennonite immigrant groups into a quite homogenous unit.

1. *The co-operative movement* Strangely enough, the co-operative system, borrowed from the Soviets, has strengthened and almost replaced church life and church solidarity. As will be seen in my second lecture on the social and diaconal dimensions, Mennonite colonies today are unthinkable without the strong co-operatives, which provided the legal and economic framework for their existence and subsistence. As a mixed blessing the co-ops embodied forces that would strengthen a social phenomenon which was not too remote from notions of a “Mennonite socialist republic.” The power of the co-ops would even overwhelm and overshadow the presence and leadership of the churches. To some extent it is fair to say that the colony citizens would look to the co-operatives to provide their basic security system and to meet their needs. On the one hand, this system has enormously strengthened economic growth and solidarity; on the other hand, it was a legal tool to keep out of the system non-ethnic Mennonites and people interested in buying land in the colony area.

2. *The K.f.K. movement* Founded in Russia at the end of the Tsar system as an all-Mennonite dialogue partner to the Russian government, the *Komitee für Kirchenangelegenheiten* (Committee for Church Affairs) in Paraguay became a kind of inter-Mennonite alliance movement. It was geared toward bringing General Conference and Mennonite Brethren congregations into a functional relationship, and enhancing spiritual life

and ethics within a settlement and a local village. Thanks to the K.f.K., most Sunday church services on the local level were held jointly (until some years ago). Recently congregational life and congregational church services have been strengthened. The K.f.K. legacy is that of a vital unifying force, bringing preachers (*Prediger*) and congregations to a considerable level of theological affinity. A result of the K.f.K. movement and the MCC influence has been the *Gemeindekomitee*, a network of 31 German-speaking congregations in the above-mentioned colonies plus Asunción, Sommerfeld, and Tres Palmas. They jointly sponsor the Christian Service agency, the Leprosy Hospital, and several other congregational and theological projects such as the Peace Committee.

*3. The educational movement* Higher education has been very important for Fernheim and has become important in the other colonies, fostering reform movements in the Menno colony in the 1960s and 1970s. From the beginning, the German government, partly through the lobbying of Dr. Walter Quiring and Dr. Fritz Kliever, played a crucial part in the immigrant Mennonite school movement. They provided textbooks and, later, teachers for high schools and teacher-training seminars. This cultural connection to Germany fostered an open-mindedness on educational matters.

However, the churches sometimes felt the strong German and partly secular influence was a mixed blessing. The first serious trouble emerged in the late 1930s and early 1940s, when a large amount of Nazi ideology and propaganda was flowing through this channel to central Chaco. Ever since, there has been a kind of hidden competition between church and school as to which is exercising the main authority. This competition was often effectively bridged by preachers who were also schoolteachers. There have been times when the school system claimed more autonomy from church life, and times when church leaders looked for more authority over the school system. Beginning in the 1970s, the Mennonite school system and its bilingual education policy were completely integrated into the national school system, which brought new dynamics into the issue.

*4. The theological schools* The Russian Mennonite branch, familiar with the Bible school movement in Russia, Germany, and Switzerland, started several small Bible schools from the 1930s through the 1970s. A

major achievement was the founding of the Mennonite Bible Seminary in Montevideo in 1956. It closed down in 1973, but reopened as Centro Evangélico Mennonita de Teología (CEMTA) in Asunción in 1978. Notably, this seminary introduced Paraguayan immigrant Mennonites to the wider Latin American context and the Spanish language, produced a number of key second generation leaders, and bolstered unity and missions.

The same was true for the Instituto Bíblico Asunción (IBA), founded in 1964 and owned by both the Spanish and German Mennonite Brethren Churches of Paraguay. The IBA and CEMTA had a hard time competing with the educational offerings of theological seminaries in Europe and North America, where a great number of immigrant Mennonites have received their training. Yet the co-operation of these schools, now two campuses of the School of Theology of the Protestant University of Paraguay, has done much to bring church leaders, mission leaders, pastors, and faculty members into close fellowship. Also, a significant part of the theological and Anabaptist consensus has been achieved through this movement.

Recently the Yalve Sanga Bible Institute, training leaders for four different native ethnic groups and Mennonite congregations, has become an important dialogue partner in this process.

*5. The mission and service movement* Since mission and service are always a two-way street, engagement in these activities has transformed the immigrant Mennonite churches considerably. Today, liturgy and spirituality are marked by Latin American trends. Local churches within a non-Mennonite environment – this is the case with most Spanish Mennonite congregations – have enhanced the church life of the immigrant groups and challenged their identity. Firsthand conversion experiences, and first generation Anabaptists coming out of either animistic backgrounds within native cultures or Catholic folk religion within the East Paraguayan context, have partly renewed people's understanding of the Anabaptist movement of the 16th century. However, the "common sense evangelicalism" characteristic of mission movements is also having an impact on the immigrant congregations. This last dynamic is also enhanced by evangelical literature coming from Germany, and by theological seminaries oriented to the European evangelical tradition.



## **B. Missions**

### *Mission by Migration*

My grandfather Kornelius Neufeld had been a very wealthy *chutor* (estate) owner and co-operative leader at Ekatarinowka-Kornjeowka in the Omsk region of Russia. After imprisonment in Moscow and the events of the miraculous November 25th, he arrived in the Chaco with his big family. When the Mennoleute with their oxcarts delivered him to the wilderness, at a place that would become Rosenort Nr.10, he reportedly said, “*Mama, nü sand wi tüs*” (“Mama, this now is our home”).<sup>4</sup>

For the Fernheim people, the traumatic Russian experience had taught them a memorable lesson. They would be very hesitant about becoming wealthy employers again; employees might start a revolution if they felt discriminated against and saw themselves as victims of social injustice. At least that has been the attitude among the family I grew up in. Whenever we remembered Russia, we felt that good fortune should reach everyone.

The relatively friendly welcome that the Enlhit tribe offered to the newcomers (even showing a willingness to learn Low German), the openness of many immigrant Mennonites to learning the Enlhit language, the exchange of experiences, and the help that the Enlhit gave the immigrants gave birth to a unique relationship of mutual friendship and appreciation. This relationship was intensified during the Chaco war with Bolivia (1932-1935), when the Enlhit were considered spies and hunted like animals by both fronts, the Paraguayan and the Bolivian. Occasionally they were hidden and protected by the newly arrived Mennonite immigrants.<sup>5</sup>

Since the Enlhit practiced a peculiar method of family planning (killing the newborn before they had a soul and prior to their first cry), the newcomers’ first spontaneous act of cultural interference was to open up a home for “orphans.” Making the gospel understandable took time, but culminated in an amazing mass movement toward Christianity and a quite Mennonite style of congregational and communitarian life. Of course, there were pioneer missionaries, but there was also the simple co-existence of two ethnic groups, resulting in a tremendous transfer of ideas, techniques, values, and faith beliefs from the immigrant Mennonite community to an emerging Enlhit Mennonite church. Today the economic gap between the two groups is considerable, and many Enlhit and Nivaclé church leaders

ask for a return to that old friendly relationship, where all the central Chaco population was poor and depended on God and on each other.

*From Refugee Consciousness to Apostolic Consciousness*

The driving force of the Mennonite migration to Paraguay was to find a place of refuge, to “hide away from the world” and again become the “*Stillen im Lande.*” Law 514 and the green desert in the Chaco without any roads or connections to the rest of Paraguay provided ideal conditions. When the Eberhard Arnold-Bruderhof people arrived in Filadelfia during World War II, expelled by Germany and Great Britain, they soon realized that in order to live their mission they would have to move toward populated areas. But for a long time Mennonites migrating to the central Chaco saw the reduced Chaco population as their only challenge for service and missions. That changed a bit with the coming of the Neuland-Volendam group: some of its members had promised the Lord while in military service that they would serve in missions if they survived, as in the case of the later missionaries Dietrich Lepp and Albert Enns. And so they did, pioneering mission extension among the Toba and in East Paraguay.

Dictator Alfredo Stroessner’s long period in office (1954-1989) allowed a sense of isolation, self-sufficiency, and autonomy to grow within the colonies – and a sense of being a kind of Mennonite Republic in the central Chaco. For the government this was good business, because it didn’t need to fulfill its duty to provide infrastructure and services. And the immigrant community enjoyed being left alone with its special identity. However, the end of the military government required and fostered an intense process of integrating political and social structures. This in turn provoked new considerations about integration and the reason for Mennonites being in Paraguay. Suddenly there was a call from the national community to make the Mennonite model of development accessible and understandable. Various political parties, especially new emerging ones, lobbied intensely to get Mennonite representatives into Parliament and politics. Now it became common to hear “*Wir haben einen Auftrag in diesem Land, und wir haben etwas zu bieten*” (“We have a mission – a duty – in this country, and we have something to offer”).

I call this process a change of consciousness among Mennonites, from

being refugees who feel threatened by any outsider to becoming apostles who consider themselves sent to deliver a message and to live an alternative. This very profound change within the immigrant group during the last twenty years has been risky – and marked by achievements and failures.

*Chaco Natives Becoming Mennonites*

Today there are three relatively large Mennonite conferences among the Enlhit, Nivaclé, and Toba, with 39 local congregations and close to 10,000 baptized members. As well, the ethnic groups of the Guarayos and the Ayoreos are in the process of structuring as conferences and asking for membership in Mennonite World Conference. They find it strange to realize they are “Mennonites,” because they always thought being a Mennonite meant belonging to an ethnic immigrant group of Prussian-Russian-Canadian origin. They even like to call themselves “Mennonite Brethren,” not in the classic denominational sense as MBs but as “Brethren of the Mennonites.” Even more, immigrant Mennonites have difficulty accepting that their native partners are authentic and probably even better Mennonites than they are themselves, if being Mennonite means relating to the experience of Menno Simons and the Anabaptists.

Now there is a vital process underway for Enlhit and Nivaclé to embrace Mennonite theological and congregational identity. The visit to Yalve Sanga of Mennonite World Conference President-elect Danisa Ndlovu from Zimbabwe in 2007 had a profound impact, in that Enlhit and Nivaclé church leaders felt united with other younger Mennonites in Africa, India, and elsewhere in the southern hemisphere. Generally they are most willing to embrace Anabaptist principles of theology and biblical interpretation, especially community-based hermeneutics, the peace witness, and the sharing of possessions. Until recently their knowledge of 16th-century Anabaptism was weak, but they would probably identify with the movement’s early leaders turning away from nominal Catholic folk religion, as they themselves have been largely turning away from ancestral tribal folk religions.

Nevertheless, these groups feel they still have a lot of homework to do, dealing with their traditional beliefs and religion in the light of their experience of embracing Christ and the Bible in the Mennonite tradition.

What Paul Hiebert has called “no contextualization” as well as “uncritical contextualization” has occurred during this process. Now they are starting to undertake more “critical contextualization.”<sup>6</sup>

*East Paraguayans Becoming Mennonites*

In 1950 John Schmidt, a medical doctor with MCC and the Mennonite churches in Paraguay, started to work in the area of Itacurubí de la Cordillera (Hospital Menonita Km 81), building a Mennonite leprosy hospital. From the beginning it was agreed that evangelism and church planting should go hand-in-hand with the service effort. In 1955 Albert Enns, after studying in Buenos Aires with the Old Mennonites, the Baptists, and the Christian and Missionary Alliance, began an evangelistic and church planting ministry in Asunción. Now, after more than 50 years, two healthy and autonomous Paraguayan Mennonite conferences (GC and MB), with over 100 local congregations and almost 5,000 baptized members, are part of Mennonite World Conference. Most of them are first generation “Anabaptists” and had to suffer much hostility, especially years ago, when embracing the gospel that Mennonite missionaries shared with them and turning their backs on family religious traditions.

Since Paraguay was nominally Catholic (encompassing at least 98 percent of the population) and Catholicism was the state religion until 1992, non-Catholic congregations were considered sects and were usually labeled as *evangélicos* (Protestants). In the founding decades of the Spanish Mennonite congregations, this identification was stronger than identification as *menonitas*. Yet there was a vital historical interest in the experience of 16th-century Anabaptists, and the *Martyrs Mirror* and movies like “The Radicals” had a profound impact.

At least two difficulties have arisen for these Paraguayan Mennonites with Mennonite identity:

1. The public and the press perceive Mennonite identity as basically ethno-religious and prefer to link it to the strong co-operatives, the dairy products, and the image of Old Colony Mexican Mennonites in overalls and straw hats selling cheese in the streets of Asunción.

2. The congregational concept of church leadership with democratic and parliamentary rules is foreign to Paraguayan culture and Catholic

religious tradition. So the congregational model of church organization tends either to fail or to cause a power struggle and leadership deficits. Some churches are now asking if they shouldn't move more toward an Episcopalian or Presbyterian model, one that is more compatible with Paraguayan leadership culture. And since Menno Simons was a bishop, they wonder if the Congregationalist model is really Anabaptist.

*The Call to the City*

Until recently Paraguay had just one real city, the capital Asunción, the focus of most of the country's cultural, economic, and educational life. MCC headquarters was centered in Asunción, as well as the business and export departments of the colony co-operatives. Since 1950 there have been German Mennonite churches there, comprising business people, university students, domestic workers, and missionaries. Asunción has indeed become a nerve center for the Mennonite presence in Paraguay. Its more than 30 flourishing Mennonite businesses rank among the strongest at the national level. There are also two Bible colleges, four schools (Concordia, Albert Schweitzer, Johannes Gutenberg, ProEd), and a robust Mennonite presence in the Protestant University, leading the schools of Music, Economics, Education, Social Work, and Theology.

As well, there is a TV station and a radio network searching for a "Mennonite way" to be present in the media. And there are dynamic church planting efforts like Raíces and La Roca, and more than twenty Mennonite congregations in the Asunción area with a total of more than 2,000 church members.

Entering the media has probably been the most daring step in "going public" with the Mennonite identity. The idea was to present an overall alternative to the existing TV channels, by covering sports, cooking, music, politics, news, art, and of course Bible counseling and pastoral work, from a Christian and Mennonite perspective. The radio and TV initiatives are commercial in that they sell advertisements compatible with their values and principles. It is a new experience for Paraguayan Mennonites to compete in the media, but so far it has been a healthy one, because it forces us to go public with our beliefs, convictions, and perspectives on everyday national life.

Business among immigrant Mennonites is booming in Asunción. Younger and older Mennonite business people are getting involved too, thanks to the influence of MEDA, the German *Christlicher Kongress für Führungskräfte in Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Christian Conference of Executives in Business and Society, a yearly study conference at the Asunción Sheraton hotel), and intense co-operation between the pastoral leadership and the business community. There is a sincere search for biblical and Mennonite perspectives on business, social justice, and social responsibility. One early outcome of this effort is a business chaplaincy: around 3,000 employees belonging to more than 30 Mennonite businesses are part of pastoral care and evangelistic outreach. This effort also provides fellowship, brainstorming, interaction, and challenges to the business owners.

Mission and service through the schools is an idea borrowed partly from mission agencies and is seen as compatible with the priority that education has had within the immigrant Mennonite community. Missionary Hans Wiens and others laid the foundation by establishing missionary schools in Yalve Sanga, Cambyretá, and Villa Hayes, as well as the Albert Schweitzer School in Asunción in 1966. Today there is a vital Mennonite school movement in Asunción, and in the immigrant and native settlements, that can effectively impact the national school scene. But proponents face some questions: What makes a school Christian? What makes a school Mennonite? What is the mission of a Mennonite school?

### **C. Theology**

#### *Theological Approaches to Ethnicity*

Mennonites coming to Paraguay often had an implicit rather than an explicit theology. Of course there was a catechism very important to the “Kanadier,” but it was written in old Prussian German, far from the everyday language and issues of the central Chaco. The “Russe” had opened up to all kind of theologies, especially the dispensational paradigm, promoted by Bibelschule Wiedenest and Hans Legiehn’s textbook *Unser Glaube ist der Sieg* (Our Faith is the Victory). The Russian-Mennonite revival movement had marked church music (Walter Rauschenbusch, Bernhard Harder), conversion experience, and missionary zeal. The Baptist influence had strengthened

the Sunday school movement (*Singvöglein*), and Jakob Kroeker (*Licht im Osten*) was the model of Bible teaching.

But never has there seemed to be serious theological reflection about ethnicity. Granted, there was an opportunistic, almost naïve debate in Russia before and after World War I about nationalistic identity, affirming either Dutch origins (B.B. Janz – “Holländerei”) or German origins for Mennonites in Russia (B.H. Unruh, Walter Quiring, Hajo Schroeder). Coming to the Chaco bush, the immigrants met different native ethnic groups. On the one hand, they consciously sought ways that these *liebe braune Brüder* (dear brown brothers) would become part of the people of God and the family of faith. The key Bible verse leading to the establishment of the *Licht den Indianern* agency in 1935 was Ephesians 3:6, where Paul sums up the mystery of Christ, stating that the Gentiles are “heirs together with Israel” (NIV). On the other hand, the legacy of ethnic and colony segregation in Russia, a feeling of Germanic superiority, and possibly the severe cultural and educational gap between immigrant Mennonites and their surroundings made them vulnerable to racist attitudes, ideologies, and theologies, especially in the form of ideas coming from the Third Reich, as John Thiesen documents in his book *Mennonite and Nazi?*.<sup>7</sup> But this very error ultimately helped correct some ethnocentric attitudes and theologies, thanks not only to the mission movement but to a clear attitude on MCC’s part.

#### *A Theology for a Mennonite Republic?*

At the second Mennonite World Conference in Danzig (August 1930) Benjamin H. Unruh and Harold S. Bender reportedly shared their vision of “establishing something like a Mennonite Republic in Paraguay.” That sounds very unusual for Bender and his recovery of the “Anabaptist Vision.” But given the circumstances in the central Chaco, the years 1930 to 1970, marked by almost no interference by the Paraguayan state and government, did produce a high level of regional self-administration by the immigrant community. Calvin Redekop calls this situation “a state within the church” – definitely an exaggeration, yet not so far from reality.<sup>8</sup>

In a way, the Schleithem idea of the separation of church and state had taken a most peculiar form through the almost complete absence of the foreign state. At the same time, Menno Simons’s concept of Christian

authorities and “the sword without blood” came very close to what was practiced during these four decades in the Mennonite colonies. In any case, this microcosm of a colony took the opportunity to develop an amazing number of community-oriented policies and good public government, social justice, and equality.

*A Theology for Public Order and Politics*

Starting in the 1970s, when their whole school and co-operative system was integrated into the national context, and much more since 1989 with the beginning of democracy, internal and external dynamics have forced immigrant Mennonites to go public. There was an insistent call by various national party leaders to learn from the Mennonite model of social and economic development. In addition, colony and church leaders realized that rapid change of their traditional structures would be necessary if their communities were to survive: provincial governments, city mayors, new tax systems, social security laws, and public police security would have to be implemented in the colonies as elsewhere.

But how to sustain these transformations theologically? At least two clear and robust alternatives have emerged. One important segment of the community views political openness as an extraordinary opportunity for Christians and Mennonites to step up and assume responsibility. According to this view, Christians – and why not Mennonite Christians? – would be the best qualified people to assume public and political responsibility and to fight for the well-being of all. The second group opts for just the opposite: To be faithful Anabaptists it is necessary to abstain from any public responsibility and political endeavors. The sheep have nothing in common with the wolves; the church has nothing in common with the world.

Through the work of the Mennonite Peace Committee, documents of Faith and Life Councils, many public and private debates, and experiments that have variously succeeded or failed, the topic is maturing theologically. At this moment political responsibility is seen by many as a twofold opportunity for Christians and Mennonites: as a “macro-diakonia,” to make a solid contribution to the nation’s well-being by strengthening health, education, economy, and justice; and as a chance for witness, to bring a Christ-centered and service perspective into public issues.



However, as the experience of the last twenty years shows, the public realm is not an easy habitat for pacifist Anabaptists.

### **Conclusion**

Evaluating eighty years of the Mennonite experience in Paraguay, I suggest that immigrant Mennonites have been facing these dialectics:

1. They wanted to form voluntary believers' churches, but to a large extent their congregations became folk and colony churches.

2. In their desire to distance themselves from politics, they developed a very sophisticated internal political system.

3. Although they fled Communism, a good functioning colony closely resembles a *Colchos* (a Soviet agricultural collective mega-farm owned and run by the community).

4. Mission efforts resulted in the emergence of young Mennonite churches that found it difficult to be identified as "Mennonites," since that label was used for the immigrant ethno-religious group.

5. Internal and external forces put Mennonites in the public eye, but "going public" will transform their congregational and social life considerably.

6. Very soon the descendants of Mennonite immigrants will be in a minority. New forms of both Mennonite and inter-ethnic community have to emerge and must be based more on theology than on history.

# 2008 BECHTEL LECTURES

## The Mennonite Experience in Paraguay

*Alfred Neufeld*

### II

## The Diaconal and Social Experience

### Introduction

As in the apostolic church in Jerusalem, missions and service transform Christian congregations, including the Mennonite churches in Paraguay. Gerhard Ratzlaff talks about a Mennonite “metamorphosis” that had once taken place in Russia, and he wonders if it is taking place again in Paraguay, if it is desirable, and if it should be part of a plan and a steering effort.<sup>9</sup>

#### A. Development of a Diaconal Theology

##### *Community and Service: Part of Anabaptist Identity*

Service and communal solidarity were undoubtedly at the core of 16th-century Anabaptist renewal. It is reported that congregations arranged for just two offices: “*Diener am Wort*” (Servants of the Word), who would be the itinerant preachers, and “*Diener der Notdurft*” (Servants of the Needy), who would be deacons looking after physical needs. Peace theology and peace witness were basically geared toward “the world,” those outside the believers’ congregation, as was an evangelistic presence. A good ethical reputation, accredited by those not belonging to the believers’ church community, was crucial for Anabaptist identity. However, the Hutterite experience, Amish solidarity, and different mutual aid set-ups within the Mennonite tradition suggest that the diaconal presence and service of the church was equally crucial to the Anabaptist heritage and presence in the world.

##### *Community and Service: Part of Mennonite Immigration to Paraguay*

Refugees may be said to benefit from sharing a common experience – that

of having lost everything, being equal, starting with zero, and needing each other. This was partly true of those coming from Canada and definitely true of those coming from Russia. Village and colony life in the case of Fernheim were already organized at the refugee camp back in Mölln, Germany: every settler would get the same amount of land; agricultural equipment would be shared among neighbors; and roads, schools, wells, and hospitals would be built together through an institution called *Scharwerk* – shared obligatory community work where everyone contributed as they were able.

The colony had a high level of democratic communal procedures and government. Every village would elect a mayor (*Schulze*) and two delegates (*Zehntmänner*) to the colony assembly – one responsible for spiritual and church life (*Ortsleitender*), the other responsible for school life (*Schulrat*). All decisions in the village would be taken by a *Schuldebott*, an assembly of all the farmers. There was an office for widows and orphans (*Waisenamt*). And the co-operative system centralized all imports and took all products to the market. Although most of these diaconal institutions were not directly linked to church congregational life, they nevertheless clearly reflected Mennonite social spirituality.

While Mennonite settlements have traditionally tended to take the form of villages and colonies, in Paraguay this heritage has been conspicuously marked and transformed by the co-operatives. Currently the five main colonies – Friesland, Volendam, Neuland, Fernheim, and Menno – are legally registered as both civil associations (*asociaciones civiles*) and multi-purpose cooperatives (*cooperatives multiactivas*). This situation is comparable to that of a community organized on the one hand as a county and on the other hand as a corporative production and commercial unit. Fernheim registered Paraguay's first cooperative in 1937. Since then the co-operative movement has become very strong across the country, and today it is a serious competitor to the banking system. Shareholders in the cooperative and in the *Asociación Civil* enjoy key social security benefits, such as health insurance and retirement pensions, as well as access to a credit system, subventions for private schooling, good country roads, better prices for products, discounts in self-owned supermarkets, and so on.

The colony system as well as the co-operative system are going through, and will continue to go through, drastic changes. But in my opinion

they contain elements that are crucial for what can be called a “Mennonite Anabaptist diaconal theology.”

*Praxis: First Act of a Diaconal Theology*

Although there has been a most impressive diaconal praxis, almost no theological and missiological reflection has taken place that would make it fruitful to the mission and service endeavors outside the immigrant community. Even worse, most of the evangelistic efforts have not found ways to integrate historic Mennonite spirituality into diaconal service. The two young Spanish Mennonite conferences in Paraguay have more than 100 local congregations. With usually strong pastoral leadership but virtually no elected deacons, they have had a very weak way of integrating pastoral and diaconal work.

However, the praxis of the immigrant communities has led to ambitious and important service and development efforts and agencies, reaching out first to the neighboring population within and around the colonies, and later to needy areas in Asunción and East Paraguay.

The ASCIM – *Asociación de Servicios de Cooperación Indígena Menonita* (Mennonite Indigenous Development Agency) – has done very thorough work in establishing a theoretical base for sustainable partnership and development among immigrant and First Nation Mennonites in the Central Chaco. The Mennonite Christian service agency (*Christlicher Dienst*), working with leprosy victims, psychiatric patients, street children, and with many volunteers from Paraguay and abroad, tries to strengthen some kind of theology of service. The slogan of the Protestant University, thanks to Mennonite influence, reads “*Educar para Servir*” – education for service. As well, the ambitious neighborhood development programs that the cooperatives of Friesland, Volendam, Menno, Neuland, and Fernheim have developed in their regions are more than just enlightened self-interest: we can only get sustainable well-being if our neighbors are doing well too.

But going beyond this praxis to get to the second act – that of developing a diaconal theology – is just beginning. Martin Eitzen has conducted doctoral work on a theology and praxis of partnership, analyzing the relationship of the immigrant and the national MB conference as well as their co-operation with the North American mission agency; Dieter

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Giesbrecht is about to defend a doctoral thesis on the diaconal theology and practice of Mennonite churches in Paraguay.

## **B. Service and Evangelism**

*Native Neighbors: “Unsere lieben braunen Brüder”*

In the Paraguayan Mennonite experience, service and evangelism went hand-in-hand but were independent partners. What is usually considered the church’s double mandate, the Great Commandment (Matt. 22:39) to love your neighbor and the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19) to make disciples, has been practiced somewhat spontaneously without extensive theological and missiological reflection. Service was not carried out in order to be more successful in evangelism, and evangelism was not always linked to service projects.

What today we call “holistic mission” can be best practiced within the model of “mission by migration.”<sup>10</sup> So the first missionaries to the Enlhit in 1936, Abram and Annchen Ratzlaff, observed a mandate to live with the tribal community, look after the sick, establish a little farm, teach people how to improve nutrition, and learn the language themselves and tell the stories of Jesus and God’s history with humankind. School, orphanage, hospital, library, Bible institute, and agricultural development programs came later.

The organic integration and independence of evangelism and social service reached a critical point in the early 1970s. The pastoral and congregational dimensions and the spiritual and theological issues needed more specialized attention; and even more so health, educational, and developmental issues, as well as specific questions of cultural anthropology as tribal communities underwent drastic changes. So there was a split in structure and approach, leading to ecclesial agencies (*Licht den Indianern*, Menno Missions Committee) and to the developmental agency ASCIM. This split, not so far from the idea of separation of church and state, was not very healthy in the long run, since both agencies dealt with the same communities, the same leaders, and the same people – and largely with the same cultural, theological, and spiritual issues.

In retrospect, the Chaco experience of service and evangelism between immigrant Mennonite groups and native Indian communities becoming Mennonites provides a challenging case study of the dialectics of separation

and integration of evangelism and service. One of the most difficult aspects of this model today is a weak interest in existential and relational partnership on a one-to-one basis. Evangelism is organized with some professionals and service is organized with some professionals. But older indigenous leaders as well as the established German Mennonite churches feel that there is a need to create space for friendship, fellowship, and relationship in spite of cultural and social differences. Theoretically, service and mission agencies build their work on partnership. But it is fair – and sad – to say that in everyday practice the temptation to “Apartheid” seems strong among many German-speaking Mennonites. The experience of authentic fraternity was definitely better in the beginning decades, when everyone was poor and needy.

#### *Christian Service and the MCC Legacy*

MCC has impacted Mennonite immigrants to Paraguay from the very beginning. American volunteers and American help had first come to the starving communities in Russia during the 1920s. MCC guaranteed a large debt that made the trip from Europe to Paraguay possible, provided basic equipment for a start in the wilderness, and supplied the necessary funds for buying land in the central Chaco. MCC sent the first medical doctors; assisted with schooling; later on, through the PAX participants, made an important contribution to constructing the Trans-Chaco road; fostered the birth of the leprosy hospital; engineered the emergence of ASCIM and Indian settlement programs; tried to create critical awareness of the Stroessner regime; and even intended to found an all-Mennonite church in Asunción through the mandate given to the young pastor Ernst Harder.<sup>11</sup> According to Edgar Stoesz’s calculations, MCC has invested over \$10,000,000 related to the Mennonite experience in this country.<sup>12</sup>

However, the attitude of the immigrants toward MCC was not always favorable. Discussions arose around at least five topics:

1. MCC tried to recover part of its funds in the 1930s and 1940s through debt payments that every family, at least in Fernheim, was expected to make. This was a heavy burden for both sides in a time of extreme suffering and poverty.

2. During World War II and Germanic euphoria in the colonies, the

North American-based MCC was perceived by the colonists as being aligned with the Allies. That caused a struggle of loyalty and identity for most immigrants, who were thankful to German President Paul Hindenburg and his government for delivering them from the Soviet Union. The immigrants may have been naïve, opportunistic, or incoherent toward Hitler's regime and Nazi ideology, but they were still very much committed to global and common Mennonite roots, Anabaptist theological tradition, and the help they received from MCC.

3. The groups of Neuland and Volendam brought by MCC and Peter Dyck in 1947 were thankful for their miraculous deliverance from World War II, but they had difficulty finding Paraguay to be "the promised land." A sizable group of "black sheep" (about 130 people) protested Dyck's leadership and stayed in Buenos Aires.

4. Immigrant Mennonites had a far more positive attitude and relationship to Paraguayan military governments (those of José Felix Estigarribia, Higinio Morínigo, and Alfredo Stroessner) than the MCC legacy would allow. Democratic political ideas, so prominent in Canada and the United States, were embraced with far less enthusiasm by an immigrant community frustrated with the Weimar Republic and nostalgic toward the Tsar and the Kaiser.

5. Beginning in the late 1960s, the MCC Peace Commission and efforts in favor of human rights, mediation in the Cold War, and disapproval of racial discrimination and Apartheid did not meet with much understanding or approval by most Paraguayan Mennonites of immigrant background.

Nevertheless, in my view MCC's presence has had a crucial, profound, and positive impact on the Mennonite experience in Paraguay. Most of the service initiatives and an important number of social and political reflections have been stimulated directly or indirectly by the MCC legacy.

#### *Neighborhood Service and the MEDA legacy*

The immigrant Mennonite community is rapidly changing from agricultural settlements to urban business enterprises and businesses like cattle ranching, dairy production, and corporate export-import activities within the paradigm of multi-active co-operatives. To a much lesser extent this is also true of segments of the Spanish Mennonite congregations and in some cases within

the native Indian congregations.

Most immigrant German Mennonites dream of being independent, self-employed entrepreneurs and, if possible, big business owners. Service-oriented professions like teaching, preaching, social work, and nursing, and labor relations characterized by dependency are not so attractive, especially for the men. Within the Spanish Paraguayan Mennonite congregations, however, things are quite different. The tradition of economic and labor independence or interdependence has been almost completely absent there. Historically, Paraguay has had a small aristocratic minority of *patrones* providing labor for the vast majority of the population. Most people seem to prefer a safe job and are willing to live in a relation of dependence with a *buen patron*, rather than be self-employed or take the risk of independent entrepreneurship. An important exception to this rule is a larger group of small *campesinos* (peasants), which is now in a severe social crisis and depends mainly on *acopiadores* (dealers), who give them credit and buy their crops.

Within the native tribal communities, family and community values as well as friendship are extremely important, even in economics and labor relations. So those cultivating their own fields in a semi-communitarian arrangement assisted by ASCIM and organized in the FIDA (the Indigenous Federation of Agricultural Development) have secured – at least compared to the tribal communities in the rest of Paraguay – quite sustainable ways of making a living, if the lack of rain doesn't ruin their crops. A very different story is true of the large number of indigenous employees working for German Mennonite bosses and the co-operative industries: socially and culturally they are less integrated, and much more vulnerable to exploitation and revolution.

Business ethics and both the social responsibility and the evangelistic responsibility of Mennonite businesses have lately become a prominent issue. MEDA International and the pastoral leadership of local churches have both played a key role in placing these topics on the agenda. There are three main outcomes of this effort:

1. Colonies and co-operatives have invested heavily in sponsoring neighborhood development initiatives. These efforts seem very fruitful, helping the population surrounding the colonies to get access to credit,



organize themselves socially for production, assure markets for their products, and so on.

2. MEDA Paraguay has started ambitious initiatives by establishing production units for Mandioca industrialization in East Paraguay (CODIPSA), charcoal production in the central Chaco, especially for the Ayoreos (DIRSSA), and in the future ethanol production for small sugar cane farmers in the poorest province of San Pedro. Marijuana plantations, the presence of the Colombian FARC, the invasion of private property by the so-called landless, and a strong revolutionary potential by *campesino* organizations characterize this area. MEDA breakfasts and membership meetings are used to discuss business ethics, social responsibility, sustainable development, macro-finances, and other subjects.

3. As noted in Lecture One, an Anabaptist business chaplaincy was founded by the MB-GC Concordia churches in Asunción. It now gathers together more than 30 Mennonite businesses and looks after more than 3,000 employees, with a staff of up to 15 chaplains. The goals are to strengthen the Anabaptist, diaconal, and evangelistic attitudes of the business owners, and to provide integrated assistance (*Diener am Wort, Diener der Notdurft*) to the employees.

### **C. Political Engagement as Macro-diakonia**

#### *Political Influence Through Presence*

If asked for core Anabaptist beliefs about the church and its relationship to the world, I would claim that Anabaptists have accepted both an evangelistic and a diaconal mandate. By an evangelistic mandate, our Anabaptist forebears, like contemporary Catholic theologians, understood much more than saving souls for heaven. Coherent biblical theology must include an evangelistic presence of the church in at least five dimensions: a personal and existential encounter with Christ, his gospel, and the community of believers as the incarnated body of Christ in time and place; transformation of individual and communal lifestyle according to the gospel of the kingdom; evangelization of culture; the prophetic presence of the church in the world, calling it to repentance and the better righteousness of the kingdom of God; and church planting, in the sense of establishing living and pastoral communities of faith as holistic alternatives to surrounding society.

I suggest that the diaconal presence of the church in a biblical and Anabaptist perspective would thus imply, at a minimum, the following requirements:

1. Making it possible that the service of the word and “the service of intercessional prayer” can be adequately realized, as was the original intention at the first election of deacons (Acts 6:1-4);
2. Acting in favor of justice and equality, with special efforts to look after the rights and needs of the poor and marginalized;
3. Taking actions in defense of human rights and human dignity, in light of our creation in the image of God as well as God’s justice and mercy;
4. Practicing social solidarity and mutuality within the believers’ church outreach to the surrounding society; and
5. In the light of Christ’s return and his final judgment, working toward transformation and the prevailing of values of the kingdom of God within humanity as a whole.

No doubt both the church’s evangelistic and diaconal presence must be considered in their overall effect as a political influence on a national society. This is what Mennonites in Paraguay are starting to realize. Political influence, of course, must be seen as much wider than just nominations, elections, and the exercise of public power or dependence on governmental and state structures. It is probably fair to say that the believers’ church, claiming that its “citizenship is in heaven” and that it already belongs to the culture of the new Jerusalem, has for far too long underestimated theologically its potential for political influence. Paraguayan Mennonites seem to have had rather confused ideas about this reality, being highly political within their colonies and claiming a completely apolitical stance towards the structures of the state, yet being very effective in lobbying the powerful on behalf of the immigrant community and the indigenous peoples in the central Chaco.

Nevertheless, presence as an evangelistic and diaconal unit has had, and will have, a lasting political influence. This is true not only for the immigrant colony model but for the nearly 200 Mennonite local congregations of the present multicultural Mennonite family in Paraguay.

*Political Engagement Through Elections*

Anyone who wants to be elected and runs for public office always tells voters that his goal is to serve the public good. But when Kornelius Sawatzky (Governor, Boquerón state) and Heinz Ratzlaff (Deputy, central Chaco) started campaigning and got elected in 1993, they really meant it. Sawatzky had been *Oberschulze* in the Menno colony and a strong candidate to lead the ASCIM. Ratzlaff had been a pastoral counselor and director of the German Mennonite mental health center in Filadelfia. They became candidates of a newly-formed idealistic party called “National Encounter,” which wanted to leave behind the totalitarian and conflictive Paraguayan political tradition and present a fresh alternative.

What began small and spontaneously inaugurated fifteen years of quite zealous electoral activities in Mennonite territory, basically in the central Chaco. As a next step, Loma Plata and Filadelfia were declared *municipios* (mayorships), therefore needing publicly elected mayors and city councils from the whole regional population. By now the Filadelfia city site population would comprise about 30 percent German Mennonites, with the rest belonging to various ethnic groups like the Nivaclé, Enlhit, Guarayos, Ayoreos, Portuguese-Brazilian immigrants, and the Paraguay-Guaraní mestizo population – all attracted to the region because of its dynamic labor market.

An evaluation of the electoral experience of the last fifteen years is not easy. Was there any other option? As far as possible, there were efforts to keep party politics at a low level, but party rivalries did become accentuated. And the democratic state system is based on party life, competition, and rivalries – all foreign to the Anabaptist-Mennonite community tradition. Paraguayan voting has always been plagued by corruption, and sadly the Mennonite territory was no exception. “Vote early, vote often” is a well-known slogan in Paraguay. And the tribal indigenous community, applying its well-developed hunting and recollecting instinct to political matters, all too eagerly sold its vote, if possible to two parties, yet was subject to the most calamitous electoral manipulations. Is there a way to mature, and to learn democratic processes without such mistakes and painful learning experiences?

The elected governors, Parliament members, and mayors of German

Mennonite background have tried to do their best, but unfortunately some of them have gone through severe spiritual and marital crises. Most do not find it easy to be part of, and to follow the instructions of, a national party with many members not sharing their Christian and Mennonite values. As well, public bureaucratic systems in Paraguay are very slow to act and are marked by a high level of suspicion, so that effective social transformation and leadership is limited.

On the positive side, developments in the last fifteen years have been healthy for the immigrant Mennonite population. Questions of law, equality, integration of different ethnic groups, and knowledge of the national reality have received much higher priority. The immigrant communities have gone public and are in an intense process to transform their traditional community life, so it will be less discriminatory against outsiders, who still today often feel marginalized in a Germanic Mennonite colony. When Fernheim celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2005, the main theme and a huge monument at the entrance of Filadelfia focused on interethnic integration, solidarity, and co-operation.

#### *Public Service Through Nominations*

Meanwhile, churches and church leaders have worked hard on something like a Paraguayan Anabaptist political theology. John Howard Yoder's little booklet *Nachfolge Christi als Gestalt politischer Verantwortung*, in which he tries to bring together radical discipleship, the ethics of Jesus, and the public responsibility of the church, has been very helpful for me personally.<sup>13</sup> The *Ältestenrat* (elders council) of the MB conference and the Mennonite Peace Committee both launched basic documents for orientation on this matter, and a sizable number of symposia, public debates, and lectures have focused on it. Heinz Ratzlaff, a former pastor and church leader, was in the very eye of the storm at the beginning because the national constitution prohibits members of the clergy from running for Parliament. So he needed a conference certification that he was not clergy, which triggered an intricate though painful discussion as to whether Anabaptist churches do indeed have clergy.

Meanwhile, in Asunción the Mennonite business community as well as the Mennonite presence in the media, higher education, and public church

life have captured more and more attention. There was a strong Mennonite initiative in the reformulation of the national constitution in 1992, together with the *Coordinadora de Iglesias*, a coalition of seventeen Protestant denominations plus the Catholic church. The result was that all four points they asked for were approved: stronger guarantees of religious liberty, separation of church and state, protection of human life from conception to natural death, and conscientious objection to military service.

The aim of the Asunción Concordia churches to open up evangelistic and pastoral space toward their neighbors, business partners, and university acquaintances culminated in the founding of Spanish Mennonite daughter churches, Raíces and La Roca. This more spiritual engagement led to many contacts in high society, something quite unusual up to then for the country's Protestant churches. So congregations like Raices suddenly found themselves associating with people from the political realm engaged in home Bible studies and strongly attracted to Anabaptist perspectives on spiritual and congregational life and on Bible reading and interpretation.

It was in this context that a completely new and unexpected form of political engagement started to take shape, based mostly on friendships and a common search for what could and should be done in the public areas of health, economics, education, development, and social action.

When Nicanor Duarte Frutos, longtime Minister of Education and friend of the Raices community through the conversion, baptism, church membership, and fervent evangelistic engagement of his wife Gloria, was elected national President in 2003, he surprised his party by nominating some high-ranking officers from a Mennonite non-party background. He put forward Carlos Walde as private economic assessor to the Presidency; Ernst F. Bergen as Minister of Industry and Commerce and later as the powerful Minister of Finances; Andreas Neufeld as Vice-Minister of Tax Collection; and Carlos Wiens as medical director of Social Security. In addition he named María José Argaña as Minister of Women's Affairs and Judith Adrasko as Minister of Social Action (both are Spanish Mennonite church members), and Derlis Céspedes as Minister of Justice (she is from a young independent Baptist church).

This experience of being called into public service, without party militancy and election campaigning but with a relationship to Christian

character values, is too new to be systematically evaluated. But some dimensions are already evident:

- On the macro-economic level Bergen, Walde, and Neufeld were able to achieve considerable success, certified by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and recognized by the Paraguayan political opposition.

- Concerning public social security and medical services, important improvements have been possible through the work of Wiens and his team partner Pedro Ferreira, a committed Catholic Christian.

- Much improvement in public policy can be achieved without party membership and party militancy, though there are limitations to this approach.

- Alleviating the lot of the poor through politics, without falling into cheap “assistentialism,” is a long and complicated road.

- Jesus’ ethics and his model of servant leadership are to a great extent politically very attractive. Yet even Mennonite politicians are constantly tempted to adopt something like a Lutheran two-kingdom stance, finding it hard to reconcile political ethics with the way of Jesus and the Sermon on the Mount.

- The four above-mentioned people with German names all belonged to one local congregation. They repeatedly expressed how important support and correction by their congregation was for them, and they submitted quite willingly to a close relationship with the congregation’s pastoral leadership.

## **Conclusion**

1. Evaluating the Mennonite experience in Paraguay, I contend that there has been an existential drive toward a strong diaconal practice right from the beginning.

2. This “existential deaconship” has kept the missionary movement close to what today is called “holistic” or “integral” mission.

3. Nevertheless, diaconal praxis and ethnic solidarity have always been tempted by an ethnocentric and even racist approach.

4. The ghosts of Apartheid, in both the ethnic and the classist sense, are alive and well all over Latin America. Paraguay is among the world’s

countries with the most drastic social class differences. This reality poses a serious challenge to immigrant background Mennonites (belonging mostly to the elite class) over against the rest of the Mennonite family in the other ethnic groups (belonging to the middle class and the poor).

5. Diaconal praxis, service leadership, and the priority of the family of faith over social and ethnic class systems need to be rooted again in the everyday theology and pastoral praxis of Mennonite congregational life.

## Notes to Lectures I and II

*For complete publication details, please refer to the Sources List which follows.*

<sup>1</sup> Gerhard Ratzlaff, *Ein Leib, viele Glieder*, 55.

<sup>2</sup> Gerhard Ratzlaff, *Historia, fe y prácticas Menonitas*, 156-58.

<sup>3</sup> Gerhard Ratzlaff, *Ein Leib, viele Glieder*, 55-56.

<sup>4</sup> According to oral family tradition.

<sup>5</sup> Frieda Siemens Kaethler, Alfred Neufeld, *Nikolai Siemens, der Chacooptimist*, 82.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Hiebert, *Critical Contextualization*.

<sup>7</sup> John Thiesen, *Mennonite and Nazi? Attitudes Among Mennonite Colonists in Latin America, 1933-1945*.

<sup>8</sup> Calvin Redekop, *Strangers Become Neighbors: Mennonite and Indigenous Relations in the Paraguayan Chaco*.

<sup>9</sup> Gerhard Ratzlaff, *Ein Leib, viele Glieder*, 50.

<sup>10</sup> John Howard Yoder, *As You Go: The Old Mission in a New Day*, Focal Pamphlet no. 5.

<sup>11</sup> David Boschmann, *Die Mennoniten in Asunción, 1986*.

<sup>12</sup> Edgar Stoesz, private conversation, September 2007.

<sup>13</sup> John Howard Yoder, *Nachfolge Christi als Gestalt politischer Verantwortung*.

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## THE BECHTEL LECTURES

The Bechtel Lectures in Anabaptist-Mennonite Studies were established at Conrad Grebel University College in 2000, through the generosity of Lester Bechtel, a devoted churchman actively interested in Mennonite history. Lester Bechtel's dream was to make the academic world of research and study accessible to a border constituency, and to build bridges of understanding between the school and the church. The lectures, held annually and open to the public, offer noted scholars and church leaders the opportunity to explore and discuss topics representing the breadth and depth of Mennonite history and identity. Previous lectures in this distinguished series were Terry Martin, Stanley Hauerwas, Rudy Wiebe, Nancy Heisey, Fernando Enns, James Urry, and Sandra Birdsell.

# **The “Shared Convictions” of Mennonite World Conference in Developmental Context and Ecumenical, Anabaptist and Global Perspective**

*Sarah Johnson*

In an historic action, MWC’s General Council approved a statement of shared convictions to give member churches around the world a clearer picture of beliefs Anabaptists hold in common. This statement is the first statement adopted by leaders in the global Anabaptist community. – *Courier*, 2006.<sup>1</sup>

On March 15, 2006 Mennonite World Conference (MWC) approved a statement of seven “Shared Convictions”<sup>2</sup> representing the beliefs and practices of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches around the world. The statement was adopted following a thirteen-year process of development and eighty-one years after MWC’s inaugural assembly. The Shared Convictions are a long overdue addition to the Anabaptist body of confessional literature. However, little work has been done to articulate the process of development and structure of the Shared Convictions or to systematically analyze the Convictions in the context of the ancient creeds of the church, the sixteenth-century Anabaptist movement, and the contemporary global community of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches. In this study I provide a context for and means of evaluating the Shared Convictions statement. The Shared Convictions and ecumenical creeds are included in Appendix 1; tables paralleling the Convictions and ecumenical, Anabaptist, and global sources appear in Appendix 2.

Mennonite World Conference was founded in Switzerland in 1925, at which point it comprised churches from only five nations and understood its primary role to be the organization of international assemblies.<sup>3</sup> By the end of the century MWC developed significantly, gathering numbers and expanding its mandate. At present MWC describes itself as:

A global community of Christian churches who trace their

beginning to the 16th-century Radical Reformation in Europe, particularly to the Anabaptist movement. Today, close to 1,500,000 believers belong to this faith family; at least 60 percent are African, Asian, or Latin American. MWC represents 97 Mennonite and Brethren in Christ national churches from 53 countries on six continents.<sup>4</sup>

MWC connects Anabaptist-related churches around the world and clearly defines its vision and mission in terms of community and facilitation rather than governance or centralized authority:

*Vision Statement:* Mennonite World Conference is called to be a communion (*Koinonia*) of Anabaptist-related churches linked to one another in a worldwide community of faith for fellowship, worship, service, and witness.

*Mission Statement:* MWC exists to (1) be a global community of faith in the Anabaptist-tradition, (2) facilitate community between Anabaptist-related churches worldwide, and (3) relate to other Christian world communions and organizations.<sup>5</sup>

MWC’s nature, vision, and mission shape the Shared Convictions.

### **The Nature of the Shared Convictions**

In order to understand the nature of the Shared Convictions we must consider the careful process through which they were developed, their internal structure and content, and the role given them in the global Anabaptist community.

#### *Process of development*

Following the thirteen-year process the Shared Convictions were adopted in 2006 by the MWC General Council (GC), an international body officially consisting of 129 delegates from 53 countries, with one to three representatives from each national church conference based on size.<sup>6</sup> The process leading to this point sought to listen to as many voices as possible in order to create a truly global document that every MWC church would be able to affirm.

In 1993 MWC decided to convene a new Faith and Life Council (FLC) at the General Council meetings in India in 1997:

We hope the Faith and Life Council will be a forum where we tell each other what it means to be Anabaptist Christians in today's world. What holds us together as a family of churches besides the name 'Mennonite'? Can we develop some accountability between churches at an international level? What do Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches in all parts of the world share in common, and what can we learn from each other?<sup>7</sup>

In preparation for the first meeting of the FLC in 1996, more than 100 church leaders and MWC General Council members were asked to respond to a questionnaire and submit statements of faith currently in use in their conferences and congregations. More than 50 responses were received from five continents, roughly a 50 percent rate of return. A group of ten readers was appointed to study the statements of faith and to report at the inaugural FLC meeting.<sup>8</sup>

In 1997 the Faith and Life Council was convened for the first time at the assembly in Calcutta, where the report on the gathered confessions and statements of faith was presented and discussed. The report addressed eight areas: how God is described and understood; the nature and work of Christ; what the church is and how it is described; church leadership; ordinances and sacraments; ethical issues; accountability and discipline in the life of the church; and the future and the end of time.<sup>9</sup> In addition, the Council's threefold purpose was defined as:

to determine how MWC churches understand and describe Anabaptist-Mennonite faith and practice; to enable MWC churches to receive and give council on Anabaptist-Mennonite identity and action in the world today, as well as on matters of Christian faith and practice in general; and to encourage MWC member churches to develop relationships of mutual accountability – internationally and cross-culturally – in the convictions we hold and the lives we live.<sup>10</sup>

In 1998 *From Anabaptist Seed*,<sup>11</sup> a study book on the "historical core of Anabaptist related identity," commissioned by MWC from C. Arnold

Snyder, was presented to the worldwide church for discussion and response. The book was initially published in six languages and in the *Courier*, MWC’s quarterly magazine.<sup>12</sup> It summarized early Anabaptist doctrines, church ordinances, and discipleship, and it was “meant to provide a common point of reference for ... discussion, not to serve as a normative or exhaustive statement for MWC member churches’ faith and life today.”<sup>13</sup> At the FLC meeting in Guatemala in 2000, at which MWC celebrated its seventy-fifth anniversary, *From Anabaptist Seed* was strongly affirmed, but it was clear certain contemporary themes were missing, including mission and witness, interdependence and diversity, and kingdom and hope. The FLC determined that a statement of contemporary core convictions reflecting the faith and life of the global church should be prepared for discussion at the MWC General Assembly in 2003.<sup>14</sup>

In 2003 an initial version of the Shared Convictions document was presented at the assembly in Zimbabwe, where it was approved for study and reflection.<sup>15</sup> Responses were requested from member churches and used to revise the Convictions over the following three years.

In 2006 at Pasadena, California, “[i]n an historic action, MWC’s General Council approved a statement of shared convictions to give member churches around the world a clearer picture of beliefs Anabaptists hold in common.”<sup>16</sup> The final affirmation of the Shared Convictions was accomplished by consensus. Decision-making by consensus, a method of arriving at decisions without voting, builds community and is the normal mode of decision-making employed by MWC.<sup>17</sup> Orange (affirmation) and blue (concern) cards were given to each General Council member and used to evaluate the mood of the council throughout the discussion. If an individual raised a blue card, s/he was expected to voice a specific concern. In this way representatives from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds could signal their opinions clearly.<sup>18</sup> Reaching consensus was possible only because of the careful and inclusive process of development. News of the adoption of the Shared Convictions was disseminated around the globe by MWC and various national and local publications.<sup>19</sup>

### *Structure and content*

The Shared Convictions appear in a concise document of only 332 words.

The seven Articles address seven themes that I summarize as God, Jesus, the church, scripture, peace, worship, and the world.<sup>20</sup> The average article length is 34 words; the longest article is 54 words and the shortest is only 23. The Shared Convictions are available in MWC's three official languages: English, French, and Spanish, as well as German.<sup>21</sup>

The Convictions reflect the emphasis of the FLC in that both faith and life are addressed: "We hold the following to be central to our belief and practice."<sup>22</sup> Faith and ethics are closely linked and receive equal weight, and the corporate dimension of faith and life is particularly strong. The Convictions employ plural language ("we seek to live and proclaim," "we gather regularly..."), and make numerous direct references to the Christian community.<sup>23</sup>

Three foundational authorities are recognized within the Convictions: Jesus Christ is the primary authority on which all other sources of authority depend explicitly and implicitly;<sup>24</sup> the Bible is named as authoritative: "We accept the Bible as our authority for faith and life";<sup>25</sup> and sixteenth-century Anabaptism is acknowledged as a source of inspiration.<sup>26</sup> These authorities are the foundation on which the Convictions are constructed.

### *Role in the church*

MWC implies a threefold purpose for the Shared Convictions. First, the Convictions define *identity*, describing the contemporary belief and practice of the global community of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches – for Anabaptist-related churches themselves and for those outside the Anabaptist family of faith. For example, the Convictions are a resource for Mennonites engaged in ecumenical dialogue.<sup>27</sup> Second, the Convictions are a starting point for *conversation* and serve as a foundation for discussion on contemporary Anabaptist faith and life. For example, they may be used in the context of catechism and preaching. Third, the Convictions may serve as a *confession* of faith for congregations and conferences that do not have an existing formal confession. *Courier* summarizes:

The statement is not meant to replace conferences' official confessions of faith, according to MWC president Nancy Heisey. Instead, 'groups are free to use it for theological conversations,' she said. It can also be used by those who do

not have a formal confession. It is also intended to help define Anabaptist to others.<sup>28</sup>

The Shared Convictions have limited authority, which reflects the limited authority of MWC<sup>29</sup> and the diffuse congregational power structure of the Mennonite church. It is the choice and responsibility of congregations and conferences to determine the role of the Convictions in their contexts.

### **Analyzing the Shared Convictions**

The content of the Shared Convictions reflects three dominant influences: the Christian tradition, the sixteenth-century Anabaptist movement, and the global church. Close examination of the Convictions reveals elements found in multiple sources and specific elements contributed by each influence. However, the Convictions borrow selectively from the sources, and a great deal is omitted. In order to understand the relationship of the three influences, I will briefly analyze the Convictions with respect to the ancient ecumenical creeds, the core teachings of the early Anabaptists, and the response of the global church to the 2003 draft Convictions.<sup>30</sup>

#### *Christian tradition*

The influence of the ancient Christian tradition can be evaluated by examining the Convictions alongside the great creeds of the church affirmed by major Christian denominations throughout history and around the world. The creeds also serve as a measure of the orthodoxy of the Convictions. The Apostolic Creed and Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed<sup>31</sup> are compared and contrasted with the Shared Convictions by means of four questions: Who is God?, Who is Jesus?, What is the church?, and What else is important?

#### *Apostolic Creed*

The Apostolic Creed (ca. 700) consists of three primary articles based on the persons of the Trinity. It moves directionally from creation to consummation. The Shared Convictions loosely reflect this pattern, beginning with articles on Creator God and Jesus and concluding with a statement on the “final fulfillment.” However, similarities and differences in content are of greater interest than similarities in structure.

Who is God? Both the Shared Convictions and the Apostolic Creed

clearly recognize the triune nature of God. Both name God as Father and Creator. However, the Apostolic Creed also describes God as almighty, placing greater emphasis on the power of God, whereas the Shared Convictions use gentler language, naming God as the one who calls and restores.

Who is Jesus? The Apostolic Creed and Shared Convictions both identify Jesus as the Lord, Christ, and Son of God, who has died, risen, and will return. The Apostolic Creed includes more detail on the events surrounding the cross, including suffering under Pontius Pilate, burial, descent into hell, resurrection on the third day, and ascent to heaven. The virgin birth is also included. In addition, power language is used to describe Christ, the “judge” who “sits at the right hand of the father.” In contrast, the Convictions emphasize the life and teachings of Jesus and the nature of Christ as example, one to be followed, and as teacher, an aid in the interpretation of scripture. The conceptualizations of Jesus as Savior and Redeemer are also present in the Convictions.

What is the church? The Apostolic Creed and Shared Convictions both connect the church and the Holy Spirit. Both understand the church to be holy, separate or set apart, and catholic or worldwide. However, the church is not a focus in the Creed, whereas it is a dominant emphasis in the Convictions. Language of community defines MWC’s description of the church. The church is a community composed of believers who follow a specific spiritual and ethical path. It is the worshiping and witnessing body of Christ and practices mutual accountability. The church is the continuation of a unique historical tradition. It is a called people who are “faithful in fellowship, worship, service and witness”<sup>32</sup> paralleling MWC’s vision statement.<sup>33</sup>

What else is important? The single additional element mentioned in both faith statements is eternal or everlasting life. Additional items found only in the Apostolic Creed include the communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, and the resurrection of the body. The emphasis is on matters of faith. The primary additions to the Shared Convictions are ethical concerns. The focus is living and proclaiming as well as believing. Additional elements include reconciliation, following a spiritual path, scripture and spirit, obedience, peacemaking, justice, sharing possessions, worship, the



Lord’s Supper, baptism, creation care, service, kingdom language, and an anthropology of fallen humanity. Some elements found in the Convictions but not the Creed appear in the ecumenical tradition, in the more expansive Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.

*Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed*

The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (hereafter Nicene Creed), was confirmed in 381. In contrast to the Apostolic Creed, both the Nicene Creed and the Shared Convictions use plural language.<sup>34</sup> Otherwise, this more extensive ecumenical statement contains all of the elements found in the Apostolic Creed (aside from the communion of saints). Therefore, my analysis focuses on comparing the additions to the Nicene Creed to the Shared Convictions.

Who is God? The centrality of the Trinity is again affirmed, as well as the nature of God as Father and Creator. The Nicene Creed adds that God is one, and that God created heaven and earth and all things seen and unseen. The unique relationship between the first and second persons of the Trinity is also emphasized.

Who is Jesus? Both the Nicene Creed and the Shared Convictions express an understanding of Christ “for us” and use the terminology of Savior or salvation. Both associate Jesus with the kingdom. The striking difference between the Nicene Creed and the Convictions is Nicea’s focus on Christology, the nature of Christ, expressed in theological language:

We believe...in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in Being with the Father. Through him all things were made.<sup>35</sup>

Nicea also employs language reflecting the incarnation and humanity of Jesus. The Definition of Chalcedon (451) is even more Christological, describing the paradoxical nature of Christ as human and divine, an aspect of Christian orthodoxy omitted from the Shared Convictions.

What is the Church? The Nicene Creed and the Shared Convictions both name the church as “one.” Nicea adds that the church is “apostolic.”

What else is important? Both the Nicene Creed and the Shared Convictions mention certain items often considered distinctively Anabaptist.

Both name scripture as a source of authority and connect scripture and the Spirit, although they do so in different ways. Nicea understands the Spirit to speak through the prophets and church, whereas MWC states that scripture is interpreted under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Both faith statements also link baptism to separation from sin. The Nicene Creed links baptism and the “remission of sins,” and the Convictions associate baptism with the call to “turn from sin...and follow Christ in life.”<sup>36</sup> Additional affirmations found in the Nicene Creed include an expanded understanding of the Holy Spirit as “Lord and life-giver who proceeds from the Father” and the resurrection of the dead.

In sum, the central Trinitarian affirmation of the ancient creeds is present in the Shared Convictions. However, the creeds are more “theological,” placing greater emphasis on belief than action, and stressing the unique nature of Christ and the power of God. By contrast, the Convictions are more “ethical,” emphasizing the way of life that necessarily accompanies faith.

#### *Sixteenth-century Anabaptism*

The Shared Convictions claim to “draw inspiration from Anabaptist forebears of the 16th century,”<sup>37</sup> and the process of developing the Convictions included a substantial study of early Anabaptist belief and practice. In order to discern sixteenth-century Anabaptist theology and practice, I will briefly examine three sources: The Schleithem Articles,<sup>38</sup> *From Anabaptist Seed*,<sup>39</sup> and C. Arnold Snyder’s “Core Teachings of Anabaptism.”<sup>40</sup> The ecumenical creeds addressed above were affirmed by the Anabaptists; however, this part of my analysis focuses on the distinctive marks of early Anabaptism rather than its commonalities with the broader Christian tradition.

Certain sixteenth-century Anabaptist principles are included but adapted in the Shared Convictions. Baptism upon confession of faith, the primary distinctive mark of the early Anabaptist movement, is present in the Convictions. But the early Anabaptist conception of threefold baptism in Spirit, water, and blood is absent. The sixteenth-century spiritual process of salvation uniting faith and works, initiated by the Holy Spirit and followed by turning from sin, faith in Christ, baptism, and following Christ in life is present in the Convictions. However, the language of salvation by grace,

rebirth, and regeneration is missing. The church of both eras is visible, yet the early Anabaptist church anticipated suffering, whereas the MWC church does not. Mutual accountability is present in both ecclesiologies, yet the ban, the Rule of Christ, and the pure church of the sixteenth century are abandoned in the twenty-first century. Economic sharing is held in common, but the Convictions do not connect it to yieldedness (*Gelassenheit*). The Lord’s Supper is noted in both eras, yet the nature of the early Anabaptist Supper as a memorial meal requiring worthy participation is absent. In short, certain sixteenth-century principles are present in the Shared Convictions, but simplified and softened.

The Shared Convictions accept other sixteenth-century Anabaptist teachings less critically, including peacemaking and nonviolence, the conjoining of scripture and Spirit, the Christocentric interpretation of scripture in community, discipleship and obedience, and living in the world without conforming to evil. At the same time, the Convictions completely exclude other early Anabaptist motifs such as footwashing, truth telling and the rejection of oaths, the election of shepherds and issues of church leadership, anti-sacramentalism, anti-clericalism, and explicit mention of free will.

Sixteenth-century Anabaptism obviously influenced MWC’s contemporary Shared Convictions. However, in various ways the Convictions are significantly different. First, they define Anabaptism positively and independently rather than negatively as a reaction against other groups. Second, the faith and life represented in the Convictions is more moderate than that expressed in the earlier period. Third, the Convictions exclude certain aspects of the Anabaptist tradition and include new emphases, partly due to the global nature of the contemporary Mennonite faith community.

### *Global church*

The call to move beyond sixteenth-century Anabaptism was present from the start of the process of developing the Shared Convictions. When the Faith and Life Council determined that a statement of contemporary core convictions should be drafted in 2000, members indicated important themes today that are missing from early Anabaptist belief and practice as presented in *From Anabaptist Seed*, namely mission and witness, interdependence and

diversity, and kingdom and hope.<sup>41</sup> These themes are present and prominent in the Shared Convictions, and the response of the global church strongly affirmed their inclusion.

Following the approval of the Shared Convictions for discussion in 2003, MWC solicited response to the document from the global Mennonite community, as noted earlier. Reactions were collected systematically from General Council members and the leaders of each church body affiliated with MWC. Responses were received from all five MWC regions: 9 from Africa, 10 from Asia and Pacific, 10 from Central and South America, 3 from Europe, and 6 from North America. Every representative responded positively to the following questions: “Did you find the text helpful?,” “Do you affirm the text?,” and “Do you recognize your own understanding in the text?” The strong international affirmation of the Shared Convictions suggests that the statement truly represents of the faith and life of the MWC community. Nevertheless, respondents also noted the statement’s strengths and weaknesses.

Strengths indicated by the global response include the biblical and Anabaptist foundation, focus on the church, connection to the universal church, Christocentrism, Trinitarian language, proclamation that Jesus is Lord, ability to give meaning and direction for life (ethical focus), use of clear and concise language, and role of the Convictions in bringing together a worldwide family of faith amidst many languages and cultures.<sup>42</sup> The stress on social concerns, peace, discipleship, sharing, reconciliation, witness, and on relationship with God, each other, and enemies was also strongly affirmed. Although the feedback was very positive, respondents were not afraid to critique the Convictions.

Weaknesses named by the global church include the lack of biblical references, the progression of articles indicating a questionable hierarchy of values (for example, peace is “more important” than worship), the lack of a separate article on the Holy Spirit, the use of technical language, and the breadth of room for interpretation inhibiting the unifying power of the confession. Certain groups pointed to a lack of emphasis on mission, the role of the individual, the church as the Body of Christ, sin and the fall, the authority of scripture, and the kingdom of God. Others believed important elements were missing, including statements on atonement, biblical

inerrancy, thanksgiving, prayer, martyrdom, the deity of Christ, the personal life of faith, heaven, hell, and bodily resurrection. Despite raising concerns, all respondents did affirm that this document reflects the faith and life of their church in their cultural and historical context.

The global nature of MWC shaped the Shared Convictions as to what was either included or excluded. The Convictions are, then, a consensus document reflecting the inculturation of the Christian and Anabaptist tradition around the world.

### **Conclusion**

Four “layers of influence,” as I call them, shape the Shared Convictions: (1) the Convictions have a foundational structure consisting of seven articles with a focus on both faith and life; (2) the Convictions reflect the ecumenical Christian tradition of the great creeds of the church, especially in Articles One through Three; (3) the Convictions reflect sixteenth-century Anabaptism, particularly in Articles Three through Six; and (4) the Convictions reflect the faith of the global church, predominantly in Article Seven and the emphasis on witness. The four layers of influence are interconnected. Many statements found in the Convictions are affirmed by the Christian, Anabaptist, and global layers. Others elements connect mainly with one layer.

So far, I have focused on what items are or are not included in the Shared Convictions. However, *why* they are present or not has not been addressed. I suggest there are four reasons that elements from the various layers may have been omitted.

First, there is a lack of consensus in the global church on certain issues, and therefore these issues are avoided in this consensus document. For example, the issue of church leadership arose near the beginning of the process<sup>43</sup> yet did not emerge in the Convictions. Matters of sexuality, marriage, and the family also fall into this category. Second, conflict between layers and within layers may prevent some issues from being addressed. The unified Christology of the great creeds, for instance, was a contentious issue in the sixteenth century, with certain Mennonite factions adhering to unorthodox views of Christ. Third, the church may recognize it was wrong about certain matters in the past and therefore not include reference to such matters in contemporary statements of faith. For example, most Mennonites

no longer adhere to the strict interpretation of the ban common in the sixteenth century. Fourth, a desire for ecumenical unity may result in the omission of certain elements. A precise interpretation of the Lord's Supper, for instance, is not included in the document, and the anti-sacramentalism of sixteenth-century Anabaptism is absent.

### **Implications and Evaluation**

The Shared Convictions mark an extremely important point in the history of the Anabaptist movement. First, the Shared Convictions are a global document. They reflect the true nature of the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ church as a global community, more than sixty percent of which is located in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, a percentage that is continually increasing. As a result, the Convictions represent the future of the Mennonite church. Despite the historic leadership and financial dominance of churches in North America and Europe, as the demographic shift continues, the leadership of the vibrant and growing churches of the global south will become increasingly influential. The role of MWC and the Shared Convictions can and should expand, because they reflect and give voice to the Mennonite churches of Africa, South and Central America, and Asia and the Pacific, as well as North America and Europe. As a global document, the Convictions are also cross-cultural. They reflect a Christian and Anabaptist core that transcends culture, or at least represents a larger number of cultures or a global culture.

Second, the Shared Convictions will play an increasingly large role in shaping the identity of Anabaptist-related churches as they are more and more often asked to define themselves in ecumenical, interfaith, and secular contexts. The Convictions are a common reference point when engaging in these conversations. Third, the Convictions reflect a remarkable unity. They were born out of a search for communion rather than division, in contrast to many confessions of the past. They represent a united Anabaptist church that is gradually emerging from a divisive history. Finally, the Shared Convictions are accessible. They are concise yet comprehensive, using simple yet precise language. It would be possible to use them in a liturgical setting, either as a text spoken by the congregation or as the basis for a teaching series. The content is manageable in scope and format.

Although I believe their strengths outweigh their weaknesses, the Shared Convictions are not perfect. The Convictions do reflect certain limitations. They avoid difficult issues through omission: church leadership, the nature of Christ, atonement, church discipline, sexuality, and feminist concerns, to name only a few. Ideally, there would be a way of recognizing that we regard these matters as important to our faith but that we understand them in different ways. Another weakness of the document is the insufficient context provided for the Convictions. Scripture references, a description of the process of development, and suggestions for use in churches would make the Convictions far more accessible and meaningful. Alfred Neufeld’s *What We Believe Together: Exploring the “Shared Convictions” of Anabaptist-Related Churches* (Good Books, 2007) is an important step in this direction.

I hope this study can also contribute to a deeper understanding of the Shared Convictions. As we continue to search for the faith and life that define our identity as Anabaptist Christians in the worldwide context of the twenty-first century, the Shared Convictions are a powerful symbol of the historical tradition and global community of which we are a part.

*Appendices and Notes to follow. – Editor*

## Appendix 1: Statements of Faith



Mennonite World Conference

A Community of Anabaptist-related Churches

### Shared Convictions

By the grace of God, we seek to live and proclaim the good news of reconciliation in Jesus Christ. As part of the one body of Christ at all times and places, we hold the following to be central to our belief and practice:

1. God is known to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Creator who seeks to restore fallen humanity by calling a people to be faithful in fellowship, worship, service and witness.
2. Jesus is the Son of God. Through his life and teachings, his cross and resurrection, he showed us how to be faithful disciples, redeemed the world, and offers eternal life.
3. As a church, we are a community of those whom God's Spirit calls to turn from sin, acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord, receive baptism upon confession of faith, and follow Christ in life.
4. As a faith community, we accept the Bible as our authority for faith and life, interpreting it together under Holy Spirit guidance, in the light of Jesus Christ to discern God's will for our obedience.
5. The Spirit of Jesus empowers us to trust God in all areas of life so we become peacemakers who renounce violence, love our enemies, seek justice, and share our possessions with those in need.
6. We gather regularly to worship, to celebrate the Lord's Supper, and to hear the Word of God in a spirit of mutual accountability.
7. As a world-wide community of faith and life we transcend boundaries of nationality, race, class, gender and language. We seek to live in the world without conforming to the powers of evil, witnessing to God's grace by serving others, caring for creation, and inviting all people to know Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

In these convictions we draw inspiration from Anabaptist forebears of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, who modeled radical discipleship to Jesus Christ. We seek to walk in his name by the power of the Holy Spirit, as we confidently await Christ's return and the final fulfillment of God's kingdom.

*Adopted by Mennonite World Conference  
General Council  
Pasadena, California (USA)  
March 15, 2006*



### **Apostolic Creed**

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.<sup>44</sup>

### **Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed**

We believe in one God, the Father, the almighty maker of heaven and earth, or all that is seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he was born of the Virgin Mary, and became man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered, died and was buried. On the third day he rose again in fulfillment of the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.<sup>45</sup>

**Appendix 2: The Shared Convictions in Ecumenical,  
Anabaptist and Global Perspective**

*Table 1: Comparison of the Shared Convictions  
and the Ecumenical Creeds*

	APOSTOLIC CREED	NICENE CREED	SHARED CONVICTIONS
Who is God?	Triune Father Creator Almighty	Triune Father Creator of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen Almighty	Triune Father Creator One who calls and restores
Who is Jesus?	Lord, Christ, Son of God Dead, risen, returning Suffered under Pontius Pilate, buried, descended to hell, resurrected on the third day, ascended to heaven Born of a virgin Judge Sits at the right hand of the father	Lord, Christ, Son of God Dead, risen, returning For our salvation Connected to kingdom Eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in Being with the Father. Through him all things were made Incarnate as a Human	Lord, Christ, Son of God Dead, risen, returning Savior Redeemer Connected to kingdom Example, one to be followed Teacher Aid in the interpretation of scripture

**Appendix 2: The Shared Convictions in Ecumenical,  
Anabaptist and Global Perspective**

*Table 1: Comparison of the Shared Convictions  
and the Ecumenical Creeds*

	APOSTOLIC CREED	NICENE CREED	SHARED CONVICTIONS
What is the church?	Connects church to Holy Spirit Holy, set apart Catholic	Connects church to Holy Spirit Holy, set apart Catholic One Apostolic	Connects church to Holy Spirit Separate, set apart Worldwide One Community Composed of believers who follow a specific spiritual and ethical path Worshipping and witnessing Body of Christ Practices mutual accountability Continues a historical tradition A called people who are faithful in fellowship, worship, service and witness

**Appendix 2: The Shared Convictions in Ecumenical,  
Anabaptist and Global Perspective**

*Table 1: Comparison of the Shared Convictions  
and the Ecumenical Creeds*

	APOSTOLIC CREED	NICENE CREED	SHARED CONVICTIONS
What else is important?	Everlasting life Communion of the saints Forgiveness of sins Resurrection of the body	Life of the world to come Resurrection of the dead Spirit speaks through the prophets and church Baptism associated with the remission of sins Holy Spirit the Lord, the giver of life who proceeds from the Father and the Son	Eternal life Scripture is interpreted under the guidance of the Holy Spirit Baptism associated with the call to turn from sin and follow Christ in life Reconciliation A spiritual path Scripture and spirit Obedience Peacemaking Justice Sharing possessions Worship Lord's Supper Baptism Creation care Service Kingdom language Anthropology of fallen humanity

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> “Faith and Life Council.” *Courier* 21.1-2 (2006): 9.

<sup>2</sup> Mennonite World Conference. “Shared Convictions.” *Mennonite World Conference: A Community of Anabaptist-related Churches*. 15 March 2006. 21 Nov. 2007. <<http://www.mwc-cmm.org/>>. Included in Appendix 1.

<sup>3</sup> Larry Miller, “A Global Anabaptist-Mennonite Family Transforms Mennonite World Conference.” *Courier* 15.2 (2000): 9-11. This issue celebrates the 75th anniversary of MWC.

<sup>4</sup> Mennonite World Conference. *Mennonite World Conference: A Community of Anabaptist-related Churches*. 15 Nov. 2007. 21 Nov. 2007. <<http://www.mwc-cmm.org/>>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. Fifteen delegates were unable to attend the 2006 meeting as they were denied visas. “General Council.” *Courier* 21.1-2 (2006): 4-6 at 4.

<sup>7</sup> Marcus Schantz, “Putting our Faith Together: Faith and Life Council.” *Courier* 11.3 (1996): 2. Shantz quotes Rainer Burkart, Faith and Life Council Secretary.

<sup>8</sup> Rainer W. Burkart, “Exploring Anabaptist-Mennonite Faith and Practice.” *Courier* 12.4 (1997): 1-7 at 2-3.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 3-7.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>11</sup> C. Arnold Snyder, *From Anabaptist Seed: The Historical Core of Anabaptist-Related Identity* (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 1999).

<sup>12</sup> C. Arnold Snyder, “Anabaptist Seed, Worldwide Growth: The Historical Core of Anabaptist-Mennonite Identity.” *Courier* 13.1 (1998): 5-8.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 5. Quoting Larry Miller, MWC Executive Secretary.

<sup>14</sup> Faith and Life Vision Discernment Team. “Faith and Life Council Vision Discernment Team Report.” *Courier* 15.3 (2000): 14-15.

<sup>15</sup> “‘Shared Convictions’: What does it mean to be Anabaptist?” *Courier* 18.3-4 (2003): 24.

<sup>16</sup> “Faith and Life Council.” *Courier* 21.1-2 (2006): 9.

<sup>17</sup> Larry Miller, “Koinonia in the future of MWC.” *Courier* 19.2 (2004): 2-4 at 3.

<sup>18</sup> Phyllis Pellman Good, “Show your cards.” *Courier* 21.3 (2006): 6-7.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Schrag and Tim Miller Dyck, “‘Shared Convictions’ Statement Approved.” *Canadian Mennonite* 17 April 2001. 20 Nov. 2007. <<http://www.canadianmennonite.org/>>. An example of a statement to a national conference.

<sup>20</sup> The Articles are referenced as SC 1, SC 2, etc. in several of the Notes below. The introductory paragraph is SC 0 and the concluding paragraph is SC 8.

<sup>21</sup> Mennonite World Conference. <[www.mwc-cmm.org](http://www.mwc-cmm.org/)>.

<sup>22</sup> SC 0.

<sup>23</sup> References to the Christian community are included in almost every article: “As part of the one body of Christ at all times and places” (SC 0), “calling a people to be faithful” (SC 1), the focus of the third article is the church (SC 3), “As a faith community, we accept the Bible...interpreting it together” (SC 4), “We gather regularly to worship” (SC 6), and “As a world-wide community of faith and life we transcend the boundaries of faith, nationality,

race, class, gender and language” (SC 7).

<sup>24</sup> Jesus is named authoritatively, “As a church, we...acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord ” (SC 3); the Bible is interpreted “in light of Jesus Christ” (SC 4); and early Anabaptists are inspirational because they “modeled radical discipleship to Jesus Christ” (SC 8).

<sup>25</sup> SC 4.

<sup>26</sup> “In these convictions we draw inspiration from Anabaptist forebears of the 16th century, who modeled radical discipleship to Jesus Christ” (SC 8).

<sup>27</sup> Nancy Heisey, “What have we learned? What next?” *Bridgefolk*. 21 July 2005. 20 Nov. 2007. <<http://bridgefolk.net/mctc05/heisey.htm>>.

<sup>28</sup> “Faith and Life Council.” *Courier* 21.1-2 (2006): 9.

<sup>29</sup> “Mennonite World Conference may take action in all matters within the mandates given to it by the member churches together. It may also take action on behalf of one or several member churches in additional matters committed to it by those churches.” Larry Miller, “Koinonia in the future of MWC,” 3.

<sup>30</sup> Tables summarizing the analysis of the Shared Convictions are included in Appendix 2.

<sup>31</sup> Creeds as presented in *Living with Christ Sunday Missal for 2006-2007*. National Liturgy Office, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (Toronto: Novalis, 2006). See Appendix 1.

<sup>32</sup> SC 1.

<sup>33</sup> Mennonite World Conference. <[www.mwc-cmm.org](http://www.mwc-cmm.org)>.

<sup>34</sup> The Nicene Creed begins, “We believe,” and the Shared Convictions, “By the grace of God, we seek.”

<sup>35</sup> *Living with Christ Sunday Missal*, 12.

<sup>36</sup> SC 3.

<sup>37</sup> SC 8.

<sup>38</sup> C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: Revised Student Edition* (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 1997), 115.

<sup>39</sup> Snyder, *From Anabaptist Seed*. See note 11.

<sup>40</sup> Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 142.

<sup>41</sup> Faith and Life Vision Discernment Team. 14.

<sup>42</sup> Readers can request this document from Mennonite World Conference: [www.mwc-cmm.org](http://www.mwc-cmm.org)

<sup>43</sup> Burkart, 5.

<sup>44</sup> *Living with Christ Sunday Missal*, 11.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

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# **Islamic Monotheism and the Trinity**

*Jon Hoover*

Christians and Muslims both believe that there is only one God, and, as I hope to show in this article, their doctrines of God share some important structural similarities. However, Muslims and Christians also find themselves differing over how this God is one, with Muslims rejecting the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. The first part of this essay surveys Islamic criticisms of the Trinity, and the subsequent parts seek to widen the scope of the discussion so as to find bridges between the Islamic and Christian doctrines of God. I outline the basics of the Islamic doctrine of God, examine how Christians affirm the unity of God by means of Trinitarian doctrine, and note parallels in order to enhance mutual understanding. As will become apparent, my aim is also apologetic: that is, I seek to clarify the sense of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity in view of typical Muslim concerns.

This essay began as a presentation at the Mennonite-Shi'i dialogue held in Qom, Iran in February 2004.<sup>1</sup> That paper was published with minor revisions in a Catholic journal the same year.<sup>2</sup> It was also to appear in a volume containing the 2004 Qom dialogue papers, but plans for that volume were eventually abandoned. In the meantime, I became aware of difficulties with my 2004 presentation. The present essay is thus a thorough revision of that work, and I trust that it is now more adequate.<sup>3</sup> However, due to the wide scope of my discussion, I have not been able either to explain and justify all of my claims as fully as some might wish or to engage the entire range of potential objections to my arguments, from both Christians and Muslims.<sup>4</sup> This remains a work in process – or rather part of a dialogue in process – and it is in the spirit of the shared and ongoing Muslim-Christian search for truth that I submit this contribution to further conversation.

## **Islamic Criticism of the Trinity**

The Qur'an asserts that God is one (e.g., Q. 16:51, 44:8, 47:19, 112:1-4). For many Muslims, the monotheism that is foundational to Islamic doctrine is known not only from Qur'anic revelation but also from reason.

Islamic criticism of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity then flows from the conviction that this doctrine compromises God's unity and entails tritheism. Once it is established that the Christian doctrine is not monotheistic, it is but a short step to censuring Christians for committing the unforgivable sin of associating partners with God (*shirk*): They wrongly give Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit a share in God's exclusive rule of the world, and they devote worship to Jesus that is due only to God.<sup>5</sup> Muslims justify their conviction that the Trinity violates God's unity in a number of ways. Here, I will survey three major lines of argument: Qur'anic criticism, Trinitarian doctrinal development as corruption of the message of Jesus, and rational deficiencies in the classical Trinitarian formulations.

The Qur'an includes several verses that Muslims often use to criticize the doctrine of the Trinity. The Qur'an rejects a triad that consists of God, Jesus, and his mother Mary: "O Jesus, son of Mary! Did you say to the people, 'Worship me and my mother as two gods besides God?'" (Q. 5:116). The Qur'an also denies that Jesus is God's Son and that God is "three," as in the verse, "The Messiah Jesus, son of Mary, was only a messenger of God.... Do not say 'Three'.... God is only one God. Glory be to him. [He is above] having a son" (Q. 4:171). Another text implies that calling Christ God's son is unbelief and that worshiping Christ as a lord is associationism (Q. 9:30-31, see also Q. 2:116, 5:73, 5:75).<sup>6</sup>

In response to this Qur'anic reproach, Christians readily note that the doctrine of the Trinity speaks not of God, Jesus, and Mary, but of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Additionally, Christians do not understand Jesus' sonship in the carnal way that Muslims often presume. Rather, as Anglican Bishop Kenneth Cragg puts it, sonship points to the obedience of Jesus the Incarnate Son to his Father and the depth of relationship within the one God.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, Christians concur with the fundamental Qur'anic rejection of polytheism, and they agree that we should not talk of three gods. It has also been suggested that the Qur'an is not even speaking to classical Christian doctrine but to something else, perhaps some kind of aberrant Christianity present in Arabia at the time of the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>8</sup>

These responses remind Muslims inclined to look to the Qur'an for their knowledge of Christianity that they need to examine what Christians themselves say about the Trinity before rejecting it. However, it remains



possible that the Qur'an did address classical Trinitarian doctrine. Even the Qur'anic polemic against polytheists may have been aimed at the allegedly defective monotheism of mainstream Jews and Christians.<sup>9</sup> Whatever the case, Christian attempts to blunt the Qur'anic critique cannot negate the fact that Trinitarian doctrine does differ from the positive Qur'anic and Islamic teaching about God. To explain how Christianity and Islam came to different views, a second line of Muslim anti-Trinitarian criticism alleges historical corruption of the Christian religion.

Islamic narratives of Christianity's historical corruption are rooted in the conviction that all of God's prophets and messengers brought the same message of God's unity. Jesus was no different. His religion was pure monotheism, but it was corrupted by the Apostle Paul and again later at the Council of Nicea in 325. The early medieval theologian 'Abd al-Jabbar (d. 1025) elaborates this narrative in lurid detail. He underlines Paul's wickedness and cunning as he adopts numerous Roman religious practices into Christianity to endear himself to Roman power. Likewise, Constantine manipulated church leaders to adopt the Nicene Creed, imposed it on the people, and killed those who opposed it.<sup>10</sup>

Modern Muslim versions of the historical corruption narrative sometimes borrow from the liberal wing of modern western scholarship on the Bible and early church history to enhance their apologetic credibility. This is evident, for example, in the recent book by Faruk Zein entitled *Christianity, Islam and Orientalism*.<sup>11</sup> Zein draws on such figures as the founder of the Jesus Seminar Robert Funk,<sup>12</sup> the Jewish Pauline scholar Hyam Maccoby,<sup>13</sup> and the British popular writer A.N. Wilson<sup>14</sup> to argue that Paul invented Christianity by transforming the human Jesus into a Hellenistic myth about a dying and rising god. This myth was then formalized in the doctrine of the Trinity adopted by the Council of Nicea. Zein also explains that the true followers of Jesus were "Nazarenes" who adhered to Jesus' moral religion and did not worship him as a god. Zein applauds the western scholars who have brought all of this to our attention. However, he chides them for not investigating Islam, which, he argues, has long taught these very same things.<sup>15</sup>

I have not been able to find lengthy rebuttals of Muslim arguments for historical corruption of the Christian faith, nor will I attempt a response of

my own. Rejoinders to the Jesus Seminar and other defenses of continuity between Jesus, Paul, and classical Christian doctrine may be seen to stand in for this lack.<sup>16</sup> However, I will sketch below how Trinitarian doctrine follows from the soteriological impulse that I take to be central to the Biblical witness.

A third strand of Muslim argument impugns the rationality of the Trinity. Many Muslim polemicists through history have been well acquainted with the essentials of the classical doctrine.<sup>17</sup> God is one substance (*ousia* in Greek, *jawhar* in Arabic) in three persons (*hypostasis* in Greek, *uqnûm* in Arabic): Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The persons are equal and coeternal, and they are distinguished one from another by their origins: the Father is ingenerate; the Son is generated from the Father; and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father. The western church tradition eventually linked the Holy Spirit to the Son as well, such that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son (*filioque*).

This doctrine is often quickly dismissed as irrational with the observation that one cannot be three. A quotation by the modern Syrian Qur'an commentator al-Sabuni (b. 1930) is typical:

[The Christians] say: One substance and three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These three are one as the sun consists in its circular shape, rays and warmth. They claim that the Father is divine, the Son is divine, the Spirit is divine, and the whole is one God. It is known to be false by the intuition of reason that three is not one and one is not three.<sup>18</sup>

Other polemicists go further in spelling out the doctrine's rational difficulties. In *A Response to the Three Sects of the Christians*, Abu 'Isa al-Warraq (d. ca. 860) provides one of the earliest and most extensive critiques of this kind. His anti-Christian polemic was highly influential even though he was deemed a Muslim heretic. After providing a full and careful description of the Trinitarian teachings of the Melkites, Nestorians, and Jacobites, Abu 'Isa goes on the offensive. He takes the hypostases to be three countable things, which, when added to the substance of the Godhead, make four eternal entities. This is rejected as violating God's unity. Conversely, he shows in diverse ways that Christian efforts to show how the three hypostases are one fail and end up in contradiction.<sup>19</sup>

David Thomas, editor and translator of this early text, observes both that Abu ‘Isa treats Trinitarian doctrinal statements as propositions making univocal assertions about the reality of God and that this is not how Christians understood them.<sup>20</sup> However, Thomas does not explain how Christians do understand them. Here we may turn to the Cappadocian theologians of the fourth century for clarification. To ward off the charge of “tri-theism” in their own time, they excluded the notion of number from the Trinitarian persons – the persons cannot be added up as numbers – and they underlined the indivisibility, simplicity, and incomprehensibility of God’s essence. For the Cappadocians, Trinitarian doctrinal statements must be made and interpreted from within the prior framework of God’s simplicity and ineffability.<sup>21</sup> A similar appeal to God’s ineffability or essential mystery is fundamental to my own interpretation of the Trinity below.

To counter the Muslim charge of irrationality, some Christians have sought to ground Trinitarian doctrine in reason itself. An example occurs in a letter to Muslims by Paul of Antioch, the Melkite Bishop of Sidon (d. early 1200s?). He begins with a cosmological argument – created things imply a Creator – to establish God’s existence. Then, Paul argues that God must be living so as not to be dead and speaking so as not to be ignorant. Thus, he concludes:

The one god who is called one Lord and one Creator is a living, speaking thing—that is, essence, speech, and life. The essence we hold to be the Father who is the source of the other two. The speech is the Son who is born from the Father in the manner of speech from the intellect. The life is the Holy Spirit.<sup>22</sup>

In response to Paul of Antioch’s letter, the fourteenth-century Sunni theologian Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) wrote the fullest Muslim refutation of Christianity in the Islamic tradition, *The Sound Response to Those Who Have Changed the Religion of Christ*.<sup>23</sup> His critique is informed and astute. With respect to the Trinity, he first calls Paul’s bluff and explains that Christians draw the language of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit from their texts. This language does not arise from reason but from what Christians take to be revelation. Moreover, the Trinity is not needed to know that God is living and speaking, and there is no reason to limit the number of God’s attributes to three.<sup>24</sup>

With Paul of Antioch's bit of natural theology out of the way, Ibn Taymiyya turns to a more comprehensive critique. Unlike Abu 'Isa al-Warraq, Ibn Taymiyya demonstrates awareness that Christians generally regard the Trinity as unknowable apart from revelation and somehow beyond rational analysis: "[Christians] claim that the divine Books have revealed these views and that they constitute a matter beyond reason. They hold this belief to be of a degree beyond that of the intellect."<sup>25</sup>

Like many other Muslim theologians, Ibn Taymiyya maintains that reason knows a great deal about God apart from revelation. Reason knows that God exists, that God is one, and that God has attributes such as power, life, knowledge, and so forth. Revelation and the teaching of the prophets then confirm what is known by reason, but they will never contradict reason. Revelation sometimes does go beyond reason to provide information that the latter cannot access. This includes information that God has revealed about recompense in the hereafter, as well as some of what God would have us to do in this life.<sup>26</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya recognizes that many Christians would want to include the Trinity under this latter rubric of revelation inaccessible to reason. However, he rejects the possibility and accuses them of not distinguishing "between [1] what the mind imagines and proves false and knows to be impossible and [2] that which the mind is unable to conceive since it knows nothing about it, and has no information on it either by affirmation or denial."<sup>27</sup> For him, the Christian doctrine falls under the first of the two categories, not the second. The Trinity is not a matter simply beyond *reason*; it is clearly *opposed* to reason.

To make the point, Ibn Taymiyya maintains that speaking of God begetting a son is even more irrational than positing a wife for God, even if 'begetting' is explained as "intellectual production like Christian scholars hold,"<sup>28</sup> or as similar to "the birth of speech from the mind."<sup>29</sup> Moreover, he argues that the Trinitarian hypostases resolve to tri-theism and contradiction. If the Son is truly equal to the Father in substance, then the Son must likewise have a substance of his own, making the Son into a second substance. Similar logic applies to the Holy Spirit, turning it into a third substance. Thus, Christians believe in fact in three substances and three gods, and this contradicts their claim that God is one.<sup>30</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya complements his rational critique of the Trinity with an historical corruption narrative. The Trinity contradicts the consistent teaching of the prophets, and Jesus did not instruct his followers to believe in this doctrine or use terms such as *uqnûm* (Arabic for *hypostasis*). Trinitarian doctrine is rather the result of errant interpretation, the impositions of the Council of Nicea, and Christian scholars appealing – in the face of sound reason – to what they alleged was written in revealed texts. To correct this, Ibn Taymiyya shows how biblical texts traditionally cited to support the Trinity may be reinterpreted to agree with Islamic monotheism. For example, he considers the command in Matt. 28:19 to baptize “in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.” Here, ‘Father’ means God the Lord; ‘Son’ refers to the prophet Christ; and the ‘Holy Spirit’ is the angel Gabriel who brings revelation or revelation itself. Thus, the biblical text commands “people to believe in God and His prophet which God sent and in the angel by which God sent down the revelation which he brought.”<sup>31</sup>

To sum up the Islamic criticism, the Trinity has not been revealed by God; it ends in tri-theism; and, for many Muslims, it is positively irrational. There is of course no way apart from faith to adjudicate whether the Trinity is rooted in revelation from God. It is also not possible, in my view, to come to knowledge of the Triune God on the basis of reason alone. However, one can attempt to explain why Christians hold this doctrine and try to explicate something of its sense in dialogue with the beliefs of others. This is what I aim to do in the remainder of this essay.

### **The Islamic Doctrine of God’s Unity**

The following presentation of the Islamic doctrine of God’s unity (*tawhîd*) draws upon and somewhat expands an analysis outlined by Murtada Mutahhari (d. 1979), a prominent and sophisticated theologian in the Shi‘i clerical tradition of modern Iran.<sup>32</sup> He identifies four levels or aspects of *tawhîd* with an analytical clarity that will prove useful later in my comparison with Trinitarian doctrine. The choice of the Shi‘i Mutahhari as my primary interlocutor also derives from the fact that I first presented this material at a Mennonite-Shi‘i dialogue with Shi‘i clerics in Iran in 2004. Sunni Muslims may find my choice unfortunate, and I must beg their indulgence. However, similar doctrinal positions are found among a good number of

Sunnis. The influential and renowned theologian al-Ghazali (d. 1111) treats the doctrine of God following a similar fourfold structure in his creed, even if not explicitly.<sup>33</sup> Also, the doctrines of *tawhîd* found in Ibn Taymiyya, the Arabian reformer Muhammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1791 or 1792), and their modern heirs bear some resemblance to Mutahhari’s presentation.<sup>34</sup> What ties Mutahhari together with these otherwise dissimilar figures is a certain debt to the philosophy of Ibn Sina (Avicenna, d. 1037).

Mutahhari identifies the first aspect or level of *tawhîd* as *al-tawhîd al-dhâtî*, the oneness of God’s essence (*dhât*): God’s essence is simple, non-composite, and without division. The classical argument is that God cannot be composed of parts lest God need a cause to bring those parts together.<sup>35</sup> The oneness of God’s essence also indicates that God’s essence and his attributes are incomparable and bear no likeness to the essences and attributes of creatures. In addition to arguments from reason, this is supported by the Qur’anic verse, “There is nothing like him” (Q. 42:11). Mutahhari observes that all Muslims agree at the level of *al-tawhîd al-dhâtî*.

In treating the next two levels of *tawhîd*, Mutahhari contrasts his views with those of the Mu‘tazili and the Ash‘ari theological traditions. The Mu‘tazili tradition, which strongly emphasizes God’s unity and justice, emerged in the eighth century and died out among Sunnis in the thirteenth. However, some Shi‘is up to the present hold views similar to some Mu‘tazili doctrines. The Ash‘ari tradition takes its name from the early tenth-century theologian al-Ash‘ari (d. 935), who broke with his Mu‘tazili teachers to give more weight to God’s power. Ash‘ari theology continues strong among Sunnis today.<sup>36</sup>

The second level of *tawhîd* according to Mutahhari is *al-tawhîd al-sifâtî*, the unity of God’s attributes (*sifât*), such as God’s life, knowledge, power, speech, and hearing. The character of these attributes has been controversial. Mu‘tazili theologians maintain God’s simplicity and numerical unity by identifying God’s attributes with his essence. Thus, God’s attributes and God’s essence are one and the same. While this seems to solve the problem of how many may be one, the Mu‘tazilis were accused of denying the reality of the attributes because each attribute is nothing but God’s essence.

On the other hand, the Ash‘ari tradition affirms that God’s essential

attributes such as knowledge, speech, and power are real and eternal. However, this introduces a certain ontological multiplicity into the being of God. How do God's real, eternal attributes fit with the simplicity of God's essence? The traditional Ash'ari response is that God's attributes are not identical with God and yet not other than God. So, for example, God's attribute of power is not identical to God himself; yet, God's power is not other than God. This does not provide a rational solution to the problem. Rather, it simply sets linguistic boundaries for what may be said of God, and it leaves unanswered the question of how God's attributes subsist in God's singular essence.

Ibn Sina presents a slightly different approach, although it comes close to the Mu'tazili view. For Ibn Sina, God's attributes are necessarily concomitant with God's essence, such that God's essence manifests diverse attributes without compromising God's absolute simplicity. In speaking about God, we simply cannot have God without God's attributes or vice versa. God and God's attributes are inseparable.<sup>37</sup>

Mutahhari accuses the Ash'aris of violating *al-tawhîd al-sifâtî* with their doctrine of God's real attributes, and he charges the Mu'tazilis with making God's essence devoid of attributes altogether. He seeks a *via media* that comes close to the position of Ibn Sina. He states that ["The Divine Attributes] are identical with the Essence, in the sense that the Divine Essence is such that the Attributes are true of It, or is such that It manifests these Attributes."<sup>38</sup>

The third level of *tawhîd* is *al-tawhîd al-af'âlî*, the uniqueness of God's acts (*af'âl*). In the Ash'ari view, this *tawhîd* means that God is the only Creator in the universe. God has no associates in his creation, and God creates and determines everything, including human acts. There is no free will. The Ash'aris try to affirm human responsibility by speaking of the human acquisition (*kasb*) of acts, but humans still have no role in bringing their acts into existence. In contrast, the Mu'tazilis maintain that humans are indeed the creators of their acts, because God may only call humans to account and justly punish their bad deeds if he does not create them. The Ash'aris counter that God is not obliged to follow such human notions of retributive justice. Moreover, they reject the Mu'tazili doctrine as a violation of God's sole prerogative to create.

Mutahhari sides initially with the Ash‘aris against the Mu‘tazilis. God’s will is all-pervasive and human beings are fully dependent on God for their existence and activity. Nonetheless, Mutahhari also affirms the reality of human action and responsibility by introducing secondary causality: “The system of causes and effects is real, and every effect, while being dependent on its proximate cause, is also dependent on God.”<sup>39</sup> He identifies this as an intermediate position between the two views. Al-Ghazali and Ibn Taymiyya adopt similar views, drawing on the resources of Ibn Sina.<sup>40</sup>

The fourth level is *al-tawhîd al-‘ibâdî*, the exclusive worship of God. Nothing else is served and worshiped but the one and only Creator. Worship of other beings is the sin of giving associates to God (*shirk*). Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab, and the Wahhabis who followed after them, as well as various modern Muslim reformers, have strongly emphasized this level of *tawhîd* and sometimes interpreted it in highly puritanical fashion.<sup>41</sup> Mutahhari observes that Muslims are in agreement at this level, but he censures the Wahhabis for rejecting many common Islamic devotional practices such as seeking the intercessory aid of prophets and saints. That is, all Muslims agree that worship must be devoted only to God, but they disagree over whether certain practices violate or fulfill this obligation. As he writes, “The debate is about whether invoking of intercession and assistance may be considered a form of worship or not.”<sup>42</sup>

### **The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity**

With both Islamic criticism of the Trinity and the Islamic doctrine of *tawhîd* now in view, we are in a position to interpret trinitarian doctrine so as to highlight structural similarities with the Islamic doctrine and to explain how Christians confess God to be one. In accord with the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition, I give priority to the biblical witness in theological reflection. As comparative theologian David Burrell notes, however, one must employ philosophical tools or strategies in seeking to communicate across religious traditions.<sup>43</sup> Different Christian theologians do this in different ways and draw on different resources. My own approach leans, both implicitly and explicitly, on strategies employed in systematic theology, and, as will become apparent below, I rely in the first instance on the work of Catholic theologian Nicholas Lash in articulating what I take to be the proper beginning point



for Trinitarian theology: God's incomprehensibility and mystery. I also seek to speak ecumenically, that is, for Christians generally. Some may find my presentation of Christianity inadequate to their emphases and concerns, and I request their forbearance in advance.<sup>44</sup>

Christian affirmation of God's unity begins with the Jewish monotheistic confession, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone" (Deut. 6:4, cf. Isa. 44:6, Mark 12:29, 1 Cor. 8:4-5). The Christian tradition also inherits the concomitant Jewish aversion to idolatry (Ex. 20:4, Deut. 5:8, Isa. 44:7-20). This is expressed theologically with the doctrines of God's simplicity and ineffability, and has solid foundations not only in the Hebrew Bible but also in the NT: "It is [God] alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see" (1 Tim. 6:16, cf. Rom. 11:33-34). God is fundamentally incomprehensible, and this parallels God's simplicity and incomparability entailed in the Muslim confession of *al-tawhîd al-dhâtî* and affirmed in the Qur'anic verse "There is nothing like him" (Q. 42:11).

The doctrines of God's simplicity, ineffability, and incomprehensibility establish at the outset that the one God is distinct from his creatures (cf. Isa. 46:5). Thus, as Nicholas Lash puts it, God is mystery, not in the sense of whatever obscurity might be left when talk of God seems to break down, but as profound and inexhaustible simplicity over against all the complexities of our world.<sup>45</sup> Lash stresses that Christian theology should not aspire to explain God in the sense of grasping God and draining the mystery out of him by reducing him to philosophically precise propositions. That would miss the point of relating to God himself. Rather, Lash finds the proper sense of mystery pertaining to God in the metaphor of human interpersonal relations:

Persons are not problems to be solved. Indeed, the *closer* we are to people, and the better we understand them, the more they evade our cognitive "grasp" and the greater the difficulty that we experience in giving adequate expression to our understanding. Other people become, in their measure, "mysterious," not insofar as we *fail* to understand them, but rather in so far as, in lovingly relating to them, we succeed in doing so.<sup>46</sup>

That God is mysterious and incomprehensible, yet is in some way

known, constitutes the beginning point for the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. The mystery that is God is not a mystery completely hidden, but a mystery that seeks encounter with humankind. There is a tradition beloved to Muslim mystics in which God says, “I was a Hidden Treasure, so I loved to be known. Hence I created the creatures that I might be known.”<sup>47</sup> In much the same way, the God of Christian confession is the Mystery who chooses to communicate and reveal himself to the world.

The Bible is basic for Christians in seeking to ascertain who God has revealed himself to be. As Muslim critics accurately note, the word “Trinity” and its attendant technical terminology is not found in the Bible. However, the Bible does bear witness to God’s saving works in history in such a way that leads to recognition of God as triune. The NT in particular speaks of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all together engaged in a great mission to save, redeem, and reconcile humankind and all creation (e.g., Mark 1:9-15, Mark 14:32-36, John 16:1-15, John 17:20-24, Rom. 8:9-27, 1 Cor. 15:20-28). Under the inspiration of this biblical witness and the ongoing Christian experience of God’s saving work, it was only a matter of time before the church made the Trinitarian pattern of God’s activity and being explicit and eventually formalized it into the doctrine of the Trinity.

Trinitarian doctrine is founded first in soteriology and Christology, that is, in salvation in Jesus Christ. That Christ is fully divine arises out of the core conviction that in him salvation has been experienced at the hand of God himself. Athanasius, the fourth-century defender of Nicene orthodoxy, argues that creatures cannot save themselves. Only the Creator can save, which he did in Christ. Salvation is not simply induction into Paradise but participation in the life of God, and this is something only God himself can render. Thus, Athanasius rejects the Christ of the Arians who, although a “divine” savior and firstborn of all creatures, is nevertheless still a creature and so lacks the ability to save fellow creatures. Rather, Jesus Christ is the eternal Word and Son incarnate for our salvation. With the identity of Christ clarified, early Christian theologians applied similar reasoning to the Holy Spirit: the Holy Spirit is eternally divine because the Spirit does what only God can do.<sup>48</sup> Comparable arguments for the deity of Christ and Holy Spirit have been rehearsed throughout the Christian tradition, including the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition. Menno Simons (d. 1561), for example,

explains that the Son and the Holy Spirit are divine because the Bible shows them sharing the same attributes with God the Father.<sup>49</sup>

Muslims typically object to the Christian claim that Jesus Christ is the eternal Word incarnate because, in Islamic theology, God himself cannot come into history and assume human form and flesh. The perfection and majesty of God renders the Incarnation impossible. To Christians, this is an unnecessarily limitation of God. Kenneth Cragg asks, “Are we right in forbidding anything to God which he does not forbid to himself?” He maintains that God is in fact greater for his coming into this world in Christ: “To believe that God stooped to our need and weakness is not to make God less, but more, the God of all power and glory.”<sup>50</sup>

With the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit each established as equally and eternally divine, the doctrine of the Trinity asserts that these three are one God. The God who creates is the same God who saves in Jesus Christ and also the same God who will bring this world to fullness in the Holy Spirit. The creation and redemption history of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit with humankind and the world is a single, unique history whose source and end are exclusively the one and only God. Much as Christians confess that God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the sole actor in creation, redemption and consummation, Muslims assert with *al-tawhîd al-af’âli* that God is the sole Creator of the universe and the One to whom all things are returning (cf. Q. 10:56). As well, Muslims confess it was the same God who revealed the Torah to Moses, the Zabûr (Psalms) to David, the Injîl (Gospel) to Jesus, and the Qur’an to Muhammad. While they allow there were some differences between these revealed books, with the Qur’ân confessed to be the final and abrogating revelation, all these books come from the same God. Thus, the Islamic narrative of history finds its unity under one God, and, though this narrative differs from the Christian story of God’s Incarnation in Christ, both Christians and Muslims confess that only one God is Lord of all history.

As noted earlier, Muslims accuse Christians of *shirk* or associating partners with God for ascribing divinity to Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit. From another perspective, however, Trinitarian doctrine was formulated precisely to deny this. Lutheran theologian Robert Jenson observes that it is Arianism that was guilty of *shirk* because it posited the Son as a creature next to God undertaking the world’s creation and salvation. Trinitarian doctrine

establishes that Jesus the Son is not merely God's associate. Rather, as the Nicene Creed affirms, the Son is of one substance (*homoousios*) with the Father. The Father and the Son are the same God. The doctrine of the Trinity is thus essential for Christians to avoid the *shirk* of regarding the Savior of the world as anyone less than the eternal God.<sup>51</sup>

Christian theology often distinguishes between the "eternal" or "immanent" Trinity and the "economic" Trinity. The immanent Trinity is God in himself, and the economic Trinity is God in relationship to creatures in his "economy" or plan of salvation. This distinction is useful for clarifying that God in himself – in the immanent Trinity – is free and self-sufficient apart from the world, but that God for us – in the economic Trinity – has nonetheless chosen out of grace to create the world and reconcile it to himself.<sup>52</sup> Even though this distinction is required for theological clarification, it does not divide God into two. The God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in his economy of salvation is also in himself Father, Son, and Holy Spirit from eternity. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not simply names given to manifestations of God in the world; they are constitutive of who God is in himself.<sup>53</sup> Catholic theologian Karl Rahner (d. 1984) expresses this identity succinctly in his famous axiom: "The Trinity of the economy of salvation is the immanent Trinity and vice versa."<sup>54</sup>

The immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity pose the question of God's unity in two different ways. What I have discussed above is the unity of the economic Trinity. Parallel to the Islamic confession of *al-tawhîd al-af'âlî*, the economic Trinity affirms that the acts of God toward us, whether those of the Father, or the Son, or the Holy Spirit, are all acts of the one and only God. Turning now to the unity of the immanent Trinity, the problem is how God is one in himself in eternity as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Christians have devoted much energy to this problem and have offered a variety of proposals. This is also the problem that Muslim rationalist criticism of Trinitarian doctrine deems inadmissible of coherent solution, which then renders the doctrine false. It goes beyond the scope of this essay to detail the rich Christian doctrinal and theological discussion of how God is three in one. Instead, I want merely to show that Muslims face a similar dilemma, and then I will make a few remarks on the character of Christian responses to this problem.

The Christian problem of how to speak of the three as one and the one as three is akin to the Islamic theological problem of conceiving the unity of the multiple divine attributes in *al-tawhîd al-sifâtî*. Much as Islamic doctrine distinguishes God's essence from God's attributes, the classical doctrine of the Trinity distinguishes God's essence or substance (*ousia*) from God's persons (*hypostases*). In Islamic perspective, God's essence is one and God's attributes are many, while in Christian perspective God's essence is one and God's persons are three. According to Islamic doctrine, God has multiple eternal attributes that are distinguished in at least name by the Mu'tazilis and in reality by the Ash'aris. In classical Trinitarian doctrine, God's three persons are equal and co-eternal but distinguished in their names and origins: the Father is ingenerate; the Son is generated from the Father; and the Spirit proceeds from the Father (in Eastern Christianity) or from the Father and the Son (in Western Christianity).

The correspondence between the Islamic and Christian doctrines is not exact, insofar as Christian doctrine also speaks of God's attributes and there too faces the question of how the multiple are one. Additionally, Christian doctrine affirms the full and essential divinity of the Trinitarian persons, whereas Islamic theology does not speak of God's attributes as fully divine in themselves. Nonetheless, the parallels are sufficiently clear to help Muslims and Christians see that they share a problem in conceiving how God in his very being is both one and multiple.

As noted earlier, the Muslim rationalist critique derives its power from reading Trinitarian doctrinal language univocally, expecting it to withstand the full rigors of logical analysis. However, this is not in keeping with the Christian sense of God's mystery and essential distinction from us and the world. Because God is different, human discourse about God will not correspond exactly to the way God is in himself. This is not to say that there is no correspondence whatsoever. The opposite error is to deny the possibility of any knowledge of God in himself and to treat theological language as equivocal. In this view, Trinitarian doctrine at best speaks only of how God happens to appear to us. It makes no claim to know anything about God in himself. This is theologically inadequate, because it denies that God has revealed himself to us, leaving traces of his nature in his work of creation, coming into history for our reconciliation in Jesus Christ, and

empowering us to respond to his initiative through the Holy Spirit. Christian theological language thus falls somewhere between the univocal and the equivocal. The technical term for this is “analogical”; that is, our theological language corresponds to God in himself in certain oblique and ambiguous ways, but not in all respects.<sup>55</sup>

What this means can be illustrated by examining two rival Trinitarian conceptual models in contemporary Christian theology. The social Trinitarian model of Jürgen Moltmann takes the intra-trinitarian relations observed in the Bible as the clue to conceiving God in himself as a community of mutual love (see, e.g., Mark 1:9-15, John 16:1-15, 1 Cor. 15:20-28). The eternal intra-trinitarian life is dynamic and consists in a history of love circulating between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Moltmann underlines the mutuality and egalitarianism in God and submits these as patterns for the way we should live out our lives in the church and human society.<sup>56</sup> While his model highlights the intensely relational and loving character of God’s inner life, it risks turning God into a community of three divine subjects with separate centers of will and consciousness. It is for this reason that Moltmann and others working within a social trinitarian framework have been accused of “tri-theism.”<sup>57</sup>

Karl Barth (d. 1968) represents a second major way of conceiving God in contemporary Christian theology. For him, the classical language of the trinitarian persons so readily implies three separate centers of consciousness and will – and thus tri-theism – that it should be abandoned. He proposes instead to speak of three ways or modes that God is God.<sup>58</sup> Barth underlines God’s freedom and sovereignty, and he argues that the one God in his lordship is free “to differentiate Himself from Himself, to become unlike Himself and yet to remain the same.”<sup>59</sup> Thus, the Father, who is ever veiled, is nonetheless the Revealer who unveils himself as Lord in the Revelation of the Son in Jesus Christ. God as Spirit enables human beings to recognize the Revelation as revelation and not just another secular event. This is God as Being Revealed. For Barth, the Trinity is God in the three modes of Revealer, Revelation, and Being Revealed. He affirms that these distinctions in God’s acts toward us apply equally to God in himself, and affirms fellowship in God with “a definite participation of each mode of being in the other modes of being.”<sup>60</sup>

However, Barth is reticent to spell out these distinctions in Moltmann's fashion. In fact Moltmann criticizes him for privileging God's freedom and lordship to the detriment of the intra-trinitarian relations. This, Moltmann says, reduces God to one absolute divine subject such that "the personal God in eternity corresponds to the bourgeois culture of personality."<sup>61</sup>

This contrast between Moltmann and Barth could be read as an intractable disagreement about how best to conceive God as triune. I suggest that it is more helpful to see these models as complementary ways of indicating different aspects of the truth about God. Barth's modal understanding of the Trinity underlines God's unity and sovereign freedom, while Moltmann's social Trinity emphasizes God's threeness and his love. Both are true in the analogical sense described above. If, however, God's distinction from the world is not respected, and these models are read as univocal descriptions of how God is both one and three, the models break down and become false. What decides which models or analogies should be used in speaking of God in himself as one and three? I propose that this is ultimately a matter of pastoral wisdom and apologetic concern. Working in dialogue with the Bible, the tradition of the church, the contemporary context, and the dynamics of worship and service, Christians employ various theological models and concepts that will most aptly convey the truth of the triune God for the situation at hand.

### The Trinity in Christian Devotion

Thus far, my discussion of the Trinity has focused on God and his acts toward us, and I have noted the relevant parallels with the Islamic doctrines of *al-tawhîd al-dhâtî*, *al-tawhîd al-sifâtî*, and *al-tawhîd al-af'âlî*. On the Islamic side, the fourth level of *tawhîd* – *al-tawhîd al-'ibâdî* – shifts our attention from God in himself and his acts toward us to our response of worshiping and serving God alone. Christians readily join with Muslims in affirming this *tawhîd*, but they differ over how it is rightly enacted. Much as Muslims themselves differ over whether *al-tawhîd al-'ibâdî* permits seeking the intercession of saints and prophets, Christians differ with Muslims over whether the one God is to be worshipped in Jesus Christ the Incarnate Word. Yet, even if Muslims reject worship of Christ as *shirk*, they may perhaps come to appreciate how Trinitarian theology contributes to balanced Christian devotion to the one God. How so?



It is essential to Trinitarian doctrine that the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit work together in each of the divine acts of creation, redemption, and sustaining empowerment. With respect to creation, for example, both the Son and the Spirit are integrally involved with God the Father in creating the world (Gen. 1:2, Col. 1:16). Yet, Christians also allow speaking of creation as distinctively the work of the Father, redemption as distinctively that of the Son, and empowerment as distinctively that of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, but at a greater level of abstraction, the Father may be linked in Christian experience to God's transcendence over the world, the Spirit with God's immanence in the world, and the Incarnate Son with God's intervention and revelation in history. With these linkages in mind, I will review an old article by H. Richard Niebuhr and then turn to further insights from Nicholas Lash in order to illustrate how the Trinity may shape a balanced Christian piety.

In a 1946 article entitled "The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Unity of the Church," Niebuhr outlines three commonly occurring Christian "unitarianisms" that focus on one of the Father, the Son, or the Spirit to the exclusion of the other two.<sup>62</sup> He notes that the unitarianism of the Father or Creator disapproves of polytheism, idolatry, and religious enthusiasm and puts great stock in reason and natural theology. However, it has difficulty interpreting the biblical narrative and making sense of inner religious experience. The unitarianism of Jesus Christ protests against the excesses of reason and naturalistic religion, and gives preeminence to Jesus as the supreme ethical or salvific figure over against the less honorable or less exemplary creator God of the OT. This unitarianism can make some sense of history and the Bible, but has difficulty accounting for the source of Jesus' power in something beyond himself. The unitarianism of the Spirit locates the source of reality in inner religious experience and feeling while neglecting the transcendent Creator and God's work of redemption in history. Thus, this unitarianism struggles to make sense of the origin of the world and the need for some kind of objective ethical standard.

Niebuhr's point is that an exclusive focus on only one of transcendence (Father), history (Son), or immanence (Spirit) constitutes an unstable belief system that must eventually acknowledge a need for the two missing dimensions. This observation allows Niebuhr to find an implicit trinitarianism even in Christian heresies. However, the aim of his analysis is not normative but pragmatic. Niebuhr is trying to use the doctrine of the



Trinity to bring Christians of diverse tendencies into one ecumenical fold. Nevertheless, his scheme leaves open the possibility that the Trinity could also function normatively to guard Christians against the excesses of any one unitarian tendency.<sup>63</sup>

This dovetails nicely with Lash's suggestion that the doctrine of the Trinity can function as a set of rules guiding Christian prayer and devotion.<sup>64</sup> First, God as Spirit indicates that God is immanent and involved in all of life and vitality in this world. Yet, it is the error of pantheism to identify God with the world completely. Thus there is need for a second rule which states that God is absolutely different from the world. God is the transcendent Creator who differs fundamentally from the creation. Yet, too much emphasis on a God who is different and incomprehensible ushers in agnosticism and even atheism. Here, God is absent, and other lesser gods – products of our own labor – rush in to fill the gap.

Lash observes that much nineteenth-century thought in the West seems to oscillate between pantheism and atheism, or between absolute identity of the world with God and absolute distinction of God from the world. This leads to the third rule, the need for revelation in history and the tradition of reference to God that grows out from it. This is God the Word, which links the Creator and the Spirit. Lash points out that even here Christians face the danger of idolatry if they fix too firmly on the tradition of language referring to the Word incarnate, thinking it provides full knowledge of God. This then requires the corrective of God's transcendence. For in Jesus "is the image of the Imageless One."<sup>65</sup> Lash understands the Christian doctrine of God to provide a set of self-correcting rules that enable us to live and pray in balanced reference to God.<sup>66</sup>

I believe that we may extend Niebuhr's and Lash's insights further to speak of an aesthetic quality in Christian devotion to God and perhaps even in God himself. From this perspective, the doctrine of the Trinity draws together God's transcendence over the world, God's immanence in the world, and God's involvement in history through Christ and points to the single, comprehensive, and all-encompassing beauty that is God. This beauty then invites Christians to live out a balanced, harmonious piety that mirrors the elegance found in the unity of the triune God. Mystically inclined Muslims may appreciate what I am trying to say here. The Islamic mystic, the Sufi, seeks to become one in whose very being the range and fullness of

God's names and character traits are brought together in balanced harmony. Similarly, Christians in their worship and service seek to reflect the harmony and grace of the triune God.

### **Conclusion**

Both Muslims and Christians affirm that there is only one God who is fundamentally simple, mysterious, and incomprehensible. Yet, this God creates the world, seeks to communicate with humankind, and desires a human response of undivided worship and service. God's communication and interaction with humankind has taken place most decisively in Jesus Christ for Christians and in the Qur'an for Muslims. Following on from the soteriological dynamic of the Bible, Christians affirm that God's Word incarnate in Christ is true God himself and that the Holy Spirit is God as well. The Christian doctrine of the Trinity maintains that these three – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – are all one God. Muslims affirm that the Qur'an is God's word spoken into history, but they do not affirm that the Qur'an is God himself. The one God in his very self does not enter into history. These respective doctrines of God are rooted in two different authoritative texts which portray God in two different ways. While these differences must be respected, they should not blind us to similarities where they occur. And, more important, they should not prevent Muslims and Christians from wrestling with these differences, seeking to understand their import more deeply, and asking how they can refine our faith in the one God. The comparative framework that I have outlined is meant to stimulate critical dialogue to these ends. If this framework is found wanting in further Muslim-Christian discussion, it will have served its purposes well.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> For an overview of this dialogue, see A. James Reimer, "Introduction: Revelation and Authority: Shi'ah Muslim-Mennonite Christian Dialogue II," *CGR* 24.1 (Winter 2006): 4-11. Four of the dialogue papers, two Mennonite and two Shi'i, were also published in this issue.

<sup>2</sup> Jon Hoover, "Revelation and the Islamic and Christian Doctrines of God," *Islamochristiana* 30 (2004): 1-14; French translation, "La révélation et les doctrines musulmane et chrétienne sur Dieu," *Chemins de Dialogue: Penser la foi dans l'esprit d'Assise* 28 (2006): 167-90.

<sup>3</sup> I would like to thank especially Najeeb Awad for his patient and expert assistance in

Trinitarian theology. I am also grateful to Muammer Iskenderoglu, George Sabra, David Burrell, Giuseppe Scattolin, dialogue partners in Iran, and an anonymous reviewer for their help along the way as I developed this article.

<sup>4</sup> I may be faulted especially for not engaging debate over the role classical Christian orthodoxy should play in contemporary Mennonite theology, especially since significant discussion of this has taken place in *CGR*. It will become apparent that I believe Mennonite theology is best situated within a pro-Nicene framework. This is well defended in dialogue with Mennonite voices in A. James Reimer, "Trinitarian Orthodoxy, Constantinianism, and Radical Protestant Theology," in *Mennonites and Classical Theology: Dogmatic Foundations for Christian Ethics* (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2001), 247-71. For a specific example of Mennonite debate in this journal that turns on the rejection or acceptance of classical Christian orthodoxy, see J. Denny Weaver, "Reading Sixteenth-century Anabaptism Theologically: Implications for Modern Mennonites as a Peace Church," and the reply by C. Arnold Snyder, "Anabaptist History and Theology: History or Heresy?" *CGR* 16:1 (Winter 1998): 37-51 and 53-59, respectively.

<sup>5</sup> For these charges, see Abu Ameenah Bilal Philips, *The Fundamentals of Tawheed (Islamic Monotheism)* (Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House, 1997), 29 and 39. Philips simply assumes that the Trinity is not monotheistic; he makes no effort to explore it. He also censures as *shirk* the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation for making God part of his creation (34).

<sup>6</sup> For a more extensive review of the Qur'anic material, see David Thomas, "Trinity," in *Encyclopedia of the Qur'ân*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2001-2006), 5:368-72. For an overview of Muslim polemic against the Trinity generally, see David Thomas, "Tathlith," *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, New Edition (hereafter EI2) (Leiden: Brill, 1954-2004), 10:373-75.

<sup>7</sup> Kenneth Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim: An Exploration* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1985; reprint Oxford: Oneworld, 1999), 29-30.

<sup>8</sup> Illustrative of these Christian responses are Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim*, 289-95; Chawkat Moucarray, *Faith to Faith: Christianity & Islam in Dialogue* (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001), 184-95; and Geoffrey Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'ân* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965; reprint Oxford: Oneworld, 1995), 126-41. Parrinder provides the fullest elaboration of the theory that the Qur'anic polemic does not address the classical doctrines of Jesus' divine sonship and the Trinity but various Christian heresies or Arab paganism.

<sup>9</sup> So argues Gerald Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: From Polemic to History* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> Gabriel Said Reynolds, *A Muslim Theologian in the Sectarian Milieu: 'Abd al-Jabbâr and the Critique of Christian Origins* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 107-17, 163-76.

<sup>11</sup> M. Faruk Zein, *Christianity, Islam and Orientalism* (London: Saqi Books, 2003), 55-68, 73-84, 93-106. Less sophisticated efforts of a similar nature are Muhammad Fazl-ur-Rahman, *Islam and Christianity in the Modern World: Being an Exposition of the Qur'anic View of Christianity in the Light of Modern Research* (Delhi: Noor Publishing House, 1992), 49-112, 135-45; and Muhammad 'Ata ur-Rahim, *Jesus: A Prophet of Islam*, 2nd ed. (London: MWH London Publishers, 1979). 'Ata ur-Rahim's book is reviewed by Jan Slomp in the *Theological Review of the Near East School of Theology* 3.2 (Nov. 1980): 35-37.

Hugh Goddard, *Muslim Perceptions of Christianity* (London: Grey Seal Books, 1996), cites numerous instances of the corruption narrative in twentieth-century Egyptian writing against Christianity (see ‘Trinity’ in the Index). Kate Zebiri, *Muslims and Christians Face to Face* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997), 67-71, analyzes the corruption narrative in English language Muslim polemic against Christianity.

<sup>12</sup> Robert W. Funk, *Honest to Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996), and *The Five Gospels* (New York: Macmillan, 1993).

<sup>13</sup> Hyam Maccoby, *The Mythmaker: Paul and the Invention of Christianity* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986).

<sup>14</sup> A.N. Wilson, *Paul: The Mind of the Apostle* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), and *Jesus* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992).

<sup>15</sup> Zein, *Christianity, Islam and Orientalism*, 91-92, 106-09.

<sup>16</sup> For critique of the Jesus Seminar, see Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996). Tom Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Oxford: Lion Publishing, 1997), 167-83, counters the thesis of A. N. Wilson that Paul invented Christianity. Lewis Ayers, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004), provides a thorough historical apologetic for pro-Nicene theology, and works with the explicit conviction that Nicene doctrinal developments were in essential continuity with God’s work in Jesus Christ. I am grateful to Najeeb Awad for drawing Ayers’ work to my attention. For a Mennonite voice of similar conviction, see the article by Reimer, “Trinitarian Orthodoxy,” noted above.

<sup>17</sup> See for example the full description of the Trinitarian teachings of the Melkites, Nestorians, and Jacobites provided by Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq in David Thomas, ed. and trans., *Anti-Christian Polemic in Early Islam: Abū ‘Isā al-Warrāq’s “Against the Trinity,”* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), 67-77.

<sup>18</sup> Muhammad ‘Alī al-Sābūnī, *Safwat al-tafāsīr*, 3 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Qur’ān al-Karīm, 1981), 1:357 n. 4, in commentary on Q. 5:73. Al-Sabuni is here quoting selectively from Abū Hayyān al-Gharnāṭī’s (d. 1344) commentary on Q. 5:73 in *Al-Bahr al-muhīt*, which is accessible in Arabic at [www.altafsir.com](http://www.altafsir.com).

<sup>19</sup> Thomas, *Anti-Christian Polemic*, 64, 99-107. Thomas shows that Abu ‘Isa’s argumentation was taken over to a large degree by the later Muslim theologians al-Baqillani (d. 1013) and ‘Abd al-Jabbar in their rationalist critiques of the Trinity (43-50). See also David Thomas, “The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Early Abbasid Era,” in *Islamic Interpretations of Christianity*, ed. Lloyd Ridgeon (Richmond, UK: Curzon, 2001), 78-98.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas, *Anti-Christian Polemic*, 63-64.

<sup>21</sup> J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1976), 267-69. The more recent work of Ayers, *Nicaea and its Legacy*, emphasizes the centrality of belief in God’s simplicity as the backdrop for pre-Nicene Trinitarian reflection in the fourth century: “In pro-Nicene texts the primary function of discussing God’s simplicity is to set the conditions for all talk of God as Trinity and of the relations between the divine ‘persons’, to shape the judgements that we make in speaking analogically, not to offer a description of divine being taken to be fully comprehensible” (287). Ayers draws this out more fully in

expositions of the Cappadocian Gregory of Nyssa (344-63) and Augustine (364-83).

<sup>22</sup> Paul of Antioch's *Letter to a Muslim Friend*, as quoted in Thomas F. Michel, *A Muslim Theologian's Response to Christianity: Ibn Taymiyya's Al-Jawab al-Sahih* (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1984), 255.

<sup>23</sup> The following discussion draws on Ibn Taymiyya's treatment of the Trinity in his *Al-Jawâb al-sahîh li-man baddala dîn al-masîh* (The sound response to those who have changed the religion of Christ), as partially translated in Michel, *A Muslim Theologian's Response*, 255-79, referred to hereafter as "Ibn Taymiyya, *Response*."

<sup>24</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Response*, 255-56.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 321, 333-37. For further discussion of Ibn Taymiyya's views on reason and revelation, see Jon Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 29-39, 56-69. Islamic theology ('ilm al-kalâm) distinguishes between the 'aqlî (rational) and the naqlî (transmitted or traditional) parts of its content. The 'aqlî is known by reason apart from revelation, even if revelation also speaks to it. This includes the existence of God, God's unity, many of God's attributes, and the human need for prophets. The naqlî that is known only through revelation includes details of religious law and knowledge of future events. Muslim theologians often insist that theology must be rationally based. This point is made for example by the Shi'î theologian Murtada Mutahhari (d. 1979), *Understanding Islamic Sciences* (London: Islamic College for Advanced Studies, 2002): "The 'aqli part of kalâm consists of the material that is purely rational, and if there is any reference to naqli (tradition), it is for the sake of illumination and confirmation of rational judgement. But in problems such as those related to Divine Unity, prophethood and some issues of Resurrection, reference to naql—the Book and the Prophet's Sunnah—is not sufficient; the argument must be purely rational" (52-53). Richard M. Frank, "The Science of Kalâm, *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 2 (1992): 7-37, argues, convincingly in my view, that Islamic Kalâm theology presents itself as "strictly philosophical metaphysics" but "is, in fact, essentially a theology" (36). Frank contrasts this with Christian theology, which "begins in the obscurity of faith in quest of rational understanding of clarification within the limits set by the nature of the object" (19). In my earlier article, "Revelation and the Islamic and Christian Doctrines of God," I portray the Kalâm view that God's unity is known most basically from reason as the primary Islamic perspective and contrast this with Christian knowledge of the Trinity deriving from revelation.

<sup>27</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Response*, 256.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*,s 267-68.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 270-71.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 262 (cf. 277).

<sup>32</sup> Murtada Mutahhari, *Understanding Islamic Sciences*, 57-84.

<sup>33</sup> Al-Ghazali's creed is found in *Ihyâ' 'ulûm al-dîn* (Beirut: Dâr al-ma'rifa, n.d.), 1:89-93 (the first *fasl* of the second *kitâb*, entitled "Kitâb qawâ'id al-'aqâ'id"), with an English translation in W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Creeds: A Selection* (Edinburgh: Univ. of Edinburgh, 1994), 73-79.

<sup>34</sup> On Ibn Taymiyya, see Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy*, 28-29, 120-22. For Ibn 'Abd al-

Wahhab, see Esther Peskes and W. Ende, “Wahhâbiyya” EI2 11:39-47 (at 40). For a recent and fully elaborated discussion in this tradition, see Philips, *The Fundamentals of Tawheed*, 1-26. The three levels of *tawhîd* outlined by Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab and Philips correspond closely to the last three of the four given by Mutahhari.

<sup>35</sup> Ibn Sînâ, *Al-Risâla al-‘arshiyya*, (Hyderabad: Matba‘at dâ‘irat al-ma‘ârif al-‘uthmâniyya, 1353/1934-5), 3-7, translated in Arthur J. Arberry, *Avicenna on Theology* (London: J. Murray, 1951), 25-32.

<sup>36</sup> Mutahhari himself elaborates the development of Mu‘tazili and Ash‘ari theology in some detail, but he does not mention al-Maturidi (d. 944) and the Maturidi theological tradition that has also been widely influential among Sunnis. For general information on Islamic theology, see W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology: An Extended Survey*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1985).

<sup>37</sup> Ibn Sînâ, *Al-Ta‘liqât*, ed. ‘Abd al-Rahmân Badawî (Cairo: Al-Hay‘a al-misriyya al-‘amma li-l-kitâb, 1973), 180-81.

<sup>38</sup> Mutahhari, *Understanding Islamic Sciences*, 59.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>40</sup> See Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya’s Theodicy*, 138-41 (Ibn Sina and al-Ghazali) and 146-65 (Ibn Taymiyya).

<sup>41</sup> The book by Philips, *The Fundamentals of Tawheed*, noted above, is a case in point.

<sup>42</sup> Mutahhari, *Understanding Islamic Sciences*, 60.

<sup>43</sup> David B. Burrell, “Trinity in Judaism and Islam,” forthcoming in *Cambridge Companion to the Trinity*, ed. Peter Phan (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press). I am grateful to the author for sharing this piece with me prior to publication.

<sup>44</sup> In addition to sources cited below, I have benefited from Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 319-44; R. L. Richard and W. J. Hill, “Trinity, Holy,” *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Thomas/Gale, 2003), 14:189-201; and A. J. Reimer, “God (Trinity), Doctrine of,” *The Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Vol. 5 (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1990), 342-48.

<sup>45</sup> Here I follow Nicholas Lash, *Easter in Ordinary: Reflections on Human Experience and the Knowledge of God* (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame, 1990), 231-42.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

<sup>47</sup> See William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (Albany: State Univ. of New York, 1989), 391 n. 14, for the translation of this saying and Ibn ‘Arabi’s comment upon it.

<sup>48</sup> For these arguments, see Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 1, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1971), 172-225. For a detailed historical study of the fourth-century trinitarian controversy in which Athanasius played a key role, see R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988).

<sup>49</sup> Menno Simons, “Confessions of the Triune God,” in *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, trans. Leonard Verduin and ed. John Christian Wenger (Scottsdale: Herald, 1956), 491-98. See Thomas N. Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology: Biblical, Historical, Constructive* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 421-64, for a survey of Anabaptist and recent Mennonite thought on the Trinity.



<sup>50</sup> Kenneth Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985), 263-64.

<sup>51</sup> Robert Jenson, "The Risen Prophet," in a 1985 unpublished report of the American Lutheran Church Board for World Mission and Inter-Church Cooperation Task Force on Christian Witness to Muslims entitled *Christian Witness to Muslims*, as cited in Mark N. Swanson, "The Trinity in Christian-Muslim Conversation," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 44.3 (Fall 2005): 256-63 (at 260-61).

<sup>52</sup> Paul D. Molnar, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity: In Dialogue with Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2002), argues forcefully for the necessity of distinguishing the immanent Trinity from the economic to counter contemporary Christian theologians (e.g., Moltmann) who make creation necessary to God's perfection and allow human history to impact God's nature.

<sup>53</sup> Here I differ with Douglas Pratt, "Christian-Muslim Theological Encounter: the priority of *tawhîd*," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 7.3 (Oct. 1996), 271-84, who argues that *tawhîd* is constitutive of God in both Islam and Christianity while Trinity is simply one among many ways of conceiving of God in relation to us: "Arguably it would be a category mistake to contrast Trinity with *tawhîd* because the latter is the prior or fundamental concept; the former is but one construct expressing the human understanding of the revelatory experience of God-in-relationship" (283, cf. 271). Perhaps unwittingly, Pratt disallows the possibility that God could reveal that he is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in himself and not merely toward us.

<sup>54</sup> Karl Rahner, "Remarks on the Dogmatic Treatise 'De Trinitate'," *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 4 (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966), 77-102 (at 87).

<sup>55</sup> The classic discussion of analogy is Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, 13, which I am not following exactly here. I am grateful to Phil Enns for drawing my attention to this passage. My thinking about analogy has also been informed by Ayers, *Nicaea and its Legacy*, 273-301, 322-24, and various passages in David B. Burrell, *Faith and Freedom: An Interfaith Perspective* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004). The theological analogy of which I speak here is not identical to the analogy (*qiyās*) of Islamic jurisprudence, in which there is a univocally shared aspect (a cause or *'illa*) by which the ruling in one legal case is transferred to a new case not yet spoken to by Islamic law. For an exposition of analogy in Islamic law, see Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1991), 197-219.

<sup>56</sup> Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981). Moltmann's social Trinitarianism is exploited in several of the essays in Miroslav Volf and Michael Welker, eds., *God's Life in Trinity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006).

<sup>57</sup> So Molnar, *Divine Freedom*, 227-33.

<sup>58</sup> Barth develops the doctrine of the Trinity in the first volume of his *Church Dogmatics*, 2d ed., trans. G.W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark), I.1.295-489; the discussion of 'person' is found at I.1.349-68.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, I.1.320.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, I.1.370.

<sup>61</sup> Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 139-44 (quote on 139).

<sup>62</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Unity of the Church," *Theology Today* 3 (October 1946): 371-84.

<sup>63</sup> According to John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 17-18, Niebuhr also argues in "The Doctrine of the Trinity" that Jesus' nonviolent social ethic should not be taken too seriously because the Father and the Spirit might point in other directions. Niebuhr does not in fact say this in his article, but Yoder is likely reacting to use of Niebuhr's Trinitarian scheme for such ends. Modern Mennonite theology in the Yoderian tradition easily falls afoul of Niebuhr's "Unitarianism of Jesus Christ" by stressing Jesus' nonviolent ethic at the expense of its foundation in God's power and transcendence. Resisting this danger is at the core of many essays in Reimer's *Mennonites and Classical Theology*.

<sup>64</sup> This discussion is based on Lash, 266-72. Reimer similarly and frequently links God's transcendence to the Father, God's immanence to the Spirit, and God's involvement in history to the Son in his *Mennonites and Classical Theology*, 229-230, 243-45, 333-34, 368-71, 459, 538-39, and elsewhere. This approach is also found in Karl Rahner, "Oneness and Threefoldness of God in Discussion with Islam," *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 18 (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 105-21: The incomprehensible Father "is unsurpassably close to man historically in Jesus Christ...and imparts himself to man in the innermost centre of human existence as Holy Spirit" (114).

<sup>65</sup> Lash, 271.

<sup>66</sup> David B. Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions* (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame, 1993), extends Lash's insights beyond Christianity to Judaism and Islam as well. While not attributing any kind of Trinitarian doctrine to Islam, Burrell identifies a threefold structure of transcendence in God the Creator, immanence in God's preservation of the Muslim community, and linkage between the two in God's revealing of the Qur'an. The difference with Christianity is that Muslims do not identify the very revelation of God's Word with God Himself (161-84). Perhaps as well, an imperfect parallel may be made with the threefold structure of Islamic theology's treatment of God. God's essence (*dhât*) indicates transcendence; God's acts (*af'âl*) involve God's immanence in the creation through his activity; and God's names and attributes (*al-asmâ' wa al-sifât*) link the two. God's names and attributes constitute the bridge between the transcendent simplicity of God's essence and the immanent multiplicity of God's acts in the world much as the Word links the Creator and the Spirit on the Christian side. The parallel with Christian theology breaks down in that God's attributes in Islam do not enter directly into the historical process, except in the case of God's Word, which comes into history as the Qur'an.

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Hans Küng. *The Beginning of All Things: Science and Religion*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007.

Hans Küng has put together in *The Beginning of All Things* a remarkable synthesis of philosophical, theological, and scientific reasoning about our universe. He argues that religious views of the universe (understood as symbolic expressions of the meaning of this reality) are compatible with scientific explanations.

This does not mean that science proves theology or that theology undergirds scientific exploration, but that each has its own distinctive procedure for understanding reality. Küng believes this reality is more than what science can explain, which is precisely why we need religion in order to understand reality fully. He emphasizes the limits of scientific knowledge. "If science is to remain faithful to its method," he says, "it may not extend its judgment beyond the horizon of experience" (52). He outlines the way cosmology cannot examine the constraints of the cosmos in which we find ourselves.

The author acknowledges that science has its own procedures that give reliable and comprehensive knowledge about the world around us. But he goes further and defines physics as follows: "Its theories and models are not literal descriptions of reality at the atomic level (naive realism) but are symbolic and selective attempts that depict the structure of the world" (8). By stressing the symbolic character of scientific explanations, Küng attempts to gain a foothold for religious explanations of the same reality. One wonders if the parallel can be drawn too closely. Surely the symbolic nature of religious explanations differs from the highly mathematical and theoretical symbols of science, which are tested by experimental data and cause/effect analysis.

In his discussion of creation, Küng stresses the symbolic character of the creation narratives of the Hebrew Bible and repudiates any attempt to gain scientific knowledge from them. However, he feels justified in interpreting evolution in religious terms, as a creation by the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition. He tries to use the fine-tuning of the cosmological constants to suggest the intelligent design of the universe. This argument is tempting to theologians, but if the universe has evolved to produce life, the

constants of the universe are merely those that we experience. It is impossible to extrapolate to other possible universes, since we have no experience of any alternatives.

Küng proposes that scientists consider God as a hypothesis. Here it seems to me that he is stepping beyond his own wise thesis that science and religion should retain separate procedures. He does acknowledge that there is no deductive or inductive proof of God. Rather, he insists on a practical and holistic rational approach to God (including the whole experience of the human being, especially subjective awareness). Küng argues that the human being is more than the body, more than brain processes, and still a mystery to neurologists. This ignorance, however, is used as a logical leap towards the “mystery” of the cosmos, which is too easily filled by the idea of God as the primal ground of our existence.

In the plethora of books about science and religion, this one stands out as more comprehensive than most because it puts the discussion in the context of a philosophical argument about reality and the way we perceive it. Küng relies on a depiction of theology as a metaphysical principle that goes beyond the limits of scientific theories. He is too well-versed in the global religions to describe this as a necessary leap and instead depicts it as a choice. But such a choice would need to be justified in comparison with other religious or metaphysical explanations of the ultimate reality. It would be interesting to see Küng use his wide knowledge of other religions to compare the various religious cosmologies with current scientific descriptions of the origins of the universe and life.

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Robert W. Brimlow, *What About Hitler? Wrestling with Jesus' Call to Nonviolence in an Evil World*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006.

In *What About Hitler?* Robert Brimlow devotes considerable time to a critique of the Just War tradition. He wrestles vigorously with George Orwell's critique of pacifism; he argues pointedly that the Christian's first concern must be to obey Jesus, not to escape death or be successful according to some short-term definition. And he points out effectively that rejecting killing makes sense only if it is part of a personal and communal lifestyle committed to peacemaking.

There is a good deal in this book that is helpful. Brimlow brings a philosopher's sharp mind to his extensive critique of the Just War tradition. I will not try to decide here whether his critique is finally successful, but his sophisticated objections to central arguments of important Just War advocates (St. Augustine, Michael Walzer, Jean Bethke Elshtain) offer challenges that no Just War advocate should ignore. "Just war theory contradicts itself in that it sanctions the killing of innocents, which it at the same time prohibits. In addition, just war theory can also be used effectively to justify all wars" (105).

Brimlow is surely right that pacifism is impossible unless it is rooted in Christian community and prayer, and that it has no integrity unless it is part of a personal and communal lifestyle that not only rejects violence but actively engages in works of compassion and mercy toward the poor and neglected.

That said, I must confess that I found the book inadequate, disappointing, and occasionally annoying. The rambling Scriptural meditations at the beginning of each chapter were not very helpful, at least not for me. The argument that Just War theory validates Osama bin Laden as much as it does military resistance to terrorism was not convincing. Equally unsatisfactory was Brimlow's lengthy argument (139-46) that Jesus was a failure. Even his final chapter arguing for the importance of a personal and communal lifestyle of peacemaking was inadequate. Jesus called for works of mercy – feeding the hungry, caring for the homeless and naked, giving alms to the poor. That is all good and true. But what about going beyond charity to understanding the structural causes of poverty and injustice

and working vigorously to overcome institutional injustice? What about activist kinds of peacemaking – whether Victim-Offender Reconciliation Programs, sophisticated mediation efforts bringing together warring parties, or Christian Peacemaker Teams?

Most important, Brimlow’s answer to the basic question, “What About Hitler?” is woefully inadequate. He opens Chapter 7 (“The Christian Response”) with the comment that “it is time for me to respond to the Hitler question.” His answer takes three paragraphs. Just one page. He had already said near the beginning that his answer to this question is absurd (10). I think that answer is fundamentally inadequate. It is certainly true that the Christian pacifist believes that she must follow Jesus, even when this leads to death. Brimlow makes the point very well. If Jesus is God become flesh, if God raised Jesus from the dead on the third day, then it simply will not do to say, “Sorry, Jesus, your ideas do not work in a world of Hitlers and Osama bin Ladens.”

We must follow Jesus even when that means death. But there is a lot more to be said to make this position less implausible than Brimlow does. It is wrong and misleading to label it “absurd.” If Jesus is the Incarnate God who announced the inauguration of the Messianic kingdom of peace and justice, called his disciples to start living in that kingdom now, and promised to return to complete the victory over evil, then it makes sense to obey his call to nonviolence now, even when Hitlers still stalk the earth. This book does not offer a convincing answer to the question it raises.

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Stanley E. Porter, ed. *Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006.

Drawn from a 2003 colloquium at McMaster Divinity School, this collection of essays tackles how New Testament writers use the Old Testament. An introductory essay by Stanley E. Porter and a concluding scholarly response to the papers by Andreas J. Köstenberger provide a helpful orienting perspective and summation.

Two essays dedicated to general topics introduce the volume. Dennis L. Stamps seeks to clarify terminology, contrasts “author-centered” and “audience-centered” approaches, and describes persuasive rhetoric in the early church period. R. Timothy McLay introduces issues concerning canon and scripture, and identifies “pluriformity” as “an essential characteristic of the Scriptures of the early church” (55).

Michael P. Knowles (Matthew) and Porter (Luke-Acts) both argue that the evangelists’ interpretive perspectives not only center on but derive from Jesus himself. Craig A. Evans (Mark) and Sylvia C. Keesmaat (Ephesians, Colossians, and others) place these documents within the political milieu of the Roman Empire to striking effect. Paul Miller (John) and Kurt Anders Richardson (James) describe the use of OT characters, while James W. Aageson (Romans, Galatians, and others) and Köstenberger (pastorals, Revelation) provide contrasting perspectives on reading epistles.

The range of foci engages the reader, and Köstenberger’s responses prove helpful, providing additional information or a contrasting perspective. His adamant response to Aageson’s paper is particularly striking and underscores significantly divergent methods and assumptions, as well as perspectives on the implications of Paul’s hermeneutics for the contemporary Christian community.

This said, the volume’s overarching author-centered perspective prompts an uncritical assumption of continuity that, in my view, should be reconsidered. Early in the volume Stamps appropriately criticizes the idea that “NT writers use the OT” because it is “anachronistic to speak of the OT when referring to the perspective of the NT writers since the differentiation between old and new had not yet occurred” (11). Though he suggests “Jewish sacred writings” (11) as an improvement, repeated statements in the rest of the volume about how NT writers, and even Jesus himself, use the “OT”

reflect the prominence of such anachronism.

Indeed, the difficulty runs deeper than Stamps suggests. While the writers in this book attempt to uncover the intentions and hermeneutics of Luke, Paul, and even Jesus, these biblical figures neither read an OT (which implies a NT) nor consciously wrote Scripture (they sought to interpret the one(s) they had). Even the common designation “NT writers” proves historically anachronistic; the most that can accurately be said is that these people wrote what later *became* the NT. More attention to how Scripture is designated within the NT would have raised this issue and strengthened the volume.

The book’s orientation leaves potentially significant *discontinuities* unexplored. For instance, what should we make of Paul’s distinction between his own opinion and elements “from the LORD,” once his writing becomes part of a NT? Should our reading of his epistles be affected by this transformation into scripture, a shift that transcends his “original intent”? The description of “Paul’s shorter epistles” as “rang[ing] from Paul’s supposedly earliest epistle to those seemingly written so late that Paul was dead when he composed them” (182) suggests further difficulties with an exclusively author-centered approach. What of the shift from Luke’s two-volume work (Luke-Acts) to a “gospel” and a non-“gospel” separated by John, or the Emmaus story’s claim that the disciples see Jesus in “the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms” only through an impromptu Bible study led by the *risen* Lord? Unfortunately these writers do not address such discontinuities at historical, literary, and canonical levels.

A collection of essays has the benefit of various perspectives and the drawback of limited flow. The papers here are well written, engaging, and accessible for interested people with some background in the subject matter. While most essays do not focus on implications for contemporary interpretation, individual chapters would be helpful as supplements or orientation for studying a specific NT book. Several essays also situate themselves within broader scholarship, which proves particularly beneficial for the non-specialist.

Overall, these writers do an admirable job of tackling a significant, complex issue. However, although the volume explores how “NT writers used the OT,” it proves less satisfying for “Hearing the OT in the NT.”

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While the latter implies the perspective of a two-testament Scripture, most essays here seek to uncover the *pre*-NT use of Scripture (not OT!) by writers of what later became the NT. Thus, this volume serves an author-centered approach well, but it does not address discontinuity in the transformation from “authorial writings” to Christian Scripture.

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Stanley Hauerwas and Romand Coles. *Christianity, Democracy and the Radical Ordinary: Conversations between a Radical Democrat and a Christian*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2007.

It is not only Christians who find difficult the practice of engaging the world in constructive ways; not just believing that engagement should happen, but engaging the complicated issues of how to proceed, occupies all kinds of people. In this volume we observe a Christian theologian (Stanley Hauerwas) and a political theorist who is not Christian (Romand Coles) grapple with such issues in ways that try to think about the right questions and display fruitful practices within a mutual pursuit of the transformation and development of a flourishing political imagination.

The purpose of this collection of essays, letters, lectures, and conversation is to exhibit a politics that refuses to let death dominate our lives, resists fear, and seeks to uncover the violence at the heart of liberal political doctrine. Not only does this book discuss such matters, it seeks to display some of the very practices it brings into view. Practices central to this ongoing conversation include attention, engagement, vulnerability, receptive patience, tending, “microdispositions” and “micropractices,” waiting, and gentleness. Such practices, patiently pursued, might make up a life that is political, claim the authors, yet not beholden to conventional politics.

We witness Coles and Hauerwas engage each other as well as a vast array of interlocutors in an attempt to cultivate a politics of “wild patience”: Sheldon Wolin, Cornell West, Ella Baker, John Howard Yoder, Will Campbell, Rowan Williams, Jean Vanier, Samuel Wells, and Gregory of Nanzianzus. Both authors here are exemplary in their own openness and vulnerability to learning from traditions outside their own, and Coles especially so as he provides insightful readings of a number of Christian theological voices.

Nonetheless, in the midst of their respectful and deep mutual engagement, Hauerwas and Coles exhibit at times a certain wariness in relation to each other. Hauerwas worries that radical democracy will be an end in itself for which God becomes an afterthought, a superfluous placeholder, domesticated and tamed in service of some other agenda. But he also worries that Christians do something very similar when they mistake the Christian faith for a garden variety of humanism. Coles, on the other hand, is concerned that Christian jealousy regarding Jesus may prevent proper vulnerability and underwrite a kind of territoriality. He further believes that no matter how sincere the upside-down practices of the church may be, these kinds of practices have a way of turning themselves right side up – and without appropriate discernment on the part of the church.

I have my own worries. Sometimes it feels as though Coles comes close to equating the insurgent grassroots political practices of radical democracy with the politics of Jesus. Coles also seems tempted to turn the church and its practices into an instance of radical democracy. Perhaps this is one reason he claims to be so “haunted” by John Howard Yoder, who himself is open to the criticism that he thinks the church’s practices can be translated into the world without loss.

Further, the extended conversation in this volume, while richly informed by a wide variety of interlocutors – political theorists, activists of many kinds, theologians, a number of Mennonite thinkers, and so on – is in the end strangely thin on the Christian exegetical tradition. While we see close, nuanced readings of Wolin, West, Campbell, et al., we search in vain for the same kind of close attention to sustained readings of the Biblical text. This is not to say that the conversation between Coles the radical democrat and Hauerwas the Christian is not informed by biblical ideas. However, I



wonder if Coles's concern for Christian jealousy of Jesus also extends to Christian privileging of the Scriptural text and, if so, what implications this might have for a long-term continuing conversation.

Jeffrey Stout, who in his own effort to revitalize the American democratic tradition often converses with Christian theologians such as Hauerwas, claims that this book gives him hope, since it takes the conversation between Christianity and democracy in a most welcome direction. This book also gives me hope as a Christian, because it seeks to find ways for people to engage in the world that resist the violence and death that have been inscribed deeply into the story of our shared lives. And part of that hopefulness includes paying close attention to practices that can be embodied on a human scale, whether as a radical democrat or a Christian.

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Laura Ruth Yordy. *Green Witness: Ecology, Ethics, and the Kingdom of God*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2008.

Laura Yordy has a vision for churches engaging holistically in ecological discipleship. She begins her discourse in *Green Witness* by briefly describing a fantasy congregation that fully integrates earth-friendly practices into its worship and daily actions. Yordy illustrates her vision by using examples from real churches that are implementing ecological practices. According to her, the greening of the church in North America has been limited because of the ineffectiveness of education, difficulties with real change, powerlessness of leadership, individualism in church life, the magnitude of the environmental crisis, and the hope of technological fixes: "The point is not to make the church a participant in the 'environmental movement,'" she says, "but to make the church more faithful by including the eschatological import of creation in its performance of worship, ... a 'way' of life that praises and witnesses to Father Son, and Holy Spirit" (161).

The author develops her thesis around the need for the church to

renew its understanding of the eschaton – “the fulfillment of God’s promises for creation” (2). The church is to be a witness to the coming Kingdom of Heaven, the result of Christ’s redemption of all of creation. Christians are not to be managers trying to fix the environmental crisis but witnesses of Christ’s relationship to creation through faithful ecological practice.

Yordy critiques the positions of three eco-theologians – Larry Rasmussen, Catherine Keller, and Rosemary Radford Ruether – by observing that they reject several central doctrines of Christian eschatology. She notes the losses that occur when eschatology does not include Jesus, the sovereignty of God, or the concept of an afterlife. She writes that our practices today in relation to ecology witness to our belief in the fullness of the Kingdom of God. The doctrine of creation should be examined from an eschatological framework, says the author; God’s future view of redeemed creation is what makes the Christian creation story distinct from views found in the “common creation story.”

Yordy carefully states that it is God’s love that generated the universe (57), and proceeds with helpful insights into the concepts of God creating the world out of nothing, the Trinitarian role in creation, the goodness of creation, and the “Fall.” Christian ethics is described as discipleship – where the lives of Christ’s followers witness to the Kingdom through worship, action, and character. Yordy provides stimulating insights into eco-discipleship by probing key characteristics of the Kingdom: peace, justice, abundance, righteousness, and communion with God. The resulting praxis is summarized well by her statement that “Christians’ witness to the Kingdom is not simply watching, but pointing toward God’s gracious creating and redeeming activity with the activity of their own lives” (112).

Yordy sees the church serving as a “demonstration plot” for ecological discipleship. She develops the view that everything the church practices – here specifically its relation to the earth – should witness to Christ’s coming redemption of all creation. It is from within community that the witness and practice will best occur. The concluding concept centers on the ecological virtue, patience. Yordy lifts it up as a key virtue while not excluding other much-needed virtues. She says it is our impatience that plays a major factor in our dominance over the natural world. But patience is woven into the web of the universe and reflects the character of God. “Part of the human need

for patience (as well as other virtues) is the imperative for humans to realign themselves with the patient character of God's creation" (155). From this framework Yordy calls us to practice eco-discipleship.

The author develops logical arguments throughout her discourse, though at points the writing style recalls the doctoral dissertation on which the book is based. The work is in the frame of a constructive theology, and it leans heavily on arguments between various theological and philosophical positions. Yordy formulates her thesis based on a broad array of authors along with insights of her own.

This volume would serve well as the basis for serious discussion by adults interested in articulating a biblical and theological response to today's environmental crisis, but it doesn't include an extensive list of examples of creation care actions. (It would also be helpful if there were an index in addition to the bibliography.) Upper-level college students in environmental studies would benefit from exploring the intersection between faith and ecological praxis found in this text.

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Conrad L. Kanagy. *Road Signs on the Journey: A Profile of Mennonite Church USA*. Waterloo, ON: Herald, 2007.

Conrad Kanagy's profile of Mennonite Church USA is a good addition to earlier similar studies of Mennonites in 1972 and 1989.<sup>1</sup> Preferring biblical to sociological categories of analysis, Kanagy presents the data as "road signs and guideposts" in order to help Mennonites find their social, political, spiritual, and theological location, and to help Mennonite churches consider the direction of their further "journey toward the reign of God" (24).

The first two chapters set a reading of the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah as the base for Kanagy's data analysis. These chapters test the

data for evidence of a *missional* intention and vision in Mennonite church life. Succeeding chapters profile Mennonite Church USA; explore church structure, polity and self-understanding; test consistency and orthodoxy of belief and ritual; survey management of resources; review recent disruptions of Mennonite “Christendom”; and assess the relation between the church and greater society. The author’s summary conclusion shares the testimony of respondents as they reflect on the quality of congregational life and challenge the church toward greater missional identity and activity.

Kanagy’s prognosis for Mennonite Church USA is disquieting yet hopeful. While the author predicts a “bleak future” (57), among “Racial/Ethnic Mennonites” he discovered signs of growth and renewal. Other signs of hope include relatively high rates of giving, marital stability, strong beliefs about Jesus, active personal piety, and greater support of women in ministry (183ff.).

At least two issues emerge that deserve greater discussion and thought. The first is how to refer to the diversity of ethnic and racial groups comprising Mennonite Church USA. Throughout the report Kanagy uses the generic term “Racial/Ethnic” to refer to African-American, Hispanic/Latino, diverse Asian, and various Native American congregations and members. Yet “Racial/Ethnic” would also apply to the various Caucasian groups comprising the church. One of the challenges in working out the tension between the margin and middle of Mennonite church has to do with how we refer to one another. The tendency to reduce our ethnic diversity to one generic category, or an implicit us/them polarity, is a pernicious problem with no easy solution.

This problem is endemic to descriptive sociological summaries, but even more, it bespeaks the difficulty that Mennonite church organizations have in dealing with an ethnic diversity that refuses to be ‘settled.’ I wonder if this reflects the broader influence of theories of assimilation as opposed to theories of ethnic pluralism in the American context. It seems to me that one of the significant challenges in combatting racism in the church is to celebrate our chaotic ethnicity in all its glorious detail. This will demand imaginative justice in reconfiguring current structures of privilege. Our commitment to such justice will help us find better, more expressive, language with which to understand the multi-ethnic fullness of Mennonite Church USA.

The second challenge concerns Kanagy's exile hypothesis. This hypothesis interprets the changes Mennonites have undergone as assimilation to a broader society; that is, that Mennonites as exiles in American culture and society are losing their true identity and becoming more like their host society. This interpretation might be more cogent if Kanagy had presented comparative data from a larger control group than conservative Protestants (171). Increased levels of education, wealth, professional vocation, and urban living, together with changes in various beliefs, support "the argument that Mennonites are becoming more conforming to the values and attitudes of the larger society" (170, 171). However, Anabaptism has looked more educated and urban before.<sup>2</sup>

Putting a slight twist on Kanagy's question of exile, the data may be suggesting that Mennonites are finally returning from an almost 200-year exile in rural America. The changes Kanagy traces may be instances of increased biblical fidelity. Engagement with surrounding society, however messy that might be, could be a truer expression of Anabaptist peoplehood than the isolationist posture of most recent memory.

It may be necessary to resist and even critique assimilation theories based on the deeper resonance between Mennonites and various values of American society and culture, such as freedom of religion, freedom of conscience, and participatory governance of group life. The isolationist interpretation of Mennonite life from the 16th through the 18th centuries has had something of a privileged status<sup>3</sup> and may need to give way to a more socially engaged and integrated understanding of Mennonite life as normative.

This may be why Kanagy is so firmly convinced that the future of Mennonite Church USA lies with congregations comprising various minority racial and ethnic groups. Indeed, it may be impossible to find future vitality in the church without following such leadership into social engagement. For observing these provocative issues in such a way as to raise further discussion of the future of Mennonite communities, we can be grateful to Kanagy for an insightful analysis of Mennonite Church USA.

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> J. Howard Kaufmann and Leland Harder, *Anabaptists: Four Centuries Later* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1975). J. Howard Kaufmann and Leo Driedger, *The Mennonite Mosaic: Identity and Modernization* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Richard K. MacMaster, *Land, Piety, Peoplehood, The Establishment of Mennonite Communities in America, 1683-1790* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1985), 138.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

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Earl Zimmerman. *Practicing the Politics of Jesus: The Origin and Significance of John Howard Yoder's Social Ethics*. Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2007.

Interest in the theological ethics of John Howard Yoder shows no signs of slowing down. I am delighted – and sometimes amazed – at the level of scholarly interest in Yoder's writings today. *Practicing the Politics of Jesus: The Origin and Significance of John Howard Yoder's Social Ethics* is composed of seven chapters. The first six attempt to identify what shaped Yoder in ways that gave rise to his most influential book, *The Politics of Jesus*. The last chapter, which seems rather artificially connected to the others, provides Earl Zimmerman with an opportunity to state the significance of “the politics of Jesus,” as he sees it, for peace-building efforts today.

This book's unique contribution is that it offers the fullest account to date of the influences on Yoder during the years he was in Western Europe (1949-1958). Having named some of the North American Mennonite influences, the book attributes most of the “background” to his *Politics* to these European influences.

Zimmerman is right to say that the realities of post-World War II Europe were quite significant for the young Yoder, who arrived in France in April 1949 to serve orphans and help French Mennonites recover their

commitment to pacifism. And undoubtedly the debates about war in which he engaged during those years were shaped by memories of Nazism and the horrors of the war.

The author's discussion of Barth's influence on Yoder is framed differently from that of Craig Carter [see his *The Politics of the Cross*]. My sense is that Carter knows Barth's thought better than Zimmerman does. But probably the careful examination of Yoder in light of his studies with Barth (as compared to other influences) will continue to generate discussion and debate. Zimmerman has certainly provided a fuller account of NT scholar Oscar Cullmann's influence on Yoder than has been done before. This is helpful.

The chapter on Yoder's doctoral work on sixteenth-century Anabaptism is also the fullest summary we have of that work and its connections to his *Politics of Jesus*, although it would have had greater significance before the recent publication of an English translation of Yoder's dissertation. But Zimmerman's work will help those who haven't noticed these connections before to see them now. We are fortunate with *The Politics of Jesus* because, aside from his doctoral work, it is Yoder's most heavily footnoted book. However, in addition to his wide reading and formal teachers, it is important to say, as Zimmerman does, that *Politics* did not simply emerge from a study. According to accounts from French Mennonites, young Yoder empathized with those who had lived through several years of Nazi invasions.

Zimmerman could also have included Yoder's exposure to Latin America. In the mid-'60s and again when working on *Politics*, Yoder spent time with Latin American Christians living in the midst of revolution. According to theologians Samuel Escobar and René Padilla, he empathized deeply with them while delivering timely, biblical messages (thus Yoder's being made an honorary member of the Latin American Theological Fraternity).

One might get the impression that Yoder did not engage Reinhold Niebuhr's writings nearly as seriously as, say, J. Lawrence Burkholder (26, 57ff, 107). That impression would be wrong. While in high school, Yoder took a course with a former student of Niebuhr's at the College of Wooster, in which Niebuhr himself lectured once. Approximately fifteen years later, Yoder did significant research on Niebuhr at the University of Basel before

he gave his first lecture on him, and that produced an article. Finally, years later, Yoder wrote two substantial lectures on Niebuhr that were included in the informally published *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace and Revolution: A Companion to Bainton* (soon to be formally published).

Again, one could get the wrong impression from the statement that Yoder “basically depended on Roland Bainton’s historical survey of Christian attitudes toward war and peace for his historical scheme” regarding the “Constantinian shift” (198). Yoder was an historical theologian. For many years he taught courses surveying the history of Christian attitudes toward war, peace, and revolution; he read numerous and varied primary and secondary sources germane to those lectures. He had therefore studied relevant sources well before publishing the main essay articulating his claims.

I don’t have space to discuss issues raised in the last two chapters of summary and interpretation for contemporary peace-building. Here serious questions emerge regarding contemporary appropriations of Yoder.

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Amy Laura Hall. *Conceiving Parenthood: American Protestantism and the Spirit of Reproduction*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.

Churchly discussions of reproductive bioethics usually take place in the third person. The major actors – those advocating for so-called “designer babies” or for prenatal testing designed to enable selective termination of pregnancies – remain distinct from *us*, the narrators, who can respond from a distance and with disgust. Such conversations also usually occur in the future tense, in anticipation of a brave new world in which parents shop for their unborn child’s hair color, IQ, and personality type.

Yet for readers with any connection to middle-class, mainline Protestantism, Christian ethicist Amy Laura Hall’s new book requires a shift



from third person to first and from future tense to past. Her study requires readers to ask not “What will *they* come up with *next*?” but “How have *we* contributed to the ethos that has engendered such technologies?”

Hall’s wide-ranging survey of 20th-century Protestant ideas about family, social status, and scientific innovation suggests that the seeds of troubling technologies were sown closer to our ecclesial home than many Christians like to admit. As she writes, “a tradition that had within it the possibility of leveling all believers as orphaned and gratuitously adopted kin came instead to baptize a culture of carefully delineated, racially encoded domesticity” (10). By uncritically blessing both scientific advancement and an idealized portrait of the nuclear family, Hall claims, 20th-century Protestantism set the stage for technologies that would enable aspiring American parents to engineer the perfect child.

The “germ-free home” stands at the center of Hall’s first chapter, which mines mid-century issues of *Parents* magazine and its Methodist cognate, *Together*. The war on germs, made possible by products like Lysol, sedimented racial and class differences between the “hygienic” families of the assumed readers and *other* people’s children.

The author’s second chapter looks at how the marketing of infant formula and baby food encouraged parents to shift their trust from informally and familiarly transmitted know-how to dictates of the medical establishment. This chapter’s examination of the bizarre “Baby-Incubators—With Living Babies!” exhibit at the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago in 1933-34, which allowed visitors to view premature infants struggling for survival inside oven-like incubators, drives home the point that Americans were beginning to employ a technological gaze to a macabre extent.

Hall turns in the third chapter to the eugenics movement in the United States, which was endorsed by many progressive Protestants. She counters the prevailing idea that the American movement withered as the horrors of Nazi-era eugenics became public knowledge. Instead, she suggests, “there are links between current hopes for genius and past attempts to vaccinate the social body against the menace of poverty, disability, and deviance” (217). Hall’s final chapter moves into current bioethical debates by tracing connections between the promises of the atomic age and the claims of the current genomic revolution.

The narrative throughout *Conceiving Parenthood* is provocative and thorough. The book teems with illustrations and advertisements from magazines from the last century and this one, and all are accompanied by painstakingly close readings. At times, however, the contour of Hall's argument buckles under the weight of the evidence she presents; she seems unwilling to weigh, rank, and especially discard data that distracts from the trajectory of her main point. Unfortunately, chapters averaging 100 pages each will likely intimidate some readers who otherwise would benefit from her analysis.

The author's voice alternates between the scholarly, the pastoral, and the autobiographical. Sometimes the shift can be jarring, although none of the voices by itself would have been up to the great task Hall sets for herself. Calling herself a pro-life feminist, Hall moves beyond historical investigation and critical analysis to pastoral and prophetic challenge. "I do indeed target for moral interrogation women like myself," she writes, "for our complicity in the narrations that render other women's wombs as prodigal" (400). Hall takes her call to action beyond protesting the eugenic whiff of some modern reproductive technologies and questioning the "meticulously planned procreation" of the elite classes. She suggests a much broader program of compassionate valuing of those who, for whatever reason, are deemed outside the realm of "normal."

Anabaptist readers will find much resonance with this book, especially with its call to resist market-driven definitions of what – and who – constitutes a productive life.

The challenge for Christian parents today, Hall says, is "to see the children in their homes, neighborhoods, and churches as unqualified gifts rather than projects, to identify 'downward' rather than to climb, and to allow their strategically protected and planned lives to become entangled in the needs of families and children judged to be at risk and behind the curve" (250).

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Donald Capps. *Jesus, the Village Psychiatrist*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2008.

Early in this book Donald Capps describes the behavior of a squirrel darting across a busy street, then suddenly freezing midway and racing back, only to dart again. He calls this a “living parable” (xv) and says we are intrigued because we see ourselves in the squirrel’s dilemma. I couldn’t agree more. In fact, I felt like that squirrel as I was reading this volume, at times running quickly to reach what I hoped was food for thought, and then retreating swiftly as the author’s beliefs and mine clashed.

I started the book intrigued by the title, only to freeze in the introduction at comments such as these: people with mental illnesses are “doing it to themselves” (xii), mental illnesses are “a form of coping and ... therefore typical ... today” (xii), and “the methods which Jesus employed are congruent ... with methods ... demonstrably effective ... today” (xxv). These statements portend what becomes clear in the rest of the book. Capps is a believer in Freudian psychoanalysis, a school of therapy formulated by Sigmund Freud in the late 1800s and popular in the US in the mid-1900s. It treats patients with psychotherapy in the belief that insight into conflicts which precede the illness will result in healing.

That paradigm of mental illness is rejected or at least highly suspect in the field of modern psychiatry. With the increasing use of brain scans and molecular research, psychiatry is moving in a biological direction in which mental illnesses are seen as dysfunctional states of the normal brain. Psychoanalysis has not proven effective in most mental illnesses.

Despite my momentary freeze I dashed on. The book is short, only 131 pages, and is divided into two parts. Part I is an academic explanation of psychoanalytic terms such as conversion and hysteria, and Part II is an analysis of seven cases of Jesus’ healing. The cases (two paralyzed men, two blind men, the demon-possessed boy, Jairus’s daughter, and the hemorrhaging woman) are used to illustrate Capps’s thesis that Jesus did not use magic to heal medical illnesses but employed therapeutic techniques to heal psychosomatic illnesses. Full understanding of Part I requires some prior knowledge of and belief in psychoanalytic principles, and thus may not be of interest to the general audience that Capps targets in his introduction. Part

2 may be easier for general readers but still requires some background.

It was surprising to me that Capps uses a blend of psychoanalytic descriptions and more modern diagnostic criteria from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (the “DSM,” with DSM IV being the fourth version, published in 1994). I was in psychiatric residency in the late 1970s when the first draft of the DSM was published and thus my training focused heavily on it. The DSM was known to be an attempt to describe conditions objectively, replacing the psychoanalytic model of mental illness that theorizes about etiology or cause.

Capps’s review of the minute details of diagnostic criteria of conversion disorder, factitious disorder, and somatization disorder from DSM IV was difficult to read through. His attempt to apply them to persons who lived 2000 years ago and whom the Bible describes only in barest detail was simply perplexing. Reading the cases, I found myself skimming through the academic material to get to the insights about Jesus. This is where I found the book provocative; for short periods I actually enjoyed myself, not feeling like a squirrel at all. Capps’s suggestion that Jesus did not use supernatural powers to cure people but actually listened to them challenged me to stop discounting Jesus’ healing stories as easy for him because he was divine.

Capps’s insights regarding the healing of Jairus’s daughter are excellent. For example, he points out that Jairus’s daughter was twelve, thus on the cusp of marriageability, representing to her father an opportunity to increase his wealth by marrying her off well. The author’s thoughts on Jesus’ understanding of the social context of illnesses and the implications of wellness are tantalizing but too brief. Each time I would begin thinking “Now he’s getting somewhere,” the chapter would end.

I finished the book hungering for more. Completing the analogy of the squirrel, I had braved all the academic traffic, only to find that the delectable pile of insightful spiritual nuts I was hoping for was small.

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Chris K. Huebner. *A Precarious Peace*. Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2006.

One realizes quickly upon reading *A Precarious Peace* that a desire for a solid thesis argued with clean, crisp, logical warrants and brought “together into some final programmatic statement of a position” (29) will be entirely frustrated. No last word can be given because words and positions, no less than politics and power, are precarious for those in the Christian community (58).

The precariousness that Chris K. Huebner places at the center of his Yoderian study of Mennonite theology, knowledge, and identity de-centers any attempt to offer a last word. This is a book whose project is “disestablishing, disowning, dislocating” (23) without reconstructing its subject theoretically. As such there is no argument that Huebner could be criticized for not showing adequately. He has promised not to provide an account of what peace *is*, and no one account of peace is given here. Instead, in a random sampling, there are stories about Alzheimer’s, Atom Egoyan’s films, friendship, speed, and Zizek.

The argument – or, as Huebner says, “common theme” (30) – is simply that peace is characterized by being precarious. For peace to be anything else would require a coercive intervention. Peace comes to us as a gift, given by Christ, and like all gifts it is both radically ours and out of our control.

While the political and ecclesiological ramifications of Yoder’s vision have been noticed, applied, and extended in various contexts, the epistemological questions that his investigations suggest have drawn less attention. This is what Huebner is about in this volume. I particularly like the description of his approach: “Let us group this collection of impulses together under the heading of standard epistemology.... What follows ... is a series of gestures toward a counter-epistemology that arises from the church’s confession that Christ is the truth. Here truth will appear to be unsettled rather than settled.... It arises from an excessive economy of gift, and thus it exists as a seemingly unnecessary and unwarranted donation” (133-34).

This language of gift gives much of Huebner’s discussion a “spatial” feel. To elaborate his conception of peace he invokes words like diaspora, settled, patience, gesture, scattered, speed, or territory. I am strongly impressed by how Huebner is able to move, and to move me, in space and

time throughout this book. The discussion has an embodiedness missing from much of the theological endeavor.

The book's biggest strength is the reworking of our perceptions, actions, emotions, and disposition towards precariousness. I teach Christian ethics at a small Mennonite liberal arts institution to students who are mostly not convinced pacifists in either action or epistemology. I find this an enormously difficult and somewhat stressful task. This is not surprising, because many of them are just beginning their education in the ethos of Christian community. While reading this book I noticed that in class my statements were clearer, my mode of engagement more patient and less anxious, and my answers more characterized by the open-endedness that characterizes the gift.

Huebner has written a course of therapy for those who believe in peace that will, if we let it, deepen our engagement with peace, make us more comfortable with its precariousness, and orient us towards the Christ who gives us this peace. Huebner skillfully calls into question our assumptions. Some debates evaporate under his critique, as in a chapter on Milbank and Barth called "Can a Gift be Commanded?" Others condense as the author brings together questions not typically asked at the same time, as in a chapter where he employs contemporary philosophers and cultural critics to show how martyrdom shapes the gift of peace.

I close with questions offered in response to a quotation at the end of a wonderful chapter on [Paul] Virilo and Yoder: "But because this good news involves a breaking of the cycle of violence that includes the renunciation of logistical effectiveness and possessive sovereignty, it can *only* be offered as a gift whose reception cannot be guaranteed or enforced" (130, emphasis mine). Here Huebner seems to want to guarantee a certain shape to peace. But if peace is always precarious, is it also true that only peace is precarious? Isn't there also precariousness to the exercise of power, the attempt to govern, or the attempt to communicate in the language of culture and not only gospel? Can we not recognize peace and precariousness even when they occur (miraculously) in spite of force, clumsy intervention, or misguided attempts to control? Or must peace, in order to remain precarious, guard against alliances threatening that precariousness?

At points Huebner eagerly recognizes that those practicing peace are also always implicated in the violent exercise of power (see chapters

8 and 12). But at other points the shape of the peace he avers seems overdetermined by the demand of precariousness. Isn't a truly precarious peace also willing to explore the possibility of remaining settled, existing in a happy exchange, or flourishing for a moment in effectiveness?

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Tripp York. *The Purple Crown: The Politics of Martyrdom*. Scottsdale: Herald, 2007.

*The Purple Crown: The Politics of Martyrdom* engages questions that have preoccupied Anabaptists for centuries: What is the appropriate posture of peace-loving Christians in a violent world? Should Christians be political?

As a work of historical theology, this book will appeal most to theologians and church historians. But York's prose, if repetitive at times, is accessible (and gender inclusive). Anyone who finds the subject matter compelling can approach this study. Some will find it inspiring; others will find it most valuable as a representative piece of a particular kind of Christian dogma. At the least, it will provoke passionate conversation.

According to York, Christians must be politically active earthly citizens, but with an important caveat: their political posture is one of exile. They are here on earth to represent heaven. Thus "martyrdom is *the* political act because it represents the ultimate imitation of Christ, signifying a life lived in obedience to, and participation in, the triune God" (23).

Beginning with a discussion of the early Christian martyrs under Rome, York interprets martyrdom as a public performance that bears witness to the triumph of Christ through a means superior to rhetoric or argument. Indeed, martyrdom is a cosmic battle "between God's people and God's enemies"

(29-30). From the early Christians, the author moves to a discussion of the 16th-century Anabaptist martyrs, and finishes with a biography of martyred Salvadoran archbishop Oscar Romero that is likely to be engaging even for those who dislike York's theology.

York deserves much credit for writing one of the more ecumenical martyrdom studies available from a Mennonite source. He focuses always on the broader Christian context and resists Anabaptist tribalism. But readers who value interfaith cooperation may find his work problematic.

*The Purple Crown* is peppered with references to "the people of God," and while York acknowledges that this group is hard to define, he remains rigid in his Christian understanding of the phrase. "Only where the triune God is worshipped can there be true sociality," he asserts (110). This claim is typical of York's language throughout. He consistently dismisses any social or political reality outside of Christianity by labeling it "false," an ideological tactic that adds no meat to his arguments. *The Purple Crown* is hardly the first theological work to claim that Christianity is inherently political by virtue of its alleged superiority to everything else, and if York is to be faulted for excessive reliance on a "church" vs. "world" binary, it must be said that he did not invent it. Still, he does little to make it fresh.

The author includes almost no discussion of contemporary politics or how Christians might shoulder their accountability in a modern democracy. Rather, government is simply "the state," an ill-defined monolith that kills and oppresses Christians. Christians are political because as followers of Christ they stand in opposition to the state, even unto death. This circular argument is the heart of *The Purple Crown*, thereby confining the book's appeal to those who share York's dualistic worldview.

York comes closest to undermining his own dualism in his chapter on 16th-century Europe – the strongest in the book – in which he discusses with admirable nuance how battles over semantics led Christians to kill one another. Recognizing the difficulty of resolving these doctrinal issues, York points us instead to the martyrdoms; such performances "give us something by which we can discern which acts are good, beautiful, and true. Maybe then it is possible to distinguish the difference between a pseudo-politics located in earthly regimes and an authentic politics constituted by nothing other than the broken yet risen body of Christ" (97).



The definition of “politics” is contested territory, and my frustration with York’s theocratic version may reveal little beyond my own partisanship. Nonetheless, the labels “pseudo-politics” and “authentic politics” strike me as ironically self-defeating. Nothing is more endemic to the politics of “earthly regimes” than claims of purity and authenticity that serve to discredit some peoples while elevating others to positions of supposed greatness. “The visible church is important not just so the elect can know each other, but because God has promised not to leave the world without a witness to God,” York continues; “This is the sort of gift that exposes false cities from the true city in an effort to bring all cities under the rule of Christ” (98).

This crusader-like language leaves us no room to approach non-Christians with any humility. Despite its nonviolent intent, I doubt York’s chauvinist theology will bring us closer to the “peace of the earthly city.”

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Hans Küng. *The Beginning of All Things: Science and Religion*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007.

Hans Küng has put together in *The Beginning of All Things* a remarkable synthesis of philosophical, theological, and scientific reasoning about our universe. He argues that religious views of the universe (understood as symbolic expressions of the meaning of this reality) are compatible with scientific explanations.

This does not mean that science proves theology or that theology undergirds scientific exploration, but that each has its own distinctive procedure for understanding reality. Küng believes this reality is more than what science can explain, which is precisely why we need religion in order to understand reality fully. He emphasizes the limits of scientific knowledge. "If science is to remain faithful to its method," he says, "it may not extend its judgment beyond the horizon of experience" (52). He outlines the way cosmology cannot examine the constraints of the cosmos in which we find ourselves.

The author acknowledges that science has its own procedures that give reliable and comprehensive knowledge about the world around us. But he goes further and defines physics as follows: "Its theories and models are not literal descriptions of reality at the atomic level (naive realism) but are symbolic and selective attempts that depict the structure of the world" (8). By stressing the symbolic character of scientific explanations, Küng attempts to gain a foothold for religious explanations of the same reality. One wonders if the parallel can be drawn too closely. Surely the symbolic nature of religious explanations differs from the highly mathematical and theoretical symbols of science, which are tested by experimental data and cause/effect analysis.

In his discussion of creation, Küng stresses the symbolic character of the creation narratives of the Hebrew Bible and repudiates any attempt to gain scientific knowledge from them. However, he feels justified in interpreting evolution in religious terms, as a creation by the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition. He tries to use the fine-tuning of the cosmological constants to suggest the intelligent design of the universe. This argument is tempting to theologians, but if the universe has evolved to produce life, the

constants of the universe are merely those that we experience. It is impossible to extrapolate to other possible universes, since we have no experience of any alternatives.

Küng proposes that scientists consider God as a hypothesis. Here it seems to me that he is stepping beyond his own wise thesis that science and religion should retain separate procedures. He does acknowledge that there is no deductive or inductive proof of God. Rather, he insists on a practical and holistic rational approach to God (including the whole experience of the human being, especially subjective awareness). Küng argues that the human being is more than the body, more than brain processes, and still a mystery to neurologists. This ignorance, however, is used as a logical leap towards the “mystery” of the cosmos, which is too easily filled by the idea of God as the primal ground of our existence.

In the plethora of books about science and religion, this one stands out as more comprehensive than most because it puts the discussion in the context of a philosophical argument about reality and the way we perceive it. Küng relies on a depiction of theology as a metaphysical principle that goes beyond the limits of scientific theories. He is too well-versed in the global religions to describe this as a necessary leap and instead depicts it as a choice. But such a choice would need to be justified in comparison with other religious or metaphysical explanations of the ultimate reality. It would be interesting to see Küng use his wide knowledge of other religions to compare the various religious cosmologies with current scientific descriptions of the origins of the universe and life.

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Robert W. Brimlow, *What About Hitler? Wrestling with Jesus' Call to Nonviolence in an Evil World*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006.

In *What About Hitler?* Robert Brimlow devotes considerable time to a critique of the Just War tradition. He wrestles vigorously with George Orwell's critique of pacifism; he argues pointedly that the Christian's first concern must be to obey Jesus, not to escape death or be successful according to some short-term definition. And he points out effectively that rejecting killing makes sense only if it is part of a personal and communal lifestyle committed to peacemaking.

There is a good deal in this book that is helpful. Brimlow brings a philosopher's sharp mind to his extensive critique of the Just War tradition. I will not try to decide here whether his critique is finally successful, but his sophisticated objections to central arguments of important Just War advocates (St. Augustine, Michael Walzer, Jean Bethke Elshtain) offer challenges that no Just War advocate should ignore. "Just war theory contradicts itself in that it sanctions the killing of innocents, which it at the same time prohibits. In addition, just war theory can also be used effectively to justify all wars" (105).

Brimlow is surely right that pacifism is impossible unless it is rooted in Christian community and prayer, and that it has no integrity unless it is part of a personal and communal lifestyle that not only rejects violence but actively engages in works of compassion and mercy toward the poor and neglected.

That said, I must confess that I found the book inadequate, disappointing, and occasionally annoying. The rambling Scriptural meditations at the beginning of each chapter were not very helpful, at least not for me. The argument that Just War theory validates Osama bin Laden as much as it does military resistance to terrorism was not convincing. Equally unsatisfactory was Brimlow's lengthy argument (139-46) that Jesus was a failure. Even his final chapter arguing for the importance of a personal and communal lifestyle of peacemaking was inadequate. Jesus called for works of mercy – feeding the hungry, caring for the homeless and naked, giving alms to the poor. That is all good and true. But what about going beyond charity to understanding the structural causes of poverty and injustice

and working vigorously to overcome institutional injustice? What about activist kinds of peacemaking – whether Victim-Offender Reconciliation Programs, sophisticated mediation efforts bringing together warring parties, or Christian Peacemaker Teams?

Most important, Brimlow's answer to the basic question, "What About Hitler?" is woefully inadequate. He opens Chapter 7 ("The Christian Response") with the comment that "it is time for me to respond to the Hitler question." His answer takes three paragraphs. Just one page. He had already said near the beginning that his answer to this question is absurd (10). I think that answer is fundamentally inadequate. It is certainly true that the Christian pacifist believes that she must follow Jesus, even when this leads to death. Brimlow makes the point very well. If Jesus is God become flesh, if God raised Jesus from the dead on the third day, then it simply will not do to say, "Sorry, Jesus, your ideas do not work in a world of Hitlers and Osama bin Ladens."

We must follow Jesus even when that means death. But there is a lot more to be said to make this position less implausible than Brimlow does. It is wrong and misleading to label it "absurd." If Jesus is the Incarnate God who announced the inauguration of the Messianic kingdom of peace and justice, called his disciples to start living in that kingdom now, and promised to return to complete the victory over evil, then it makes sense to obey his call to nonviolence now, even when Hitlers still stalk the earth. This book does not offer a convincing answer to the question it raises.

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Stanley E. Porter, ed. *Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006.

Drawn from a 2003 colloquium at McMaster Divinity School, this collection of essays tackles how New Testament writers use the Old Testament. An introductory essay by Stanley E. Porter and a concluding scholarly response to the papers by Andreas J. Köstenberger provide a helpful orienting perspective and summation.

Two essays dedicated to general topics introduce the volume. Dennis L. Stamps seeks to clarify terminology, contrasts “author-centered” and “audience-centered” approaches, and describes persuasive rhetoric in the early church period. R. Timothy McLay introduces issues concerning canon and scripture, and identifies “pluriformity” as “an essential characteristic of the Scriptures of the early church” (55).

Michael P. Knowles (Matthew) and Porter (Luke-Acts) both argue that the evangelists’ interpretive perspectives not only center on but derive from Jesus himself. Craig A. Evans (Mark) and Sylvia C. Keesmaat (Ephesians, Colossians, and others) place these documents within the political milieu of the Roman Empire to striking effect. Paul Miller (John) and Kurt Anders Richardson (James) describe the use of OT characters, while James W. Aageson (Romans, Galatians, and others) and Köstenberger (pastorals, Revelation) provide contrasting perspectives on reading epistles.

The range of foci engages the reader, and Köstenberger’s responses prove helpful, providing additional information or a contrasting perspective. His adamant response to Aageson’s paper is particularly striking and underscores significantly divergent methods and assumptions, as well as perspectives on the implications of Paul’s hermeneutics for the contemporary Christian community.

This said, the volume’s overarching author-centered perspective prompts an uncritical assumption of continuity that, in my view, should be reconsidered. Early in the volume Stamps appropriately criticizes the idea that “NT writers use the OT” because it is “anachronistic to speak of the OT when referring to the perspective of the NT writers since the differentiation between old and new had not yet occurred” (11). Though he suggests “Jewish sacred writings” (11) as an improvement, repeated statements in the rest of the volume about how NT writers, and even Jesus himself, use the “OT”

reflect the prominence of such anachronism.

Indeed, the difficulty runs deeper than Stamps suggests. While the writers in this book attempt to uncover the intentions and hermeneutics of Luke, Paul, and even Jesus, these biblical figures neither read an OT (which implies a NT) nor consciously wrote Scripture (they sought to interpret the one(s) they had). Even the common designation “NT writers” proves historically anachronistic; the most that can accurately be said is that these people wrote what later *became* the NT. More attention to how Scripture is designated within the NT would have raised this issue and strengthened the volume.

The book’s orientation leaves potentially significant *discontinuities* unexplored. For instance, what should we make of Paul’s distinction between his own opinion and elements “from the LORD,” once his writing becomes part of a NT? Should our reading of his epistles be affected by this transformation into scripture, a shift that transcends his “original intent”? The description of “Paul’s shorter epistles” as “rang[ing] from Paul’s supposedly earliest epistle to those seemingly written so late that Paul was dead when he composed them” (182) suggests further difficulties with an exclusively author-centered approach. What of the shift from Luke’s two-volume work (Luke-Acts) to a “gospel” and a non-“gospel” separated by John, or the Emmaus story’s claim that the disciples see Jesus in “the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms” only through an impromptu Bible study led by the *risen* Lord? Unfortunately these writers do not address such discontinuities at historical, literary, and canonical levels.

A collection of essays has the benefit of various perspectives and the drawback of limited flow. The papers here are well written, engaging, and accessible for interested people with some background in the subject matter. While most essays do not focus on implications for contemporary interpretation, individual chapters would be helpful as supplements or orientation for studying a specific NT book. Several essays also situate themselves within broader scholarship, which proves particularly beneficial for the non-specialist.

Overall, these writers do an admirable job of tackling a significant, complex issue. However, although the volume explores how “NT writers used the OT,” it proves less satisfying for “Hearing the OT in the NT.”

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While the latter implies the perspective of a two-testament Scripture, most essays here seek to uncover the *pre*-NT use of Scripture (not OT!) by writers of what later became the NT. Thus, this volume serves an author-centered approach well, but it does not address discontinuity in the transformation from “authorial writings” to Christian Scripture.

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Stanley Hauerwas and Romand Coles. *Christianity, Democracy and the Radical Ordinary: Conversations between a Radical Democrat and a Christian*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2007.

It is not only Christians who find difficult the practice of engaging the world in constructive ways; not just believing that engagement should happen, but engaging the complicated issues of how to proceed, occupies all kinds of people. In this volume we observe a Christian theologian (Stanley Hauerwas) and a political theorist who is not Christian (Romand Coles) grapple with such issues in ways that try to think about the right questions and display fruitful practices within a mutual pursuit of the transformation and development of a flourishing political imagination.

The purpose of this collection of essays, letters, lectures, and conversation is to exhibit a politics that refuses to let death dominate our lives, resists fear, and seeks to uncover the violence at the heart of liberal political doctrine. Not only does this book discuss such matters, it seeks to display some of the very practices it brings into view. Practices central to this ongoing conversation include attention, engagement, vulnerability, receptive patience, tending, “microdispositions” and “micropractices,” waiting, and gentleness. Such practices, patiently pursued, might make up a life that is political, claim the authors, yet not beholden to conventional politics.



We witness Coles and Hauerwas engage each other as well as a vast array of interlocutors in an attempt to cultivate a politics of “wild patience”: Sheldon Wolin, Cornell West, Ella Baker, John Howard Yoder, Will Campbell, Rowan Williams, Jean Vanier, Samuel Wells, and Gregory of Nanzianzus. Both authors here are exemplary in their own openness and vulnerability to learning from traditions outside their own, and Coles especially so as he provides insightful readings of a number of Christian theological voices.

Nonetheless, in the midst of their respectful and deep mutual engagement, Hauerwas and Coles exhibit at times a certain wariness in relation to each other. Hauerwas worries that radical democracy will be an end in itself for which God becomes an afterthought, a superfluous placeholder, domesticated and tamed in service of some other agenda. But he also worries that Christians do something very similar when they mistake the Christian faith for a garden variety of humanism. Coles, on the other hand, is concerned that Christian jealousy regarding Jesus may prevent proper vulnerability and underwrite a kind of territoriality. He further believes that no matter how sincere the upside-down practices of the church may be, these kinds of practices have a way of turning themselves right side up – and without appropriate discernment on the part of the church.

I have my own worries. Sometimes it feels as though Coles comes close to equating the insurgent grassroots political practices of radical democracy with the politics of Jesus. Coles also seems tempted to turn the church and its practices into an instance of radical democracy. Perhaps this is one reason he claims to be so “haunted” by John Howard Yoder, who himself is open to the criticism that he thinks the church’s practices can be translated into the world without loss.

Further, the extended conversation in this volume, while richly informed by a wide variety of interlocutors – political theorists, activists of many kinds, theologians, a number of Mennonite thinkers, and so on – is in the end strangely thin on the Christian exegetical tradition. While we see close, nuanced readings of Wolin, West, Campbell, et al., we search in vain for the same kind of close attention to sustained readings of the Biblical text. This is not to say that the conversation between Coles the radical democrat and Hauerwas the Christian is not informed by biblical ideas. However, I

wonder if Coles's concern for Christian jealousy of Jesus also extends to Christian privileging of the Scriptural text and, if so, what implications this might have for a long-term continuing conversation.

Jeffrey Stout, who in his own effort to revitalize the American democratic tradition often converses with Christian theologians such as Hauerwas, claims that this book gives him hope, since it takes the conversation between Christianity and democracy in a most welcome direction. This book also gives me hope as a Christian, because it seeks to find ways for people to engage in the world that resist the violence and death that have been inscribed deeply into the story of our shared lives. And part of that hopefulness includes paying close attention to practices that can be embodied on a human scale, whether as a radical democrat or a Christian.

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Laura Ruth Yordy. *Green Witness: Ecology, Ethics, and the Kingdom of God*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2008.

Laura Yordy has a vision for churches engaging holistically in ecological discipleship. She begins her discourse in *Green Witness* by briefly describing a fantasy congregation that fully integrates earth-friendly practices into its worship and daily actions. Yordy illustrates her vision by using examples from real churches that are implementing ecological practices. According to her, the greening of the church in North America has been limited because of the ineffectiveness of education, difficulties with real change, powerlessness of leadership, individualism in church life, the magnitude of the environmental crisis, and the hope of technological fixes: "The point is not to make the church a participant in the 'environmental movement,'" she says, "but to make the church more faithful by including the eschatological import of creation in its performance of worship, ... a 'way' of life that praises and witnesses to Father Son, and Holy Spirit" (161).

The author develops her thesis around the need for the church to

renew its understanding of the eschaton – “the fulfillment of God’s promises for creation” (2). The church is to be a witness to the coming Kingdom of Heaven, the result of Christ’s redemption of all of creation. Christians are not to be managers trying to fix the environmental crisis but witnesses of Christ’s relationship to creation through faithful ecological practice.

Yordy critiques the positions of three eco-theologians – Larry Rasmussen, Catherine Keller, and Rosemary Radford Ruether – by observing that they reject several central doctrines of Christian eschatology. She notes the losses that occur when eschatology does not include Jesus, the sovereignty of God, or the concept of an afterlife. She writes that our practices today in relation to ecology witness to our belief in the fullness of the Kingdom of God. The doctrine of creation should be examined from an eschatological framework, says the author; God’s future view of redeemed creation is what makes the Christian creation story distinct from views found in the “common creation story.”

Yordy carefully states that it is God’s love that generated the universe (57), and proceeds with helpful insights into the concepts of God creating the world out of nothing, the Trinitarian role in creation, the goodness of creation, and the “Fall.” Christian ethics is described as discipleship – where the lives of Christ’s followers witness to the Kingdom through worship, action, and character. Yordy provides stimulating insights into eco-discipleship by probing key characteristics of the Kingdom: peace, justice, abundance, righteousness, and communion with God. The resulting praxis is summarized well by her statement that “Christians’ witness to the Kingdom is not simply watching, but pointing toward God’s gracious creating and redeeming activity with the activity of their own lives” (112).

Yordy sees the church serving as a “demonstration plot” for ecological discipleship. She develops the view that everything the church practices – here specifically its relation to the earth – should witness to Christ’s coming redemption of all creation. It is from within community that the witness and practice will best occur. The concluding concept centers on the ecological virtue, patience. Yordy lifts it up as a key virtue while not excluding other much-needed virtues. She says it is our impatience that plays a major factor in our dominance over the natural world. But patience is woven into the web of the universe and reflects the character of God. “Part of the human need

for patience (as well as other virtues) is the imperative for humans to realign themselves with the patient character of God's creation" (155). From this framework Yordy calls us to practice eco-discipleship.

The author develops logical arguments throughout her discourse, though at points the writing style recalls the doctoral dissertation on which the book is based. The work is in the frame of a constructive theology, and it leans heavily on arguments between various theological and philosophical positions. Yordy formulates her thesis based on a broad array of authors along with insights of her own.

This volume would serve well as the basis for serious discussion by adults interested in articulating a biblical and theological response to today's environmental crisis, but it doesn't include an extensive list of examples of creation care actions. (It would also be helpful if there were an index in addition to the bibliography.) Upper-level college students in environmental studies would benefit from exploring the intersection between faith and ecological praxis found in this text.

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Conrad L. Kanagy. *Road Signs on the Journey: A Profile of Mennonite Church USA*. Waterloo, ON: Herald, 2007.

Conrad Kanagy's profile of Mennonite Church USA is a good addition to earlier similar studies of Mennonites in 1972 and 1989.<sup>1</sup> Preferring biblical to sociological categories of analysis, Kanagy presents the data as "road signs and guideposts" in order to help Mennonites find their social, political, spiritual, and theological location, and to help Mennonite churches consider the direction of their further "journey toward the reign of God" (24).

The first two chapters set a reading of the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah as the base for Kanagy's data analysis. These chapters test the

data for evidence of a *missional* intention and vision in Mennonite church life. Succeeding chapters profile Mennonite Church USA; explore church structure, polity and self-understanding; test consistency and orthodoxy of belief and ritual; survey management of resources; review recent disruptions of Mennonite “Christendom”; and assess the relation between the church and greater society. The author’s summary conclusion shares the testimony of respondents as they reflect on the quality of congregational life and challenge the church toward greater missional identity and activity.

Kanagy’s prognosis for Mennonite Church USA is disquieting yet hopeful. While the author predicts a “bleak future” (57), among “Racial/Ethnic Mennonites” he discovered signs of growth and renewal. Other signs of hope include relatively high rates of giving, marital stability, strong beliefs about Jesus, active personal piety, and greater support of women in ministry (183ff.).

At least two issues emerge that deserve greater discussion and thought. The first is how to refer to the diversity of ethnic and racial groups comprising Mennonite Church USA. Throughout the report Kanagy uses the generic term “Racial/Ethnic” to refer to African-American, Hispanic/Latino, diverse Asian, and various Native American congregations and members. Yet “Racial/Ethnic” would also apply to the various Caucasian groups comprising the church. One of the challenges in working out the tension between the margin and middle of Mennonite church has to do with how we refer to one another. The tendency to reduce our ethnic diversity to one generic category, or an implicit us/them polarity, is a pernicious problem with no easy solution.

This problem is endemic to descriptive sociological summaries, but even more, it bespeaks the difficulty that Mennonite church organizations have in dealing with an ethnic diversity that refuses to be ‘settled.’ I wonder if this reflects the broader influence of theories of assimilation as opposed to theories of ethnic pluralism in the American context. It seems to me that one of the significant challenges in combatting racism in the church is to celebrate our chaotic ethnicity in all its glorious detail. This will demand imaginative justice in reconfiguring current structures of privilege. Our commitment to such justice will help us find better, more expressive, language with which to understand the multi-ethnic fullness of Mennonite Church USA.

The second challenge concerns Kanagy's exile hypothesis. This hypothesis interprets the changes Mennonites have undergone as assimilation to a broader society; that is, that Mennonites as exiles in American culture and society are losing their true identity and becoming more like their host society. This interpretation might be more cogent if Kanagy had presented comparative data from a larger control group than conservative Protestants (171). Increased levels of education, wealth, professional vocation, and urban living, together with changes in various beliefs, support "the argument that Mennonites are becoming more conforming to the values and attitudes of the larger society" (170, 171). However, Anabaptism has looked more educated and urban before.<sup>2</sup>

Putting a slight twist on Kanagy's question of exile, the data may be suggesting that Mennonites are finally returning from an almost 200-year exile in rural America. The changes Kanagy traces may be instances of increased biblical fidelity. Engagement with surrounding society, however messy that might be, could be a truer expression of Anabaptist peoplehood than the isolationist posture of most recent memory.

It may be necessary to resist and even critique assimilation theories based on the deeper resonance between Mennonites and various values of American society and culture, such as freedom of religion, freedom of conscience, and participatory governance of group life. The isolationist interpretation of Mennonite life from the 16th through the 18th centuries has had something of a privileged status<sup>3</sup> and may need to give way to a more socially engaged and integrated understanding of Mennonite life as normative.

This may be why Kanagy is so firmly convinced that the future of Mennonite Church USA lies with congregations comprising various minority racial and ethnic groups. Indeed, it may be impossible to find future vitality in the church without following such leadership into social engagement. For observing these provocative issues in such a way as to raise further discussion of the future of Mennonite communities, we can be grateful to Kanagy for an insightful analysis of Mennonite Church USA.

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> J. Howard Kaufmann and Leland Harder, *Anabaptists: Four Centuries Later* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1975). J. Howard Kaufmann and Leo Driedger, *The Mennonite Mosaic: Identity and Modernization* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Richard K. MacMaster, *Land, Piety, Peoplehood, The Establishment of Mennonite Communities in America, 1683-1790* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1985), 138.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

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Earl Zimmerman. *Practicing the Politics of Jesus: The Origin and Significance of John Howard Yoder's Social Ethics*. Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2007.

Interest in the theological ethics of John Howard Yoder shows no signs of slowing down. I am delighted – and sometimes amazed – at the level of scholarly interest in Yoder's writings today. *Practicing the Politics of Jesus: The Origin and Significance of John Howard Yoder's Social Ethics* is composed of seven chapters. The first six attempt to identify what shaped Yoder in ways that gave rise to his most influential book, *The Politics of Jesus*. The last chapter, which seems rather artificially connected to the others, provides Earl Zimmerman with an opportunity to state the significance of “the politics of Jesus,” as he sees it, for peace-building efforts today.

This book's unique contribution is that it offers the fullest account to date of the influences on Yoder during the years he was in Western Europe (1949-1958). Having named some of the North American Mennonite influences, the book attributes most of the “background” to his *Politics* to these European influences.

Zimmerman is right to say that the realities of post-World War II Europe were quite significant for the young Yoder, who arrived in France in April 1949 to serve orphans and help French Mennonites recover their

commitment to pacifism. And undoubtedly the debates about war in which he engaged during those years were shaped by memories of Nazism and the horrors of the war.

The author's discussion of Barth's influence on Yoder is framed differently from that of Craig Carter [see his *The Politics of the Cross*]. My sense is that Carter knows Barth's thought better than Zimmerman does. But probably the careful examination of Yoder in light of his studies with Barth (as compared to other influences) will continue to generate discussion and debate. Zimmerman has certainly provided a fuller account of NT scholar Oscar Cullmann's influence on Yoder than has been done before. This is helpful.

The chapter on Yoder's doctoral work on sixteenth-century Anabaptism is also the fullest summary we have of that work and its connections to his *Politics of Jesus*, although it would have had greater significance before the recent publication of an English translation of Yoder's dissertation. But Zimmerman's work will help those who haven't noticed these connections before to see them now. We are fortunate with *The Politics of Jesus* because, aside from his doctoral work, it is Yoder's most heavily footnoted book. However, in addition to his wide reading and formal teachers, it is important to say, as Zimmerman does, that *Politics* did not simply emerge from a study. According to accounts from French Mennonites, young Yoder empathized with those who had lived through several years of Nazi invasions.

Zimmerman could also have included Yoder's exposure to Latin America. In the mid-'60s and again when working on *Politics*, Yoder spent time with Latin American Christians living in the midst of revolution. According to theologians Samuel Escobar and René Padilla, he empathized deeply with them while delivering timely, biblical messages (thus Yoder's being made an honorary member of the Latin American Theological Fraternity).

One might get the impression that Yoder did not engage Reinhold Niebuhr's writings nearly as seriously as, say, J. Lawrence Burkholder (26, 57ff, 107). That impression would be wrong. While in high school, Yoder took a course with a former student of Niebuhr's at the College of Wooster, in which Niebuhr himself lectured once. Approximately fifteen years later, Yoder did significant research on Niebuhr at the University of Basel before



he gave his first lecture on him, and that produced an article. Finally, years later, Yoder wrote two substantial lectures on Niebuhr that were included in the informally published *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace and Revolution: A Companion to Bainton* (soon to be formally published).

Again, one could get the wrong impression from the statement that Yoder “basically depended on Roland Bainton’s historical survey of Christian attitudes toward war and peace for his historical scheme” regarding the “Constantinian shift” (198). Yoder was an historical theologian. For many years he taught courses surveying the history of Christian attitudes toward war, peace, and revolution; he read numerous and varied primary and secondary sources germane to those lectures. He had therefore studied relevant sources well before publishing the main essay articulating his claims.

I don’t have space to discuss issues raised in the last two chapters of summary and interpretation for contemporary peace-building. Here serious questions emerge regarding contemporary appropriations of Yoder.

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Amy Laura Hall. *Conceiving Parenthood: American Protestantism and the Spirit of Reproduction*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.

Churchly discussions of reproductive bioethics usually take place in the third person. The major actors – those advocating for so-called “designer babies” or for prenatal testing designed to enable selective termination of pregnancies – remain distinct from *us*, the narrators, who can respond from a distance and with disgust. Such conversations also usually occur in the future tense, in anticipation of a brave new world in which parents shop for their unborn child’s hair color, IQ, and personality type.

Yet for readers with any connection to middle-class, mainline Protestantism, Christian ethicist Amy Laura Hall’s new book requires a shift

from third person to first and from future tense to past. Her study requires readers to ask not “What will *they* come up with *next*?” but “How have *we* contributed to the ethos that has engendered such technologies?”

Hall’s wide-ranging survey of 20th-century Protestant ideas about family, social status, and scientific innovation suggests that the seeds of troubling technologies were sown closer to our ecclesial home than many Christians like to admit. As she writes, “a tradition that had within it the possibility of leveling all believers as orphaned and gratuitously adopted kin came instead to baptize a culture of carefully delineated, racially encoded domesticity” (10). By uncritically blessing both scientific advancement and an idealized portrait of the nuclear family, Hall claims, 20th-century Protestantism set the stage for technologies that would enable aspiring American parents to engineer the perfect child.

The “germ-free home” stands at the center of Hall’s first chapter, which mines mid-century issues of *Parents* magazine and its Methodist cognate, *Together*. The war on germs, made possible by products like Lysol, sedimented racial and class differences between the “hygienic” families of the assumed readers and *other* people’s children.

The author’s second chapter looks at how the marketing of infant formula and baby food encouraged parents to shift their trust from informally and familiarly transmitted know-how to dictates of the medical establishment. This chapter’s examination of the bizarre “Baby-Incubators—With Living Babies!” exhibit at the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago in 1933-34, which allowed visitors to view premature infants struggling for survival inside oven-like incubators, drives home the point that Americans were beginning to employ a technological gaze to a macabre extent.

Hall turns in the third chapter to the eugenics movement in the United States, which was endorsed by many progressive Protestants. She counters the prevailing idea that the American movement withered as the horrors of Nazi-era eugenics became public knowledge. Instead, she suggests, “there are links between current hopes for genius and past attempts to vaccinate the social body against the menace of poverty, disability, and deviance” (217). Hall’s final chapter moves into current bioethical debates by tracing connections between the promises of the atomic age and the claims of the current genomic revolution.

The narrative throughout *Conceiving Parenthood* is provocative and thorough. The book teems with illustrations and advertisements from magazines from the last century and this one, and all are accompanied by painstakingly close readings. At times, however, the contour of Hall's argument buckles under the weight of the evidence she presents; she seems unwilling to weigh, rank, and especially discard data that distracts from the trajectory of her main point. Unfortunately, chapters averaging 100 pages each will likely intimidate some readers who otherwise would benefit from her analysis.

The author's voice alternates between the scholarly, the pastoral, and the autobiographical. Sometimes the shift can be jarring, although none of the voices by itself would have been up to the great task Hall sets for herself. Calling herself a pro-life feminist, Hall moves beyond historical investigation and critical analysis to pastoral and prophetic challenge. "I do indeed target for moral interrogation women like myself," she writes, "for our complicity in the narrations that render other women's wombs as prodigal" (400). Hall takes her call to action beyond protesting the eugenic whiff of some modern reproductive technologies and questioning the "meticulously planned procreation" of the elite classes. She suggests a much broader program of compassionate valuing of those who, for whatever reason, are deemed outside the realm of "normal."

Anabaptist readers will find much resonance with this book, especially with its call to resist market-driven definitions of what – and who – constitutes a productive life.

The challenge for Christian parents today, Hall says, is "to see the children in their homes, neighborhoods, and churches as unqualified gifts rather than projects, to identify 'downward' rather than to climb, and to allow their strategically protected and planned lives to become entangled in the needs of families and children judged to be at risk and behind the curve" (250).

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Donald Capps. *Jesus, the Village Psychiatrist*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2008.

Early in this book Donald Capps describes the behavior of a squirrel darting across a busy street, then suddenly freezing midway and racing back, only to dart again. He calls this a “living parable” (xv) and says we are intrigued because we see ourselves in the squirrel’s dilemma. I couldn’t agree more. In fact, I felt like that squirrel as I was reading this volume, at times running quickly to reach what I hoped was food for thought, and then retreating swiftly as the author’s beliefs and mine clashed.

I started the book intrigued by the title, only to freeze in the introduction at comments such as these: people with mental illnesses are “doing it to themselves” (xii), mental illnesses are “a form of coping and ... therefore typical ... today” (xii), and “the methods which Jesus employed are congruent ... with methods ... demonstrably effective ... today” (xxv). These statements portend what becomes clear in the rest of the book. Capps is a believer in Freudian psychoanalysis, a school of therapy formulated by Sigmund Freud in the late 1800s and popular in the US in the mid-1900s. It treats patients with psychotherapy in the belief that insight into conflicts which precede the illness will result in healing.

That paradigm of mental illness is rejected or at least highly suspect in the field of modern psychiatry. With the increasing use of brain scans and molecular research, psychiatry is moving in a biological direction in which mental illnesses are seen as dysfunctional states of the normal brain. Psychoanalysis has not proven effective in most mental illnesses.

Despite my momentary freeze I dashed on. The book is short, only 131 pages, and is divided into two parts. Part I is an academic explanation of psychoanalytic terms such as conversion and hysteria, and Part II is an analysis of seven cases of Jesus’ healing. The cases (two paralyzed men, two blind men, the demon-possessed boy, Jairus’s daughter, and the hemorrhaging woman) are used to illustrate Capps’s thesis that Jesus did not use magic to heal medical illnesses but employed therapeutic techniques to heal psychosomatic illnesses. Full understanding of Part I requires some prior knowledge of and belief in psychoanalytic principles, and thus may not be of interest to the general audience that Capps targets in his introduction. Part

2 may be easier for general readers but still requires some background.

It was surprising to me that Capps uses a blend of psychoanalytic descriptions and more modern diagnostic criteria from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (the “DSM,” with DSM IV being the fourth version, published in 1994). I was in psychiatric residency in the late 1970s when the first draft of the DSM was published and thus my training focused heavily on it. The DSM was known to be an attempt to describe conditions objectively, replacing the psychoanalytic model of mental illness that theorizes about etiology or cause.

Capps’s review of the minute details of diagnostic criteria of conversion disorder, factitious disorder, and somatization disorder from DSM IV was difficult to read through. His attempt to apply them to persons who lived 2000 years ago and whom the Bible describes only in barest detail was simply perplexing. Reading the cases, I found myself skimming through the academic material to get to the insights about Jesus. This is where I found the book provocative; for short periods I actually enjoyed myself, not feeling like a squirrel at all. Capps’s suggestion that Jesus did not use supernatural powers to cure people but actually listened to them challenged me to stop discounting Jesus’ healing stories as easy for him because he was divine.

Capps’s insights regarding the healing of Jairus’s daughter are excellent. For example, he points out that Jairus’s daughter was twelve, thus on the cusp of marriageability, representing to her father an opportunity to increase his wealth by marrying her off well. The author’s thoughts on Jesus’ understanding of the social context of illnesses and the implications of wellness are tantalizing but too brief. Each time I would begin thinking “Now he’s getting somewhere,” the chapter would end.

I finished the book hungering for more. Completing the analogy of the squirrel, I had braved all the academic traffic, only to find that the delectable pile of insightful spiritual nuts I was hoping for was small.

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Chris K. Huebner. *A Precarious Peace*. Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2006.

One realizes quickly upon reading *A Precarious Peace* that a desire for a solid thesis argued with clean, crisp, logical warrants and brought “together into some final programmatic statement of a position” (29) will be entirely frustrated. No last word can be given because words and positions, no less than politics and power, are precarious for those in the Christian community (58).

The precariousness that Chris K. Huebner places at the center of his Yoderian study of Mennonite theology, knowledge, and identity de-centers any attempt to offer a last word. This is a book whose project is “disestablishing, disowning, dislocating” (23) without reconstructing its subject theoretically. As such there is no argument that Huebner could be criticized for not showing adequately. He has promised not to provide an account of what peace *is*, and no one account of peace is given here. Instead, in a random sampling, there are stories about Alzheimer’s, Atom Egoyan’s films, friendship, speed, and Zizek.

The argument – or, as Huebner says, “common theme” (30) – is simply that peace is characterized by being precarious. For peace to be anything else would require a coercive intervention. Peace comes to us as a gift, given by Christ, and like all gifts it is both radically ours and out of our control.

While the political and ecclesiological ramifications of Yoder’s vision have been noticed, applied, and extended in various contexts, the epistemological questions that his investigations suggest have drawn less attention. This is what Huebner is about in this volume. I particularly like the description of his approach: “Let us group this collection of impulses together under the heading of standard epistemology.... What follows ... is a series of gestures toward a counter-epistemology that arises from the church’s confession that Christ is the truth. Here truth will appear to be unsettled rather than settled.... It arises from an excessive economy of gift, and thus it exists as a seemingly unnecessary and unwarranted donation” (133-34).

This language of gift gives much of Huebner’s discussion a “spatial” feel. To elaborate his conception of peace he invokes words like diaspora, settled, patience, gesture, scattered, speed, or territory. I am strongly impressed by how Huebner is able to move, and to move me, in space and

time throughout this book. The discussion has an embodiedness missing from much of the theological endeavor.

The book's biggest strength is the reworking of our perceptions, actions, emotions, and disposition towards precariousness. I teach Christian ethics at a small Mennonite liberal arts institution to students who are mostly not convinced pacifists in either action or epistemology. I find this an enormously difficult and somewhat stressful task. This is not surprising, because many of them are just beginning their education in the ethos of Christian community. While reading this book I noticed that in class my statements were clearer, my mode of engagement more patient and less anxious, and my answers more characterized by the open-endedness that characterizes the gift.

Huebner has written a course of therapy for those who believe in peace that will, if we let it, deepen our engagement with peace, make us more comfortable with its precariousness, and orient us towards the Christ who gives us this peace. Huebner skillfully calls into question our assumptions. Some debates evaporate under his critique, as in a chapter on Milbank and Barth called "Can a Gift be Commanded?" Others condense as the author brings together questions not typically asked at the same time, as in a chapter where he employs contemporary philosophers and cultural critics to show how martyrdom shapes the gift of peace.

I close with questions offered in response to a quotation at the end of a wonderful chapter on [Paul] Virilo and Yoder: "But because this good news involves a breaking of the cycle of violence that includes the renunciation of logistical effectiveness and possessive sovereignty, it can *only* be offered as a gift whose reception cannot be guaranteed or enforced" (130, emphasis mine). Here Huebner seems to want to guarantee a certain shape to peace. But if peace is always precarious, is it also true that only peace is precarious? Isn't there also precariousness to the exercise of power, the attempt to govern, or the attempt to communicate in the language of culture and not only gospel? Can we not recognize peace and precariousness even when they occur (miraculously) in spite of force, clumsy intervention, or misguided attempts to control? Or must peace, in order to remain precarious, guard against alliances threatening that precariousness?

At points Huebner eagerly recognizes that those practicing peace are also always implicated in the violent exercise of power (see chapters

8 and 12). But at other points the shape of the peace he avers seems overdetermined by the demand of precariousness. Isn't a truly precarious peace also willing to explore the possibility of remaining settled, existing in a happy exchange, or flourishing for a moment in effectiveness?

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Tripp York. *The Purple Crown: The Politics of Martyrdom*. Scottsdale: Herald, 2007.

*The Purple Crown: The Politics of Martyrdom* engages questions that have preoccupied Anabaptists for centuries: What is the appropriate posture of peace-loving Christians in a violent world? Should Christians be political?

As a work of historical theology, this book will appeal most to theologians and church historians. But York's prose, if repetitive at times, is accessible (and gender inclusive). Anyone who finds the subject matter compelling can approach this study. Some will find it inspiring; others will find it most valuable as a representative piece of a particular kind of Christian dogma. At the least, it will provoke passionate conversation.

According to York, Christians must be politically active earthly citizens, but with an important caveat: their political posture is one of exile. They are here on earth to represent heaven. Thus "martyrdom is *the* political act because it represents the ultimate imitation of Christ, signifying a life lived in obedience to, and participation in, the triune God" (23).

Beginning with a discussion of the early Christian martyrs under Rome, York interprets martyrdom as a public performance that bears witness to the triumph of Christ through a means superior to rhetoric or argument. Indeed, martyrdom is a cosmic battle "between God's people and God's enemies"



(29-30). From the early Christians, the author moves to a discussion of the 16th-century Anabaptist martyrs, and finishes with a biography of martyred Salvadoran archbishop Oscar Romero that is likely to be engaging even for those who dislike York's theology.

York deserves much credit for writing one of the more ecumenical martyrdom studies available from a Mennonite source. He focuses always on the broader Christian context and resists Anabaptist tribalism. But readers who value interfaith cooperation may find his work problematic.

*The Purple Crown* is peppered with references to "the people of God," and while York acknowledges that this group is hard to define, he remains rigid in his Christian understanding of the phrase. "Only where the triune God is worshipped can there be true sociality," he asserts (110). This claim is typical of York's language throughout. He consistently dismisses any social or political reality outside of Christianity by labeling it "false," an ideological tactic that adds no meat to his arguments. *The Purple Crown* is hardly the first theological work to claim that Christianity is inherently political by virtue of its alleged superiority to everything else, and if York is to be faulted for excessive reliance on a "church" vs. "world" binary, it must be said that he did not invent it. Still, he does little to make it fresh.

The author includes almost no discussion of contemporary politics or how Christians might shoulder their accountability in a modern democracy. Rather, government is simply "the state," an ill-defined monolith that kills and oppresses Christians. Christians are political because as followers of Christ they stand in opposition to the state, even unto death. This circular argument is the heart of *The Purple Crown*, thereby confining the book's appeal to those who share York's dualistic worldview.

York comes closest to undermining his own dualism in his chapter on 16th-century Europe – the strongest in the book – in which he discusses with admirable nuance how battles over semantics led Christians to kill one another. Recognizing the difficulty of resolving these doctrinal issues, York points us instead to the martyrdoms; such performances "give us something by which we can discern which acts are good, beautiful, and true. Maybe then it is possible to distinguish the difference between a pseudo-politics located in earthly regimes and an authentic politics constituted by nothing other than the broken yet risen body of Christ" (97).

The definition of “politics” is contested territory, and my frustration with York’s theocratic version may reveal little beyond my own partisanship. Nonetheless, the labels “pseudo-politics” and “authentic politics” strike me as ironically self-defeating. Nothing is more endemic to the politics of “earthly regimes” than claims of purity and authenticity that serve to discredit some peoples while elevating others to positions of supposed greatness. “The visible church is important not just so the elect can know each other, but because God has promised not to leave the world without a witness to God,” York continues; “This is the sort of gift that exposes false cities from the true city in an effort to bring all cities under the rule of Christ” (98).

This crusader-like language leaves us no room to approach non-Christians with any humility. Despite its nonviolent intent, I doubt York’s chauvinist theology will bring us closer to the “peace of the earthly city.”

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Hans Küng. *The Beginning of All Things: Science and Religion*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007.

Hans Küng has put together in *The Beginning of All Things* a remarkable synthesis of philosophical, theological, and scientific reasoning about our universe. He argues that religious views of the universe (understood as symbolic expressions of the meaning of this reality) are compatible with scientific explanations.

This does not mean that science proves theology or that theology undergirds scientific exploration, but that each has its own distinctive procedure for understanding reality. Küng believes this reality is more than what science can explain, which is precisely why we need religion in order to understand reality fully. He emphasizes the limits of scientific knowledge. "If science is to remain faithful to its method," he says, "it may not extend its judgment beyond the horizon of experience" (52). He outlines the way cosmology cannot examine the constraints of the cosmos in which we find ourselves.

The author acknowledges that science has its own procedures that give reliable and comprehensive knowledge about the world around us. But he goes further and defines physics as follows: "Its theories and models are not literal descriptions of reality at the atomic level (naive realism) but are symbolic and selective attempts that depict the structure of the world" (8). By stressing the symbolic character of scientific explanations, Küng attempts to gain a foothold for religious explanations of the same reality. One wonders if the parallel can be drawn too closely. Surely the symbolic nature of religious explanations differs from the highly mathematical and theoretical symbols of science, which are tested by experimental data and cause/effect analysis.

In his discussion of creation, Küng stresses the symbolic character of the creation narratives of the Hebrew Bible and repudiates any attempt to gain scientific knowledge from them. However, he feels justified in interpreting evolution in religious terms, as a creation by the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition. He tries to use the fine-tuning of the cosmological constants to suggest the intelligent design of the universe. This argument is tempting to theologians, but if the universe has evolved to produce life, the

constants of the universe are merely those that we experience. It is impossible to extrapolate to other possible universes, since we have no experience of any alternatives.

Küng proposes that scientists consider God as a hypothesis. Here it seems to me that he is stepping beyond his own wise thesis that science and religion should retain separate procedures. He does acknowledge that there is no deductive or inductive proof of God. Rather, he insists on a practical and holistic rational approach to God (including the whole experience of the human being, especially subjective awareness). Küng argues that the human being is more than the body, more than brain processes, and still a mystery to neurologists. This ignorance, however, is used as a logical leap towards the “mystery” of the cosmos, which is too easily filled by the idea of God as the primal ground of our existence.

In the plethora of books about science and religion, this one stands out as more comprehensive than most because it puts the discussion in the context of a philosophical argument about reality and the way we perceive it. Küng relies on a depiction of theology as a metaphysical principle that goes beyond the limits of scientific theories. He is too well-versed in the global religions to describe this as a necessary leap and instead depicts it as a choice. But such a choice would need to be justified in comparison with other religious or metaphysical explanations of the ultimate reality. It would be interesting to see Küng use his wide knowledge of other religions to compare the various religious cosmologies with current scientific descriptions of the origins of the universe and life.

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Robert W. Brimlow, *What About Hitler? Wrestling with Jesus' Call to Nonviolence in an Evil World*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006.

In *What About Hitler?* Robert Brimlow devotes considerable time to a critique of the Just War tradition. He wrestles vigorously with George Orwell's critique of pacifism; he argues pointedly that the Christian's first concern must be to obey Jesus, not to escape death or be successful according to some short-term definition. And he points out effectively that rejecting killing makes sense only if it is part of a personal and communal lifestyle committed to peacemaking.

There is a good deal in this book that is helpful. Brimlow brings a philosopher's sharp mind to his extensive critique of the Just War tradition. I will not try to decide here whether his critique is finally successful, but his sophisticated objections to central arguments of important Just War advocates (St. Augustine, Michael Walzer, Jean Bethke Elshtain) offer challenges that no Just War advocate should ignore. "Just war theory contradicts itself in that it sanctions the killing of innocents, which it at the same time prohibits. In addition, just war theory can also be used effectively to justify all wars" (105).

Brimlow is surely right that pacifism is impossible unless it is rooted in Christian community and prayer, and that it has no integrity unless it is part of a personal and communal lifestyle that not only rejects violence but actively engages in works of compassion and mercy toward the poor and neglected.

That said, I must confess that I found the book inadequate, disappointing, and occasionally annoying. The rambling Scriptural meditations at the beginning of each chapter were not very helpful, at least not for me. The argument that Just War theory validates Osama bin Laden as much as it does military resistance to terrorism was not convincing. Equally unsatisfactory was Brimlow's lengthy argument (139-46) that Jesus was a failure. Even his final chapter arguing for the importance of a personal and communal lifestyle of peacemaking was inadequate. Jesus called for works of mercy – feeding the hungry, caring for the homeless and naked, giving alms to the poor. That is all good and true. But what about going beyond charity to understanding the structural causes of poverty and injustice

and working vigorously to overcome institutional injustice? What about activist kinds of peacemaking – whether Victim-Offender Reconciliation Programs, sophisticated mediation efforts bringing together warring parties, or Christian Peacemaker Teams?

Most important, Brimlow’s answer to the basic question, “What About Hitler?” is woefully inadequate. He opens Chapter 7 (“The Christian Response”) with the comment that “it is time for me to respond to the Hitler question.” His answer takes three paragraphs. Just one page. He had already said near the beginning that his answer to this question is absurd (10). I think that answer is fundamentally inadequate. It is certainly true that the Christian pacifist believes that she must follow Jesus, even when this leads to death. Brimlow makes the point very well. If Jesus is God become flesh, if God raised Jesus from the dead on the third day, then it simply will not do to say, “Sorry, Jesus, your ideas do not work in a world of Hitlers and Osama bin Ladens.”

We must follow Jesus even when that means death. But there is a lot more to be said to make this position less implausible than Brimlow does. It is wrong and misleading to label it “absurd.” If Jesus is the Incarnate God who announced the inauguration of the Messianic kingdom of peace and justice, called his disciples to start living in that kingdom now, and promised to return to complete the victory over evil, then it makes sense to obey his call to nonviolence now, even when Hitlers still stalk the earth. This book does not offer a convincing answer to the question it raises.

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Stanley E. Porter, ed. *Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006.

Drawn from a 2003 colloquium at McMaster Divinity School, this collection of essays tackles how New Testament writers use the Old Testament. An introductory essay by Stanley E. Porter and a concluding scholarly response to the papers by Andreas J. Köstenberger provide a helpful orienting perspective and summation.

Two essays dedicated to general topics introduce the volume. Dennis L. Stamps seeks to clarify terminology, contrasts “author-centered” and “audience-centered” approaches, and describes persuasive rhetoric in the early church period. R. Timothy McLay introduces issues concerning canon and scripture, and identifies “pluriformity” as “an essential characteristic of the Scriptures of the early church” (55).

Michael P. Knowles (Matthew) and Porter (Luke-Acts) both argue that the evangelists’ interpretive perspectives not only center on but derive from Jesus himself. Craig A. Evans (Mark) and Sylvia C. Keesmaat (Ephesians, Colossians, and others) place these documents within the political milieu of the Roman Empire to striking effect. Paul Miller (John) and Kurt Anders Richardson (James) describe the use of OT characters, while James W. Aageson (Romans, Galatians, and others) and Köstenberger (pastorals, Revelation) provide contrasting perspectives on reading epistles.

The range of foci engages the reader, and Köstenberger’s responses prove helpful, providing additional information or a contrasting perspective. His adamant response to Aageson’s paper is particularly striking and underscores significantly divergent methods and assumptions, as well as perspectives on the implications of Paul’s hermeneutics for the contemporary Christian community.

This said, the volume’s overarching author-centered perspective prompts an uncritical assumption of continuity that, in my view, should be reconsidered. Early in the volume Stamps appropriately criticizes the idea that “NT writers use the OT” because it is “anachronistic to speak of the OT when referring to the perspective of the NT writers since the differentiation between old and new had not yet occurred” (11). Though he suggests “Jewish sacred writings” (11) as an improvement, repeated statements in the rest of the volume about how NT writers, and even Jesus himself, use the “OT”

reflect the prominence of such anachronism.

Indeed, the difficulty runs deeper than Stamps suggests. While the writers in this book attempt to uncover the intentions and hermeneutics of Luke, Paul, and even Jesus, these biblical figures neither read an OT (which implies a NT) nor consciously wrote Scripture (they sought to interpret the one(s) they had). Even the common designation “NT writers” proves historically anachronistic; the most that can accurately be said is that these people wrote what later *became* the NT. More attention to how Scripture is designated within the NT would have raised this issue and strengthened the volume.

The book’s orientation leaves potentially significant *discontinuities* unexplored. For instance, what should we make of Paul’s distinction between his own opinion and elements “from the LORD,” once his writing becomes part of a NT? Should our reading of his epistles be affected by this transformation into scripture, a shift that transcends his “original intent”? The description of “Paul’s shorter epistles” as “rang[ing] from Paul’s supposedly earliest epistle to those seemingly written so late that Paul was dead when he composed them” (182) suggests further difficulties with an exclusively author-centered approach. What of the shift from Luke’s two-volume work (Luke-Acts) to a “gospel” and a non-“gospel” separated by John, or the Emmaus story’s claim that the disciples see Jesus in “the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms” only through an impromptu Bible study led by the *risen* Lord? Unfortunately these writers do not address such discontinuities at historical, literary, and canonical levels.

A collection of essays has the benefit of various perspectives and the drawback of limited flow. The papers here are well written, engaging, and accessible for interested people with some background in the subject matter. While most essays do not focus on implications for contemporary interpretation, individual chapters would be helpful as supplements or orientation for studying a specific NT book. Several essays also situate themselves within broader scholarship, which proves particularly beneficial for the non-specialist.

Overall, these writers do an admirable job of tackling a significant, complex issue. However, although the volume explores how “NT writers used the OT,” it proves less satisfying for “Hearing the OT in the NT.”



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While the latter implies the perspective of a two-testament Scripture, most essays here seek to uncover the *pre*-NT use of Scripture (not OT!) by writers of what later became the NT. Thus, this volume serves an author-centered approach well, but it does not address discontinuity in the transformation from “authorial writings” to Christian Scripture.

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Stanley Hauerwas and Romand Coles. *Christianity, Democracy and the Radical Ordinary: Conversations between a Radical Democrat and a Christian*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2007.

It is not only Christians who find difficult the practice of engaging the world in constructive ways; not just believing that engagement should happen, but engaging the complicated issues of how to proceed, occupies all kinds of people. In this volume we observe a Christian theologian (Stanley Hauerwas) and a political theorist who is not Christian (Romand Coles) grapple with such issues in ways that try to think about the right questions and display fruitful practices within a mutual pursuit of the transformation and development of a flourishing political imagination.

The purpose of this collection of essays, letters, lectures, and conversation is to exhibit a politics that refuses to let death dominate our lives, resists fear, and seeks to uncover the violence at the heart of liberal political doctrine. Not only does this book discuss such matters, it seeks to display some of the very practices it brings into view. Practices central to this ongoing conversation include attention, engagement, vulnerability, receptive patience, tending, “microdispositions” and “micropractices,” waiting, and gentleness. Such practices, patiently pursued, might make up a life that is political, claim the authors, yet not beholden to conventional politics.

We witness Coles and Hauerwas engage each other as well as a vast array of interlocutors in an attempt to cultivate a politics of “wild patience”: Sheldon Wolin, Cornell West, Ella Baker, John Howard Yoder, Will Campbell, Rowan Williams, Jean Vanier, Samuel Wells, and Gregory of Nanzianzus. Both authors here are exemplary in their own openness and vulnerability to learning from traditions outside their own, and Coles especially so as he provides insightful readings of a number of Christian theological voices.

Nonetheless, in the midst of their respectful and deep mutual engagement, Hauerwas and Coles exhibit at times a certain wariness in relation to each other. Hauerwas worries that radical democracy will be an end in itself for which God becomes an afterthought, a superfluous placeholder, domesticated and tamed in service of some other agenda. But he also worries that Christians do something very similar when they mistake the Christian faith for a garden variety of humanism. Coles, on the other hand, is concerned that Christian jealousy regarding Jesus may prevent proper vulnerability and underwrite a kind of territoriality. He further believes that no matter how sincere the upside-down practices of the church may be, these kinds of practices have a way of turning themselves right side up – and without appropriate discernment on the part of the church.

I have my own worries. Sometimes it feels as though Coles comes close to equating the insurgent grassroots political practices of radical democracy with the politics of Jesus. Coles also seems tempted to turn the church and its practices into an instance of radical democracy. Perhaps this is one reason he claims to be so “haunted” by John Howard Yoder, who himself is open to the criticism that he thinks the church’s practices can be translated into the world without loss.

Further, the extended conversation in this volume, while richly informed by a wide variety of interlocutors – political theorists, activists of many kinds, theologians, a number of Mennonite thinkers, and so on – is in the end strangely thin on the Christian exegetical tradition. While we see close, nuanced readings of Wolin, West, Campbell, et al., we search in vain for the same kind of close attention to sustained readings of the Biblical text. This is not to say that the conversation between Coles the radical democrat and Hauerwas the Christian is not informed by biblical ideas. However, I

wonder if Coles's concern for Christian jealousy of Jesus also extends to Christian privileging of the Scriptural text and, if so, what implications this might have for a long-term continuing conversation.

Jeffrey Stout, who in his own effort to revitalize the American democratic tradition often converses with Christian theologians such as Hauerwas, claims that this book gives him hope, since it takes the conversation between Christianity and democracy in a most welcome direction. This book also gives me hope as a Christian, because it seeks to find ways for people to engage in the world that resist the violence and death that have been inscribed deeply into the story of our shared lives. And part of that hopefulness includes paying close attention to practices that can be embodied on a human scale, whether as a radical democrat or a Christian.

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Laura Ruth Yordy. *Green Witness: Ecology, Ethics, and the Kingdom of God*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2008.

Laura Yordy has a vision for churches engaging holistically in ecological discipleship. She begins her discourse in *Green Witness* by briefly describing a fantasy congregation that fully integrates earth-friendly practices into its worship and daily actions. Yordy illustrates her vision by using examples from real churches that are implementing ecological practices. According to her, the greening of the church in North America has been limited because of the ineffectiveness of education, difficulties with real change, powerlessness of leadership, individualism in church life, the magnitude of the environmental crisis, and the hope of technological fixes: "The point is not to make the church a participant in the 'environmental movement,'" she says, "but to make the church more faithful by including the eschatological import of creation in its performance of worship, ... a 'way' of life that praises and witnesses to Father Son, and Holy Spirit" (161).

The author develops her thesis around the need for the church to

renew its understanding of the eschaton – “the fulfillment of God’s promises for creation” (2). The church is to be a witness to the coming Kingdom of Heaven, the result of Christ’s redemption of all of creation. Christians are not to be managers trying to fix the environmental crisis but witnesses of Christ’s relationship to creation through faithful ecological practice.

Yordy critiques the positions of three eco-theologians – Larry Rasmussen, Catherine Keller, and Rosemary Radford Ruether – by observing that they reject several central doctrines of Christian eschatology. She notes the losses that occur when eschatology does not include Jesus, the sovereignty of God, or the concept of an afterlife. She writes that our practices today in relation to ecology witness to our belief in the fullness of the Kingdom of God. The doctrine of creation should be examined from an eschatological framework, says the author; God’s future view of redeemed creation is what makes the Christian creation story distinct from views found in the “common creation story.”

Yordy carefully states that it is God’s love that generated the universe (57), and proceeds with helpful insights into the concepts of God creating the world out of nothing, the Trinitarian role in creation, the goodness of creation, and the “Fall.” Christian ethics is described as discipleship – where the lives of Christ’s followers witness to the Kingdom through worship, action, and character. Yordy provides stimulating insights into eco-discipleship by probing key characteristics of the Kingdom: peace, justice, abundance, righteousness, and communion with God. The resulting praxis is summarized well by her statement that “Christians’ witness to the Kingdom is not simply watching, but pointing toward God’s gracious creating and redeeming activity with the activity of their own lives” (112).

Yordy sees the church serving as a “demonstration plot” for ecological discipleship. She develops the view that everything the church practices – here specifically its relation to the earth – should witness to Christ’s coming redemption of all creation. It is from within community that the witness and practice will best occur. The concluding concept centers on the ecological virtue, patience. Yordy lifts it up as a key virtue while not excluding other much-needed virtues. She says it is our impatience that plays a major factor in our dominance over the natural world. But patience is woven into the web of the universe and reflects the character of God. “Part of the human need

for patience (as well as other virtues) is the imperative for humans to realign themselves with the patient character of God's creation" (155). From this framework Yordy calls us to practice eco-discipleship.

The author develops logical arguments throughout her discourse, though at points the writing style recalls the doctoral dissertation on which the book is based. The work is in the frame of a constructive theology, and it leans heavily on arguments between various theological and philosophical positions. Yordy formulates her thesis based on a broad array of authors along with insights of her own.

This volume would serve well as the basis for serious discussion by adults interested in articulating a biblical and theological response to today's environmental crisis, but it doesn't include an extensive list of examples of creation care actions. (It would also be helpful if there were an index in addition to the bibliography.) Upper-level college students in environmental studies would benefit from exploring the intersection between faith and ecological praxis found in this text.

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Conrad L. Kanagy. *Road Signs on the Journey: A Profile of Mennonite Church USA*. Waterloo, ON: Herald, 2007.

Conrad Kanagy's profile of Mennonite Church USA is a good addition to earlier similar studies of Mennonites in 1972 and 1989.<sup>1</sup> Preferring biblical to sociological categories of analysis, Kanagy presents the data as "road signs and guideposts" in order to help Mennonites find their social, political, spiritual, and theological location, and to help Mennonite churches consider the direction of their further "journey toward the reign of God" (24).

The first two chapters set a reading of the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah as the base for Kanagy's data analysis. These chapters test the

data for evidence of a *missional* intention and vision in Mennonite church life. Succeeding chapters profile Mennonite Church USA; explore church structure, polity and self-understanding; test consistency and orthodoxy of belief and ritual; survey management of resources; review recent disruptions of Mennonite “Christendom”; and assess the relation between the church and greater society. The author’s summary conclusion shares the testimony of respondents as they reflect on the quality of congregational life and challenge the church toward greater missional identity and activity.

Kanagy’s prognosis for Mennonite Church USA is disquieting yet hopeful. While the author predicts a “bleak future” (57), among “Racial/Ethnic Mennonites” he discovered signs of growth and renewal. Other signs of hope include relatively high rates of giving, marital stability, strong beliefs about Jesus, active personal piety, and greater support of women in ministry (183ff.).

At least two issues emerge that deserve greater discussion and thought. The first is how to refer to the diversity of ethnic and racial groups comprising Mennonite Church USA. Throughout the report Kanagy uses the generic term “Racial/Ethnic” to refer to African-American, Hispanic/Latino, diverse Asian, and various Native American congregations and members. Yet “Racial/Ethnic” would also apply to the various Caucasian groups comprising the church. One of the challenges in working out the tension between the margin and middle of Mennonite church has to do with how we refer to one another. The tendency to reduce our ethnic diversity to one generic category, or an implicit us/them polarity, is a pernicious problem with no easy solution.

This problem is endemic to descriptive sociological summaries, but even more, it bespeaks the difficulty that Mennonite church organizations have in dealing with an ethnic diversity that refuses to be ‘settled.’ I wonder if this reflects the broader influence of theories of assimilation as opposed to theories of ethnic pluralism in the American context. It seems to me that one of the significant challenges in combatting racism in the church is to celebrate our chaotic ethnicity in all its glorious detail. This will demand imaginative justice in reconfiguring current structures of privilege. Our commitment to such justice will help us find better, more expressive, language with which to understand the multi-ethnic fullness of Mennonite Church USA.

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The second challenge concerns Kanagy's exile hypothesis. This hypothesis interprets the changes Mennonites have undergone as assimilation to a broader society; that is, that Mennonites as exiles in American culture and society are losing their true identity and becoming more like their host society. This interpretation might be more cogent if Kanagy had presented comparative data from a larger control group than conservative Protestants (171). Increased levels of education, wealth, professional vocation, and urban living, together with changes in various beliefs, support "the argument that Mennonites are becoming more conforming to the values and attitudes of the larger society" (170, 171). However, Anabaptism has looked more educated and urban before.<sup>2</sup>

Putting a slight twist on Kanagy's question of exile, the data may be suggesting that Mennonites are finally returning from an almost 200-year exile in rural America. The changes Kanagy traces may be instances of increased biblical fidelity. Engagement with surrounding society, however messy that might be, could be a truer expression of Anabaptist peoplehood than the isolationist posture of most recent memory.

It may be necessary to resist and even critique assimilation theories based on the deeper resonance between Mennonites and various values of American society and culture, such as freedom of religion, freedom of conscience, and participatory governance of group life. The isolationist interpretation of Mennonite life from the 16th through the 18th centuries has had something of a privileged status<sup>3</sup> and may need to give way to a more socially engaged and integrated understanding of Mennonite life as normative.

This may be why Kanagy is so firmly convinced that the future of Mennonite Church USA lies with congregations comprising various minority racial and ethnic groups. Indeed, it may be impossible to find future vitality in the church without following such leadership into social engagement. For observing these provocative issues in such a way as to raise further discussion of the future of Mennonite communities, we can be grateful to Kanagy for an insightful analysis of Mennonite Church USA.

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> J. Howard Kaufmann and Leland Harder, *Anabaptists: Four Centuries Later* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1975). J. Howard Kaufmann and Leo Driedger, *The Mennonite Mosaic: Identity and Modernization* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Richard K. MacMaster, *Land, Piety, Peoplehood, The Establishment of Mennonite Communities in America, 1683-1790* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1985), 138.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

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Earl Zimmerman. *Practicing the Politics of Jesus: The Origin and Significance of John Howard Yoder's Social Ethics*. Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2007.

Interest in the theological ethics of John Howard Yoder shows no signs of slowing down. I am delighted – and sometimes amazed – at the level of scholarly interest in Yoder's writings today. *Practicing the Politics of Jesus: The Origin and Significance of John Howard Yoder's Social Ethics* is composed of seven chapters. The first six attempt to identify what shaped Yoder in ways that gave rise to his most influential book, *The Politics of Jesus*. The last chapter, which seems rather artificially connected to the others, provides Earl Zimmerman with an opportunity to state the significance of “the politics of Jesus,” as he sees it, for peace-building efforts today.

This book's unique contribution is that it offers the fullest account to date of the influences on Yoder during the years he was in Western Europe (1949-1958). Having named some of the North American Mennonite influences, the book attributes most of the “background” to his *Politics* to these European influences.

Zimmerman is right to say that the realities of post-World War II Europe were quite significant for the young Yoder, who arrived in France in April 1949 to serve orphans and help French Mennonites recover their



commitment to pacifism. And undoubtedly the debates about war in which he engaged during those years were shaped by memories of Nazism and the horrors of the war.

The author's discussion of Barth's influence on Yoder is framed differently from that of Craig Carter [see his *The Politics of the Cross*]. My sense is that Carter knows Barth's thought better than Zimmerman does. But probably the careful examination of Yoder in light of his studies with Barth (as compared to other influences) will continue to generate discussion and debate. Zimmerman has certainly provided a fuller account of NT scholar Oscar Cullmann's influence on Yoder than has been done before. This is helpful.

The chapter on Yoder's doctoral work on sixteenth-century Anabaptism is also the fullest summary we have of that work and its connections to his *Politics of Jesus*, although it would have had greater significance before the recent publication of an English translation of Yoder's dissertation. But Zimmerman's work will help those who haven't noticed these connections before to see them now. We are fortunate with *The Politics of Jesus* because, aside from his doctoral work, it is Yoder's most heavily footnoted book. However, in addition to his wide reading and formal teachers, it is important to say, as Zimmerman does, that *Politics* did not simply emerge from a study. According to accounts from French Mennonites, young Yoder empathized with those who had lived through several years of Nazi invasions.

Zimmerman could also have included Yoder's exposure to Latin America. In the mid-'60s and again when working on *Politics*, Yoder spent time with Latin American Christians living in the midst of revolution. According to theologians Samuel Escobar and René Padilla, he empathized deeply with them while delivering timely, biblical messages (thus Yoder's being made an honorary member of the Latin American Theological Fraternity).

One might get the impression that Yoder did not engage Reinhold Niebuhr's writings nearly as seriously as, say, J. Lawrence Burkholder (26, 57ff, 107). That impression would be wrong. While in high school, Yoder took a course with a former student of Niebuhr's at the College of Wooster, in which Niebuhr himself lectured once. Approximately fifteen years later, Yoder did significant research on Niebuhr at the University of Basel before

he gave his first lecture on him, and that produced an article. Finally, years later, Yoder wrote two substantial lectures on Niebuhr that were included in the informally published *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace and Revolution: A Companion to Bainton* (soon to be formally published).

Again, one could get the wrong impression from the statement that Yoder “basically depended on Roland Bainton’s historical survey of Christian attitudes toward war and peace for his historical scheme” regarding the “Constantinian shift” (198). Yoder was an historical theologian. For many years he taught courses surveying the history of Christian attitudes toward war, peace, and revolution; he read numerous and varied primary and secondary sources germane to those lectures. He had therefore studied relevant sources well before publishing the main essay articulating his claims.

I don’t have space to discuss issues raised in the last two chapters of summary and interpretation for contemporary peace-building. Here serious questions emerge regarding contemporary appropriations of Yoder.

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Amy Laura Hall. *Conceiving Parenthood: American Protestantism and the Spirit of Reproduction*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.

Churchly discussions of reproductive bioethics usually take place in the third person. The major actors – those advocating for so-called “designer babies” or for prenatal testing designed to enable selective termination of pregnancies – remain distinct from *us*, the narrators, who can respond from a distance and with disgust. Such conversations also usually occur in the future tense, in anticipation of a brave new world in which parents shop for their unborn child’s hair color, IQ, and personality type.

Yet for readers with any connection to middle-class, mainline Protestantism, Christian ethicist Amy Laura Hall’s new book requires a shift

from third person to first and from future tense to past. Her study requires readers to ask not “What will *they* come up with *next*?” but “How have *we* contributed to the ethos that has engendered such technologies?”

Hall’s wide-ranging survey of 20th-century Protestant ideas about family, social status, and scientific innovation suggests that the seeds of troubling technologies were sown closer to our ecclesial home than many Christians like to admit. As she writes, “a tradition that had within it the possibility of leveling all believers as orphaned and gratuitously adopted kin came instead to baptize a culture of carefully delineated, racially encoded domesticity” (10). By uncritically blessing both scientific advancement and an idealized portrait of the nuclear family, Hall claims, 20th-century Protestantism set the stage for technologies that would enable aspiring American parents to engineer the perfect child.

The “germ-free home” stands at the center of Hall’s first chapter, which mines mid-century issues of *Parents* magazine and its Methodist cognate, *Together*. The war on germs, made possible by products like Lysol, sedimented racial and class differences between the “hygienic” families of the assumed readers and *other* people’s children.

The author’s second chapter looks at how the marketing of infant formula and baby food encouraged parents to shift their trust from informally and familiarly transmitted know-how to dictates of the medical establishment. This chapter’s examination of the bizarre “Baby-Incubators—With Living Babies!” exhibit at the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago in 1933-34, which allowed visitors to view premature infants struggling for survival inside oven-like incubators, drives home the point that Americans were beginning to employ a technological gaze to a macabre extent.

Hall turns in the third chapter to the eugenics movement in the United States, which was endorsed by many progressive Protestants. She counters the prevailing idea that the American movement withered as the horrors of Nazi-era eugenics became public knowledge. Instead, she suggests, “there are links between current hopes for genius and past attempts to vaccinate the social body against the menace of poverty, disability, and deviance” (217). Hall’s final chapter moves into current bioethical debates by tracing connections between the promises of the atomic age and the claims of the current genomic revolution.

The narrative throughout *Conceiving Parenthood* is provocative and thorough. The book teems with illustrations and advertisements from magazines from the last century and this one, and all are accompanied by painstakingly close readings. At times, however, the contour of Hall's argument buckles under the weight of the evidence she presents; she seems unwilling to weigh, rank, and especially discard data that distracts from the trajectory of her main point. Unfortunately, chapters averaging 100 pages each will likely intimidate some readers who otherwise would benefit from her analysis.

The author's voice alternates between the scholarly, the pastoral, and the autobiographical. Sometimes the shift can be jarring, although none of the voices by itself would have been up to the great task Hall sets for herself. Calling herself a pro-life feminist, Hall moves beyond historical investigation and critical analysis to pastoral and prophetic challenge. "I do indeed target for moral interrogation women like myself," she writes, "for our complicity in the narrations that render other women's wombs as prodigal" (400). Hall takes her call to action beyond protesting the eugenic whiff of some modern reproductive technologies and questioning the "meticulously planned procreation" of the elite classes. She suggests a much broader program of compassionate valuing of those who, for whatever reason, are deemed outside the realm of "normal."

Anabaptist readers will find much resonance with this book, especially with its call to resist market-driven definitions of what – and who – constitutes a productive life.

The challenge for Christian parents today, Hall says, is "to see the children in their homes, neighborhoods, and churches as unqualified gifts rather than projects, to identify 'downward' rather than to climb, and to allow their strategically protected and planned lives to become entangled in the needs of families and children judged to be at risk and behind the curve" (250).

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Donald Capps. *Jesus, the Village Psychiatrist*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2008.

Early in this book Donald Capps describes the behavior of a squirrel darting across a busy street, then suddenly freezing midway and racing back, only to dart again. He calls this a “living parable” (xv) and says we are intrigued because we see ourselves in the squirrel’s dilemma. I couldn’t agree more. In fact, I felt like that squirrel as I was reading this volume, at times running quickly to reach what I hoped was food for thought, and then retreating swiftly as the author’s beliefs and mine clashed.

I started the book intrigued by the title, only to freeze in the introduction at comments such as these: people with mental illnesses are “doing it to themselves” (xii), mental illnesses are “a form of coping and ... therefore typical ... today” (xii), and “the methods which Jesus employed are congruent ... with methods ... demonstrably effective ... today” (xxv). These statements portend what becomes clear in the rest of the book. Capps is a believer in Freudian psychoanalysis, a school of therapy formulated by Sigmund Freud in the late 1800s and popular in the US in the mid-1900s. It treats patients with psychotherapy in the belief that insight into conflicts which precede the illness will result in healing.

That paradigm of mental illness is rejected or at least highly suspect in the field of modern psychiatry. With the increasing use of brain scans and molecular research, psychiatry is moving in a biological direction in which mental illnesses are seen as dysfunctional states of the normal brain. Psychoanalysis has not proven effective in most mental illnesses.

Despite my momentary freeze I dashed on. The book is short, only 131 pages, and is divided into two parts. Part I is an academic explanation of psychoanalytic terms such as conversion and hysteria, and Part II is an analysis of seven cases of Jesus’ healing. The cases (two paralyzed men, two blind men, the demon-possessed boy, Jairus’s daughter, and the hemorrhaging woman) are used to illustrate Capps’s thesis that Jesus did not use magic to heal medical illnesses but employed therapeutic techniques to heal psychosomatic illnesses. Full understanding of Part I requires some prior knowledge of and belief in psychoanalytic principles, and thus may not be of interest to the general audience that Capps targets in his introduction. Part

2 may be easier for general readers but still requires some background.

It was surprising to me that Capps uses a blend of psychoanalytic descriptions and more modern diagnostic criteria from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (the “DSM,” with DSM IV being the fourth version, published in 1994). I was in psychiatric residency in the late 1970s when the first draft of the DSM was published and thus my training focused heavily on it. The DSM was known to be an attempt to describe conditions objectively, replacing the psychoanalytic model of mental illness that theorizes about etiology or cause.

Capps’s review of the minute details of diagnostic criteria of conversion disorder, factitious disorder, and somatization disorder from DSM IV was difficult to read through. His attempt to apply them to persons who lived 2000 years ago and whom the Bible describes only in barest detail was simply perplexing. Reading the cases, I found myself skimming through the academic material to get to the insights about Jesus. This is where I found the book provocative; for short periods I actually enjoyed myself, not feeling like a squirrel at all. Capps’s suggestion that Jesus did not use supernatural powers to cure people but actually listened to them challenged me to stop discounting Jesus’ healing stories as easy for him because he was divine.

Capps’s insights regarding the healing of Jairus’s daughter are excellent. For example, he points out that Jairus’s daughter was twelve, thus on the cusp of marriageability, representing to her father an opportunity to increase his wealth by marrying her off well. The author’s thoughts on Jesus’ understanding of the social context of illnesses and the implications of wellness are tantalizing but too brief. Each time I would begin thinking “Now he’s getting somewhere,” the chapter would end.

I finished the book hungering for more. Completing the analogy of the squirrel, I had braved all the academic traffic, only to find that the delectable pile of insightful spiritual nuts I was hoping for was small.

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Chris K. Huebner. *A Precarious Peace*. Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2006.

One realizes quickly upon reading *A Precarious Peace* that a desire for a solid thesis argued with clean, crisp, logical warrants and brought “together into some final programmatic statement of a position” (29) will be entirely frustrated. No last word can be given because words and positions, no less than politics and power, are precarious for those in the Christian community (58).

The precariousness that Chris K. Huebner places at the center of his Yoderian study of Mennonite theology, knowledge, and identity de-centers any attempt to offer a last word. This is a book whose project is “disestablishing, disowning, dislocating” (23) without reconstructing its subject theoretically. As such there is no argument that Huebner could be criticized for not showing adequately. He has promised not to provide an account of what peace *is*, and no one account of peace is given here. Instead, in a random sampling, there are stories about Alzheimer’s, Atom Egoyan’s films, friendship, speed, and Zizek.

The argument – or, as Huebner says, “common theme” (30) – is simply that peace is characterized by being precarious. For peace to be anything else would require a coercive intervention. Peace comes to us as a gift, given by Christ, and like all gifts it is both radically ours and out of our control.

While the political and ecclesiological ramifications of Yoder’s vision have been noticed, applied, and extended in various contexts, the epistemological questions that his investigations suggest have drawn less attention. This is what Huebner is about in this volume. I particularly like the description of his approach: “Let us group this collection of impulses together under the heading of standard epistemology.... What follows ... is a series of gestures toward a counter-epistemology that arises from the church’s confession that Christ is the truth. Here truth will appear to be unsettled rather than settled.... It arises from an excessive economy of gift, and thus it exists as a seemingly unnecessary and unwarranted donation” (133-34).

This language of gift gives much of Huebner’s discussion a “spatial” feel. To elaborate his conception of peace he invokes words like diaspora, settled, patience, gesture, scattered, speed, or territory. I am strongly impressed by how Huebner is able to move, and to move me, in space and

time throughout this book. The discussion has an embodiedness missing from much of the theological endeavor.

The book's biggest strength is the reworking of our perceptions, actions, emotions, and disposition towards precariousness. I teach Christian ethics at a small Mennonite liberal arts institution to students who are mostly not convinced pacifists in either action or epistemology. I find this an enormously difficult and somewhat stressful task. This is not surprising, because many of them are just beginning their education in the ethos of Christian community. While reading this book I noticed that in class my statements were clearer, my mode of engagement more patient and less anxious, and my answers more characterized by the open-endedness that characterizes the gift.

Huebner has written a course of therapy for those who believe in peace that will, if we let it, deepen our engagement with peace, make us more comfortable with its precariousness, and orient us towards the Christ who gives us this peace. Huebner skillfully calls into question our assumptions. Some debates evaporate under his critique, as in a chapter on Milbank and Barth called "Can a Gift be Commanded?" Others condense as the author brings together questions not typically asked at the same time, as in a chapter where he employs contemporary philosophers and cultural critics to show how martyrdom shapes the gift of peace.

I close with questions offered in response to a quotation at the end of a wonderful chapter on [Paul] Virilio and Yoder: "But because this good news involves a breaking of the cycle of violence that includes the renunciation of logistical effectiveness and possessive sovereignty, it can *only* be offered as a gift whose reception cannot be guaranteed or enforced" (130, emphasis mine). Here Huebner seems to want to guarantee a certain shape to peace. But if peace is always precarious, is it also true that only peace is precarious? Isn't there also precariousness to the exercise of power, the attempt to govern, or the attempt to communicate in the language of culture and not only gospel? Can we not recognize peace and precariousness even when they occur (miraculously) in spite of force, clumsy intervention, or misguided attempts to control? Or must peace, in order to remain precarious, guard against alliances threatening that precariousness?

At points Huebner eagerly recognizes that those practicing peace are also always implicated in the violent exercise of power (see chapters



8 and 12). But at other points the shape of the peace he avers seems overdetermined by the demand of precariousness. Isn't a truly precarious peace also willing to explore the possibility of remaining settled, existing in a happy exchange, or flourishing for a moment in effectiveness?

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Tripp York. *The Purple Crown: The Politics of Martyrdom*. Scottsdale: Herald, 2007.

*The Purple Crown: The Politics of Martyrdom* engages questions that have preoccupied Anabaptists for centuries: What is the appropriate posture of peace-loving Christians in a violent world? Should Christians be political?

As a work of historical theology, this book will appeal most to theologians and church historians. But York's prose, if repetitive at times, is accessible (and gender inclusive). Anyone who finds the subject matter compelling can approach this study. Some will find it inspiring; others will find it most valuable as a representative piece of a particular kind of Christian dogma. At the least, it will provoke passionate conversation.

According to York, Christians must be politically active earthly citizens, but with an important caveat: their political posture is one of exile. They are here on earth to represent heaven. Thus "martyrdom is *the* political act because it represents the ultimate imitation of Christ, signifying a life lived in obedience to, and participation in, the triune God" (23).

Beginning with a discussion of the early Christian martyrs under Rome, York interprets martyrdom as a public performance that bears witness to the triumph of Christ through a means superior to rhetoric or argument. Indeed, martyrdom is a cosmic battle "between God's people and God's enemies"

(29-30). From the early Christians, the author moves to a discussion of the 16th-century Anabaptist martyrs, and finishes with a biography of martyred Salvadoran archbishop Oscar Romero that is likely to be engaging even for those who dislike York's theology.

York deserves much credit for writing one of the more ecumenical martyrdom studies available from a Mennonite source. He focuses always on the broader Christian context and resists Anabaptist tribalism. But readers who value interfaith cooperation may find his work problematic.

*The Purple Crown* is peppered with references to "the people of God," and while York acknowledges that this group is hard to define, he remains rigid in his Christian understanding of the phrase. "Only where the triune God is worshipped can there be true sociality," he asserts (110). This claim is typical of York's language throughout. He consistently dismisses any social or political reality outside of Christianity by labeling it "false," an ideological tactic that adds no meat to his arguments. *The Purple Crown* is hardly the first theological work to claim that Christianity is inherently political by virtue of its alleged superiority to everything else, and if York is to be faulted for excessive reliance on a "church" vs. "world" binary, it must be said that he did not invent it. Still, he does little to make it fresh.

The author includes almost no discussion of contemporary politics or how Christians might shoulder their accountability in a modern democracy. Rather, government is simply "the state," an ill-defined monolith that kills and oppresses Christians. Christians are political because as followers of Christ they stand in opposition to the state, even unto death. This circular argument is the heart of *The Purple Crown*, thereby confining the book's appeal to those who share York's dualistic worldview.

York comes closest to undermining his own dualism in his chapter on 16th-century Europe – the strongest in the book – in which he discusses with admirable nuance how battles over semantics led Christians to kill one another. Recognizing the difficulty of resolving these doctrinal issues, York points us instead to the martyrdoms; such performances "give us something by which we can discern which acts are good, beautiful, and true. Maybe then it is possible to distinguish the difference between a pseudo-politics located in earthly regimes and an authentic politics constituted by nothing other than the broken yet risen body of Christ" (97).

The definition of “politics” is contested territory, and my frustration with York’s theocratic version may reveal little beyond my own partisanship. Nonetheless, the labels “pseudo-politics” and “authentic politics” strike me as ironically self-defeating. Nothing is more endemic to the politics of “earthly regimes” than claims of purity and authenticity that serve to discredit some peoples while elevating others to positions of supposed greatness. “The visible church is important not just so the elect can know each other, but because God has promised not to leave the world without a witness to God,” York continues; “This is the sort of gift that exposes false cities from the true city in an effort to bring all cities under the rule of Christ” (98).

This crusader-like language leaves us no room to approach non-Christians with any humility. Despite its nonviolent intent, I doubt York’s chauvinist theology will bring us closer to the “peace of the earthly city.”

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Hans Küng. *The Beginning of All Things: Science and Religion*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007.

Hans Küng has put together in *The Beginning of All Things* a remarkable synthesis of philosophical, theological, and scientific reasoning about our universe. He argues that religious views of the universe (understood as symbolic expressions of the meaning of this reality) are compatible with scientific explanations.

This does not mean that science proves theology or that theology undergirds scientific exploration, but that each has its own distinctive procedure for understanding reality. Küng believes this reality is more than what science can explain, which is precisely why we need religion in order to understand reality fully. He emphasizes the limits of scientific knowledge. "If science is to remain faithful to its method," he says, "it may not extend its judgment beyond the horizon of experience" (52). He outlines the way cosmology cannot examine the constraints of the cosmos in which we find ourselves.

The author acknowledges that science has its own procedures that give reliable and comprehensive knowledge about the world around us. But he goes further and defines physics as follows: "Its theories and models are not literal descriptions of reality at the atomic level (naive realism) but are symbolic and selective attempts that depict the structure of the world" (8). By stressing the symbolic character of scientific explanations, Küng attempts to gain a foothold for religious explanations of the same reality. One wonders if the parallel can be drawn too closely. Surely the symbolic nature of religious explanations differs from the highly mathematical and theoretical symbols of science, which are tested by experimental data and cause/effect analysis.

In his discussion of creation, Küng stresses the symbolic character of the creation narratives of the Hebrew Bible and repudiates any attempt to gain scientific knowledge from them. However, he feels justified in interpreting evolution in religious terms, as a creation by the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition. He tries to use the fine-tuning of the cosmological constants to suggest the intelligent design of the universe. This argument is tempting to theologians, but if the universe has evolved to produce life, the

constants of the universe are merely those that we experience. It is impossible to extrapolate to other possible universes, since we have no experience of any alternatives.

Küng proposes that scientists consider God as a hypothesis. Here it seems to me that he is stepping beyond his own wise thesis that science and religion should retain separate procedures. He does acknowledge that there is no deductive or inductive proof of God. Rather, he insists on a practical and holistic rational approach to God (including the whole experience of the human being, especially subjective awareness). Küng argues that the human being is more than the body, more than brain processes, and still a mystery to neurologists. This ignorance, however, is used as a logical leap towards the “mystery” of the cosmos, which is too easily filled by the idea of God as the primal ground of our existence.

In the plethora of books about science and religion, this one stands out as more comprehensive than most because it puts the discussion in the context of a philosophical argument about reality and the way we perceive it. Küng relies on a depiction of theology as a metaphysical principle that goes beyond the limits of scientific theories. He is too well-versed in the global religions to describe this as a necessary leap and instead depicts it as a choice. But such a choice would need to be justified in comparison with other religious or metaphysical explanations of the ultimate reality. It would be interesting to see Küng use his wide knowledge of other religions to compare the various religious cosmologies with current scientific descriptions of the origins of the universe and life.

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Robert W. Brimlow, *What About Hitler? Wrestling with Jesus' Call to Nonviolence in an Evil World*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006.

In *What About Hitler?* Robert Brimlow devotes considerable time to a critique of the Just War tradition. He wrestles vigorously with George Orwell's critique of pacifism; he argues pointedly that the Christian's first concern must be to obey Jesus, not to escape death or be successful according to some short-term definition. And he points out effectively that rejecting killing makes sense only if it is part of a personal and communal lifestyle committed to peacemaking.

There is a good deal in this book that is helpful. Brimlow brings a philosopher's sharp mind to his extensive critique of the Just War tradition. I will not try to decide here whether his critique is finally successful, but his sophisticated objections to central arguments of important Just War advocates (St. Augustine, Michael Walzer, Jean Bethke Elshtain) offer challenges that no Just War advocate should ignore. "Just war theory contradicts itself in that it sanctions the killing of innocents, which it at the same time prohibits. In addition, just war theory can also be used effectively to justify all wars" (105).

Brimlow is surely right that pacifism is impossible unless it is rooted in Christian community and prayer, and that it has no integrity unless it is part of a personal and communal lifestyle that not only rejects violence but actively engages in works of compassion and mercy toward the poor and neglected.

That said, I must confess that I found the book inadequate, disappointing, and occasionally annoying. The rambling Scriptural meditations at the beginning of each chapter were not very helpful, at least not for me. The argument that Just War theory validates Osama bin Laden as much as it does military resistance to terrorism was not convincing. Equally unsatisfactory was Brimlow's lengthy argument (139-46) that Jesus was a failure. Even his final chapter arguing for the importance of a personal and communal lifestyle of peacemaking was inadequate. Jesus called for works of mercy – feeding the hungry, caring for the homeless and naked, giving alms to the poor. That is all good and true. But what about going beyond charity to understanding the structural causes of poverty and injustice

and working vigorously to overcome institutional injustice? What about activist kinds of peacemaking – whether Victim-Offender Reconciliation Programs, sophisticated mediation efforts bringing together warring parties, or Christian Peacemaker Teams?

Most important, Brimlow’s answer to the basic question, “What About Hitler?” is woefully inadequate. He opens Chapter 7 (“The Christian Response”) with the comment that “it is time for me to respond to the Hitler question.” His answer takes three paragraphs. Just one page. He had already said near the beginning that his answer to this question is absurd (10). I think that answer is fundamentally inadequate. It is certainly true that the Christian pacifist believes that she must follow Jesus, even when this leads to death. Brimlow makes the point very well. If Jesus is God become flesh, if God raised Jesus from the dead on the third day, then it simply will not do to say, “Sorry, Jesus, your ideas do not work in a world of Hitlers and Osama bin Ladens.”

We must follow Jesus even when that means death. But there is a lot more to be said to make this position less implausible than Brimlow does. It is wrong and misleading to label it “absurd.” If Jesus is the Incarnate God who announced the inauguration of the Messianic kingdom of peace and justice, called his disciples to start living in that kingdom now, and promised to return to complete the victory over evil, then it makes sense to obey his call to nonviolence now, even when Hitlers still stalk the earth. This book does not offer a convincing answer to the question it raises.

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Stanley E. Porter, ed. *Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006.

Drawn from a 2003 colloquium at McMaster Divinity School, this collection of essays tackles how New Testament writers use the Old Testament. An introductory essay by Stanley E. Porter and a concluding scholarly response to the papers by Andreas J. Köstenberger provide a helpful orienting perspective and summation.

Two essays dedicated to general topics introduce the volume. Dennis L. Stamps seeks to clarify terminology, contrasts “author-centered” and “audience-centered” approaches, and describes persuasive rhetoric in the early church period. R. Timothy McLay introduces issues concerning canon and scripture, and identifies “pluriformity” as “an essential characteristic of the Scriptures of the early church” (55).

Michael P. Knowles (Matthew) and Porter (Luke-Acts) both argue that the evangelists’ interpretive perspectives not only center on but derive from Jesus himself. Craig A. Evans (Mark) and Sylvia C. Keesmaat (Ephesians, Colossians, and others) place these documents within the political milieu of the Roman Empire to striking effect. Paul Miller (John) and Kurt Anders Richardson (James) describe the use of OT characters, while James W. Aageson (Romans, Galatians, and others) and Köstenberger (pastorals, Revelation) provide contrasting perspectives on reading epistles.

The range of foci engages the reader, and Köstenberger’s responses prove helpful, providing additional information or a contrasting perspective. His adamant response to Aageson’s paper is particularly striking and underscores significantly divergent methods and assumptions, as well as perspectives on the implications of Paul’s hermeneutics for the contemporary Christian community.

This said, the volume’s overarching author-centered perspective prompts an uncritical assumption of continuity that, in my view, should be reconsidered. Early in the volume Stamps appropriately criticizes the idea that “NT writers use the OT” because it is “anachronistic to speak of the OT when referring to the perspective of the NT writers since the differentiation between old and new had not yet occurred” (11). Though he suggests “Jewish sacred writings” (11) as an improvement, repeated statements in the rest of the volume about how NT writers, and even Jesus himself, use the “OT”



reflect the prominence of such anachronism.

Indeed, the difficulty runs deeper than Stamps suggests. While the writers in this book attempt to uncover the intentions and hermeneutics of Luke, Paul, and even Jesus, these biblical figures neither read an OT (which implies a NT) nor consciously wrote Scripture (they sought to interpret the one(s) they had). Even the common designation “NT writers” proves historically anachronistic; the most that can accurately be said is that these people wrote what later *became* the NT. More attention to how Scripture is designated within the NT would have raised this issue and strengthened the volume.

The book’s orientation leaves potentially significant *discontinuities* unexplored. For instance, what should we make of Paul’s distinction between his own opinion and elements “from the LORD,” once his writing becomes part of a NT? Should our reading of his epistles be affected by this transformation into scripture, a shift that transcends his “original intent”? The description of “Paul’s shorter epistles” as “rang[ing] from Paul’s supposedly earliest epistle to those seemingly written so late that Paul was dead when he composed them” (182) suggests further difficulties with an exclusively author-centered approach. What of the shift from Luke’s two-volume work (Luke-Acts) to a “gospel” and a non-“gospel” separated by John, or the Emmaus story’s claim that the disciples see Jesus in “the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms” only through an impromptu Bible study led by the *risen* Lord? Unfortunately these writers do not address such discontinuities at historical, literary, and canonical levels.

A collection of essays has the benefit of various perspectives and the drawback of limited flow. The papers here are well written, engaging, and accessible for interested people with some background in the subject matter. While most essays do not focus on implications for contemporary interpretation, individual chapters would be helpful as supplements or orientation for studying a specific NT book. Several essays also situate themselves within broader scholarship, which proves particularly beneficial for the non-specialist.

Overall, these writers do an admirable job of tackling a significant, complex issue. However, although the volume explores how “NT writers used the OT,” it proves less satisfying for “Hearing the OT in the NT.”

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While the latter implies the perspective of a two-testament Scripture, most essays here seek to uncover the *pre*-NT use of Scripture (not OT!) by writers of what later became the NT. Thus, this volume serves an author-centered approach well, but it does not address discontinuity in the transformation from “authorial writings” to Christian Scripture.

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Stanley Hauerwas and Romand Coles. *Christianity, Democracy and the Radical Ordinary: Conversations between a Radical Democrat and a Christian*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2007.

It is not only Christians who find difficult the practice of engaging the world in constructive ways; not just believing that engagement should happen, but engaging the complicated issues of how to proceed, occupies all kinds of people. In this volume we observe a Christian theologian (Stanley Hauerwas) and a political theorist who is not Christian (Romand Coles) grapple with such issues in ways that try to think about the right questions and display fruitful practices within a mutual pursuit of the transformation and development of a flourishing political imagination.

The purpose of this collection of essays, letters, lectures, and conversation is to exhibit a politics that refuses to let death dominate our lives, resists fear, and seeks to uncover the violence at the heart of liberal political doctrine. Not only does this book discuss such matters, it seeks to display some of the very practices it brings into view. Practices central to this ongoing conversation include attention, engagement, vulnerability, receptive patience, tending, “microdispositions” and “micropractices,” waiting, and gentleness. Such practices, patiently pursued, might make up a life that is political, claim the authors, yet not beholden to conventional politics.

We witness Coles and Hauerwas engage each other as well as a vast array of interlocutors in an attempt to cultivate a politics of “wild patience”: Sheldon Wolin, Cornell West, Ella Baker, John Howard Yoder, Will Campbell, Rowan Williams, Jean Vanier, Samuel Wells, and Gregory of Nanzianzus. Both authors here are exemplary in their own openness and vulnerability to learning from traditions outside their own, and Coles especially so as he provides insightful readings of a number of Christian theological voices.

Nonetheless, in the midst of their respectful and deep mutual engagement, Hauerwas and Coles exhibit at times a certain wariness in relation to each other. Hauerwas worries that radical democracy will be an end in itself for which God becomes an afterthought, a superfluous placeholder, domesticated and tamed in service of some other agenda. But he also worries that Christians do something very similar when they mistake the Christian faith for a garden variety of humanism. Coles, on the other hand, is concerned that Christian jealousy regarding Jesus may prevent proper vulnerability and underwrite a kind of territoriality. He further believes that no matter how sincere the upside-down practices of the church may be, these kinds of practices have a way of turning themselves right side up – and without appropriate discernment on the part of the church.

I have my own worries. Sometimes it feels as though Coles comes close to equating the insurgent grassroots political practices of radical democracy with the politics of Jesus. Coles also seems tempted to turn the church and its practices into an instance of radical democracy. Perhaps this is one reason he claims to be so “haunted” by John Howard Yoder, who himself is open to the criticism that he thinks the church’s practices can be translated into the world without loss.

Further, the extended conversation in this volume, while richly informed by a wide variety of interlocutors – political theorists, activists of many kinds, theologians, a number of Mennonite thinkers, and so on – is in the end strangely thin on the Christian exegetical tradition. While we see close, nuanced readings of Wolin, West, Campbell, et al., we search in vain for the same kind of close attention to sustained readings of the Biblical text. This is not to say that the conversation between Coles the radical democrat and Hauerwas the Christian is not informed by biblical ideas. However, I

wonder if Coles's concern for Christian jealousy of Jesus also extends to Christian privileging of the Scriptural text and, if so, what implications this might have for a long-term continuing conversation.

Jeffrey Stout, who in his own effort to revitalize the American democratic tradition often converses with Christian theologians such as Hauerwas, claims that this book gives him hope, since it takes the conversation between Christianity and democracy in a most welcome direction. This book also gives me hope as a Christian, because it seeks to find ways for people to engage in the world that resist the violence and death that have been inscribed deeply into the story of our shared lives. And part of that hopefulness includes paying close attention to practices that can be embodied on a human scale, whether as a radical democrat or a Christian.

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Laura Ruth Yordy. *Green Witness: Ecology, Ethics, and the Kingdom of God*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2008.

Laura Yordy has a vision for churches engaging holistically in ecological discipleship. She begins her discourse in *Green Witness* by briefly describing a fantasy congregation that fully integrates earth-friendly practices into its worship and daily actions. Yordy illustrates her vision by using examples from real churches that are implementing ecological practices. According to her, the greening of the church in North America has been limited because of the ineffectiveness of education, difficulties with real change, powerlessness of leadership, individualism in church life, the magnitude of the environmental crisis, and the hope of technological fixes: "The point is not to make the church a participant in the 'environmental movement,'" she says, "but to make the church more faithful by including the eschatological import of creation in its performance of worship, ... a 'way' of life that praises and witnesses to Father Son, and Holy Spirit" (161).

The author develops her thesis around the need for the church to

renew its understanding of the eschaton – “the fulfillment of God’s promises for creation” (2). The church is to be a witness to the coming Kingdom of Heaven, the result of Christ’s redemption of all of creation. Christians are not to be managers trying to fix the environmental crisis but witnesses of Christ’s relationship to creation through faithful ecological practice.

Yordy critiques the positions of three eco-theologians – Larry Rasmussen, Catherine Keller, and Rosemary Radford Ruether – by observing that they reject several central doctrines of Christian eschatology. She notes the losses that occur when eschatology does not include Jesus, the sovereignty of God, or the concept of an afterlife. She writes that our practices today in relation to ecology witness to our belief in the fullness of the Kingdom of God. The doctrine of creation should be examined from an eschatological framework, says the author; God’s future view of redeemed creation is what makes the Christian creation story distinct from views found in the “common creation story.”

Yordy carefully states that it is God’s love that generated the universe (57), and proceeds with helpful insights into the concepts of God creating the world out of nothing, the Trinitarian role in creation, the goodness of creation, and the “Fall.” Christian ethics is described as discipleship – where the lives of Christ’s followers witness to the Kingdom through worship, action, and character. Yordy provides stimulating insights into eco-discipleship by probing key characteristics of the Kingdom: peace, justice, abundance, righteousness, and communion with God. The resulting praxis is summarized well by her statement that “Christians’ witness to the Kingdom is not simply watching, but pointing toward God’s gracious creating and redeeming activity with the activity of their own lives” (112).

Yordy sees the church serving as a “demonstration plot” for ecological discipleship. She develops the view that everything the church practices – here specifically its relation to the earth – should witness to Christ’s coming redemption of all creation. It is from within community that the witness and practice will best occur. The concluding concept centers on the ecological virtue, patience. Yordy lifts it up as a key virtue while not excluding other much-needed virtues. She says it is our impatience that plays a major factor in our dominance over the natural world. But patience is woven into the web of the universe and reflects the character of God. “Part of the human need

for patience (as well as other virtues) is the imperative for humans to realign themselves with the patient character of God's creation" (155). From this framework Yordy calls us to practice eco-discipleship.

The author develops logical arguments throughout her discourse, though at points the writing style recalls the doctoral dissertation on which the book is based. The work is in the frame of a constructive theology, and it leans heavily on arguments between various theological and philosophical positions. Yordy formulates her thesis based on a broad array of authors along with insights of her own.

This volume would serve well as the basis for serious discussion by adults interested in articulating a biblical and theological response to today's environmental crisis, but it doesn't include an extensive list of examples of creation care actions. (It would also be helpful if there were an index in addition to the bibliography.) Upper-level college students in environmental studies would benefit from exploring the intersection between faith and ecological praxis found in this text.

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Conrad L. Kanagy. *Road Signs on the Journey: A Profile of Mennonite Church USA*. Waterloo, ON: Herald, 2007.

Conrad Kanagy's profile of Mennonite Church USA is a good addition to earlier similar studies of Mennonites in 1972 and 1989.<sup>1</sup> Preferring biblical to sociological categories of analysis, Kanagy presents the data as "road signs and guideposts" in order to help Mennonites find their social, political, spiritual, and theological location, and to help Mennonite churches consider the direction of their further "journey toward the reign of God" (24).

The first two chapters set a reading of the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah as the base for Kanagy's data analysis. These chapters test the

data for evidence of a *missional* intention and vision in Mennonite church life. Succeeding chapters profile Mennonite Church USA; explore church structure, polity and self-understanding; test consistency and orthodoxy of belief and ritual; survey management of resources; review recent disruptions of Mennonite “Christendom”; and assess the relation between the church and greater society. The author’s summary conclusion shares the testimony of respondents as they reflect on the quality of congregational life and challenge the church toward greater missional identity and activity.

Kanagy’s prognosis for Mennonite Church USA is disquieting yet hopeful. While the author predicts a “bleak future” (57), among “Racial/Ethnic Mennonites” he discovered signs of growth and renewal. Other signs of hope include relatively high rates of giving, marital stability, strong beliefs about Jesus, active personal piety, and greater support of women in ministry (183ff.).

At least two issues emerge that deserve greater discussion and thought. The first is how to refer to the diversity of ethnic and racial groups comprising Mennonite Church USA. Throughout the report Kanagy uses the generic term “Racial/Ethnic” to refer to African-American, Hispanic/Latino, diverse Asian, and various Native American congregations and members. Yet “Racial/Ethnic” would also apply to the various Caucasian groups comprising the church. One of the challenges in working out the tension between the margin and middle of Mennonite church has to do with how we refer to one another. The tendency to reduce our ethnic diversity to one generic category, or an implicit us/them polarity, is a pernicious problem with no easy solution.

This problem is endemic to descriptive sociological summaries, but even more, it bespeaks the difficulty that Mennonite church organizations have in dealing with an ethnic diversity that refuses to be ‘settled.’ I wonder if this reflects the broader influence of theories of assimilation as opposed to theories of ethnic pluralism in the American context. It seems to me that one of the significant challenges in combatting racism in the church is to celebrate our chaotic ethnicity in all its glorious detail. This will demand imaginative justice in reconfiguring current structures of privilege. Our commitment to such justice will help us find better, more expressive, language with which to understand the multi-ethnic fullness of Mennonite Church USA.

The second challenge concerns Kanagy's exile hypothesis. This hypothesis interprets the changes Mennonites have undergone as assimilation to a broader society; that is, that Mennonites as exiles in American culture and society are losing their true identity and becoming more like their host society. This interpretation might be more cogent if Kanagy had presented comparative data from a larger control group than conservative Protestants (171). Increased levels of education, wealth, professional vocation, and urban living, together with changes in various beliefs, support "the argument that Mennonites are becoming more conforming to the values and attitudes of the larger society" (170, 171). However, Anabaptism has looked more educated and urban before.<sup>2</sup>

Putting a slight twist on Kanagy's question of exile, the data may be suggesting that Mennonites are finally returning from an almost 200-year exile in rural America. The changes Kanagy traces may be instances of increased biblical fidelity. Engagement with surrounding society, however messy that might be, could be a truer expression of Anabaptist peoplehood than the isolationist posture of most recent memory.

It may be necessary to resist and even critique assimilation theories based on the deeper resonance between Mennonites and various values of American society and culture, such as freedom of religion, freedom of conscience, and participatory governance of group life. The isolationist interpretation of Mennonite life from the 16th through the 18th centuries has had something of a privileged status<sup>3</sup> and may need to give way to a more socially engaged and integrated understanding of Mennonite life as normative.

This may be why Kanagy is so firmly convinced that the future of Mennonite Church USA lies with congregations comprising various minority racial and ethnic groups. Indeed, it may be impossible to find future vitality in the church without following such leadership into social engagement. For observing these provocative issues in such a way as to raise further discussion of the future of Mennonite communities, we can be grateful to Kanagy for an insightful analysis of Mennonite Church USA.



**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> J. Howard Kaufmann and Leland Harder, *Anabaptists: Four Centuries Later* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1975). J. Howard Kaufmann and Leo Driedger, *The Mennonite Mosaic: Identity and Modernization* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Richard K. MacMaster, *Land, Piety, Peoplehood, The Establishment of Mennonite Communities in America, 1683-1790* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1985), 138.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

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Earl Zimmerman. *Practicing the Politics of Jesus: The Origin and Significance of John Howard Yoder's Social Ethics*. Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2007.

Interest in the theological ethics of John Howard Yoder shows no signs of slowing down. I am delighted – and sometimes amazed – at the level of scholarly interest in Yoder's writings today. *Practicing the Politics of Jesus: The Origin and Significance of John Howard Yoder's Social Ethics* is composed of seven chapters. The first six attempt to identify what shaped Yoder in ways that gave rise to his most influential book, *The Politics of Jesus*. The last chapter, which seems rather artificially connected to the others, provides Earl Zimmerman with an opportunity to state the significance of “the politics of Jesus,” as he sees it, for peace-building efforts today.

This book's unique contribution is that it offers the fullest account to date of the influences on Yoder during the years he was in Western Europe (1949-1958). Having named some of the North American Mennonite influences, the book attributes most of the “background” to his *Politics* to these European influences.

Zimmerman is right to say that the realities of post-World War II Europe were quite significant for the young Yoder, who arrived in France in April 1949 to serve orphans and help French Mennonites recover their

commitment to pacifism. And undoubtedly the debates about war in which he engaged during those years were shaped by memories of Nazism and the horrors of the war.

The author's discussion of Barth's influence on Yoder is framed differently from that of Craig Carter [see his *The Politics of the Cross*]. My sense is that Carter knows Barth's thought better than Zimmerman does. But probably the careful examination of Yoder in light of his studies with Barth (as compared to other influences) will continue to generate discussion and debate. Zimmerman has certainly provided a fuller account of NT scholar Oscar Cullmann's influence on Yoder than has been done before. This is helpful.

The chapter on Yoder's doctoral work on sixteenth-century Anabaptism is also the fullest summary we have of that work and its connections to his *Politics of Jesus*, although it would have had greater significance before the recent publication of an English translation of Yoder's dissertation. But Zimmerman's work will help those who haven't noticed these connections before to see them now. We are fortunate with *The Politics of Jesus* because, aside from his doctoral work, it is Yoder's most heavily footnoted book. However, in addition to his wide reading and formal teachers, it is important to say, as Zimmerman does, that *Politics* did not simply emerge from a study. According to accounts from French Mennonites, young Yoder empathized with those who had lived through several years of Nazi invasions.

Zimmerman could also have included Yoder's exposure to Latin America. In the mid-'60s and again when working on *Politics*, Yoder spent time with Latin American Christians living in the midst of revolution. According to theologians Samuel Escobar and René Padilla, he empathized deeply with them while delivering timely, biblical messages (thus Yoder's being made an honorary member of the Latin American Theological Fraternity).

One might get the impression that Yoder did not engage Reinhold Niebuhr's writings nearly as seriously as, say, J. Lawrence Burkholder (26, 57ff, 107). That impression would be wrong. While in high school, Yoder took a course with a former student of Niebuhr's at the College of Wooster, in which Niebuhr himself lectured once. Approximately fifteen years later, Yoder did significant research on Niebuhr at the University of Basel before

he gave his first lecture on him, and that produced an article. Finally, years later, Yoder wrote two substantial lectures on Niebuhr that were included in the informally published *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace and Revolution: A Companion to Bainton* (soon to be formally published).

Again, one could get the wrong impression from the statement that Yoder “basically depended on Roland Bainton’s historical survey of Christian attitudes toward war and peace for his historical scheme” regarding the “Constantinian shift” (198). Yoder was an historical theologian. For many years he taught courses surveying the history of Christian attitudes toward war, peace, and revolution; he read numerous and varied primary and secondary sources germane to those lectures. He had therefore studied relevant sources well before publishing the main essay articulating his claims.

I don’t have space to discuss issues raised in the last two chapters of summary and interpretation for contemporary peace-building. Here serious questions emerge regarding contemporary appropriations of Yoder.

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Amy Laura Hall. *Conceiving Parenthood: American Protestantism and the Spirit of Reproduction*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.

Churchly discussions of reproductive bioethics usually take place in the third person. The major actors – those advocating for so-called “designer babies” or for prenatal testing designed to enable selective termination of pregnancies – remain distinct from *us*, the narrators, who can respond from a distance and with disgust. Such conversations also usually occur in the future tense, in anticipation of a brave new world in which parents shop for their unborn child’s hair color, IQ, and personality type.

Yet for readers with any connection to middle-class, mainline Protestantism, Christian ethicist Amy Laura Hall’s new book requires a shift

from third person to first and from future tense to past. Her study requires readers to ask not “What will *they* come up with *next*?” but “How have *we* contributed to the ethos that has engendered such technologies?”

Hall’s wide-ranging survey of 20th-century Protestant ideas about family, social status, and scientific innovation suggests that the seeds of troubling technologies were sown closer to our ecclesial home than many Christians like to admit. As she writes, “a tradition that had within it the possibility of leveling all believers as orphaned and gratuitously adopted kin came instead to baptize a culture of carefully delineated, racially encoded domesticity” (10). By uncritically blessing both scientific advancement and an idealized portrait of the nuclear family, Hall claims, 20th-century Protestantism set the stage for technologies that would enable aspiring American parents to engineer the perfect child.

The “germ-free home” stands at the center of Hall’s first chapter, which mines mid-century issues of *Parents* magazine and its Methodist cognate, *Together*. The war on germs, made possible by products like Lysol, sedimented racial and class differences between the “hygienic” families of the assumed readers and *other* people’s children.

The author’s second chapter looks at how the marketing of infant formula and baby food encouraged parents to shift their trust from informally and familiarly transmitted know-how to dictates of the medical establishment. This chapter’s examination of the bizarre “Baby-Incubators—With Living Babies!” exhibit at the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago in 1933-34, which allowed visitors to view premature infants struggling for survival inside oven-like incubators, drives home the point that Americans were beginning to employ a technological gaze to a macabre extent.

Hall turns in the third chapter to the eugenics movement in the United States, which was endorsed by many progressive Protestants. She counters the prevailing idea that the American movement withered as the horrors of Nazi-era eugenics became public knowledge. Instead, she suggests, “there are links between current hopes for genius and past attempts to vaccinate the social body against the menace of poverty, disability, and deviance” (217). Hall’s final chapter moves into current bioethical debates by tracing connections between the promises of the atomic age and the claims of the current genomic revolution.

The narrative throughout *Conceiving Parenthood* is provocative and thorough. The book teems with illustrations and advertisements from magazines from the last century and this one, and all are accompanied by painstakingly close readings. At times, however, the contour of Hall's argument buckles under the weight of the evidence she presents; she seems unwilling to weigh, rank, and especially discard data that distracts from the trajectory of her main point. Unfortunately, chapters averaging 100 pages each will likely intimidate some readers who otherwise would benefit from her analysis.

The author's voice alternates between the scholarly, the pastoral, and the autobiographical. Sometimes the shift can be jarring, although none of the voices by itself would have been up to the great task Hall sets for herself. Calling herself a pro-life feminist, Hall moves beyond historical investigation and critical analysis to pastoral and prophetic challenge. "I do indeed target for moral interrogation women like myself," she writes, "for our complicity in the narrations that render other women's wombs as prodigal" (400). Hall takes her call to action beyond protesting the eugenic whiff of some modern reproductive technologies and questioning the "meticulously planned procreation" of the elite classes. She suggests a much broader program of compassionate valuing of those who, for whatever reason, are deemed outside the realm of "normal."

Anabaptist readers will find much resonance with this book, especially with its call to resist market-driven definitions of what – and who – constitutes a productive life.

The challenge for Christian parents today, Hall says, is "to see the children in their homes, neighborhoods, and churches as unqualified gifts rather than projects, to identify 'downward' rather than to climb, and to allow their strategically protected and planned lives to become entangled in the needs of families and children judged to be at risk and behind the curve" (250).

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Donald Capps. *Jesus, the Village Psychiatrist*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2008.

Early in this book Donald Capps describes the behavior of a squirrel darting across a busy street, then suddenly freezing midway and racing back, only to dart again. He calls this a “living parable” (xv) and says we are intrigued because we see ourselves in the squirrel’s dilemma. I couldn’t agree more. In fact, I felt like that squirrel as I was reading this volume, at times running quickly to reach what I hoped was food for thought, and then retreating swiftly as the author’s beliefs and mine clashed.

I started the book intrigued by the title, only to freeze in the introduction at comments such as these: people with mental illnesses are “doing it to themselves” (xii), mental illnesses are “a form of coping and ... therefore typical ... today” (xii), and “the methods which Jesus employed are congruent ... with methods ... demonstrably effective ... today” (xxv). These statements portend what becomes clear in the rest of the book. Capps is a believer in Freudian psychoanalysis, a school of therapy formulated by Sigmund Freud in the late 1800s and popular in the US in the mid-1900s. It treats patients with psychotherapy in the belief that insight into conflicts which precede the illness will result in healing.

That paradigm of mental illness is rejected or at least highly suspect in the field of modern psychiatry. With the increasing use of brain scans and molecular research, psychiatry is moving in a biological direction in which mental illnesses are seen as dysfunctional states of the normal brain. Psychoanalysis has not proven effective in most mental illnesses.

Despite my momentary freeze I dashed on. The book is short, only 131 pages, and is divided into two parts. Part I is an academic explanation of psychoanalytic terms such as conversion and hysteria, and Part II is an analysis of seven cases of Jesus’ healing. The cases (two paralyzed men, two blind men, the demon-possessed boy, Jairus’s daughter, and the hemorrhaging woman) are used to illustrate Capps’s thesis that Jesus did not use magic to heal medical illnesses but employed therapeutic techniques to heal psychosomatic illnesses. Full understanding of Part I requires some prior knowledge of and belief in psychoanalytic principles, and thus may not be of interest to the general audience that Capps targets in his introduction. Part

2 may be easier for general readers but still requires some background.

It was surprising to me that Capps uses a blend of psychoanalytic descriptions and more modern diagnostic criteria from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (the “DSM,” with DSM IV being the fourth version, published in 1994). I was in psychiatric residency in the late 1970s when the first draft of the DSM was published and thus my training focused heavily on it. The DSM was known to be an attempt to describe conditions objectively, replacing the psychoanalytic model of mental illness that theorizes about etiology or cause.

Capps’s review of the minute details of diagnostic criteria of conversion disorder, factitious disorder, and somatization disorder from DSM IV was difficult to read through. His attempt to apply them to persons who lived 2000 years ago and whom the Bible describes only in barest detail was simply perplexing. Reading the cases, I found myself skimming through the academic material to get to the insights about Jesus. This is where I found the book provocative; for short periods I actually enjoyed myself, not feeling like a squirrel at all. Capps’s suggestion that Jesus did not use supernatural powers to cure people but actually listened to them challenged me to stop discounting Jesus’ healing stories as easy for him because he was divine.

Capps’s insights regarding the healing of Jairus’s daughter are excellent. For example, he points out that Jairus’s daughter was twelve, thus on the cusp of marriageability, representing to her father an opportunity to increase his wealth by marrying her off well. The author’s thoughts on Jesus’ understanding of the social context of illnesses and the implications of wellness are tantalizing but too brief. Each time I would begin thinking “Now he’s getting somewhere,” the chapter would end.

I finished the book hungering for more. Completing the analogy of the squirrel, I had braved all the academic traffic, only to find that the delectable pile of insightful spiritual nuts I was hoping for was small.

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Chris K. Huebner. *A Precarious Peace*. Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2006.

One realizes quickly upon reading *A Precarious Peace* that a desire for a solid thesis argued with clean, crisp, logical warrants and brought “together into some final programmatic statement of a position” (29) will be entirely frustrated. No last word can be given because words and positions, no less than politics and power, are precarious for those in the Christian community (58).

The precariousness that Chris K. Huebner places at the center of his Yoderian study of Mennonite theology, knowledge, and identity de-centers any attempt to offer a last word. This is a book whose project is “disestablishing, disowning, dislocating” (23) without reconstructing its subject theoretically. As such there is no argument that Huebner could be criticized for not showing adequately. He has promised not to provide an account of what peace *is*, and no one account of peace is given here. Instead, in a random sampling, there are stories about Alzheimer’s, Atom Egoyan’s films, friendship, speed, and Zizek.

The argument – or, as Huebner says, “common theme” (30) – is simply that peace is characterized by being precarious. For peace to be anything else would require a coercive intervention. Peace comes to us as a gift, given by Christ, and like all gifts it is both radically ours and out of our control.

While the political and ecclesiological ramifications of Yoder’s vision have been noticed, applied, and extended in various contexts, the epistemological questions that his investigations suggest have drawn less attention. This is what Huebner is about in this volume. I particularly like the description of his approach: “Let us group this collection of impulses together under the heading of standard epistemology.... What follows ... is a series of gestures toward a counter-epistemology that arises from the church’s confession that Christ is the truth. Here truth will appear to be unsettled rather than settled.... It arises from an excessive economy of gift, and thus it exists as a seemingly unnecessary and unwarranted donation” (133-34).

This language of gift gives much of Huebner’s discussion a “spatial” feel. To elaborate his conception of peace he invokes words like diaspora, settled, patience, gesture, scattered, speed, or territory. I am strongly impressed by how Huebner is able to move, and to move me, in space and



time throughout this book. The discussion has an embodiedness missing from much of the theological endeavor.

The book's biggest strength is the reworking of our perceptions, actions, emotions, and disposition towards precariousness. I teach Christian ethics at a small Mennonite liberal arts institution to students who are mostly not convinced pacifists in either action or epistemology. I find this an enormously difficult and somewhat stressful task. This is not surprising, because many of them are just beginning their education in the ethos of Christian community. While reading this book I noticed that in class my statements were clearer, my mode of engagement more patient and less anxious, and my answers more characterized by the open-endedness that characterizes the gift.

Huebner has written a course of therapy for those who believe in peace that will, if we let it, deepen our engagement with peace, make us more comfortable with its precariousness, and orient us towards the Christ who gives us this peace. Huebner skillfully calls into question our assumptions. Some debates evaporate under his critique, as in a chapter on Milbank and Barth called "Can a Gift be Commanded?" Others condense as the author brings together questions not typically asked at the same time, as in a chapter where he employs contemporary philosophers and cultural critics to show how martyrdom shapes the gift of peace.

I close with questions offered in response to a quotation at the end of a wonderful chapter on [Paul] Virilo and Yoder: "But because this good news involves a breaking of the cycle of violence that includes the renunciation of logistical effectiveness and possessive sovereignty, it can *only* be offered as a gift whose reception cannot be guaranteed or enforced" (130, emphasis mine). Here Huebner seems to want to guarantee a certain shape to peace. But if peace is always precarious, is it also true that only peace is precarious? Isn't there also precariousness to the exercise of power, the attempt to govern, or the attempt to communicate in the language of culture and not only gospel? Can we not recognize peace and precariousness even when they occur (miraculously) in spite of force, clumsy intervention, or misguided attempts to control? Or must peace, in order to remain precarious, guard against alliances threatening that precariousness?

At points Huebner eagerly recognizes that those practicing peace are also always implicated in the violent exercise of power (see chapters

8 and 12). But at other points the shape of the peace he avers seems overdetermined by the demand of precariousness. Isn't a truly precarious peace also willing to explore the possibility of remaining settled, existing in a happy exchange, or flourishing for a moment in effectiveness?

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Tripp York. *The Purple Crown: The Politics of Martyrdom*. Scottsdale: Herald, 2007.

*The Purple Crown: The Politics of Martyrdom* engages questions that have preoccupied Anabaptists for centuries: What is the appropriate posture of peace-loving Christians in a violent world? Should Christians be political?

As a work of historical theology, this book will appeal most to theologians and church historians. But York's prose, if repetitive at times, is accessible (and gender inclusive). Anyone who finds the subject matter compelling can approach this study. Some will find it inspiring; others will find it most valuable as a representative piece of a particular kind of Christian dogma. At the least, it will provoke passionate conversation.

According to York, Christians must be politically active earthly citizens, but with an important caveat: their political posture is one of exile. They are here on earth to represent heaven. Thus "martyrdom is *the* political act because it represents the ultimate imitation of Christ, signifying a life lived in obedience to, and participation in, the triune God" (23).

Beginning with a discussion of the early Christian martyrs under Rome, York interprets martyrdom as a public performance that bears witness to the triumph of Christ through a means superior to rhetoric or argument. Indeed, martyrdom is a cosmic battle "between God's people and God's enemies"

(29-30). From the early Christians, the author moves to a discussion of the 16th-century Anabaptist martyrs, and finishes with a biography of martyred Salvadoran archbishop Oscar Romero that is likely to be engaging even for those who dislike York's theology.

York deserves much credit for writing one of the more ecumenical martyrdom studies available from a Mennonite source. He focuses always on the broader Christian context and resists Anabaptist tribalism. But readers who value interfaith cooperation may find his work problematic.

*The Purple Crown* is peppered with references to "the people of God," and while York acknowledges that this group is hard to define, he remains rigid in his Christian understanding of the phrase. "Only where the triune God is worshipped can there be true sociality," he asserts (110). This claim is typical of York's language throughout. He consistently dismisses any social or political reality outside of Christianity by labeling it "false," an ideological tactic that adds no meat to his arguments. *The Purple Crown* is hardly the first theological work to claim that Christianity is inherently political by virtue of its alleged superiority to everything else, and if York is to be faulted for excessive reliance on a "church" vs. "world" binary, it must be said that he did not invent it. Still, he does little to make it fresh.

The author includes almost no discussion of contemporary politics or how Christians might shoulder their accountability in a modern democracy. Rather, government is simply "the state," an ill-defined monolith that kills and oppresses Christians. Christians are political because as followers of Christ they stand in opposition to the state, even unto death. This circular argument is the heart of *The Purple Crown*, thereby confining the book's appeal to those who share York's dualistic worldview.

York comes closest to undermining his own dualism in his chapter on 16th-century Europe – the strongest in the book – in which he discusses with admirable nuance how battles over semantics led Christians to kill one another. Recognizing the difficulty of resolving these doctrinal issues, York points us instead to the martyrdoms; such performances "give us something by which we can discern which acts are good, beautiful, and true. Maybe then it is possible to distinguish the difference between a pseudo-politics located in earthly regimes and an authentic politics constituted by nothing other than the broken yet risen body of Christ" (97).

The definition of “politics” is contested territory, and my frustration with York’s theocratic version may reveal little beyond my own partisanship. Nonetheless, the labels “pseudo-politics” and “authentic politics” strike me as ironically self-defeating. Nothing is more endemic to the politics of “earthly regimes” than claims of purity and authenticity that serve to discredit some peoples while elevating others to positions of supposed greatness. “The visible church is important not just so the elect can know each other, but because God has promised not to leave the world without a witness to God,” York continues; “This is the sort of gift that exposes false cities from the true city in an effort to bring all cities under the rule of Christ” (98).

This crusader-like language leaves us no room to approach non-Christians with any humility. Despite its nonviolent intent, I doubt York’s chauvinist theology will bring us closer to the “peace of the earthly city.”

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Hans Küng. *The Beginning of All Things: Science and Religion*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007.

Hans Küng has put together in *The Beginning of All Things* a remarkable synthesis of philosophical, theological, and scientific reasoning about our universe. He argues that religious views of the universe (understood as symbolic expressions of the meaning of this reality) are compatible with scientific explanations.

This does not mean that science proves theology or that theology undergirds scientific exploration, but that each has its own distinctive procedure for understanding reality. Küng believes this reality is more than what science can explain, which is precisely why we need religion in order to understand reality fully. He emphasizes the limits of scientific knowledge. "If science is to remain faithful to its method," he says, "it may not extend its judgment beyond the horizon of experience" (52). He outlines the way cosmology cannot examine the constraints of the cosmos in which we find ourselves.

The author acknowledges that science has its own procedures that give reliable and comprehensive knowledge about the world around us. But he goes further and defines physics as follows: "Its theories and models are not literal descriptions of reality at the atomic level (naive realism) but are symbolic and selective attempts that depict the structure of the world" (8). By stressing the symbolic character of scientific explanations, Küng attempts to gain a foothold for religious explanations of the same reality. One wonders if the parallel can be drawn too closely. Surely the symbolic nature of religious explanations differs from the highly mathematical and theoretical symbols of science, which are tested by experimental data and cause/effect analysis.

In his discussion of creation, Küng stresses the symbolic character of the creation narratives of the Hebrew Bible and repudiates any attempt to gain scientific knowledge from them. However, he feels justified in interpreting evolution in religious terms, as a creation by the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition. He tries to use the fine-tuning of the cosmological constants to suggest the intelligent design of the universe. This argument is tempting to theologians, but if the universe has evolved to produce life, the

constants of the universe are merely those that we experience. It is impossible to extrapolate to other possible universes, since we have no experience of any alternatives.

Küng proposes that scientists consider God as a hypothesis. Here it seems to me that he is stepping beyond his own wise thesis that science and religion should retain separate procedures. He does acknowledge that there is no deductive or inductive proof of God. Rather, he insists on a practical and holistic rational approach to God (including the whole experience of the human being, especially subjective awareness). Küng argues that the human being is more than the body, more than brain processes, and still a mystery to neurologists. This ignorance, however, is used as a logical leap towards the “mystery” of the cosmos, which is too easily filled by the idea of God as the primal ground of our existence.

In the plethora of books about science and religion, this one stands out as more comprehensive than most because it puts the discussion in the context of a philosophical argument about reality and the way we perceive it. Küng relies on a depiction of theology as a metaphysical principle that goes beyond the limits of scientific theories. He is too well-versed in the global religions to describe this as a necessary leap and instead depicts it as a choice. But such a choice would need to be justified in comparison with other religious or metaphysical explanations of the ultimate reality. It would be interesting to see Küng use his wide knowledge of other religions to compare the various religious cosmologies with current scientific descriptions of the origins of the universe and life.

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Robert W. Brimlow, *What About Hitler? Wrestling with Jesus' Call to Nonviolence in an Evil World*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006.

In *What About Hitler?* Robert Brimlow devotes considerable time to a critique of the Just War tradition. He wrestles vigorously with George Orwell's critique of pacifism; he argues pointedly that the Christian's first concern must be to obey Jesus, not to escape death or be successful according to some short-term definition. And he points out effectively that rejecting killing makes sense only if it is part of a personal and communal lifestyle committed to peacemaking.

There is a good deal in this book that is helpful. Brimlow brings a philosopher's sharp mind to his extensive critique of the Just War tradition. I will not try to decide here whether his critique is finally successful, but his sophisticated objections to central arguments of important Just War advocates (St. Augustine, Michael Walzer, Jean Bethke Elshtain) offer challenges that no Just War advocate should ignore. "Just war theory contradicts itself in that it sanctions the killing of innocents, which it at the same time prohibits. In addition, just war theory can also be used effectively to justify all wars" (105).

Brimlow is surely right that pacifism is impossible unless it is rooted in Christian community and prayer, and that it has no integrity unless it is part of a personal and communal lifestyle that not only rejects violence but actively engages in works of compassion and mercy toward the poor and neglected.

That said, I must confess that I found the book inadequate, disappointing, and occasionally annoying. The rambling Scriptural meditations at the beginning of each chapter were not very helpful, at least not for me. The argument that Just War theory validates Osama bin Laden as much as it does military resistance to terrorism was not convincing. Equally unsatisfactory was Brimlow's lengthy argument (139-46) that Jesus was a failure. Even his final chapter arguing for the importance of a personal and communal lifestyle of peacemaking was inadequate. Jesus called for works of mercy – feeding the hungry, caring for the homeless and naked, giving alms to the poor. That is all good and true. But what about going beyond charity to understanding the structural causes of poverty and injustice

and working vigorously to overcome institutional injustice? What about activist kinds of peacemaking – whether Victim-Offender Reconciliation Programs, sophisticated mediation efforts bringing together warring parties, or Christian Peacemaker Teams?

Most important, Brimlow’s answer to the basic question, “What About Hitler?” is woefully inadequate. He opens Chapter 7 (“The Christian Response”) with the comment that “it is time for me to respond to the Hitler question.” His answer takes three paragraphs. Just one page. He had already said near the beginning that his answer to this question is absurd (10). I think that answer is fundamentally inadequate. It is certainly true that the Christian pacifist believes that she must follow Jesus, even when this leads to death. Brimlow makes the point very well. If Jesus is God become flesh, if God raised Jesus from the dead on the third day, then it simply will not do to say, “Sorry, Jesus, your ideas do not work in a world of Hitlers and Osama bin Ladens.”

We must follow Jesus even when that means death. But there is a lot more to be said to make this position less implausible than Brimlow does. It is wrong and misleading to label it “absurd.” If Jesus is the Incarnate God who announced the inauguration of the Messianic kingdom of peace and justice, called his disciples to start living in that kingdom now, and promised to return to complete the victory over evil, then it makes sense to obey his call to nonviolence now, even when Hitlers still stalk the earth. This book does not offer a convincing answer to the question it raises.

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Stanley E. Porter, ed. *Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006.

Drawn from a 2003 colloquium at McMaster Divinity School, this collection of essays tackles how New Testament writers use the Old Testament. An introductory essay by Stanley E. Porter and a concluding scholarly response to the papers by Andreas J. Köstenberger provide a helpful orienting perspective and summation.

Two essays dedicated to general topics introduce the volume. Dennis L. Stamps seeks to clarify terminology, contrasts “author-centered” and “audience-centered” approaches, and describes persuasive rhetoric in the early church period. R. Timothy McLay introduces issues concerning canon and scripture, and identifies “pluriformity” as “an essential characteristic of the Scriptures of the early church” (55).

Michael P. Knowles (Matthew) and Porter (Luke-Acts) both argue that the evangelists’ interpretive perspectives not only center on but derive from Jesus himself. Craig A. Evans (Mark) and Sylvia C. Keesmaat (Ephesians, Colossians, and others) place these documents within the political milieu of the Roman Empire to striking effect. Paul Miller (John) and Kurt Anders Richardson (James) describe the use of OT characters, while James W. Aageson (Romans, Galatians, and others) and Köstenberger (pastorals, Revelation) provide contrasting perspectives on reading epistles.

The range of foci engages the reader, and Köstenberger’s responses prove helpful, providing additional information or a contrasting perspective. His adamant response to Aageson’s paper is particularly striking and underscores significantly divergent methods and assumptions, as well as perspectives on the implications of Paul’s hermeneutics for the contemporary Christian community.

This said, the volume’s overarching author-centered perspective prompts an uncritical assumption of continuity that, in my view, should be reconsidered. Early in the volume Stamps appropriately criticizes the idea that “NT writers use the OT” because it is “anachronistic to speak of the OT when referring to the perspective of the NT writers since the differentiation between old and new had not yet occurred” (11). Though he suggests “Jewish sacred writings” (11) as an improvement, repeated statements in the rest of the volume about how NT writers, and even Jesus himself, use the “OT”

reflect the prominence of such anachronism.

Indeed, the difficulty runs deeper than Stamps suggests. While the writers in this book attempt to uncover the intentions and hermeneutics of Luke, Paul, and even Jesus, these biblical figures neither read an OT (which implies a NT) nor consciously wrote Scripture (they sought to interpret the one(s) they had). Even the common designation “NT writers” proves historically anachronistic; the most that can accurately be said is that these people wrote what later *became* the NT. More attention to how Scripture is designated within the NT would have raised this issue and strengthened the volume.

The book’s orientation leaves potentially significant *discontinuities* unexplored. For instance, what should we make of Paul’s distinction between his own opinion and elements “from the LORD,” once his writing becomes part of a NT? Should our reading of his epistles be affected by this transformation into scripture, a shift that transcends his “original intent”? The description of “Paul’s shorter epistles” as “rang[ing] from Paul’s supposedly earliest epistle to those seemingly written so late that Paul was dead when he composed them” (182) suggests further difficulties with an exclusively author-centered approach. What of the shift from Luke’s two-volume work (Luke-Acts) to a “gospel” and a non-“gospel” separated by John, or the Emmaus story’s claim that the disciples see Jesus in “the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms” only through an impromptu Bible study led by the *risen* Lord? Unfortunately these writers do not address such discontinuities at historical, literary, and canonical levels.

A collection of essays has the benefit of various perspectives and the drawback of limited flow. The papers here are well written, engaging, and accessible for interested people with some background in the subject matter. While most essays do not focus on implications for contemporary interpretation, individual chapters would be helpful as supplements or orientation for studying a specific NT book. Several essays also situate themselves within broader scholarship, which proves particularly beneficial for the non-specialist.

Overall, these writers do an admirable job of tackling a significant, complex issue. However, although the volume explores how “NT writers used the OT,” it proves less satisfying for “Hearing the OT in the NT.”

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While the latter implies the perspective of a two-testament Scripture, most essays here seek to uncover the *pre*-NT use of Scripture (not OT!) by writers of what later became the NT. Thus, this volume serves an author-centered approach well, but it does not address discontinuity in the transformation from “authorial writings” to Christian Scripture.

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Stanley Hauerwas and Romand Coles. *Christianity, Democracy and the Radical Ordinary: Conversations between a Radical Democrat and a Christian*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2007.

It is not only Christians who find difficult the practice of engaging the world in constructive ways; not just believing that engagement should happen, but engaging the complicated issues of how to proceed, occupies all kinds of people. In this volume we observe a Christian theologian (Stanley Hauerwas) and a political theorist who is not Christian (Romand Coles) grapple with such issues in ways that try to think about the right questions and display fruitful practices within a mutual pursuit of the transformation and development of a flourishing political imagination.

The purpose of this collection of essays, letters, lectures, and conversation is to exhibit a politics that refuses to let death dominate our lives, resists fear, and seeks to uncover the violence at the heart of liberal political doctrine. Not only does this book discuss such matters, it seeks to display some of the very practices it brings into view. Practices central to this ongoing conversation include attention, engagement, vulnerability, receptive patience, tending, “microdispositions” and “micropractices,” waiting, and gentleness. Such practices, patiently pursued, might make up a life that is political, claim the authors, yet not beholden to conventional politics.

We witness Coles and Hauerwas engage each other as well as a vast array of interlocutors in an attempt to cultivate a politics of “wild patience”: Sheldon Wolin, Cornell West, Ella Baker, John Howard Yoder, Will Campbell, Rowan Williams, Jean Vanier, Samuel Wells, and Gregory of Nanzianzus. Both authors here are exemplary in their own openness and vulnerability to learning from traditions outside their own, and Coles especially so as he provides insightful readings of a number of Christian theological voices.

Nonetheless, in the midst of their respectful and deep mutual engagement, Hauerwas and Coles exhibit at times a certain wariness in relation to each other. Hauerwas worries that radical democracy will be an end in itself for which God becomes an afterthought, a superfluous placeholder, domesticated and tamed in service of some other agenda. But he also worries that Christians do something very similar when they mistake the Christian faith for a garden variety of humanism. Coles, on the other hand, is concerned that Christian jealousy regarding Jesus may prevent proper vulnerability and underwrite a kind of territoriality. He further believes that no matter how sincere the upside-down practices of the church may be, these kinds of practices have a way of turning themselves right side up – and without appropriate discernment on the part of the church.

I have my own worries. Sometimes it feels as though Coles comes close to equating the insurgent grassroots political practices of radical democracy with the politics of Jesus. Coles also seems tempted to turn the church and its practices into an instance of radical democracy. Perhaps this is one reason he claims to be so “haunted” by John Howard Yoder, who himself is open to the criticism that he thinks the church’s practices can be translated into the world without loss.

Further, the extended conversation in this volume, while richly informed by a wide variety of interlocutors – political theorists, activists of many kinds, theologians, a number of Mennonite thinkers, and so on – is in the end strangely thin on the Christian exegetical tradition. While we see close, nuanced readings of Wolin, West, Campbell, et al., we search in vain for the same kind of close attention to sustained readings of the Biblical text. This is not to say that the conversation between Coles the radical democrat and Hauerwas the Christian is not informed by biblical ideas. However, I

wonder if Coles's concern for Christian jealousy of Jesus also extends to Christian privileging of the Scriptural text and, if so, what implications this might have for a long-term continuing conversation.

Jeffrey Stout, who in his own effort to revitalize the American democratic tradition often converses with Christian theologians such as Hauerwas, claims that this book gives him hope, since it takes the conversation between Christianity and democracy in a most welcome direction. This book also gives me hope as a Christian, because it seeks to find ways for people to engage in the world that resist the violence and death that have been inscribed deeply into the story of our shared lives. And part of that hopefulness includes paying close attention to practices that can be embodied on a human scale, whether as a radical democrat or a Christian.

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Laura Ruth Yordy. *Green Witness: Ecology, Ethics, and the Kingdom of God*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2008.

Laura Yordy has a vision for churches engaging holistically in ecological discipleship. She begins her discourse in *Green Witness* by briefly describing a fantasy congregation that fully integrates earth-friendly practices into its worship and daily actions. Yordy illustrates her vision by using examples from real churches that are implementing ecological practices. According to her, the greening of the church in North America has been limited because of the ineffectiveness of education, difficulties with real change, powerlessness of leadership, individualism in church life, the magnitude of the environmental crisis, and the hope of technological fixes: "The point is not to make the church a participant in the 'environmental movement,'" she says, "but to make the church more faithful by including the eschatological import of creation in its performance of worship, ... a 'way' of life that praises and witnesses to Father Son, and Holy Spirit" (161).

The author develops her thesis around the need for the church to

renew its understanding of the eschaton – “the fulfillment of God’s promises for creation” (2). The church is to be a witness to the coming Kingdom of Heaven, the result of Christ’s redemption of all of creation. Christians are not to be managers trying to fix the environmental crisis but witnesses of Christ’s relationship to creation through faithful ecological practice.

Yordy critiques the positions of three eco-theologians – Larry Rasmussen, Catherine Keller, and Rosemary Radford Ruether – by observing that they reject several central doctrines of Christian eschatology. She notes the losses that occur when eschatology does not include Jesus, the sovereignty of God, or the concept of an afterlife. She writes that our practices today in relation to ecology witness to our belief in the fullness of the Kingdom of God. The doctrine of creation should be examined from an eschatological framework, says the author; God’s future view of redeemed creation is what makes the Christian creation story distinct from views found in the “common creation story.”

Yordy carefully states that it is God’s love that generated the universe (57), and proceeds with helpful insights into the concepts of God creating the world out of nothing, the Trinitarian role in creation, the goodness of creation, and the “Fall.” Christian ethics is described as discipleship – where the lives of Christ’s followers witness to the Kingdom through worship, action, and character. Yordy provides stimulating insights into eco-discipleship by probing key characteristics of the Kingdom: peace, justice, abundance, righteousness, and communion with God. The resulting praxis is summarized well by her statement that “Christians’ witness to the Kingdom is not simply watching, but pointing toward God’s gracious creating and redeeming activity with the activity of their own lives” (112).

Yordy sees the church serving as a “demonstration plot” for ecological discipleship. She develops the view that everything the church practices – here specifically its relation to the earth – should witness to Christ’s coming redemption of all creation. It is from within community that the witness and practice will best occur. The concluding concept centers on the ecological virtue, patience. Yordy lifts it up as a key virtue while not excluding other much-needed virtues. She says it is our impatience that plays a major factor in our dominance over the natural world. But patience is woven into the web of the universe and reflects the character of God. “Part of the human need

for patience (as well as other virtues) is the imperative for humans to realign themselves with the patient character of God's creation" (155). From this framework Yordy calls us to practice eco-discipleship.

The author develops logical arguments throughout her discourse, though at points the writing style recalls the doctoral dissertation on which the book is based. The work is in the frame of a constructive theology, and it leans heavily on arguments between various theological and philosophical positions. Yordy formulates her thesis based on a broad array of authors along with insights of her own.

This volume would serve well as the basis for serious discussion by adults interested in articulating a biblical and theological response to today's environmental crisis, but it doesn't include an extensive list of examples of creation care actions. (It would also be helpful if there were an index in addition to the bibliography.) Upper-level college students in environmental studies would benefit from exploring the intersection between faith and ecological praxis found in this text.

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Conrad L. Kanagy. *Road Signs on the Journey: A Profile of Mennonite Church USA*. Waterloo, ON: Herald, 2007.

Conrad Kanagy's profile of Mennonite Church USA is a good addition to earlier similar studies of Mennonites in 1972 and 1989.<sup>1</sup> Preferring biblical to sociological categories of analysis, Kanagy presents the data as "road signs and guideposts" in order to help Mennonites find their social, political, spiritual, and theological location, and to help Mennonite churches consider the direction of their further "journey toward the reign of God" (24).

The first two chapters set a reading of the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah as the base for Kanagy's data analysis. These chapters test the

data for evidence of a *missional* intention and vision in Mennonite church life. Succeeding chapters profile Mennonite Church USA; explore church structure, polity and self-understanding; test consistency and orthodoxy of belief and ritual; survey management of resources; review recent disruptions of Mennonite “Christendom”; and assess the relation between the church and greater society. The author’s summary conclusion shares the testimony of respondents as they reflect on the quality of congregational life and challenge the church toward greater missional identity and activity.

Kanagy’s prognosis for Mennonite Church USA is disquieting yet hopeful. While the author predicts a “bleak future” (57), among “Racial/Ethnic Mennonites” he discovered signs of growth and renewal. Other signs of hope include relatively high rates of giving, marital stability, strong beliefs about Jesus, active personal piety, and greater support of women in ministry (183ff.).

At least two issues emerge that deserve greater discussion and thought. The first is how to refer to the diversity of ethnic and racial groups comprising Mennonite Church USA. Throughout the report Kanagy uses the generic term “Racial/Ethnic” to refer to African-American, Hispanic/Latino, diverse Asian, and various Native American congregations and members. Yet “Racial/Ethnic” would also apply to the various Caucasian groups comprising the church. One of the challenges in working out the tension between the margin and middle of Mennonite church has to do with how we refer to one another. The tendency to reduce our ethnic diversity to one generic category, or an implicit us/them polarity, is a pernicious problem with no easy solution.

This problem is endemic to descriptive sociological summaries, but even more, it bespeaks the difficulty that Mennonite church organizations have in dealing with an ethnic diversity that refuses to be ‘settled.’ I wonder if this reflects the broader influence of theories of assimilation as opposed to theories of ethnic pluralism in the American context. It seems to me that one of the significant challenges in combatting racism in the church is to celebrate our chaotic ethnicity in all its glorious detail. This will demand imaginative justice in reconfiguring current structures of privilege. Our commitment to such justice will help us find better, more expressive, language with which to understand the multi-ethnic fullness of Mennonite Church USA.



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The second challenge concerns Kanagy's exile hypothesis. This hypothesis interprets the changes Mennonites have undergone as assimilation to a broader society; that is, that Mennonites as exiles in American culture and society are losing their true identity and becoming more like their host society. This interpretation might be more cogent if Kanagy had presented comparative data from a larger control group than conservative Protestants (171). Increased levels of education, wealth, professional vocation, and urban living, together with changes in various beliefs, support "the argument that Mennonites are becoming more conforming to the values and attitudes of the larger society" (170, 171). However, Anabaptism has looked more educated and urban before.<sup>2</sup>

Putting a slight twist on Kanagy's question of exile, the data may be suggesting that Mennonites are finally returning from an almost 200-year exile in rural America. The changes Kanagy traces may be instances of increased biblical fidelity. Engagement with surrounding society, however messy that might be, could be a truer expression of Anabaptist peoplehood than the isolationist posture of most recent memory.

It may be necessary to resist and even critique assimilation theories based on the deeper resonance between Mennonites and various values of American society and culture, such as freedom of religion, freedom of conscience, and participatory governance of group life. The isolationist interpretation of Mennonite life from the 16th through the 18th centuries has had something of a privileged status<sup>3</sup> and may need to give way to a more socially engaged and integrated understanding of Mennonite life as normative.

This may be why Kanagy is so firmly convinced that the future of Mennonite Church USA lies with congregations comprising various minority racial and ethnic groups. Indeed, it may be impossible to find future vitality in the church without following such leadership into social engagement. For observing these provocative issues in such a way as to raise further discussion of the future of Mennonite communities, we can be grateful to Kanagy for an insightful analysis of Mennonite Church USA.

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> J. Howard Kaufmann and Leland Harder, *Anabaptists: Four Centuries Later* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1975). J. Howard Kaufmann and Leo Driedger, *The Mennonite Mosaic: Identity and Modernization* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Richard K. MacMaster, *Land, Piety, Peoplehood, The Establishment of Mennonite Communities in America, 1683-1790* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1985), 138.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

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Earl Zimmerman. *Practicing the Politics of Jesus: The Origin and Significance of John Howard Yoder's Social Ethics*. Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2007.

Interest in the theological ethics of John Howard Yoder shows no signs of slowing down. I am delighted – and sometimes amazed – at the level of scholarly interest in Yoder's writings today. *Practicing the Politics of Jesus: The Origin and Significance of John Howard Yoder's Social Ethics* is composed of seven chapters. The first six attempt to identify what shaped Yoder in ways that gave rise to his most influential book, *The Politics of Jesus*. The last chapter, which seems rather artificially connected to the others, provides Earl Zimmerman with an opportunity to state the significance of “the politics of Jesus,” as he sees it, for peace-building efforts today.

This book's unique contribution is that it offers the fullest account to date of the influences on Yoder during the years he was in Western Europe (1949-1958). Having named some of the North American Mennonite influences, the book attributes most of the “background” to his *Politics* to these European influences.

Zimmerman is right to say that the realities of post-World War II Europe were quite significant for the young Yoder, who arrived in France in April 1949 to serve orphans and help French Mennonites recover their

commitment to pacifism. And undoubtedly the debates about war in which he engaged during those years were shaped by memories of Nazism and the horrors of the war.

The author's discussion of Barth's influence on Yoder is framed differently from that of Craig Carter [see his *The Politics of the Cross*]. My sense is that Carter knows Barth's thought better than Zimmerman does. But probably the careful examination of Yoder in light of his studies with Barth (as compared to other influences) will continue to generate discussion and debate. Zimmerman has certainly provided a fuller account of NT scholar Oscar Cullmann's influence on Yoder than has been done before. This is helpful.

The chapter on Yoder's doctoral work on sixteenth-century Anabaptism is also the fullest summary we have of that work and its connections to his *Politics of Jesus*, although it would have had greater significance before the recent publication of an English translation of Yoder's dissertation. But Zimmerman's work will help those who haven't noticed these connections before to see them now. We are fortunate with *The Politics of Jesus* because, aside from his doctoral work, it is Yoder's most heavily footnoted book. However, in addition to his wide reading and formal teachers, it is important to say, as Zimmerman does, that *Politics* did not simply emerge from a study. According to accounts from French Mennonites, young Yoder empathized with those who had lived through several years of Nazi invasions.

Zimmerman could also have included Yoder's exposure to Latin America. In the mid-'60s and again when working on *Politics*, Yoder spent time with Latin American Christians living in the midst of revolution. According to theologians Samuel Escobar and René Padilla, he empathized deeply with them while delivering timely, biblical messages (thus Yoder's being made an honorary member of the Latin American Theological Fraternity).

One might get the impression that Yoder did not engage Reinhold Niebuhr's writings nearly as seriously as, say, J. Lawrence Burkholder (26, 57ff, 107). That impression would be wrong. While in high school, Yoder took a course with a former student of Niebuhr's at the College of Wooster, in which Niebuhr himself lectured once. Approximately fifteen years later, Yoder did significant research on Niebuhr at the University of Basel before

he gave his first lecture on him, and that produced an article. Finally, years later, Yoder wrote two substantial lectures on Niebuhr that were included in the informally published *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace and Revolution: A Companion to Bainton* (soon to be formally published).

Again, one could get the wrong impression from the statement that Yoder “basically depended on Roland Bainton’s historical survey of Christian attitudes toward war and peace for his historical scheme” regarding the “Constantinian shift” (198). Yoder was an historical theologian. For many years he taught courses surveying the history of Christian attitudes toward war, peace, and revolution; he read numerous and varied primary and secondary sources germane to those lectures. He had therefore studied relevant sources well before publishing the main essay articulating his claims.

I don’t have space to discuss issues raised in the last two chapters of summary and interpretation for contemporary peace-building. Here serious questions emerge regarding contemporary appropriations of Yoder.

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Amy Laura Hall. *Conceiving Parenthood: American Protestantism and the Spirit of Reproduction*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.

Churchly discussions of reproductive bioethics usually take place in the third person. The major actors – those advocating for so-called “designer babies” or for prenatal testing designed to enable selective termination of pregnancies – remain distinct from *us*, the narrators, who can respond from a distance and with disgust. Such conversations also usually occur in the future tense, in anticipation of a brave new world in which parents shop for their unborn child’s hair color, IQ, and personality type.

Yet for readers with any connection to middle-class, mainline Protestantism, Christian ethicist Amy Laura Hall’s new book requires a shift

from third person to first and from future tense to past. Her study requires readers to ask not “What will *they* come up with *next*?” but “How have *we* contributed to the ethos that has engendered such technologies?”

Hall’s wide-ranging survey of 20th-century Protestant ideas about family, social status, and scientific innovation suggests that the seeds of troubling technologies were sown closer to our ecclesial home than many Christians like to admit. As she writes, “a tradition that had within it the possibility of leveling all believers as orphaned and gratuitously adopted kin came instead to baptize a culture of carefully delineated, racially encoded domesticity” (10). By uncritically blessing both scientific advancement and an idealized portrait of the nuclear family, Hall claims, 20th-century Protestantism set the stage for technologies that would enable aspiring American parents to engineer the perfect child.

The “germ-free home” stands at the center of Hall’s first chapter, which mines mid-century issues of *Parents* magazine and its Methodist cognate, *Together*. The war on germs, made possible by products like Lysol, sedimented racial and class differences between the “hygienic” families of the assumed readers and *other* people’s children.

The author’s second chapter looks at how the marketing of infant formula and baby food encouraged parents to shift their trust from informally and familiarly transmitted know-how to dictates of the medical establishment. This chapter’s examination of the bizarre “Baby-Incubators—With Living Babies!” exhibit at the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago in 1933-34, which allowed visitors to view premature infants struggling for survival inside oven-like incubators, drives home the point that Americans were beginning to employ a technological gaze to a macabre extent.

Hall turns in the third chapter to the eugenics movement in the United States, which was endorsed by many progressive Protestants. She counters the prevailing idea that the American movement withered as the horrors of Nazi-era eugenics became public knowledge. Instead, she suggests, “there are links between current hopes for genius and past attempts to vaccinate the social body against the menace of poverty, disability, and deviance” (217). Hall’s final chapter moves into current bioethical debates by tracing connections between the promises of the atomic age and the claims of the current genomic revolution.

The narrative throughout *Conceiving Parenthood* is provocative and thorough. The book teems with illustrations and advertisements from magazines from the last century and this one, and all are accompanied by painstakingly close readings. At times, however, the contour of Hall's argument buckles under the weight of the evidence she presents; she seems unwilling to weigh, rank, and especially discard data that distracts from the trajectory of her main point. Unfortunately, chapters averaging 100 pages each will likely intimidate some readers who otherwise would benefit from her analysis.

The author's voice alternates between the scholarly, the pastoral, and the autobiographical. Sometimes the shift can be jarring, although none of the voices by itself would have been up to the great task Hall sets for herself. Calling herself a pro-life feminist, Hall moves beyond historical investigation and critical analysis to pastoral and prophetic challenge. "I do indeed target for moral interrogation women like myself," she writes, "for our complicity in the narrations that render other women's wombs as prodigal" (400). Hall takes her call to action beyond protesting the eugenic whiff of some modern reproductive technologies and questioning the "meticulously planned procreation" of the elite classes. She suggests a much broader program of compassionate valuing of those who, for whatever reason, are deemed outside the realm of "normal."

Anabaptist readers will find much resonance with this book, especially with its call to resist market-driven definitions of what – and who – constitutes a productive life.

The challenge for Christian parents today, Hall says, is "to see the children in their homes, neighborhoods, and churches as unqualified gifts rather than projects, to identify 'downward' rather than to climb, and to allow their strategically protected and planned lives to become entangled in the needs of families and children judged to be at risk and behind the curve" (250).

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Donald Capps. *Jesus, the Village Psychiatrist*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2008.

Early in this book Donald Capps describes the behavior of a squirrel darting across a busy street, then suddenly freezing midway and racing back, only to dart again. He calls this a “living parable” (xv) and says we are intrigued because we see ourselves in the squirrel’s dilemma. I couldn’t agree more. In fact, I felt like that squirrel as I was reading this volume, at times running quickly to reach what I hoped was food for thought, and then retreating swiftly as the author’s beliefs and mine clashed.

I started the book intrigued by the title, only to freeze in the introduction at comments such as these: people with mental illnesses are “doing it to themselves” (xii), mental illnesses are “a form of coping and ... therefore typical ... today” (xii), and “the methods which Jesus employed are congruent ... with methods ... demonstrably effective ... today” (xxv). These statements portend what becomes clear in the rest of the book. Capps is a believer in Freudian psychoanalysis, a school of therapy formulated by Sigmund Freud in the late 1800s and popular in the US in the mid-1900s. It treats patients with psychotherapy in the belief that insight into conflicts which precede the illness will result in healing.

That paradigm of mental illness is rejected or at least highly suspect in the field of modern psychiatry. With the increasing use of brain scans and molecular research, psychiatry is moving in a biological direction in which mental illnesses are seen as dysfunctional states of the normal brain. Psychoanalysis has not proven effective in most mental illnesses.

Despite my momentary freeze I dashed on. The book is short, only 131 pages, and is divided into two parts. Part I is an academic explanation of psychoanalytic terms such as conversion and hysteria, and Part II is an analysis of seven cases of Jesus’ healing. The cases (two paralyzed men, two blind men, the demon-possessed boy, Jairus’s daughter, and the hemorrhaging woman) are used to illustrate Capps’s thesis that Jesus did not use magic to heal medical illnesses but employed therapeutic techniques to heal psychosomatic illnesses. Full understanding of Part I requires some prior knowledge of and belief in psychoanalytic principles, and thus may not be of interest to the general audience that Capps targets in his introduction. Part

2 may be easier for general readers but still requires some background.

It was surprising to me that Capps uses a blend of psychoanalytic descriptions and more modern diagnostic criteria from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (the “DSM,” with DSM IV being the fourth version, published in 1994). I was in psychiatric residency in the late 1970s when the first draft of the DSM was published and thus my training focused heavily on it. The DSM was known to be an attempt to describe conditions objectively, replacing the psychoanalytic model of mental illness that theorizes about etiology or cause.

Capps’s review of the minute details of diagnostic criteria of conversion disorder, factitious disorder, and somatization disorder from DSM IV was difficult to read through. His attempt to apply them to persons who lived 2000 years ago and whom the Bible describes only in barest detail was simply perplexing. Reading the cases, I found myself skimming through the academic material to get to the insights about Jesus. This is where I found the book provocative; for short periods I actually enjoyed myself, not feeling like a squirrel at all. Capps’s suggestion that Jesus did not use supernatural powers to cure people but actually listened to them challenged me to stop discounting Jesus’ healing stories as easy for him because he was divine.

Capps’s insights regarding the healing of Jairus’s daughter are excellent. For example, he points out that Jairus’s daughter was twelve, thus on the cusp of marriageability, representing to her father an opportunity to increase his wealth by marrying her off well. The author’s thoughts on Jesus’ understanding of the social context of illnesses and the implications of wellness are tantalizing but too brief. Each time I would begin thinking “Now he’s getting somewhere,” the chapter would end.

I finished the book hungering for more. Completing the analogy of the squirrel, I had braved all the academic traffic, only to find that the delectable pile of insightful spiritual nuts I was hoping for was small.

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Chris K. Huebner. *A Precarious Peace*. Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2006.

One realizes quickly upon reading *A Precarious Peace* that a desire for a solid thesis argued with clean, crisp, logical warrants and brought “together into some final programmatic statement of a position” (29) will be entirely frustrated. No last word can be given because words and positions, no less than politics and power, are precarious for those in the Christian community (58).

The precariousness that Chris K. Huebner places at the center of his Yoderian study of Mennonite theology, knowledge, and identity de-centers any attempt to offer a last word. This is a book whose project is “disestablishing, disowning, dislocating” (23) without reconstructing its subject theoretically. As such there is no argument that Huebner could be criticized for not showing adequately. He has promised not to provide an account of what peace *is*, and no one account of peace is given here. Instead, in a random sampling, there are stories about Alzheimer’s, Atom Egoyan’s films, friendship, speed, and Zizek.

The argument – or, as Huebner says, “common theme” (30) – is simply that peace is characterized by being precarious. For peace to be anything else would require a coercive intervention. Peace comes to us as a gift, given by Christ, and like all gifts it is both radically ours and out of our control.

While the political and ecclesiological ramifications of Yoder’s vision have been noticed, applied, and extended in various contexts, the epistemological questions that his investigations suggest have drawn less attention. This is what Huebner is about in this volume. I particularly like the description of his approach: “Let us group this collection of impulses together under the heading of standard epistemology.... What follows ... is a series of gestures toward a counter-epistemology that arises from the church’s confession that Christ is the truth. Here truth will appear to be unsettled rather than settled.... It arises from an excessive economy of gift, and thus it exists as a seemingly unnecessary and unwarranted donation” (133-34).

This language of gift gives much of Huebner’s discussion a “spatial” feel. To elaborate his conception of peace he invokes words like diaspora, settled, patience, gesture, scattered, speed, or territory. I am strongly impressed by how Huebner is able to move, and to move me, in space and

time throughout this book. The discussion has an embodiedness missing from much of the theological endeavor.

The book's biggest strength is the reworking of our perceptions, actions, emotions, and disposition towards precariousness. I teach Christian ethics at a small Mennonite liberal arts institution to students who are mostly not convinced pacifists in either action or epistemology. I find this an enormously difficult and somewhat stressful task. This is not surprising, because many of them are just beginning their education in the ethos of Christian community. While reading this book I noticed that in class my statements were clearer, my mode of engagement more patient and less anxious, and my answers more characterized by the open-endedness that characterizes the gift.

Huebner has written a course of therapy for those who believe in peace that will, if we let it, deepen our engagement with peace, make us more comfortable with its precariousness, and orient us towards the Christ who gives us this peace. Huebner skillfully calls into question our assumptions. Some debates evaporate under his critique, as in a chapter on Milbank and Barth called "Can a Gift be Commanded?" Others condense as the author brings together questions not typically asked at the same time, as in a chapter where he employs contemporary philosophers and cultural critics to show how martyrdom shapes the gift of peace.

I close with questions offered in response to a quotation at the end of a wonderful chapter on [Paul] Virilo and Yoder: "But because this good news involves a breaking of the cycle of violence that includes the renunciation of logistical effectiveness and possessive sovereignty, it can *only* be offered as a gift whose reception cannot be guaranteed or enforced" (130, emphasis mine). Here Huebner seems to want to guarantee a certain shape to peace. But if peace is always precarious, is it also true that only peace is precarious? Isn't there also precariousness to the exercise of power, the attempt to govern, or the attempt to communicate in the language of culture and not only gospel? Can we not recognize peace and precariousness even when they occur (miraculously) in spite of force, clumsy intervention, or misguided attempts to control? Or must peace, in order to remain precarious, guard against alliances threatening that precariousness?

At points Huebner eagerly recognizes that those practicing peace are also always implicated in the violent exercise of power (see chapters

8 and 12). But at other points the shape of the peace he avers seems overdetermined by the demand of precariousness. Isn't a truly precarious peace also willing to explore the possibility of remaining settled, existing in a happy exchange, or flourishing for a moment in effectiveness?

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Tripp York. *The Purple Crown: The Politics of Martyrdom*. Scottsdale: Herald, 2007.

*The Purple Crown: The Politics of Martyrdom* engages questions that have preoccupied Anabaptists for centuries: What is the appropriate posture of peace-loving Christians in a violent world? Should Christians be political?

As a work of historical theology, this book will appeal most to theologians and church historians. But York's prose, if repetitive at times, is accessible (and gender inclusive). Anyone who finds the subject matter compelling can approach this study. Some will find it inspiring; others will find it most valuable as a representative piece of a particular kind of Christian dogma. At the least, it will provoke passionate conversation.

According to York, Christians must be politically active earthly citizens, but with an important caveat: their political posture is one of exile. They are here on earth to represent heaven. Thus "martyrdom is *the* political act because it represents the ultimate imitation of Christ, signifying a life lived in obedience to, and participation in, the triune God" (23).

Beginning with a discussion of the early Christian martyrs under Rome, York interprets martyrdom as a public performance that bears witness to the triumph of Christ through a means superior to rhetoric or argument. Indeed, martyrdom is a cosmic battle "between God's people and God's enemies"

(29-30). From the early Christians, the author moves to a discussion of the 16th-century Anabaptist martyrs, and finishes with a biography of martyred Salvadoran archbishop Oscar Romero that is likely to be engaging even for those who dislike York's theology.

York deserves much credit for writing one of the more ecumenical martyrdom studies available from a Mennonite source. He focuses always on the broader Christian context and resists Anabaptist tribalism. But readers who value interfaith cooperation may find his work problematic.

*The Purple Crown* is peppered with references to "the people of God," and while York acknowledges that this group is hard to define, he remains rigid in his Christian understanding of the phrase. "Only where the triune God is worshipped can there be true sociality," he asserts (110). This claim is typical of York's language throughout. He consistently dismisses any social or political reality outside of Christianity by labeling it "false," an ideological tactic that adds no meat to his arguments. *The Purple Crown* is hardly the first theological work to claim that Christianity is inherently political by virtue of its alleged superiority to everything else, and if York is to be faulted for excessive reliance on a "church" vs. "world" binary, it must be said that he did not invent it. Still, he does little to make it fresh.

The author includes almost no discussion of contemporary politics or how Christians might shoulder their accountability in a modern democracy. Rather, government is simply "the state," an ill-defined monolith that kills and oppresses Christians. Christians are political because as followers of Christ they stand in opposition to the state, even unto death. This circular argument is the heart of *The Purple Crown*, thereby confining the book's appeal to those who share York's dualistic worldview.

York comes closest to undermining his own dualism in his chapter on 16th-century Europe – the strongest in the book – in which he discusses with admirable nuance how battles over semantics led Christians to kill one another. Recognizing the difficulty of resolving these doctrinal issues, York points us instead to the martyrdoms; such performances "give us something by which we can discern which acts are good, beautiful, and true. Maybe then it is possible to distinguish the difference between a pseudo-politics located in earthly regimes and an authentic politics constituted by nothing other than the broken yet risen body of Christ" (97).

The definition of “politics” is contested territory, and my frustration with York’s theocratic version may reveal little beyond my own partisanship. Nonetheless, the labels “pseudo-politics” and “authentic politics” strike me as ironically self-defeating. Nothing is more endemic to the politics of “earthly regimes” than claims of purity and authenticity that serve to discredit some peoples while elevating others to positions of supposed greatness. “The visible church is important not just so the elect can know each other, but because God has promised not to leave the world without a witness to God,” York continues; “This is the sort of gift that exposes false cities from the true city in an effort to bring all cities under the rule of Christ” (98).

This crusader-like language leaves us no room to approach non-Christians with any humility. Despite its nonviolent intent, I doubt York’s chauvinist theology will bring us closer to the “peace of the earthly city.”

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Hans Küng. *The Beginning of All Things: Science and Religion*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007.

Hans Küng has put together in *The Beginning of All Things* a remarkable synthesis of philosophical, theological, and scientific reasoning about our universe. He argues that religious views of the universe (understood as symbolic expressions of the meaning of this reality) are compatible with scientific explanations.

This does not mean that science proves theology or that theology undergirds scientific exploration, but that each has its own distinctive procedure for understanding reality. Küng believes this reality is more than what science can explain, which is precisely why we need religion in order to understand reality fully. He emphasizes the limits of scientific knowledge. "If science is to remain faithful to its method," he says, "it may not extend its judgment beyond the horizon of experience" (52). He outlines the way cosmology cannot examine the constraints of the cosmos in which we find ourselves.

The author acknowledges that science has its own procedures that give reliable and comprehensive knowledge about the world around us. But he goes further and defines physics as follows: "Its theories and models are not literal descriptions of reality at the atomic level (naive realism) but are symbolic and selective attempts that depict the structure of the world" (8). By stressing the symbolic character of scientific explanations, Küng attempts to gain a foothold for religious explanations of the same reality. One wonders if the parallel can be drawn too closely. Surely the symbolic nature of religious explanations differs from the highly mathematical and theoretical symbols of science, which are tested by experimental data and cause/effect analysis.

In his discussion of creation, Küng stresses the symbolic character of the creation narratives of the Hebrew Bible and repudiates any attempt to gain scientific knowledge from them. However, he feels justified in interpreting evolution in religious terms, as a creation by the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition. He tries to use the fine-tuning of the cosmological constants to suggest the intelligent design of the universe. This argument is tempting to theologians, but if the universe has evolved to produce life, the

constants of the universe are merely those that we experience. It is impossible to extrapolate to other possible universes, since we have no experience of any alternatives.

Küng proposes that scientists consider God as a hypothesis. Here it seems to me that he is stepping beyond his own wise thesis that science and religion should retain separate procedures. He does acknowledge that there is no deductive or inductive proof of God. Rather, he insists on a practical and holistic rational approach to God (including the whole experience of the human being, especially subjective awareness). Küng argues that the human being is more than the body, more than brain processes, and still a mystery to neurologists. This ignorance, however, is used as a logical leap towards the “mystery” of the cosmos, which is too easily filled by the idea of God as the primal ground of our existence.

In the plethora of books about science and religion, this one stands out as more comprehensive than most because it puts the discussion in the context of a philosophical argument about reality and the way we perceive it. Küng relies on a depiction of theology as a metaphysical principle that goes beyond the limits of scientific theories. He is too well-versed in the global religions to describe this as a necessary leap and instead depicts it as a choice. But such a choice would need to be justified in comparison with other religious or metaphysical explanations of the ultimate reality. It would be interesting to see Küng use his wide knowledge of other religions to compare the various religious cosmologies with current scientific descriptions of the origins of the universe and life.

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Robert W. Brimlow, *What About Hitler? Wrestling with Jesus' Call to Nonviolence in an Evil World*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006.

In *What About Hitler?* Robert Brimlow devotes considerable time to a critique of the Just War tradition. He wrestles vigorously with George Orwell's critique of pacifism; he argues pointedly that the Christian's first concern must be to obey Jesus, not to escape death or be successful according to some short-term definition. And he points out effectively that rejecting killing makes sense only if it is part of a personal and communal lifestyle committed to peacemaking.

There is a good deal in this book that is helpful. Brimlow brings a philosopher's sharp mind to his extensive critique of the Just War tradition. I will not try to decide here whether his critique is finally successful, but his sophisticated objections to central arguments of important Just War advocates (St. Augustine, Michael Walzer, Jean Bethke Elshtain) offer challenges that no Just War advocate should ignore. "Just war theory contradicts itself in that it sanctions the killing of innocents, which it at the same time prohibits. In addition, just war theory can also be used effectively to justify all wars" (105).

Brimlow is surely right that pacifism is impossible unless it is rooted in Christian community and prayer, and that it has no integrity unless it is part of a personal and communal lifestyle that not only rejects violence but actively engages in works of compassion and mercy toward the poor and neglected.

That said, I must confess that I found the book inadequate, disappointing, and occasionally annoying. The rambling Scriptural meditations at the beginning of each chapter were not very helpful, at least not for me. The argument that Just War theory validates Osama bin Laden as much as it does military resistance to terrorism was not convincing. Equally unsatisfactory was Brimlow's lengthy argument (139-46) that Jesus was a failure. Even his final chapter arguing for the importance of a personal and communal lifestyle of peacemaking was inadequate. Jesus called for works of mercy – feeding the hungry, caring for the homeless and naked, giving alms to the poor. That is all good and true. But what about going beyond charity to understanding the structural causes of poverty and injustice



and working vigorously to overcome institutional injustice? What about activist kinds of peacemaking – whether Victim-Offender Reconciliation Programs, sophisticated mediation efforts bringing together warring parties, or Christian Peacemaker Teams?

Most important, Brimlow’s answer to the basic question, “What About Hitler?” is woefully inadequate. He opens Chapter 7 (“The Christian Response”) with the comment that “it is time for me to respond to the Hitler question.” His answer takes three paragraphs. Just one page. He had already said near the beginning that his answer to this question is absurd (10). I think that answer is fundamentally inadequate. It is certainly true that the Christian pacifist believes that she must follow Jesus, even when this leads to death. Brimlow makes the point very well. If Jesus is God become flesh, if God raised Jesus from the dead on the third day, then it simply will not do to say, “Sorry, Jesus, your ideas do not work in a world of Hitlers and Osama bin Ladens.”

We must follow Jesus even when that means death. But there is a lot more to be said to make this position less implausible than Brimlow does. It is wrong and misleading to label it “absurd.” If Jesus is the Incarnate God who announced the inauguration of the Messianic kingdom of peace and justice, called his disciples to start living in that kingdom now, and promised to return to complete the victory over evil, then it makes sense to obey his call to nonviolence now, even when Hitlers still stalk the earth. This book does not offer a convincing answer to the question it raises.

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Stanley E. Porter, ed. *Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006.

Drawn from a 2003 colloquium at McMaster Divinity School, this collection of essays tackles how New Testament writers use the Old Testament. An introductory essay by Stanley E. Porter and a concluding scholarly response to the papers by Andreas J. Köstenberger provide a helpful orienting perspective and summation.

Two essays dedicated to general topics introduce the volume. Dennis L. Stamps seeks to clarify terminology, contrasts “author-centered” and “audience-centered” approaches, and describes persuasive rhetoric in the early church period. R. Timothy McLay introduces issues concerning canon and scripture, and identifies “pluriformity” as “an essential characteristic of the Scriptures of the early church” (55).

Michael P. Knowles (Matthew) and Porter (Luke-Acts) both argue that the evangelists’ interpretive perspectives not only center on but derive from Jesus himself. Craig A. Evans (Mark) and Sylvia C. Keesmaat (Ephesians, Colossians, and others) place these documents within the political milieu of the Roman Empire to striking effect. Paul Miller (John) and Kurt Anders Richardson (James) describe the use of OT characters, while James W. Aageson (Romans, Galatians, and others) and Köstenberger (pastorals, Revelation) provide contrasting perspectives on reading epistles.

The range of foci engages the reader, and Köstenberger’s responses prove helpful, providing additional information or a contrasting perspective. His adamant response to Aageson’s paper is particularly striking and underscores significantly divergent methods and assumptions, as well as perspectives on the implications of Paul’s hermeneutics for the contemporary Christian community.

This said, the volume’s overarching author-centered perspective prompts an uncritical assumption of continuity that, in my view, should be reconsidered. Early in the volume Stamps appropriately criticizes the idea that “NT writers use the OT” because it is “anachronistic to speak of the OT when referring to the perspective of the NT writers since the differentiation between old and new had not yet occurred” (11). Though he suggests “Jewish sacred writings” (11) as an improvement, repeated statements in the rest of the volume about how NT writers, and even Jesus himself, use the “OT”

reflect the prominence of such anachronism.

Indeed, the difficulty runs deeper than Stamps suggests. While the writers in this book attempt to uncover the intentions and hermeneutics of Luke, Paul, and even Jesus, these biblical figures neither read an OT (which implies a NT) nor consciously wrote Scripture (they sought to interpret the one(s) they had). Even the common designation “NT writers” proves historically anachronistic; the most that can accurately be said is that these people wrote what later *became* the NT. More attention to how Scripture is designated within the NT would have raised this issue and strengthened the volume.

The book’s orientation leaves potentially significant *discontinuities* unexplored. For instance, what should we make of Paul’s distinction between his own opinion and elements “from the LORD,” once his writing becomes part of a NT? Should our reading of his epistles be affected by this transformation into scripture, a shift that transcends his “original intent”? The description of “Paul’s shorter epistles” as “rang[ing] from Paul’s supposedly earliest epistle to those seemingly written so late that Paul was dead when he composed them” (182) suggests further difficulties with an exclusively author-centered approach. What of the shift from Luke’s two-volume work (Luke-Acts) to a “gospel” and a non-“gospel” separated by John, or the Emmaus story’s claim that the disciples see Jesus in “the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms” only through an impromptu Bible study led by the *risen* Lord? Unfortunately these writers do not address such discontinuities at historical, literary, and canonical levels.

A collection of essays has the benefit of various perspectives and the drawback of limited flow. The papers here are well written, engaging, and accessible for interested people with some background in the subject matter. While most essays do not focus on implications for contemporary interpretation, individual chapters would be helpful as supplements or orientation for studying a specific NT book. Several essays also situate themselves within broader scholarship, which proves particularly beneficial for the non-specialist.

Overall, these writers do an admirable job of tackling a significant, complex issue. However, although the volume explores how “NT writers used the OT,” it proves less satisfying for “Hearing the OT in the NT.”

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While the latter implies the perspective of a two-testament Scripture, most essays here seek to uncover the *pre*-NT use of Scripture (not OT!) by writers of what later became the NT. Thus, this volume serves an author-centered approach well, but it does not address discontinuity in the transformation from “authorial writings” to Christian Scripture.

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Stanley Hauerwas and Romand Coles. *Christianity, Democracy and the Radical Ordinary: Conversations between a Radical Democrat and a Christian*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2007.

It is not only Christians who find difficult the practice of engaging the world in constructive ways; not just believing that engagement should happen, but engaging the complicated issues of how to proceed, occupies all kinds of people. In this volume we observe a Christian theologian (Stanley Hauerwas) and a political theorist who is not Christian (Romand Coles) grapple with such issues in ways that try to think about the right questions and display fruitful practices within a mutual pursuit of the transformation and development of a flourishing political imagination.

The purpose of this collection of essays, letters, lectures, and conversation is to exhibit a politics that refuses to let death dominate our lives, resists fear, and seeks to uncover the violence at the heart of liberal political doctrine. Not only does this book discuss such matters, it seeks to display some of the very practices it brings into view. Practices central to this ongoing conversation include attention, engagement, vulnerability, receptive patience, tending, “microdispositions” and “micropractices,” waiting, and gentleness. Such practices, patiently pursued, might make up a life that is political, claim the authors, yet not beholden to conventional politics.

We witness Coles and Hauerwas engage each other as well as a vast array of interlocutors in an attempt to cultivate a politics of “wild patience”: Sheldon Wolin, Cornell West, Ella Baker, John Howard Yoder, Will Campbell, Rowan Williams, Jean Vanier, Samuel Wells, and Gregory of Nanzianzus. Both authors here are exemplary in their own openness and vulnerability to learning from traditions outside their own, and Coles especially so as he provides insightful readings of a number of Christian theological voices.

Nonetheless, in the midst of their respectful and deep mutual engagement, Hauerwas and Coles exhibit at times a certain wariness in relation to each other. Hauerwas worries that radical democracy will be an end in itself for which God becomes an afterthought, a superfluous placeholder, domesticated and tamed in service of some other agenda. But he also worries that Christians do something very similar when they mistake the Christian faith for a garden variety of humanism. Coles, on the other hand, is concerned that Christian jealousy regarding Jesus may prevent proper vulnerability and underwrite a kind of territoriality. He further believes that no matter how sincere the upside-down practices of the church may be, these kinds of practices have a way of turning themselves right side up – and without appropriate discernment on the part of the church.

I have my own worries. Sometimes it feels as though Coles comes close to equating the insurgent grassroots political practices of radical democracy with the politics of Jesus. Coles also seems tempted to turn the church and its practices into an instance of radical democracy. Perhaps this is one reason he claims to be so “haunted” by John Howard Yoder, who himself is open to the criticism that he thinks the church’s practices can be translated into the world without loss.

Further, the extended conversation in this volume, while richly informed by a wide variety of interlocutors – political theorists, activists of many kinds, theologians, a number of Mennonite thinkers, and so on – is in the end strangely thin on the Christian exegetical tradition. While we see close, nuanced readings of Wolin, West, Campbell, et al., we search in vain for the same kind of close attention to sustained readings of the Biblical text. This is not to say that the conversation between Coles the radical democrat and Hauerwas the Christian is not informed by biblical ideas. However, I

wonder if Coles's concern for Christian jealousy of Jesus also extends to Christian privileging of the Scriptural text and, if so, what implications this might have for a long-term continuing conversation.

Jeffrey Stout, who in his own effort to revitalize the American democratic tradition often converses with Christian theologians such as Hauerwas, claims that this book gives him hope, since it takes the conversation between Christianity and democracy in a most welcome direction. This book also gives me hope as a Christian, because it seeks to find ways for people to engage in the world that resist the violence and death that have been inscribed deeply into the story of our shared lives. And part of that hopefulness includes paying close attention to practices that can be embodied on a human scale, whether as a radical democrat or a Christian.

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Laura Ruth Yordy. *Green Witness: Ecology, Ethics, and the Kingdom of God*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2008.

Laura Yordy has a vision for churches engaging holistically in ecological discipleship. She begins her discourse in *Green Witness* by briefly describing a fantasy congregation that fully integrates earth-friendly practices into its worship and daily actions. Yordy illustrates her vision by using examples from real churches that are implementing ecological practices. According to her, the greening of the church in North America has been limited because of the ineffectiveness of education, difficulties with real change, powerlessness of leadership, individualism in church life, the magnitude of the environmental crisis, and the hope of technological fixes: "The point is not to make the church a participant in the 'environmental movement,'" she says, "but to make the church more faithful by including the eschatological import of creation in its performance of worship, ... a 'way' of life that praises and witnesses to Father Son, and Holy Spirit" (161).

The author develops her thesis around the need for the church to

renew its understanding of the eschaton – “the fulfillment of God’s promises for creation” (2). The church is to be a witness to the coming Kingdom of Heaven, the result of Christ’s redemption of all of creation. Christians are not to be managers trying to fix the environmental crisis but witnesses of Christ’s relationship to creation through faithful ecological practice.

Yordy critiques the positions of three eco-theologians – Larry Rasmussen, Catherine Keller, and Rosemary Radford Ruether – by observing that they reject several central doctrines of Christian eschatology. She notes the losses that occur when eschatology does not include Jesus, the sovereignty of God, or the concept of an afterlife. She writes that our practices today in relation to ecology witness to our belief in the fullness of the Kingdom of God. The doctrine of creation should be examined from an eschatological framework, says the author; God’s future view of redeemed creation is what makes the Christian creation story distinct from views found in the “common creation story.”

Yordy carefully states that it is God’s love that generated the universe (57), and proceeds with helpful insights into the concepts of God creating the world out of nothing, the Trinitarian role in creation, the goodness of creation, and the “Fall.” Christian ethics is described as discipleship – where the lives of Christ’s followers witness to the Kingdom through worship, action, and character. Yordy provides stimulating insights into eco-discipleship by probing key characteristics of the Kingdom: peace, justice, abundance, righteousness, and communion with God. The resulting praxis is summarized well by her statement that “Christians’ witness to the Kingdom is not simply watching, but pointing toward God’s gracious creating and redeeming activity with the activity of their own lives” (112).

Yordy sees the church serving as a “demonstration plot” for ecological discipleship. She develops the view that everything the church practices – here specifically its relation to the earth – should witness to Christ’s coming redemption of all creation. It is from within community that the witness and practice will best occur. The concluding concept centers on the ecological virtue, patience. Yordy lifts it up as a key virtue while not excluding other much-needed virtues. She says it is our impatience that plays a major factor in our dominance over the natural world. But patience is woven into the web of the universe and reflects the character of God. “Part of the human need

for patience (as well as other virtues) is the imperative for humans to realign themselves with the patient character of God's creation" (155). From this framework Yordy calls us to practice eco-discipleship.

The author develops logical arguments throughout her discourse, though at points the writing style recalls the doctoral dissertation on which the book is based. The work is in the frame of a constructive theology, and it leans heavily on arguments between various theological and philosophical positions. Yordy formulates her thesis based on a broad array of authors along with insights of her own.

This volume would serve well as the basis for serious discussion by adults interested in articulating a biblical and theological response to today's environmental crisis, but it doesn't include an extensive list of examples of creation care actions. (It would also be helpful if there were an index in addition to the bibliography.) Upper-level college students in environmental studies would benefit from exploring the intersection between faith and ecological praxis found in this text.

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Conrad L. Kanagy. *Road Signs on the Journey: A Profile of Mennonite Church USA*. Waterloo, ON: Herald, 2007.

Conrad Kanagy's profile of Mennonite Church USA is a good addition to earlier similar studies of Mennonites in 1972 and 1989.<sup>1</sup> Preferring biblical to sociological categories of analysis, Kanagy presents the data as "road signs and guideposts" in order to help Mennonites find their social, political, spiritual, and theological location, and to help Mennonite churches consider the direction of their further "journey toward the reign of God" (24).

The first two chapters set a reading of the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah as the base for Kanagy's data analysis. These chapters test the



data for evidence of a *missional* intention and vision in Mennonite church life. Succeeding chapters profile Mennonite Church USA; explore church structure, polity and self-understanding; test consistency and orthodoxy of belief and ritual; survey management of resources; review recent disruptions of Mennonite “Christendom”; and assess the relation between the church and greater society. The author’s summary conclusion shares the testimony of respondents as they reflect on the quality of congregational life and challenge the church toward greater missional identity and activity.

Kanagy’s prognosis for Mennonite Church USA is disquieting yet hopeful. While the author predicts a “bleak future” (57), among “Racial/Ethnic Mennonites” he discovered signs of growth and renewal. Other signs of hope include relatively high rates of giving, marital stability, strong beliefs about Jesus, active personal piety, and greater support of women in ministry (183ff.).

At least two issues emerge that deserve greater discussion and thought. The first is how to refer to the diversity of ethnic and racial groups comprising Mennonite Church USA. Throughout the report Kanagy uses the generic term “Racial/Ethnic” to refer to African-American, Hispanic/Latino, diverse Asian, and various Native American congregations and members. Yet “Racial/Ethnic” would also apply to the various Caucasian groups comprising the church. One of the challenges in working out the tension between the margin and middle of Mennonite church has to do with how we refer to one another. The tendency to reduce our ethnic diversity to one generic category, or an implicit us/them polarity, is a pernicious problem with no easy solution.

This problem is endemic to descriptive sociological summaries, but even more, it bespeaks the difficulty that Mennonite church organizations have in dealing with an ethnic diversity that refuses to be ‘settled.’ I wonder if this reflects the broader influence of theories of assimilation as opposed to theories of ethnic pluralism in the American context. It seems to me that one of the significant challenges in combatting racism in the church is to celebrate our chaotic ethnicity in all its glorious detail. This will demand imaginative justice in reconfiguring current structures of privilege. Our commitment to such justice will help us find better, more expressive, language with which to understand the multi-ethnic fullness of Mennonite Church USA.

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The second challenge concerns Kanagy's exile hypothesis. This hypothesis interprets the changes Mennonites have undergone as assimilation to a broader society; that is, that Mennonites as exiles in American culture and society are losing their true identity and becoming more like their host society. This interpretation might be more cogent if Kanagy had presented comparative data from a larger control group than conservative Protestants (171). Increased levels of education, wealth, professional vocation, and urban living, together with changes in various beliefs, support "the argument that Mennonites are becoming more conforming to the values and attitudes of the larger society" (170, 171). However, Anabaptism has looked more educated and urban before.<sup>2</sup>

Putting a slight twist on Kanagy's question of exile, the data may be suggesting that Mennonites are finally returning from an almost 200-year exile in rural America. The changes Kanagy traces may be instances of increased biblical fidelity. Engagement with surrounding society, however messy that might be, could be a truer expression of Anabaptist peoplehood than the isolationist posture of most recent memory.

It may be necessary to resist and even critique assimilation theories based on the deeper resonance between Mennonites and various values of American society and culture, such as freedom of religion, freedom of conscience, and participatory governance of group life. The isolationist interpretation of Mennonite life from the 16th through the 18th centuries has had something of a privileged status<sup>3</sup> and may need to give way to a more socially engaged and integrated understanding of Mennonite life as normative.

This may be why Kanagy is so firmly convinced that the future of Mennonite Church USA lies with congregations comprising various minority racial and ethnic groups. Indeed, it may be impossible to find future vitality in the church without following such leadership into social engagement. For observing these provocative issues in such a way as to raise further discussion of the future of Mennonite communities, we can be grateful to Kanagy for an insightful analysis of Mennonite Church USA.

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> J. Howard Kaufmann and Leland Harder, *Anabaptists: Four Centuries Later* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1975). J. Howard Kaufmann and Leo Driedger, *The Mennonite Mosaic: Identity and Modernization* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Richard K. MacMaster, *Land, Piety, Peoplehood, The Establishment of Mennonite Communities in America, 1683-1790* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1985), 138.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

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Earl Zimmerman. *Practicing the Politics of Jesus: The Origin and Significance of John Howard Yoder's Social Ethics*. Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2007.

Interest in the theological ethics of John Howard Yoder shows no signs of slowing down. I am delighted – and sometimes amazed – at the level of scholarly interest in Yoder's writings today. *Practicing the Politics of Jesus: The Origin and Significance of John Howard Yoder's Social Ethics* is composed of seven chapters. The first six attempt to identify what shaped Yoder in ways that gave rise to his most influential book, *The Politics of Jesus*. The last chapter, which seems rather artificially connected to the others, provides Earl Zimmerman with an opportunity to state the significance of “the politics of Jesus,” as he sees it, for peace-building efforts today.

This book's unique contribution is that it offers the fullest account to date of the influences on Yoder during the years he was in Western Europe (1949-1958). Having named some of the North American Mennonite influences, the book attributes most of the “background” to his *Politics* to these European influences.

Zimmerman is right to say that the realities of post-World War II Europe were quite significant for the young Yoder, who arrived in France in April 1949 to serve orphans and help French Mennonites recover their

commitment to pacifism. And undoubtedly the debates about war in which he engaged during those years were shaped by memories of Nazism and the horrors of the war.

The author's discussion of Barth's influence on Yoder is framed differently from that of Craig Carter [see his *The Politics of the Cross*]. My sense is that Carter knows Barth's thought better than Zimmerman does. But probably the careful examination of Yoder in light of his studies with Barth (as compared to other influences) will continue to generate discussion and debate. Zimmerman has certainly provided a fuller account of NT scholar Oscar Cullmann's influence on Yoder than has been done before. This is helpful.

The chapter on Yoder's doctoral work on sixteenth-century Anabaptism is also the fullest summary we have of that work and its connections to his *Politics of Jesus*, although it would have had greater significance before the recent publication of an English translation of Yoder's dissertation. But Zimmerman's work will help those who haven't noticed these connections before to see them now. We are fortunate with *The Politics of Jesus* because, aside from his doctoral work, it is Yoder's most heavily footnoted book. However, in addition to his wide reading and formal teachers, it is important to say, as Zimmerman does, that *Politics* did not simply emerge from a study. According to accounts from French Mennonites, young Yoder empathized with those who had lived through several years of Nazi invasions.

Zimmerman could also have included Yoder's exposure to Latin America. In the mid-'60s and again when working on *Politics*, Yoder spent time with Latin American Christians living in the midst of revolution. According to theologians Samuel Escobar and René Padilla, he empathized deeply with them while delivering timely, biblical messages (thus Yoder's being made an honorary member of the Latin American Theological Fraternity).

One might get the impression that Yoder did not engage Reinhold Niebuhr's writings nearly as seriously as, say, J. Lawrence Burkholder (26, 57ff, 107). That impression would be wrong. While in high school, Yoder took a course with a former student of Niebuhr's at the College of Wooster, in which Niebuhr himself lectured once. Approximately fifteen years later, Yoder did significant research on Niebuhr at the University of Basel before

he gave his first lecture on him, and that produced an article. Finally, years later, Yoder wrote two substantial lectures on Niebuhr that were included in the informally published *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace and Revolution: A Companion to Bainton* (soon to be formally published).

Again, one could get the wrong impression from the statement that Yoder “basically depended on Roland Bainton’s historical survey of Christian attitudes toward war and peace for his historical scheme” regarding the “Constantinian shift” (198). Yoder was an historical theologian. For many years he taught courses surveying the history of Christian attitudes toward war, peace, and revolution; he read numerous and varied primary and secondary sources germane to those lectures. He had therefore studied relevant sources well before publishing the main essay articulating his claims.

I don’t have space to discuss issues raised in the last two chapters of summary and interpretation for contemporary peace-building. Here serious questions emerge regarding contemporary appropriations of Yoder.

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Amy Laura Hall. *Conceiving Parenthood: American Protestantism and the Spirit of Reproduction*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.

Churchly discussions of reproductive bioethics usually take place in the third person. The major actors – those advocating for so-called “designer babies” or for prenatal testing designed to enable selective termination of pregnancies – remain distinct from *us*, the narrators, who can respond from a distance and with disgust. Such conversations also usually occur in the future tense, in anticipation of a brave new world in which parents shop for their unborn child’s hair color, IQ, and personality type.

Yet for readers with any connection to middle-class, mainline Protestantism, Christian ethicist Amy Laura Hall’s new book requires a shift

from third person to first and from future tense to past. Her study requires readers to ask not “What will *they* come up with *next*?” but “How have *we* contributed to the ethos that has engendered such technologies?”

Hall’s wide-ranging survey of 20th-century Protestant ideas about family, social status, and scientific innovation suggests that the seeds of troubling technologies were sown closer to our ecclesial home than many Christians like to admit. As she writes, “a tradition that had within it the possibility of leveling all believers as orphaned and gratuitously adopted kin came instead to baptize a culture of carefully delineated, racially encoded domesticity” (10). By uncritically blessing both scientific advancement and an idealized portrait of the nuclear family, Hall claims, 20th-century Protestantism set the stage for technologies that would enable aspiring American parents to engineer the perfect child.

The “germ-free home” stands at the center of Hall’s first chapter, which mines mid-century issues of *Parents* magazine and its Methodist cognate, *Together*. The war on germs, made possible by products like Lysol, sedimented racial and class differences between the “hygienic” families of the assumed readers and *other* people’s children.

The author’s second chapter looks at how the marketing of infant formula and baby food encouraged parents to shift their trust from informally and familiarly transmitted know-how to dictates of the medical establishment. This chapter’s examination of the bizarre “Baby-Incubators—With Living Babies!” exhibit at the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago in 1933-34, which allowed visitors to view premature infants struggling for survival inside oven-like incubators, drives home the point that Americans were beginning to employ a technological gaze to a macabre extent.

Hall turns in the third chapter to the eugenics movement in the United States, which was endorsed by many progressive Protestants. She counters the prevailing idea that the American movement withered as the horrors of Nazi-era eugenics became public knowledge. Instead, she suggests, “there are links between current hopes for genius and past attempts to vaccinate the social body against the menace of poverty, disability, and deviance” (217). Hall’s final chapter moves into current bioethical debates by tracing connections between the promises of the atomic age and the claims of the current genomic revolution.

The narrative throughout *Conceiving Parenthood* is provocative and thorough. The book teems with illustrations and advertisements from magazines from the last century and this one, and all are accompanied by painstakingly close readings. At times, however, the contour of Hall's argument buckles under the weight of the evidence she presents; she seems unwilling to weigh, rank, and especially discard data that distracts from the trajectory of her main point. Unfortunately, chapters averaging 100 pages each will likely intimidate some readers who otherwise would benefit from her analysis.

The author's voice alternates between the scholarly, the pastoral, and the autobiographical. Sometimes the shift can be jarring, although none of the voices by itself would have been up to the great task Hall sets for herself. Calling herself a pro-life feminist, Hall moves beyond historical investigation and critical analysis to pastoral and prophetic challenge. "I do indeed target for moral interrogation women like myself," she writes, "for our complicity in the narrations that render other women's wombs as prodigal" (400). Hall takes her call to action beyond protesting the eugenic whiff of some modern reproductive technologies and questioning the "meticulously planned procreation" of the elite classes. She suggests a much broader program of compassionate valuing of those who, for whatever reason, are deemed outside the realm of "normal."

Anabaptist readers will find much resonance with this book, especially with its call to resist market-driven definitions of what – and who – constitutes a productive life.

The challenge for Christian parents today, Hall says, is "to see the children in their homes, neighborhoods, and churches as unqualified gifts rather than projects, to identify 'downward' rather than to climb, and to allow their strategically protected and planned lives to become entangled in the needs of families and children judged to be at risk and behind the curve" (250).

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Donald Capps. *Jesus, the Village Psychiatrist*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2008.

Early in this book Donald Capps describes the behavior of a squirrel darting across a busy street, then suddenly freezing midway and racing back, only to dart again. He calls this a “living parable” (xv) and says we are intrigued because we see ourselves in the squirrel’s dilemma. I couldn’t agree more. In fact, I felt like that squirrel as I was reading this volume, at times running quickly to reach what I hoped was food for thought, and then retreating swiftly as the author’s beliefs and mine clashed.

I started the book intrigued by the title, only to freeze in the introduction at comments such as these: people with mental illnesses are “doing it to themselves” (xii), mental illnesses are “a form of coping and ... therefore typical ... today” (xii), and “the methods which Jesus employed are congruent ... with methods ... demonstrably effective ... today” (xxv). These statements portend what becomes clear in the rest of the book. Capps is a believer in Freudian psychoanalysis, a school of therapy formulated by Sigmund Freud in the late 1800s and popular in the US in the mid-1900s. It treats patients with psychotherapy in the belief that insight into conflicts which precede the illness will result in healing.

That paradigm of mental illness is rejected or at least highly suspect in the field of modern psychiatry. With the increasing use of brain scans and molecular research, psychiatry is moving in a biological direction in which mental illnesses are seen as dysfunctional states of the normal brain. Psychoanalysis has not proven effective in most mental illnesses.

Despite my momentary freeze I dashed on. The book is short, only 131 pages, and is divided into two parts. Part I is an academic explanation of psychoanalytic terms such as conversion and hysteria, and Part II is an analysis of seven cases of Jesus’ healing. The cases (two paralyzed men, two blind men, the demon-possessed boy, Jairus’s daughter, and the hemorrhaging woman) are used to illustrate Capps’s thesis that Jesus did not use magic to heal medical illnesses but employed therapeutic techniques to heal psychosomatic illnesses. Full understanding of Part I requires some prior knowledge of and belief in psychoanalytic principles, and thus may not be of interest to the general audience that Capps targets in his introduction. Part



2 may be easier for general readers but still requires some background.

It was surprising to me that Capps uses a blend of psychoanalytic descriptions and more modern diagnostic criteria from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (the “DSM,” with DSM IV being the fourth version, published in 1994). I was in psychiatric residency in the late 1970s when the first draft of the DSM was published and thus my training focused heavily on it. The DSM was known to be an attempt to describe conditions objectively, replacing the psychoanalytic model of mental illness that theorizes about etiology or cause.

Capps’s review of the minute details of diagnostic criteria of conversion disorder, factitious disorder, and somatization disorder from DSM IV was difficult to read through. His attempt to apply them to persons who lived 2000 years ago and whom the Bible describes only in barest detail was simply perplexing. Reading the cases, I found myself skimming through the academic material to get to the insights about Jesus. This is where I found the book provocative; for short periods I actually enjoyed myself, not feeling like a squirrel at all. Capps’s suggestion that Jesus did not use supernatural powers to cure people but actually listened to them challenged me to stop discounting Jesus’ healing stories as easy for him because he was divine.

Capps’s insights regarding the healing of Jairus’s daughter are excellent. For example, he points out that Jairus’s daughter was twelve, thus on the cusp of marriageability, representing to her father an opportunity to increase his wealth by marrying her off well. The author’s thoughts on Jesus’ understanding of the social context of illnesses and the implications of wellness are tantalizing but too brief. Each time I would begin thinking “Now he’s getting somewhere,” the chapter would end.

I finished the book hungering for more. Completing the analogy of the squirrel, I had braved all the academic traffic, only to find that the delectable pile of insightful spiritual nuts I was hoping for was small.

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Chris K. Huebner. *A Precarious Peace*. Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2006.

One realizes quickly upon reading *A Precarious Peace* that a desire for a solid thesis argued with clean, crisp, logical warrants and brought “together into some final programmatic statement of a position” (29) will be entirely frustrated. No last word can be given because words and positions, no less than politics and power, are precarious for those in the Christian community (58).

The precariousness that Chris K. Huebner places at the center of his Yoderian study of Mennonite theology, knowledge, and identity de-centers any attempt to offer a last word. This is a book whose project is “disestablishing, disowning, dislocating” (23) without reconstructing its subject theoretically. As such there is no argument that Huebner could be criticized for not showing adequately. He has promised not to provide an account of what peace *is*, and no one account of peace is given here. Instead, in a random sampling, there are stories about Alzheimer’s, Atom Egoyan’s films, friendship, speed, and Zizek.

The argument – or, as Huebner says, “common theme” (30) – is simply that peace is characterized by being precarious. For peace to be anything else would require a coercive intervention. Peace comes to us as a gift, given by Christ, and like all gifts it is both radically ours and out of our control.

While the political and ecclesiological ramifications of Yoder’s vision have been noticed, applied, and extended in various contexts, the epistemological questions that his investigations suggest have drawn less attention. This is what Huebner is about in this volume. I particularly like the description of his approach: “Let us group this collection of impulses together under the heading of standard epistemology.... What follows ... is a series of gestures toward a counter-epistemology that arises from the church’s confession that Christ is the truth. Here truth will appear to be unsettled rather than settled.... It arises from an excessive economy of gift, and thus it exists as a seemingly unnecessary and unwarranted donation” (133-34).

This language of gift gives much of Huebner’s discussion a “spatial” feel. To elaborate his conception of peace he invokes words like diaspora, settled, patience, gesture, scattered, speed, or territory. I am strongly impressed by how Huebner is able to move, and to move me, in space and

time throughout this book. The discussion has an embodiedness missing from much of the theological endeavor.

The book's biggest strength is the reworking of our perceptions, actions, emotions, and disposition towards precariousness. I teach Christian ethics at a small Mennonite liberal arts institution to students who are mostly not convinced pacifists in either action or epistemology. I find this an enormously difficult and somewhat stressful task. This is not surprising, because many of them are just beginning their education in the ethos of Christian community. While reading this book I noticed that in class my statements were clearer, my mode of engagement more patient and less anxious, and my answers more characterized by the open-endedness that characterizes the gift.

Huebner has written a course of therapy for those who believe in peace that will, if we let it, deepen our engagement with peace, make us more comfortable with its precariousness, and orient us towards the Christ who gives us this peace. Huebner skillfully calls into question our assumptions. Some debates evaporate under his critique, as in a chapter on Milbank and Barth called "Can a Gift be Commanded?" Others condense as the author brings together questions not typically asked at the same time, as in a chapter where he employs contemporary philosophers and cultural critics to show how martyrdom shapes the gift of peace.

I close with questions offered in response to a quotation at the end of a wonderful chapter on [Paul] Virilo and Yoder: "But because this good news involves a breaking of the cycle of violence that includes the renunciation of logistical effectiveness and possessive sovereignty, it can *only* be offered as a gift whose reception cannot be guaranteed or enforced" (130, emphasis mine). Here Huebner seems to want to guarantee a certain shape to peace. But if peace is always precarious, is it also true that only peace is precarious? Isn't there also precariousness to the exercise of power, the attempt to govern, or the attempt to communicate in the language of culture and not only gospel? Can we not recognize peace and precariousness even when they occur (miraculously) in spite of force, clumsy intervention, or misguided attempts to control? Or must peace, in order to remain precarious, guard against alliances threatening that precariousness?

At points Huebner eagerly recognizes that those practicing peace are also always implicated in the violent exercise of power (see chapters

8 and 12). But at other points the shape of the peace he avers seems overdetermined by the demand of precariousness. Isn't a truly precarious peace also willing to explore the possibility of remaining settled, existing in a happy exchange, or flourishing for a moment in effectiveness?

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Tripp York. *The Purple Crown: The Politics of Martyrdom*. Scottsdale: Herald, 2007.

*The Purple Crown: The Politics of Martyrdom* engages questions that have preoccupied Anabaptists for centuries: What is the appropriate posture of peace-loving Christians in a violent world? Should Christians be political?

As a work of historical theology, this book will appeal most to theologians and church historians. But York's prose, if repetitive at times, is accessible (and gender inclusive). Anyone who finds the subject matter compelling can approach this study. Some will find it inspiring; others will find it most valuable as a representative piece of a particular kind of Christian dogma. At the least, it will provoke passionate conversation.

According to York, Christians must be politically active earthly citizens, but with an important caveat: their political posture is one of exile. They are here on earth to represent heaven. Thus "martyrdom is *the* political act because it represents the ultimate imitation of Christ, signifying a life lived in obedience to, and participation in, the triune God" (23).

Beginning with a discussion of the early Christian martyrs under Rome, York interprets martyrdom as a public performance that bears witness to the triumph of Christ through a means superior to rhetoric or argument. Indeed, martyrdom is a cosmic battle "between God's people and God's enemies"

(29-30). From the early Christians, the author moves to a discussion of the 16th-century Anabaptist martyrs, and finishes with a biography of martyred Salvadoran archbishop Oscar Romero that is likely to be engaging even for those who dislike York's theology.

York deserves much credit for writing one of the more ecumenical martyrdom studies available from a Mennonite source. He focuses always on the broader Christian context and resists Anabaptist tribalism. But readers who value interfaith cooperation may find his work problematic.

*The Purple Crown* is peppered with references to "the people of God," and while York acknowledges that this group is hard to define, he remains rigid in his Christian understanding of the phrase. "Only where the triune God is worshipped can there be true sociality," he asserts (110). This claim is typical of York's language throughout. He consistently dismisses any social or political reality outside of Christianity by labeling it "false," an ideological tactic that adds no meat to his arguments. *The Purple Crown* is hardly the first theological work to claim that Christianity is inherently political by virtue of its alleged superiority to everything else, and if York is to be faulted for excessive reliance on a "church" vs. "world" binary, it must be said that he did not invent it. Still, he does little to make it fresh.

The author includes almost no discussion of contemporary politics or how Christians might shoulder their accountability in a modern democracy. Rather, government is simply "the state," an ill-defined monolith that kills and oppresses Christians. Christians are political because as followers of Christ they stand in opposition to the state, even unto death. This circular argument is the heart of *The Purple Crown*, thereby confining the book's appeal to those who share York's dualistic worldview.

York comes closest to undermining his own dualism in his chapter on 16th-century Europe – the strongest in the book – in which he discusses with admirable nuance how battles over semantics led Christians to kill one another. Recognizing the difficulty of resolving these doctrinal issues, York points us instead to the martyrdoms; such performances "give us something by which we can discern which acts are good, beautiful, and true. Maybe then it is possible to distinguish the difference between a pseudo-politics located in earthly regimes and an authentic politics constituted by nothing other than the broken yet risen body of Christ" (97).

The definition of “politics” is contested territory, and my frustration with York’s theocratic version may reveal little beyond my own partisanship. Nonetheless, the labels “pseudo-politics” and “authentic politics” strike me as ironically self-defeating. Nothing is more endemic to the politics of “earthly regimes” than claims of purity and authenticity that serve to discredit some peoples while elevating others to positions of supposed greatness. “The visible church is important not just so the elect can know each other, but because God has promised not to leave the world without a witness to God,” York continues; “This is the sort of gift that exposes false cities from the true city in an effort to bring all cities under the rule of Christ” (98).

This crusader-like language leaves us no room to approach non-Christians with any humility. Despite its nonviolent intent, I doubt York’s chauvinist theology will bring us closer to the “peace of the earthly city.”

*Stephanie Krehbiel*, independent scholar

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Hans Küng. *The Beginning of All Things: Science and Religion*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007.

Hans Küng has put together in *The Beginning of All Things* a remarkable synthesis of philosophical, theological, and scientific reasoning about our universe. He argues that religious views of the universe (understood as symbolic expressions of the meaning of this reality) are compatible with scientific explanations.

This does not mean that science proves theology or that theology undergirds scientific exploration, but that each has its own distinctive procedure for understanding reality. Küng believes this reality is more than what science can explain, which is precisely why we need religion in order to understand reality fully. He emphasizes the limits of scientific knowledge. "If science is to remain faithful to its method," he says, "it may not extend its judgment beyond the horizon of experience" (52). He outlines the way cosmology cannot examine the constraints of the cosmos in which we find ourselves.

The author acknowledges that science has its own procedures that give reliable and comprehensive knowledge about the world around us. But he goes further and defines physics as follows: "Its theories and models are not literal descriptions of reality at the atomic level (naive realism) but are symbolic and selective attempts that depict the structure of the world" (8). By stressing the symbolic character of scientific explanations, Küng attempts to gain a foothold for religious explanations of the same reality. One wonders if the parallel can be drawn too closely. Surely the symbolic nature of religious explanations differs from the highly mathematical and theoretical symbols of science, which are tested by experimental data and cause/effect analysis.

In his discussion of creation, Küng stresses the symbolic character of the creation narratives of the Hebrew Bible and repudiates any attempt to gain scientific knowledge from them. However, he feels justified in interpreting evolution in religious terms, as a creation by the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition. He tries to use the fine-tuning of the cosmological constants to suggest the intelligent design of the universe. This argument is tempting to theologians, but if the universe has evolved to produce life, the

constants of the universe are merely those that we experience. It is impossible to extrapolate to other possible universes, since we have no experience of any alternatives.

Küng proposes that scientists consider God as a hypothesis. Here it seems to me that he is stepping beyond his own wise thesis that science and religion should retain separate procedures. He does acknowledge that there is no deductive or inductive proof of God. Rather, he insists on a practical and holistic rational approach to God (including the whole experience of the human being, especially subjective awareness). Küng argues that the human being is more than the body, more than brain processes, and still a mystery to neurologists. This ignorance, however, is used as a logical leap towards the “mystery” of the cosmos, which is too easily filled by the idea of God as the primal ground of our existence.

In the plethora of books about science and religion, this one stands out as more comprehensive than most because it puts the discussion in the context of a philosophical argument about reality and the way we perceive it. Küng relies on a depiction of theology as a metaphysical principle that goes beyond the limits of scientific theories. He is too well-versed in the global religions to describe this as a necessary leap and instead depicts it as a choice. But such a choice would need to be justified in comparison with other religious or metaphysical explanations of the ultimate reality. It would be interesting to see Küng use his wide knowledge of other religions to compare the various religious cosmologies with current scientific descriptions of the origins of the universe and life.

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Robert W. Brimlow, *What About Hitler? Wrestling with Jesus' Call to Nonviolence in an Evil World*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006.

In *What About Hitler?* Robert Brimlow devotes considerable time to a critique of the Just War tradition. He wrestles vigorously with George Orwell's critique of pacifism; he argues pointedly that the Christian's first concern must be to obey Jesus, not to escape death or be successful according to some short-term definition. And he points out effectively that rejecting killing makes sense only if it is part of a personal and communal lifestyle committed to peacemaking.

There is a good deal in this book that is helpful. Brimlow brings a philosopher's sharp mind to his extensive critique of the Just War tradition. I will not try to decide here whether his critique is finally successful, but his sophisticated objections to central arguments of important Just War advocates (St. Augustine, Michael Walzer, Jean Bethke Elshtain) offer challenges that no Just War advocate should ignore. "Just war theory contradicts itself in that it sanctions the killing of innocents, which it at the same time prohibits. In addition, just war theory can also be used effectively to justify all wars" (105).

Brimlow is surely right that pacifism is impossible unless it is rooted in Christian community and prayer, and that it has no integrity unless it is part of a personal and communal lifestyle that not only rejects violence but actively engages in works of compassion and mercy toward the poor and neglected.

That said, I must confess that I found the book inadequate, disappointing, and occasionally annoying. The rambling Scriptural meditations at the beginning of each chapter were not very helpful, at least not for me. The argument that Just War theory validates Osama bin Laden as much as it does military resistance to terrorism was not convincing. Equally unsatisfactory was Brimlow's lengthy argument (139-46) that Jesus was a failure. Even his final chapter arguing for the importance of a personal and communal lifestyle of peacemaking was inadequate. Jesus called for works of mercy – feeding the hungry, caring for the homeless and naked, giving alms to the poor. That is all good and true. But what about going beyond charity to understanding the structural causes of poverty and injustice

and working vigorously to overcome institutional injustice? What about activist kinds of peacemaking – whether Victim-Offender Reconciliation Programs, sophisticated mediation efforts bringing together warring parties, or Christian Peacemaker Teams?

Most important, Brimlow’s answer to the basic question, “What About Hitler?” is woefully inadequate. He opens Chapter 7 (“The Christian Response”) with the comment that “it is time for me to respond to the Hitler question.” His answer takes three paragraphs. Just one page. He had already said near the beginning that his answer to this question is absurd (10). I think that answer is fundamentally inadequate. It is certainly true that the Christian pacifist believes that she must follow Jesus, even when this leads to death. Brimlow makes the point very well. If Jesus is God become flesh, if God raised Jesus from the dead on the third day, then it simply will not do to say, “Sorry, Jesus, your ideas do not work in a world of Hitlers and Osama bin Ladens.”

We must follow Jesus even when that means death. But there is a lot more to be said to make this position less implausible than Brimlow does. It is wrong and misleading to label it “absurd.” If Jesus is the Incarnate God who announced the inauguration of the Messianic kingdom of peace and justice, called his disciples to start living in that kingdom now, and promised to return to complete the victory over evil, then it makes sense to obey his call to nonviolence now, even when Hitlers still stalk the earth. This book does not offer a convincing answer to the question it raises.

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Stanley E. Porter, ed. *Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006.

Drawn from a 2003 colloquium at McMaster Divinity School, this collection of essays tackles how New Testament writers use the Old Testament. An introductory essay by Stanley E. Porter and a concluding scholarly response to the papers by Andreas J. Köstenberger provide a helpful orienting perspective and summation.

Two essays dedicated to general topics introduce the volume. Dennis L. Stamps seeks to clarify terminology, contrasts “author-centered” and “audience-centered” approaches, and describes persuasive rhetoric in the early church period. R. Timothy McLay introduces issues concerning canon and scripture, and identifies “pluriformity” as “an essential characteristic of the Scriptures of the early church” (55).

Michael P. Knowles (Matthew) and Porter (Luke-Acts) both argue that the evangelists’ interpretive perspectives not only center on but derive from Jesus himself. Craig A. Evans (Mark) and Sylvia C. Keesmaat (Ephesians, Colossians, and others) place these documents within the political milieu of the Roman Empire to striking effect. Paul Miller (John) and Kurt Anders Richardson (James) describe the use of OT characters, while James W. Aageson (Romans, Galatians, and others) and Köstenberger (pastorals, Revelation) provide contrasting perspectives on reading epistles.

The range of foci engages the reader, and Köstenberger’s responses prove helpful, providing additional information or a contrasting perspective. His adamant response to Aageson’s paper is particularly striking and underscores significantly divergent methods and assumptions, as well as perspectives on the implications of Paul’s hermeneutics for the contemporary Christian community.

This said, the volume’s overarching author-centered perspective prompts an uncritical assumption of continuity that, in my view, should be reconsidered. Early in the volume Stamps appropriately criticizes the idea that “NT writers use the OT” because it is “anachronistic to speak of the OT when referring to the perspective of the NT writers since the differentiation between old and new had not yet occurred” (11). Though he suggests “Jewish sacred writings” (11) as an improvement, repeated statements in the rest of the volume about how NT writers, and even Jesus himself, use the “OT”

reflect the prominence of such anachronism.

Indeed, the difficulty runs deeper than Stamps suggests. While the writers in this book attempt to uncover the intentions and hermeneutics of Luke, Paul, and even Jesus, these biblical figures neither read an OT (which implies a NT) nor consciously wrote Scripture (they sought to interpret the one(s) they had). Even the common designation “NT writers” proves historically anachronistic; the most that can accurately be said is that these people wrote what later *became* the NT. More attention to how Scripture is designated within the NT would have raised this issue and strengthened the volume.

The book’s orientation leaves potentially significant *discontinuities* unexplored. For instance, what should we make of Paul’s distinction between his own opinion and elements “from the LORD,” once his writing becomes part of a NT? Should our reading of his epistles be affected by this transformation into scripture, a shift that transcends his “original intent”? The description of “Paul’s shorter epistles” as “rang[ing] from Paul’s supposedly earliest epistle to those seemingly written so late that Paul was dead when he composed them” (182) suggests further difficulties with an exclusively author-centered approach. What of the shift from Luke’s two-volume work (Luke-Acts) to a “gospel” and a non-“gospel” separated by John, or the Emmaus story’s claim that the disciples see Jesus in “the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms” only through an impromptu Bible study led by the *risen* Lord? Unfortunately these writers do not address such discontinuities at historical, literary, and canonical levels.

A collection of essays has the benefit of various perspectives and the drawback of limited flow. The papers here are well written, engaging, and accessible for interested people with some background in the subject matter. While most essays do not focus on implications for contemporary interpretation, individual chapters would be helpful as supplements or orientation for studying a specific NT book. Several essays also situate themselves within broader scholarship, which proves particularly beneficial for the non-specialist.

Overall, these writers do an admirable job of tackling a significant, complex issue. However, although the volume explores how “NT writers used the OT,” it proves less satisfying for “Hearing the OT in the NT.”

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While the latter implies the perspective of a two-testament Scripture, most essays here seek to uncover the *pre*-NT use of Scripture (not OT!) by writers of what later became the NT. Thus, this volume serves an author-centered approach well, but it does not address discontinuity in the transformation from “authorial writings” to Christian Scripture.

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Stanley Hauerwas and Romand Coles. *Christianity, Democracy and the Radical Ordinary: Conversations between a Radical Democrat and a Christian*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2007.

It is not only Christians who find difficult the practice of engaging the world in constructive ways; not just believing that engagement should happen, but engaging the complicated issues of how to proceed, occupies all kinds of people. In this volume we observe a Christian theologian (Stanley Hauerwas) and a political theorist who is not Christian (Romand Coles) grapple with such issues in ways that try to think about the right questions and display fruitful practices within a mutual pursuit of the transformation and development of a flourishing political imagination.

The purpose of this collection of essays, letters, lectures, and conversation is to exhibit a politics that refuses to let death dominate our lives, resists fear, and seeks to uncover the violence at the heart of liberal political doctrine. Not only does this book discuss such matters, it seeks to display some of the very practices it brings into view. Practices central to this ongoing conversation include attention, engagement, vulnerability, receptive patience, tending, “microdispositions” and “micropractices,” waiting, and gentleness. Such practices, patiently pursued, might make up a life that is political, claim the authors, yet not beholden to conventional politics.

We witness Coles and Hauerwas engage each other as well as a vast array of interlocutors in an attempt to cultivate a politics of “wild patience”: Sheldon Wolin, Cornell West, Ella Baker, John Howard Yoder, Will Campbell, Rowan Williams, Jean Vanier, Samuel Wells, and Gregory of Nanzianzus. Both authors here are exemplary in their own openness and vulnerability to learning from traditions outside their own, and Coles especially so as he provides insightful readings of a number of Christian theological voices.

Nonetheless, in the midst of their respectful and deep mutual engagement, Hauerwas and Coles exhibit at times a certain wariness in relation to each other. Hauerwas worries that radical democracy will be an end in itself for which God becomes an afterthought, a superfluous placeholder, domesticated and tamed in service of some other agenda. But he also worries that Christians do something very similar when they mistake the Christian faith for a garden variety of humanism. Coles, on the other hand, is concerned that Christian jealousy regarding Jesus may prevent proper vulnerability and underwrite a kind of territoriality. He further believes that no matter how sincere the upside-down practices of the church may be, these kinds of practices have a way of turning themselves right side up – and without appropriate discernment on the part of the church.

I have my own worries. Sometimes it feels as though Coles comes close to equating the insurgent grassroots political practices of radical democracy with the politics of Jesus. Coles also seems tempted to turn the church and its practices into an instance of radical democracy. Perhaps this is one reason he claims to be so “haunted” by John Howard Yoder, who himself is open to the criticism that he thinks the church’s practices can be translated into the world without loss.

Further, the extended conversation in this volume, while richly informed by a wide variety of interlocutors – political theorists, activists of many kinds, theologians, a number of Mennonite thinkers, and so on – is in the end strangely thin on the Christian exegetical tradition. While we see close, nuanced readings of Wolin, West, Campbell, et al., we search in vain for the same kind of close attention to sustained readings of the Biblical text. This is not to say that the conversation between Coles the radical democrat and Hauerwas the Christian is not informed by biblical ideas. However, I

wonder if Coles's concern for Christian jealousy of Jesus also extends to Christian privileging of the Scriptural text and, if so, what implications this might have for a long-term continuing conversation.

Jeffrey Stout, who in his own effort to revitalize the American democratic tradition often converses with Christian theologians such as Hauerwas, claims that this book gives him hope, since it takes the conversation between Christianity and democracy in a most welcome direction. This book also gives me hope as a Christian, because it seeks to find ways for people to engage in the world that resist the violence and death that have been inscribed deeply into the story of our shared lives. And part of that hopefulness includes paying close attention to practices that can be embodied on a human scale, whether as a radical democrat or a Christian.

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Laura Ruth Yordy. *Green Witness: Ecology, Ethics, and the Kingdom of God*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2008.

Laura Yordy has a vision for churches engaging holistically in ecological discipleship. She begins her discourse in *Green Witness* by briefly describing a fantasy congregation that fully integrates earth-friendly practices into its worship and daily actions. Yordy illustrates her vision by using examples from real churches that are implementing ecological practices. According to her, the greening of the church in North America has been limited because of the ineffectiveness of education, difficulties with real change, powerlessness of leadership, individualism in church life, the magnitude of the environmental crisis, and the hope of technological fixes: "The point is not to make the church a participant in the 'environmental movement,'" she says, "but to make the church more faithful by including the eschatological import of creation in its performance of worship, ... a 'way' of life that praises and witnesses to Father Son, and Holy Spirit" (161).

The author develops her thesis around the need for the church to

renew its understanding of the eschaton – “the fulfillment of God’s promises for creation” (2). The church is to be a witness to the coming Kingdom of Heaven, the result of Christ’s redemption of all of creation. Christians are not to be managers trying to fix the environmental crisis but witnesses of Christ’s relationship to creation through faithful ecological practice.

Yordy critiques the positions of three eco-theologians – Larry Rasmussen, Catherine Keller, and Rosemary Radford Ruether – by observing that they reject several central doctrines of Christian eschatology. She notes the losses that occur when eschatology does not include Jesus, the sovereignty of God, or the concept of an afterlife. She writes that our practices today in relation to ecology witness to our belief in the fullness of the Kingdom of God. The doctrine of creation should be examined from an eschatological framework, says the author; God’s future view of redeemed creation is what makes the Christian creation story distinct from views found in the “common creation story.”

Yordy carefully states that it is God’s love that generated the universe (57), and proceeds with helpful insights into the concepts of God creating the world out of nothing, the Trinitarian role in creation, the goodness of creation, and the “Fall.” Christian ethics is described as discipleship – where the lives of Christ’s followers witness to the Kingdom through worship, action, and character. Yordy provides stimulating insights into eco-discipleship by probing key characteristics of the Kingdom: peace, justice, abundance, righteousness, and communion with God. The resulting praxis is summarized well by her statement that “Christians’ witness to the Kingdom is not simply watching, but pointing toward God’s gracious creating and redeeming activity with the activity of their own lives” (112).

Yordy sees the church serving as a “demonstration plot” for ecological discipleship. She develops the view that everything the church practices – here specifically its relation to the earth – should witness to Christ’s coming redemption of all creation. It is from within community that the witness and practice will best occur. The concluding concept centers on the ecological virtue, patience. Yordy lifts it up as a key virtue while not excluding other much-needed virtues. She says it is our impatience that plays a major factor in our dominance over the natural world. But patience is woven into the web of the universe and reflects the character of God. “Part of the human need



for patience (as well as other virtues) is the imperative for humans to realign themselves with the patient character of God's creation" (155). From this framework Yordy calls us to practice eco-discipleship.

The author develops logical arguments throughout her discourse, though at points the writing style recalls the doctoral dissertation on which the book is based. The work is in the frame of a constructive theology, and it leans heavily on arguments between various theological and philosophical positions. Yordy formulates her thesis based on a broad array of authors along with insights of her own.

This volume would serve well as the basis for serious discussion by adults interested in articulating a biblical and theological response to today's environmental crisis, but it doesn't include an extensive list of examples of creation care actions. (It would also be helpful if there were an index in addition to the bibliography.) Upper-level college students in environmental studies would benefit from exploring the intersection between faith and ecological praxis found in this text.

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Conrad L. Kanagy. *Road Signs on the Journey: A Profile of Mennonite Church USA*. Waterloo, ON: Herald, 2007.

Conrad Kanagy's profile of Mennonite Church USA is a good addition to earlier similar studies of Mennonites in 1972 and 1989.<sup>1</sup> Preferring biblical to sociological categories of analysis, Kanagy presents the data as "road signs and guideposts" in order to help Mennonites find their social, political, spiritual, and theological location, and to help Mennonite churches consider the direction of their further "journey toward the reign of God" (24).

The first two chapters set a reading of the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah as the base for Kanagy's data analysis. These chapters test the

data for evidence of a *missional* intention and vision in Mennonite church life. Succeeding chapters profile Mennonite Church USA; explore church structure, polity and self-understanding; test consistency and orthodoxy of belief and ritual; survey management of resources; review recent disruptions of Mennonite “Christendom”; and assess the relation between the church and greater society. The author’s summary conclusion shares the testimony of respondents as they reflect on the quality of congregational life and challenge the church toward greater missional identity and activity.

Kanagy’s prognosis for Mennonite Church USA is disquieting yet hopeful. While the author predicts a “bleak future” (57), among “Racial/Ethnic Mennonites” he discovered signs of growth and renewal. Other signs of hope include relatively high rates of giving, marital stability, strong beliefs about Jesus, active personal piety, and greater support of women in ministry (183ff.).

At least two issues emerge that deserve greater discussion and thought. The first is how to refer to the diversity of ethnic and racial groups comprising Mennonite Church USA. Throughout the report Kanagy uses the generic term “Racial/Ethnic” to refer to African-American, Hispanic/Latino, diverse Asian, and various Native American congregations and members. Yet “Racial/Ethnic” would also apply to the various Caucasian groups comprising the church. One of the challenges in working out the tension between the margin and middle of Mennonite church has to do with how we refer to one another. The tendency to reduce our ethnic diversity to one generic category, or an implicit us/them polarity, is a pernicious problem with no easy solution.

This problem is endemic to descriptive sociological summaries, but even more, it bespeaks the difficulty that Mennonite church organizations have in dealing with an ethnic diversity that refuses to be ‘settled.’ I wonder if this reflects the broader influence of theories of assimilation as opposed to theories of ethnic pluralism in the American context. It seems to me that one of the significant challenges in combatting racism in the church is to celebrate our chaotic ethnicity in all its glorious detail. This will demand imaginative justice in reconfiguring current structures of privilege. Our commitment to such justice will help us find better, more expressive, language with which to understand the multi-ethnic fullness of Mennonite Church USA.

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The second challenge concerns Kanagy's exile hypothesis. This hypothesis interprets the changes Mennonites have undergone as assimilation to a broader society; that is, that Mennonites as exiles in American culture and society are losing their true identity and becoming more like their host society. This interpretation might be more cogent if Kanagy had presented comparative data from a larger control group than conservative Protestants (171). Increased levels of education, wealth, professional vocation, and urban living, together with changes in various beliefs, support "the argument that Mennonites are becoming more conforming to the values and attitudes of the larger society" (170, 171). However, Anabaptism has looked more educated and urban before.<sup>2</sup>

Putting a slight twist on Kanagy's question of exile, the data may be suggesting that Mennonites are finally returning from an almost 200-year exile in rural America. The changes Kanagy traces may be instances of increased biblical fidelity. Engagement with surrounding society, however messy that might be, could be a truer expression of Anabaptist peoplehood than the isolationist posture of most recent memory.

It may be necessary to resist and even critique assimilation theories based on the deeper resonance between Mennonites and various values of American society and culture, such as freedom of religion, freedom of conscience, and participatory governance of group life. The isolationist interpretation of Mennonite life from the 16th through the 18th centuries has had something of a privileged status<sup>3</sup> and may need to give way to a more socially engaged and integrated understanding of Mennonite life as normative.

This may be why Kanagy is so firmly convinced that the future of Mennonite Church USA lies with congregations comprising various minority racial and ethnic groups. Indeed, it may be impossible to find future vitality in the church without following such leadership into social engagement. For observing these provocative issues in such a way as to raise further discussion of the future of Mennonite communities, we can be grateful to Kanagy for an insightful analysis of Mennonite Church USA.

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> J. Howard Kaufmann and Leland Harder, *Anabaptists: Four Centuries Later* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1975). J. Howard Kaufmann and Leo Driedger, *The Mennonite Mosaic: Identity and Modernization* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Richard K. MacMaster, *Land, Piety, Peoplehood, The Establishment of Mennonite Communities in America, 1683-1790* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1985), 138.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

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Earl Zimmerman. *Practicing the Politics of Jesus: The Origin and Significance of John Howard Yoder's Social Ethics*. Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2007.

Interest in the theological ethics of John Howard Yoder shows no signs of slowing down. I am delighted – and sometimes amazed – at the level of scholarly interest in Yoder's writings today. *Practicing the Politics of Jesus: The Origin and Significance of John Howard Yoder's Social Ethics* is composed of seven chapters. The first six attempt to identify what shaped Yoder in ways that gave rise to his most influential book, *The Politics of Jesus*. The last chapter, which seems rather artificially connected to the others, provides Earl Zimmerman with an opportunity to state the significance of “the politics of Jesus,” as he sees it, for peace-building efforts today.

This book's unique contribution is that it offers the fullest account to date of the influences on Yoder during the years he was in Western Europe (1949-1958). Having named some of the North American Mennonite influences, the book attributes most of the “background” to his *Politics* to these European influences.

Zimmerman is right to say that the realities of post-World War II Europe were quite significant for the young Yoder, who arrived in France in April 1949 to serve orphans and help French Mennonites recover their

commitment to pacifism. And undoubtedly the debates about war in which he engaged during those years were shaped by memories of Nazism and the horrors of the war.

The author's discussion of Barth's influence on Yoder is framed differently from that of Craig Carter [see his *The Politics of the Cross*]. My sense is that Carter knows Barth's thought better than Zimmerman does. But probably the careful examination of Yoder in light of his studies with Barth (as compared to other influences) will continue to generate discussion and debate. Zimmerman has certainly provided a fuller account of NT scholar Oscar Cullmann's influence on Yoder than has been done before. This is helpful.

The chapter on Yoder's doctoral work on sixteenth-century Anabaptism is also the fullest summary we have of that work and its connections to his *Politics of Jesus*, although it would have had greater significance before the recent publication of an English translation of Yoder's dissertation. But Zimmerman's work will help those who haven't noticed these connections before to see them now. We are fortunate with *The Politics of Jesus* because, aside from his doctoral work, it is Yoder's most heavily footnoted book. However, in addition to his wide reading and formal teachers, it is important to say, as Zimmerman does, that *Politics* did not simply emerge from a study. According to accounts from French Mennonites, young Yoder empathized with those who had lived through several years of Nazi invasions.

Zimmerman could also have included Yoder's exposure to Latin America. In the mid-'60s and again when working on *Politics*, Yoder spent time with Latin American Christians living in the midst of revolution. According to theologians Samuel Escobar and René Padilla, he empathized deeply with them while delivering timely, biblical messages (thus Yoder's being made an honorary member of the Latin American Theological Fraternity).

One might get the impression that Yoder did not engage Reinhold Niebuhr's writings nearly as seriously as, say, J. Lawrence Burkholder (26, 57ff, 107). That impression would be wrong. While in high school, Yoder took a course with a former student of Niebuhr's at the College of Wooster, in which Niebuhr himself lectured once. Approximately fifteen years later, Yoder did significant research on Niebuhr at the University of Basel before

he gave his first lecture on him, and that produced an article. Finally, years later, Yoder wrote two substantial lectures on Niebuhr that were included in the informally published *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace and Revolution: A Companion to Bainton* (soon to be formally published).

Again, one could get the wrong impression from the statement that Yoder “basically depended on Roland Bainton’s historical survey of Christian attitudes toward war and peace for his historical scheme” regarding the “Constantinian shift” (198). Yoder was an historical theologian. For many years he taught courses surveying the history of Christian attitudes toward war, peace, and revolution; he read numerous and varied primary and secondary sources germane to those lectures. He had therefore studied relevant sources well before publishing the main essay articulating his claims.

I don’t have space to discuss issues raised in the last two chapters of summary and interpretation for contemporary peace-building. Here serious questions emerge regarding contemporary appropriations of Yoder.

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Amy Laura Hall. *Conceiving Parenthood: American Protestantism and the Spirit of Reproduction*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.

Churchly discussions of reproductive bioethics usually take place in the third person. The major actors – those advocating for so-called “designer babies” or for prenatal testing designed to enable selective termination of pregnancies – remain distinct from *us*, the narrators, who can respond from a distance and with disgust. Such conversations also usually occur in the future tense, in anticipation of a brave new world in which parents shop for their unborn child’s hair color, IQ, and personality type.

Yet for readers with any connection to middle-class, mainline Protestantism, Christian ethicist Amy Laura Hall’s new book requires a shift

from third person to first and from future tense to past. Her study requires readers to ask not “What will *they* come up with *next*?” but “How have *we* contributed to the ethos that has engendered such technologies?”

Hall’s wide-ranging survey of 20th-century Protestant ideas about family, social status, and scientific innovation suggests that the seeds of troubling technologies were sown closer to our ecclesial home than many Christians like to admit. As she writes, “a tradition that had within it the possibility of leveling all believers as orphaned and gratuitously adopted kin came instead to baptize a culture of carefully delineated, racially encoded domesticity” (10). By uncritically blessing both scientific advancement and an idealized portrait of the nuclear family, Hall claims, 20th-century Protestantism set the stage for technologies that would enable aspiring American parents to engineer the perfect child.

The “germ-free home” stands at the center of Hall’s first chapter, which mines mid-century issues of *Parents* magazine and its Methodist cognate, *Together*. The war on germs, made possible by products like Lysol, sedimented racial and class differences between the “hygienic” families of the assumed readers and *other* people’s children.

The author’s second chapter looks at how the marketing of infant formula and baby food encouraged parents to shift their trust from informally and familiarly transmitted know-how to dictates of the medical establishment. This chapter’s examination of the bizarre “Baby-Incubators—With Living Babies!” exhibit at the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago in 1933-34, which allowed visitors to view premature infants struggling for survival inside oven-like incubators, drives home the point that Americans were beginning to employ a technological gaze to a macabre extent.

Hall turns in the third chapter to the eugenics movement in the United States, which was endorsed by many progressive Protestants. She counters the prevailing idea that the American movement withered as the horrors of Nazi-era eugenics became public knowledge. Instead, she suggests, “there are links between current hopes for genius and past attempts to vaccinate the social body against the menace of poverty, disability, and deviance” (217). Hall’s final chapter moves into current bioethical debates by tracing connections between the promises of the atomic age and the claims of the current genomic revolution.

The narrative throughout *Conceiving Parenthood* is provocative and thorough. The book teems with illustrations and advertisements from magazines from the last century and this one, and all are accompanied by painstakingly close readings. At times, however, the contour of Hall's argument buckles under the weight of the evidence she presents; she seems unwilling to weigh, rank, and especially discard data that distracts from the trajectory of her main point. Unfortunately, chapters averaging 100 pages each will likely intimidate some readers who otherwise would benefit from her analysis.

The author's voice alternates between the scholarly, the pastoral, and the autobiographical. Sometimes the shift can be jarring, although none of the voices by itself would have been up to the great task Hall sets for herself. Calling herself a pro-life feminist, Hall moves beyond historical investigation and critical analysis to pastoral and prophetic challenge. "I do indeed target for moral interrogation women like myself," she writes, "for our complicity in the narrations that render other women's wombs as prodigal" (400). Hall takes her call to action beyond protesting the eugenic whiff of some modern reproductive technologies and questioning the "meticulously planned procreation" of the elite classes. She suggests a much broader program of compassionate valuing of those who, for whatever reason, are deemed outside the realm of "normal."

Anabaptist readers will find much resonance with this book, especially with its call to resist market-driven definitions of what – and who – constitutes a productive life.

The challenge for Christian parents today, Hall says, is "to see the children in their homes, neighborhoods, and churches as unqualified gifts rather than projects, to identify 'downward' rather than to climb, and to allow their strategically protected and planned lives to become entangled in the needs of families and children judged to be at risk and behind the curve" (250).

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Donald Capps. *Jesus, the Village Psychiatrist*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2008.

Early in this book Donald Capps describes the behavior of a squirrel darting across a busy street, then suddenly freezing midway and racing back, only to dart again. He calls this a “living parable” (xv) and says we are intrigued because we see ourselves in the squirrel’s dilemma. I couldn’t agree more. In fact, I felt like that squirrel as I was reading this volume, at times running quickly to reach what I hoped was food for thought, and then retreating swiftly as the author’s beliefs and mine clashed.

I started the book intrigued by the title, only to freeze in the introduction at comments such as these: people with mental illnesses are “doing it to themselves” (xii), mental illnesses are “a form of coping and ... therefore typical ... today” (xii), and “the methods which Jesus employed are congruent ... with methods ... demonstrably effective ... today” (xxv). These statements portend what becomes clear in the rest of the book. Capps is a believer in Freudian psychoanalysis, a school of therapy formulated by Sigmund Freud in the late 1800s and popular in the US in the mid-1900s. It treats patients with psychotherapy in the belief that insight into conflicts which precede the illness will result in healing.

That paradigm of mental illness is rejected or at least highly suspect in the field of modern psychiatry. With the increasing use of brain scans and molecular research, psychiatry is moving in a biological direction in which mental illnesses are seen as dysfunctional states of the normal brain. Psychoanalysis has not proven effective in most mental illnesses.

Despite my momentary freeze I dashed on. The book is short, only 131 pages, and is divided into two parts. Part I is an academic explanation of psychoanalytic terms such as conversion and hysteria, and Part II is an analysis of seven cases of Jesus’ healing. The cases (two paralyzed men, two blind men, the demon-possessed boy, Jairus’s daughter, and the hemorrhaging woman) are used to illustrate Capps’s thesis that Jesus did not use magic to heal medical illnesses but employed therapeutic techniques to heal psychosomatic illnesses. Full understanding of Part I requires some prior knowledge of and belief in psychoanalytic principles, and thus may not be of interest to the general audience that Capps targets in his introduction. Part

2 may be easier for general readers but still requires some background.

It was surprising to me that Capps uses a blend of psychoanalytic descriptions and more modern diagnostic criteria from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (the “DSM,” with DSM IV being the fourth version, published in 1994). I was in psychiatric residency in the late 1970s when the first draft of the DSM was published and thus my training focused heavily on it. The DSM was known to be an attempt to describe conditions objectively, replacing the psychoanalytic model of mental illness that theorizes about etiology or cause.

Capps’s review of the minute details of diagnostic criteria of conversion disorder, factitious disorder, and somatization disorder from DSM IV was difficult to read through. His attempt to apply them to persons who lived 2000 years ago and whom the Bible describes only in barest detail was simply perplexing. Reading the cases, I found myself skimming through the academic material to get to the insights about Jesus. This is where I found the book provocative; for short periods I actually enjoyed myself, not feeling like a squirrel at all. Capps’s suggestion that Jesus did not use supernatural powers to cure people but actually listened to them challenged me to stop discounting Jesus’ healing stories as easy for him because he was divine.

Capps’s insights regarding the healing of Jairus’s daughter are excellent. For example, he points out that Jairus’s daughter was twelve, thus on the cusp of marriageability, representing to her father an opportunity to increase his wealth by marrying her off well. The author’s thoughts on Jesus’ understanding of the social context of illnesses and the implications of wellness are tantalizing but too brief. Each time I would begin thinking “Now he’s getting somewhere,” the chapter would end.

I finished the book hungering for more. Completing the analogy of the squirrel, I had braved all the academic traffic, only to find that the delectable pile of insightful spiritual nuts I was hoping for was small.

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Chris K. Huebner. *A Precarious Peace*. Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2006.

One realizes quickly upon reading *A Precarious Peace* that a desire for a solid thesis argued with clean, crisp, logical warrants and brought “together into some final programmatic statement of a position” (29) will be entirely frustrated. No last word can be given because words and positions, no less than politics and power, are precarious for those in the Christian community (58).

The precariousness that Chris K. Huebner places at the center of his Yoderian study of Mennonite theology, knowledge, and identity de-centers any attempt to offer a last word. This is a book whose project is “disestablishing, disowning, dislocating” (23) without reconstructing its subject theoretically. As such there is no argument that Huebner could be criticized for not showing adequately. He has promised not to provide an account of what peace *is*, and no one account of peace is given here. Instead, in a random sampling, there are stories about Alzheimer’s, Atom Egoyan’s films, friendship, speed, and Zizek.

The argument – or, as Huebner says, “common theme” (30) – is simply that peace is characterized by being precarious. For peace to be anything else would require a coercive intervention. Peace comes to us as a gift, given by Christ, and like all gifts it is both radically ours and out of our control.

While the political and ecclesiological ramifications of Yoder’s vision have been noticed, applied, and extended in various contexts, the epistemological questions that his investigations suggest have drawn less attention. This is what Huebner is about in this volume. I particularly like the description of his approach: “Let us group this collection of impulses together under the heading of standard epistemology.... What follows ... is a series of gestures toward a counter-epistemology that arises from the church’s confession that Christ is the truth. Here truth will appear to be unsettled rather than settled.... It arises from an excessive economy of gift, and thus it exists as a seemingly unnecessary and unwarranted donation” (133-34).

This language of gift gives much of Huebner’s discussion a “spatial” feel. To elaborate his conception of peace he invokes words like diaspora, settled, patience, gesture, scattered, speed, or territory. I am strongly impressed by how Huebner is able to move, and to move me, in space and

time throughout this book. The discussion has an embodiedness missing from much of the theological endeavor.

The book's biggest strength is the reworking of our perceptions, actions, emotions, and disposition towards precariousness. I teach Christian ethics at a small Mennonite liberal arts institution to students who are mostly not convinced pacifists in either action or epistemology. I find this an enormously difficult and somewhat stressful task. This is not surprising, because many of them are just beginning their education in the ethos of Christian community. While reading this book I noticed that in class my statements were clearer, my mode of engagement more patient and less anxious, and my answers more characterized by the open-endedness that characterizes the gift.

Huebner has written a course of therapy for those who believe in peace that will, if we let it, deepen our engagement with peace, make us more comfortable with its precariousness, and orient us towards the Christ who gives us this peace. Huebner skillfully calls into question our assumptions. Some debates evaporate under his critique, as in a chapter on Milbank and Barth called "Can a Gift be Commanded?" Others condense as the author brings together questions not typically asked at the same time, as in a chapter where he employs contemporary philosophers and cultural critics to show how martyrdom shapes the gift of peace.

I close with questions offered in response to a quotation at the end of a wonderful chapter on [Paul] Virilo and Yoder: "But because this good news involves a breaking of the cycle of violence that includes the renunciation of logistical effectiveness and possessive sovereignty, it can *only* be offered as a gift whose reception cannot be guaranteed or enforced" (130, emphasis mine). Here Huebner seems to want to guarantee a certain shape to peace. But if peace is always precarious, is it also true that only peace is precarious? Isn't there also precariousness to the exercise of power, the attempt to govern, or the attempt to communicate in the language of culture and not only gospel? Can we not recognize peace and precariousness even when they occur (miraculously) in spite of force, clumsy intervention, or misguided attempts to control? Or must peace, in order to remain precarious, guard against alliances threatening that precariousness?

At points Huebner eagerly recognizes that those practicing peace are also always implicated in the violent exercise of power (see chapters

8 and 12). But at other points the shape of the peace he avers seems overdetermined by the demand of precariousness. Isn't a truly precarious peace also willing to explore the possibility of remaining settled, existing in a happy exchange, or flourishing for a moment in effectiveness?

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Tripp York. *The Purple Crown: The Politics of Martyrdom*. Scottsdale: Herald, 2007.

*The Purple Crown: The Politics of Martyrdom* engages questions that have preoccupied Anabaptists for centuries: What is the appropriate posture of peace-loving Christians in a violent world? Should Christians be political?

As a work of historical theology, this book will appeal most to theologians and church historians. But York's prose, if repetitive at times, is accessible (and gender inclusive). Anyone who finds the subject matter compelling can approach this study. Some will find it inspiring; others will find it most valuable as a representative piece of a particular kind of Christian dogma. At the least, it will provoke passionate conversation.

According to York, Christians must be politically active earthly citizens, but with an important caveat: their political posture is one of exile. They are here on earth to represent heaven. Thus "martyrdom is *the* political act because it represents the ultimate imitation of Christ, signifying a life lived in obedience to, and participation in, the triune God" (23).

Beginning with a discussion of the early Christian martyrs under Rome, York interprets martyrdom as a public performance that bears witness to the triumph of Christ through a means superior to rhetoric or argument. Indeed, martyrdom is a cosmic battle "between God's people and God's enemies"

(29-30). From the early Christians, the author moves to a discussion of the 16th-century Anabaptist martyrs, and finishes with a biography of martyred Salvadoran archbishop Oscar Romero that is likely to be engaging even for those who dislike York's theology.

York deserves much credit for writing one of the more ecumenical martyrdom studies available from a Mennonite source. He focuses always on the broader Christian context and resists Anabaptist tribalism. But readers who value interfaith cooperation may find his work problematic.

*The Purple Crown* is peppered with references to "the people of God," and while York acknowledges that this group is hard to define, he remains rigid in his Christian understanding of the phrase. "Only where the triune God is worshipped can there be true sociality," he asserts (110). This claim is typical of York's language throughout. He consistently dismisses any social or political reality outside of Christianity by labeling it "false," an ideological tactic that adds no meat to his arguments. *The Purple Crown* is hardly the first theological work to claim that Christianity is inherently political by virtue of its alleged superiority to everything else, and if York is to be faulted for excessive reliance on a "church" vs. "world" binary, it must be said that he did not invent it. Still, he does little to make it fresh.

The author includes almost no discussion of contemporary politics or how Christians might shoulder their accountability in a modern democracy. Rather, government is simply "the state," an ill-defined monolith that kills and oppresses Christians. Christians are political because as followers of Christ they stand in opposition to the state, even unto death. This circular argument is the heart of *The Purple Crown*, thereby confining the book's appeal to those who share York's dualistic worldview.

York comes closest to undermining his own dualism in his chapter on 16th-century Europe – the strongest in the book – in which he discusses with admirable nuance how battles over semantics led Christians to kill one another. Recognizing the difficulty of resolving these doctrinal issues, York points us instead to the martyrdoms; such performances "give us something by which we can discern which acts are good, beautiful, and true. Maybe then it is possible to distinguish the difference between a pseudo-politics located in earthly regimes and an authentic politics constituted by nothing other than the broken yet risen body of Christ" (97).

The definition of “politics” is contested territory, and my frustration with York’s theocratic version may reveal little beyond my own partisanship. Nonetheless, the labels “pseudo-politics” and “authentic politics” strike me as ironically self-defeating. Nothing is more endemic to the politics of “earthly regimes” than claims of purity and authenticity that serve to discredit some peoples while elevating others to positions of supposed greatness. “The visible church is important not just so the elect can know each other, but because God has promised not to leave the world without a witness to God,” York continues; “This is the sort of gift that exposes false cities from the true city in an effort to bring all cities under the rule of Christ” (98).

This crusader-like language leaves us no room to approach non-Christians with any humility. Despite its nonviolent intent, I doubt York’s chauvinist theology will bring us closer to the “peace of the earthly city.”

*Stephanie Krehbiel*, independent scholar

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Hans Küng. *The Beginning of All Things: Science and Religion*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007.

Hans Küng has put together in *The Beginning of All Things* a remarkable synthesis of philosophical, theological, and scientific reasoning about our universe. He argues that religious views of the universe (understood as symbolic expressions of the meaning of this reality) are compatible with scientific explanations.

This does not mean that science proves theology or that theology undergirds scientific exploration, but that each has its own distinctive procedure for understanding reality. Küng believes this reality is more than what science can explain, which is precisely why we need religion in order to understand reality fully. He emphasizes the limits of scientific knowledge. "If science is to remain faithful to its method," he says, "it may not extend its judgment beyond the horizon of experience" (52). He outlines the way cosmology cannot examine the constraints of the cosmos in which we find ourselves.

The author acknowledges that science has its own procedures that give reliable and comprehensive knowledge about the world around us. But he goes further and defines physics as follows: "Its theories and models are not literal descriptions of reality at the atomic level (naive realism) but are symbolic and selective attempts that depict the structure of the world" (8). By stressing the symbolic character of scientific explanations, Küng attempts to gain a foothold for religious explanations of the same reality. One wonders if the parallel can be drawn too closely. Surely the symbolic nature of religious explanations differs from the highly mathematical and theoretical symbols of science, which are tested by experimental data and cause/effect analysis.

In his discussion of creation, Küng stresses the symbolic character of the creation narratives of the Hebrew Bible and repudiates any attempt to gain scientific knowledge from them. However, he feels justified in interpreting evolution in religious terms, as a creation by the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition. He tries to use the fine-tuning of the cosmological constants to suggest the intelligent design of the universe. This argument is tempting to theologians, but if the universe has evolved to produce life, the



constants of the universe are merely those that we experience. It is impossible to extrapolate to other possible universes, since we have no experience of any alternatives.

Küng proposes that scientists consider God as a hypothesis. Here it seems to me that he is stepping beyond his own wise thesis that science and religion should retain separate procedures. He does acknowledge that there is no deductive or inductive proof of God. Rather, he insists on a practical and holistic rational approach to God (including the whole experience of the human being, especially subjective awareness). Küng argues that the human being is more than the body, more than brain processes, and still a mystery to neurologists. This ignorance, however, is used as a logical leap towards the “mystery” of the cosmos, which is too easily filled by the idea of God as the primal ground of our existence.

In the plethora of books about science and religion, this one stands out as more comprehensive than most because it puts the discussion in the context of a philosophical argument about reality and the way we perceive it. Küng relies on a depiction of theology as a metaphysical principle that goes beyond the limits of scientific theories. He is too well-versed in the global religions to describe this as a necessary leap and instead depicts it as a choice. But such a choice would need to be justified in comparison with other religious or metaphysical explanations of the ultimate reality. It would be interesting to see Küng use his wide knowledge of other religions to compare the various religious cosmologies with current scientific descriptions of the origins of the universe and life.

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Robert W. Brimlow, *What About Hitler? Wrestling with Jesus' Call to Nonviolence in an Evil World*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006.

In *What About Hitler?* Robert Brimlow devotes considerable time to a critique of the Just War tradition. He wrestles vigorously with George Orwell's critique of pacifism; he argues pointedly that the Christian's first concern must be to obey Jesus, not to escape death or be successful according to some short-term definition. And he points out effectively that rejecting killing makes sense only if it is part of a personal and communal lifestyle committed to peacemaking.

There is a good deal in this book that is helpful. Brimlow brings a philosopher's sharp mind to his extensive critique of the Just War tradition. I will not try to decide here whether his critique is finally successful, but his sophisticated objections to central arguments of important Just War advocates (St. Augustine, Michael Walzer, Jean Bethke Elshtain) offer challenges that no Just War advocate should ignore. "Just war theory contradicts itself in that it sanctions the killing of innocents, which it at the same time prohibits. In addition, just war theory can also be used effectively to justify all wars" (105).

Brimlow is surely right that pacifism is impossible unless it is rooted in Christian community and prayer, and that it has no integrity unless it is part of a personal and communal lifestyle that not only rejects violence but actively engages in works of compassion and mercy toward the poor and neglected.

That said, I must confess that I found the book inadequate, disappointing, and occasionally annoying. The rambling Scriptural meditations at the beginning of each chapter were not very helpful, at least not for me. The argument that Just War theory validates Osama bin Laden as much as it does military resistance to terrorism was not convincing. Equally unsatisfactory was Brimlow's lengthy argument (139-46) that Jesus was a failure. Even his final chapter arguing for the importance of a personal and communal lifestyle of peacemaking was inadequate. Jesus called for works of mercy – feeding the hungry, caring for the homeless and naked, giving alms to the poor. That is all good and true. But what about going beyond charity to understanding the structural causes of poverty and injustice

and working vigorously to overcome institutional injustice? What about activist kinds of peacemaking – whether Victim-Offender Reconciliation Programs, sophisticated mediation efforts bringing together warring parties, or Christian Peacemaker Teams?

Most important, Brimlow’s answer to the basic question, “What About Hitler?” is woefully inadequate. He opens Chapter 7 (“The Christian Response”) with the comment that “it is time for me to respond to the Hitler question.” His answer takes three paragraphs. Just one page. He had already said near the beginning that his answer to this question is absurd (10). I think that answer is fundamentally inadequate. It is certainly true that the Christian pacifist believes that she must follow Jesus, even when this leads to death. Brimlow makes the point very well. If Jesus is God become flesh, if God raised Jesus from the dead on the third day, then it simply will not do to say, “Sorry, Jesus, your ideas do not work in a world of Hitlers and Osama bin Ladens.”

We must follow Jesus even when that means death. But there is a lot more to be said to make this position less implausible than Brimlow does. It is wrong and misleading to label it “absurd.” If Jesus is the Incarnate God who announced the inauguration of the Messianic kingdom of peace and justice, called his disciples to start living in that kingdom now, and promised to return to complete the victory over evil, then it makes sense to obey his call to nonviolence now, even when Hitlers still stalk the earth. This book does not offer a convincing answer to the question it raises.

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Stanley E. Porter, ed. *Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006.

Drawn from a 2003 colloquium at McMaster Divinity School, this collection of essays tackles how New Testament writers use the Old Testament. An introductory essay by Stanley E. Porter and a concluding scholarly response to the papers by Andreas J. Köstenberger provide a helpful orienting perspective and summation.

Two essays dedicated to general topics introduce the volume. Dennis L. Stamps seeks to clarify terminology, contrasts “author-centered” and “audience-centered” approaches, and describes persuasive rhetoric in the early church period. R. Timothy McLay introduces issues concerning canon and scripture, and identifies “pluriformity” as “an essential characteristic of the Scriptures of the early church” (55).

Michael P. Knowles (Matthew) and Porter (Luke-Acts) both argue that the evangelists’ interpretive perspectives not only center on but derive from Jesus himself. Craig A. Evans (Mark) and Sylvia C. Keesmaat (Ephesians, Colossians, and others) place these documents within the political milieu of the Roman Empire to striking effect. Paul Miller (John) and Kurt Anders Richardson (James) describe the use of OT characters, while James W. Aageson (Romans, Galatians, and others) and Köstenberger (pastorals, Revelation) provide contrasting perspectives on reading epistles.

The range of foci engages the reader, and Köstenberger’s responses prove helpful, providing additional information or a contrasting perspective. His adamant response to Aageson’s paper is particularly striking and underscores significantly divergent methods and assumptions, as well as perspectives on the implications of Paul’s hermeneutics for the contemporary Christian community.

This said, the volume’s overarching author-centered perspective prompts an uncritical assumption of continuity that, in my view, should be reconsidered. Early in the volume Stamps appropriately criticizes the idea that “NT writers use the OT” because it is “anachronistic to speak of the OT when referring to the perspective of the NT writers since the differentiation between old and new had not yet occurred” (11). Though he suggests “Jewish sacred writings” (11) as an improvement, repeated statements in the rest of the volume about how NT writers, and even Jesus himself, use the “OT”

reflect the prominence of such anachronism.

Indeed, the difficulty runs deeper than Stamps suggests. While the writers in this book attempt to uncover the intentions and hermeneutics of Luke, Paul, and even Jesus, these biblical figures neither read an OT (which implies a NT) nor consciously wrote Scripture (they sought to interpret the one(s) they had). Even the common designation “NT writers” proves historically anachronistic; the most that can accurately be said is that these people wrote what later *became* the NT. More attention to how Scripture is designated within the NT would have raised this issue and strengthened the volume.

The book’s orientation leaves potentially significant *discontinuities* unexplored. For instance, what should we make of Paul’s distinction between his own opinion and elements “from the LORD,” once his writing becomes part of a NT? Should our reading of his epistles be affected by this transformation into scripture, a shift that transcends his “original intent”? The description of “Paul’s shorter epistles” as “rang[ing] from Paul’s supposedly earliest epistle to those seemingly written so late that Paul was dead when he composed them” (182) suggests further difficulties with an exclusively author-centered approach. What of the shift from Luke’s two-volume work (Luke-Acts) to a “gospel” and a non-“gospel” separated by John, or the Emmaus story’s claim that the disciples see Jesus in “the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms” only through an impromptu Bible study led by the *risen* Lord? Unfortunately these writers do not address such discontinuities at historical, literary, and canonical levels.

A collection of essays has the benefit of various perspectives and the drawback of limited flow. The papers here are well written, engaging, and accessible for interested people with some background in the subject matter. While most essays do not focus on implications for contemporary interpretation, individual chapters would be helpful as supplements or orientation for studying a specific NT book. Several essays also situate themselves within broader scholarship, which proves particularly beneficial for the non-specialist.

Overall, these writers do an admirable job of tackling a significant, complex issue. However, although the volume explores how “NT writers used the OT,” it proves less satisfying for “Hearing the OT in the NT.”

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While the latter implies the perspective of a two-testament Scripture, most essays here seek to uncover the *pre*-NT use of Scripture (not OT!) by writers of what later became the NT. Thus, this volume serves an author-centered approach well, but it does not address discontinuity in the transformation from “authorial writings” to Christian Scripture.

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Stanley Hauerwas and Romand Coles. *Christianity, Democracy and the Radical Ordinary: Conversations between a Radical Democrat and a Christian*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2007.

It is not only Christians who find difficult the practice of engaging the world in constructive ways; not just believing that engagement should happen, but engaging the complicated issues of how to proceed, occupies all kinds of people. In this volume we observe a Christian theologian (Stanley Hauerwas) and a political theorist who is not Christian (Romand Coles) grapple with such issues in ways that try to think about the right questions and display fruitful practices within a mutual pursuit of the transformation and development of a flourishing political imagination.

The purpose of this collection of essays, letters, lectures, and conversation is to exhibit a politics that refuses to let death dominate our lives, resists fear, and seeks to uncover the violence at the heart of liberal political doctrine. Not only does this book discuss such matters, it seeks to display some of the very practices it brings into view. Practices central to this ongoing conversation include attention, engagement, vulnerability, receptive patience, tending, “microdispositions” and “micropractices,” waiting, and gentleness. Such practices, patiently pursued, might make up a life that is political, claim the authors, yet not beholden to conventional politics.

We witness Coles and Hauerwas engage each other as well as a vast array of interlocutors in an attempt to cultivate a politics of “wild patience”: Sheldon Wolin, Cornell West, Ella Baker, John Howard Yoder, Will Campbell, Rowan Williams, Jean Vanier, Samuel Wells, and Gregory of Nanzianzus. Both authors here are exemplary in their own openness and vulnerability to learning from traditions outside their own, and Coles especially so as he provides insightful readings of a number of Christian theological voices.

Nonetheless, in the midst of their respectful and deep mutual engagement, Hauerwas and Coles exhibit at times a certain wariness in relation to each other. Hauerwas worries that radical democracy will be an end in itself for which God becomes an afterthought, a superfluous placeholder, domesticated and tamed in service of some other agenda. But he also worries that Christians do something very similar when they mistake the Christian faith for a garden variety of humanism. Coles, on the other hand, is concerned that Christian jealousy regarding Jesus may prevent proper vulnerability and underwrite a kind of territoriality. He further believes that no matter how sincere the upside-down practices of the church may be, these kinds of practices have a way of turning themselves right side up – and without appropriate discernment on the part of the church.

I have my own worries. Sometimes it feels as though Coles comes close to equating the insurgent grassroots political practices of radical democracy with the politics of Jesus. Coles also seems tempted to turn the church and its practices into an instance of radical democracy. Perhaps this is one reason he claims to be so “haunted” by John Howard Yoder, who himself is open to the criticism that he thinks the church’s practices can be translated into the world without loss.

Further, the extended conversation in this volume, while richly informed by a wide variety of interlocutors – political theorists, activists of many kinds, theologians, a number of Mennonite thinkers, and so on – is in the end strangely thin on the Christian exegetical tradition. While we see close, nuanced readings of Wolin, West, Campbell, et al., we search in vain for the same kind of close attention to sustained readings of the Biblical text. This is not to say that the conversation between Coles the radical democrat and Hauerwas the Christian is not informed by biblical ideas. However, I

wonder if Coles's concern for Christian jealousy of Jesus also extends to Christian privileging of the Scriptural text and, if so, what implications this might have for a long-term continuing conversation.

Jeffrey Stout, who in his own effort to revitalize the American democratic tradition often converses with Christian theologians such as Hauerwas, claims that this book gives him hope, since it takes the conversation between Christianity and democracy in a most welcome direction. This book also gives me hope as a Christian, because it seeks to find ways for people to engage in the world that resist the violence and death that have been inscribed deeply into the story of our shared lives. And part of that hopefulness includes paying close attention to practices that can be embodied on a human scale, whether as a radical democrat or a Christian.

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Laura Ruth Yordy. *Green Witness: Ecology, Ethics, and the Kingdom of God*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2008.

Laura Yordy has a vision for churches engaging holistically in ecological discipleship. She begins her discourse in *Green Witness* by briefly describing a fantasy congregation that fully integrates earth-friendly practices into its worship and daily actions. Yordy illustrates her vision by using examples from real churches that are implementing ecological practices. According to her, the greening of the church in North America has been limited because of the ineffectiveness of education, difficulties with real change, powerlessness of leadership, individualism in church life, the magnitude of the environmental crisis, and the hope of technological fixes: "The point is not to make the church a participant in the 'environmental movement,'" she says, "but to make the church more faithful by including the eschatological import of creation in its performance of worship, ... a 'way' of life that praises and witnesses to Father Son, and Holy Spirit" (161).

The author develops her thesis around the need for the church to



renew its understanding of the eschaton – “the fulfillment of God’s promises for creation” (2). The church is to be a witness to the coming Kingdom of Heaven, the result of Christ’s redemption of all of creation. Christians are not to be managers trying to fix the environmental crisis but witnesses of Christ’s relationship to creation through faithful ecological practice.

Yordy critiques the positions of three eco-theologians – Larry Rasmussen, Catherine Keller, and Rosemary Radford Ruether – by observing that they reject several central doctrines of Christian eschatology. She notes the losses that occur when eschatology does not include Jesus, the sovereignty of God, or the concept of an afterlife. She writes that our practices today in relation to ecology witness to our belief in the fullness of the Kingdom of God. The doctrine of creation should be examined from an eschatological framework, says the author; God’s future view of redeemed creation is what makes the Christian creation story distinct from views found in the “common creation story.”

Yordy carefully states that it is God’s love that generated the universe (57), and proceeds with helpful insights into the concepts of God creating the world out of nothing, the Trinitarian role in creation, the goodness of creation, and the “Fall.” Christian ethics is described as discipleship – where the lives of Christ’s followers witness to the Kingdom through worship, action, and character. Yordy provides stimulating insights into eco-discipleship by probing key characteristics of the Kingdom: peace, justice, abundance, righteousness, and communion with God. The resulting praxis is summarized well by her statement that “Christians’ witness to the Kingdom is not simply watching, but pointing toward God’s gracious creating and redeeming activity with the activity of their own lives” (112).

Yordy sees the church serving as a “demonstration plot” for ecological discipleship. She develops the view that everything the church practices – here specifically its relation to the earth – should witness to Christ’s coming redemption of all creation. It is from within community that the witness and practice will best occur. The concluding concept centers on the ecological virtue, patience. Yordy lifts it up as a key virtue while not excluding other much-needed virtues. She says it is our impatience that plays a major factor in our dominance over the natural world. But patience is woven into the web of the universe and reflects the character of God. “Part of the human need

for patience (as well as other virtues) is the imperative for humans to realign themselves with the patient character of God's creation" (155). From this framework Yordy calls us to practice eco-discipleship.

The author develops logical arguments throughout her discourse, though at points the writing style recalls the doctoral dissertation on which the book is based. The work is in the frame of a constructive theology, and it leans heavily on arguments between various theological and philosophical positions. Yordy formulates her thesis based on a broad array of authors along with insights of her own.

This volume would serve well as the basis for serious discussion by adults interested in articulating a biblical and theological response to today's environmental crisis, but it doesn't include an extensive list of examples of creation care actions. (It would also be helpful if there were an index in addition to the bibliography.) Upper-level college students in environmental studies would benefit from exploring the intersection between faith and ecological praxis found in this text.

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Conrad L. Kanagy. *Road Signs on the Journey: A Profile of Mennonite Church USA*. Waterloo, ON: Herald, 2007.

Conrad Kanagy's profile of Mennonite Church USA is a good addition to earlier similar studies of Mennonites in 1972 and 1989.<sup>1</sup> Preferring biblical to sociological categories of analysis, Kanagy presents the data as "road signs and guideposts" in order to help Mennonites find their social, political, spiritual, and theological location, and to help Mennonite churches consider the direction of their further "journey toward the reign of God" (24).

The first two chapters set a reading of the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah as the base for Kanagy's data analysis. These chapters test the

data for evidence of a *missional* intention and vision in Mennonite church life. Succeeding chapters profile Mennonite Church USA; explore church structure, polity and self-understanding; test consistency and orthodoxy of belief and ritual; survey management of resources; review recent disruptions of Mennonite “Christendom”; and assess the relation between the church and greater society. The author’s summary conclusion shares the testimony of respondents as they reflect on the quality of congregational life and challenge the church toward greater missional identity and activity.

Kanagy’s prognosis for Mennonite Church USA is disquieting yet hopeful. While the author predicts a “bleak future” (57), among “Racial/Ethnic Mennonites” he discovered signs of growth and renewal. Other signs of hope include relatively high rates of giving, marital stability, strong beliefs about Jesus, active personal piety, and greater support of women in ministry (183ff.).

At least two issues emerge that deserve greater discussion and thought. The first is how to refer to the diversity of ethnic and racial groups comprising Mennonite Church USA. Throughout the report Kanagy uses the generic term “Racial/Ethnic” to refer to African-American, Hispanic/Latino, diverse Asian, and various Native American congregations and members. Yet “Racial/Ethnic” would also apply to the various Caucasian groups comprising the church. One of the challenges in working out the tension between the margin and middle of Mennonite church has to do with how we refer to one another. The tendency to reduce our ethnic diversity to one generic category, or an implicit us/them polarity, is a pernicious problem with no easy solution.

This problem is endemic to descriptive sociological summaries, but even more, it bespeaks the difficulty that Mennonite church organizations have in dealing with an ethnic diversity that refuses to be ‘settled.’ I wonder if this reflects the broader influence of theories of assimilation as opposed to theories of ethnic pluralism in the American context. It seems to me that one of the significant challenges in combatting racism in the church is to celebrate our chaotic ethnicity in all its glorious detail. This will demand imaginative justice in reconfiguring current structures of privilege. Our commitment to such justice will help us find better, more expressive, language with which to understand the multi-ethnic fullness of Mennonite Church USA.

The second challenge concerns Kanagy's exile hypothesis. This hypothesis interprets the changes Mennonites have undergone as assimilation to a broader society; that is, that Mennonites as exiles in American culture and society are losing their true identity and becoming more like their host society. This interpretation might be more cogent if Kanagy had presented comparative data from a larger control group than conservative Protestants (171). Increased levels of education, wealth, professional vocation, and urban living, together with changes in various beliefs, support "the argument that Mennonites are becoming more conforming to the values and attitudes of the larger society" (170, 171). However, Anabaptism has looked more educated and urban before.<sup>2</sup>

Putting a slight twist on Kanagy's question of exile, the data may be suggesting that Mennonites are finally returning from an almost 200-year exile in rural America. The changes Kanagy traces may be instances of increased biblical fidelity. Engagement with surrounding society, however messy that might be, could be a truer expression of Anabaptist peoplehood than the isolationist posture of most recent memory.

It may be necessary to resist and even critique assimilation theories based on the deeper resonance between Mennonites and various values of American society and culture, such as freedom of religion, freedom of conscience, and participatory governance of group life. The isolationist interpretation of Mennonite life from the 16th through the 18th centuries has had something of a privileged status<sup>3</sup> and may need to give way to a more socially engaged and integrated understanding of Mennonite life as normative.

This may be why Kanagy is so firmly convinced that the future of Mennonite Church USA lies with congregations comprising various minority racial and ethnic groups. Indeed, it may be impossible to find future vitality in the church without following such leadership into social engagement. For observing these provocative issues in such a way as to raise further discussion of the future of Mennonite communities, we can be grateful to Kanagy for an insightful analysis of Mennonite Church USA.

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> J. Howard Kaufmann and Leland Harder, *Anabaptists: Four Centuries Later* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1975). J. Howard Kaufmann and Leo Driedger, *The Mennonite Mosaic: Identity and Modernization* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Richard K. MacMaster, *Land, Piety, Peoplehood, The Establishment of Mennonite Communities in America, 1683-1790* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1985), 138.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

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Earl Zimmerman. *Practicing the Politics of Jesus: The Origin and Significance of John Howard Yoder's Social Ethics*. Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2007.

Interest in the theological ethics of John Howard Yoder shows no signs of slowing down. I am delighted – and sometimes amazed – at the level of scholarly interest in Yoder's writings today. *Practicing the Politics of Jesus: The Origin and Significance of John Howard Yoder's Social Ethics* is composed of seven chapters. The first six attempt to identify what shaped Yoder in ways that gave rise to his most influential book, *The Politics of Jesus*. The last chapter, which seems rather artificially connected to the others, provides Earl Zimmerman with an opportunity to state the significance of “the politics of Jesus,” as he sees it, for peace-building efforts today.

This book's unique contribution is that it offers the fullest account to date of the influences on Yoder during the years he was in Western Europe (1949-1958). Having named some of the North American Mennonite influences, the book attributes most of the “background” to his *Politics* to these European influences.

Zimmerman is right to say that the realities of post-World War II Europe were quite significant for the young Yoder, who arrived in France in April 1949 to serve orphans and help French Mennonites recover their

commitment to pacifism. And undoubtedly the debates about war in which he engaged during those years were shaped by memories of Nazism and the horrors of the war.

The author's discussion of Barth's influence on Yoder is framed differently from that of Craig Carter [see his *The Politics of the Cross*]. My sense is that Carter knows Barth's thought better than Zimmerman does. But probably the careful examination of Yoder in light of his studies with Barth (as compared to other influences) will continue to generate discussion and debate. Zimmerman has certainly provided a fuller account of NT scholar Oscar Cullmann's influence on Yoder than has been done before. This is helpful.

The chapter on Yoder's doctoral work on sixteenth-century Anabaptism is also the fullest summary we have of that work and its connections to his *Politics of Jesus*, although it would have had greater significance before the recent publication of an English translation of Yoder's dissertation. But Zimmerman's work will help those who haven't noticed these connections before to see them now. We are fortunate with *The Politics of Jesus* because, aside from his doctoral work, it is Yoder's most heavily footnoted book. However, in addition to his wide reading and formal teachers, it is important to say, as Zimmerman does, that *Politics* did not simply emerge from a study. According to accounts from French Mennonites, young Yoder empathized with those who had lived through several years of Nazi invasions.

Zimmerman could also have included Yoder's exposure to Latin America. In the mid-'60s and again when working on *Politics*, Yoder spent time with Latin American Christians living in the midst of revolution. According to theologians Samuel Escobar and René Padilla, he empathized deeply with them while delivering timely, biblical messages (thus Yoder's being made an honorary member of the Latin American Theological Fraternity).

One might get the impression that Yoder did not engage Reinhold Niebuhr's writings nearly as seriously as, say, J. Lawrence Burkholder (26, 57ff, 107). That impression would be wrong. While in high school, Yoder took a course with a former student of Niebuhr's at the College of Wooster, in which Niebuhr himself lectured once. Approximately fifteen years later, Yoder did significant research on Niebuhr at the University of Basel before

he gave his first lecture on him, and that produced an article. Finally, years later, Yoder wrote two substantial lectures on Niebuhr that were included in the informally published *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace and Revolution: A Companion to Bainton* (soon to be formally published).

Again, one could get the wrong impression from the statement that Yoder “basically depended on Roland Bainton’s historical survey of Christian attitudes toward war and peace for his historical scheme” regarding the “Constantinian shift” (198). Yoder was an historical theologian. For many years he taught courses surveying the history of Christian attitudes toward war, peace, and revolution; he read numerous and varied primary and secondary sources germane to those lectures. He had therefore studied relevant sources well before publishing the main essay articulating his claims.

I don’t have space to discuss issues raised in the last two chapters of summary and interpretation for contemporary peace-building. Here serious questions emerge regarding contemporary appropriations of Yoder.

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Amy Laura Hall. *Conceiving Parenthood: American Protestantism and the Spirit of Reproduction*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.

Churchly discussions of reproductive bioethics usually take place in the third person. The major actors – those advocating for so-called “designer babies” or for prenatal testing designed to enable selective termination of pregnancies – remain distinct from *us*, the narrators, who can respond from a distance and with disgust. Such conversations also usually occur in the future tense, in anticipation of a brave new world in which parents shop for their unborn child’s hair color, IQ, and personality type.

Yet for readers with any connection to middle-class, mainline Protestantism, Christian ethicist Amy Laura Hall’s new book requires a shift

from third person to first and from future tense to past. Her study requires readers to ask not “What will *they* come up with *next*?” but “How have *we* contributed to the ethos that has engendered such technologies?”

Hall’s wide-ranging survey of 20th-century Protestant ideas about family, social status, and scientific innovation suggests that the seeds of troubling technologies were sown closer to our ecclesial home than many Christians like to admit. As she writes, “a tradition that had within it the possibility of leveling all believers as orphaned and gratuitously adopted kin came instead to baptize a culture of carefully delineated, racially encoded domesticity” (10). By uncritically blessing both scientific advancement and an idealized portrait of the nuclear family, Hall claims, 20th-century Protestantism set the stage for technologies that would enable aspiring American parents to engineer the perfect child.

The “germ-free home” stands at the center of Hall’s first chapter, which mines mid-century issues of *Parents* magazine and its Methodist cognate, *Together*. The war on germs, made possible by products like Lysol, sedimented racial and class differences between the “hygienic” families of the assumed readers and *other* people’s children.

The author’s second chapter looks at how the marketing of infant formula and baby food encouraged parents to shift their trust from informally and familiarly transmitted know-how to dictates of the medical establishment. This chapter’s examination of the bizarre “Baby-Incubators—With Living Babies!” exhibit at the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago in 1933-34, which allowed visitors to view premature infants struggling for survival inside oven-like incubators, drives home the point that Americans were beginning to employ a technological gaze to a macabre extent.

Hall turns in the third chapter to the eugenics movement in the United States, which was endorsed by many progressive Protestants. She counters the prevailing idea that the American movement withered as the horrors of Nazi-era eugenics became public knowledge. Instead, she suggests, “there are links between current hopes for genius and past attempts to vaccinate the social body against the menace of poverty, disability, and deviance” (217). Hall’s final chapter moves into current bioethical debates by tracing connections between the promises of the atomic age and the claims of the current genomic revolution.



The narrative throughout *Conceiving Parenthood* is provocative and thorough. The book teems with illustrations and advertisements from magazines from the last century and this one, and all are accompanied by painstakingly close readings. At times, however, the contour of Hall's argument buckles under the weight of the evidence she presents; she seems unwilling to weigh, rank, and especially discard data that distracts from the trajectory of her main point. Unfortunately, chapters averaging 100 pages each will likely intimidate some readers who otherwise would benefit from her analysis.

The author's voice alternates between the scholarly, the pastoral, and the autobiographical. Sometimes the shift can be jarring, although none of the voices by itself would have been up to the great task Hall sets for herself. Calling herself a pro-life feminist, Hall moves beyond historical investigation and critical analysis to pastoral and prophetic challenge. "I do indeed target for moral interrogation women like myself," she writes, "for our complicity in the narrations that render other women's wombs as prodigal" (400). Hall takes her call to action beyond protesting the eugenic whiff of some modern reproductive technologies and questioning the "meticulously planned procreation" of the elite classes. She suggests a much broader program of compassionate valuing of those who, for whatever reason, are deemed outside the realm of "normal."

Anabaptist readers will find much resonance with this book, especially with its call to resist market-driven definitions of what – and who – constitutes a productive life.

The challenge for Christian parents today, Hall says, is "to see the children in their homes, neighborhoods, and churches as unqualified gifts rather than projects, to identify 'downward' rather than to climb, and to allow their strategically protected and planned lives to become entangled in the needs of families and children judged to be at risk and behind the curve" (250).

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Donald Capps. *Jesus, the Village Psychiatrist*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2008.

Early in this book Donald Capps describes the behavior of a squirrel darting across a busy street, then suddenly freezing midway and racing back, only to dart again. He calls this a “living parable” (xv) and says we are intrigued because we see ourselves in the squirrel’s dilemma. I couldn’t agree more. In fact, I felt like that squirrel as I was reading this volume, at times running quickly to reach what I hoped was food for thought, and then retreating swiftly as the author’s beliefs and mine clashed.

I started the book intrigued by the title, only to freeze in the introduction at comments such as these: people with mental illnesses are “doing it to themselves” (xii), mental illnesses are “a form of coping and ... therefore typical ... today” (xii), and “the methods which Jesus employed are congruent ... with methods ... demonstrably effective ... today” (xxv). These statements portend what becomes clear in the rest of the book. Capps is a believer in Freudian psychoanalysis, a school of therapy formulated by Sigmund Freud in the late 1800s and popular in the US in the mid-1900s. It treats patients with psychotherapy in the belief that insight into conflicts which precede the illness will result in healing.

That paradigm of mental illness is rejected or at least highly suspect in the field of modern psychiatry. With the increasing use of brain scans and molecular research, psychiatry is moving in a biological direction in which mental illnesses are seen as dysfunctional states of the normal brain. Psychoanalysis has not proven effective in most mental illnesses.

Despite my momentary freeze I dashed on. The book is short, only 131 pages, and is divided into two parts. Part I is an academic explanation of psychoanalytic terms such as conversion and hysteria, and Part II is an analysis of seven cases of Jesus’ healing. The cases (two paralyzed men, two blind men, the demon-possessed boy, Jairus’s daughter, and the hemorrhaging woman) are used to illustrate Capps’s thesis that Jesus did not use magic to heal medical illnesses but employed therapeutic techniques to heal psychosomatic illnesses. Full understanding of Part I requires some prior knowledge of and belief in psychoanalytic principles, and thus may not be of interest to the general audience that Capps targets in his introduction. Part

2 may be easier for general readers but still requires some background.

It was surprising to me that Capps uses a blend of psychoanalytic descriptions and more modern diagnostic criteria from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (the “DSM,” with DSM IV being the fourth version, published in 1994). I was in psychiatric residency in the late 1970s when the first draft of the DSM was published and thus my training focused heavily on it. The DSM was known to be an attempt to describe conditions objectively, replacing the psychoanalytic model of mental illness that theorizes about etiology or cause.

Capps’s review of the minute details of diagnostic criteria of conversion disorder, factitious disorder, and somatization disorder from DSM IV was difficult to read through. His attempt to apply them to persons who lived 2000 years ago and whom the Bible describes only in barest detail was simply perplexing. Reading the cases, I found myself skimming through the academic material to get to the insights about Jesus. This is where I found the book provocative; for short periods I actually enjoyed myself, not feeling like a squirrel at all. Capps’s suggestion that Jesus did not use supernatural powers to cure people but actually listened to them challenged me to stop discounting Jesus’ healing stories as easy for him because he was divine.

Capps’s insights regarding the healing of Jairus’s daughter are excellent. For example, he points out that Jairus’s daughter was twelve, thus on the cusp of marriageability, representing to her father an opportunity to increase his wealth by marrying her off well. The author’s thoughts on Jesus’ understanding of the social context of illnesses and the implications of wellness are tantalizing but too brief. Each time I would begin thinking “Now he’s getting somewhere,” the chapter would end.

I finished the book hungering for more. Completing the analogy of the squirrel, I had braved all the academic traffic, only to find that the delectable pile of insightful spiritual nuts I was hoping for was small.

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Chris K. Huebner. *A Precarious Peace*. Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2006.

One realizes quickly upon reading *A Precarious Peace* that a desire for a solid thesis argued with clean, crisp, logical warrants and brought “together into some final programmatic statement of a position” (29) will be entirely frustrated. No last word can be given because words and positions, no less than politics and power, are precarious for those in the Christian community (58).

The precariousness that Chris K. Huebner places at the center of his Yoderian study of Mennonite theology, knowledge, and identity de-centers any attempt to offer a last word. This is a book whose project is “disestablishing, disowning, dislocating” (23) without reconstructing its subject theoretically. As such there is no argument that Huebner could be criticized for not showing adequately. He has promised not to provide an account of what peace *is*, and no one account of peace is given here. Instead, in a random sampling, there are stories about Alzheimer’s, Atom Egoyan’s films, friendship, speed, and Zizek.

The argument – or, as Huebner says, “common theme” (30) – is simply that peace is characterized by being precarious. For peace to be anything else would require a coercive intervention. Peace comes to us as a gift, given by Christ, and like all gifts it is both radically ours and out of our control.

While the political and ecclesiological ramifications of Yoder’s vision have been noticed, applied, and extended in various contexts, the epistemological questions that his investigations suggest have drawn less attention. This is what Huebner is about in this volume. I particularly like the description of his approach: “Let us group this collection of impulses together under the heading of standard epistemology.... What follows ... is a series of gestures toward a counter-epistemology that arises from the church’s confession that Christ is the truth. Here truth will appear to be unsettled rather than settled.... It arises from an excessive economy of gift, and thus it exists as a seemingly unnecessary and unwarranted donation” (133-34).

This language of gift gives much of Huebner’s discussion a “spatial” feel. To elaborate his conception of peace he invokes words like diaspora, settled, patience, gesture, scattered, speed, or territory. I am strongly impressed by how Huebner is able to move, and to move me, in space and

time throughout this book. The discussion has an embodiedness missing from much of the theological endeavor.

The book's biggest strength is the reworking of our perceptions, actions, emotions, and disposition towards precariousness. I teach Christian ethics at a small Mennonite liberal arts institution to students who are mostly not convinced pacifists in either action or epistemology. I find this an enormously difficult and somewhat stressful task. This is not surprising, because many of them are just beginning their education in the ethos of Christian community. While reading this book I noticed that in class my statements were clearer, my mode of engagement more patient and less anxious, and my answers more characterized by the open-endedness that characterizes the gift.

Huebner has written a course of therapy for those who believe in peace that will, if we let it, deepen our engagement with peace, make us more comfortable with its precariousness, and orient us towards the Christ who gives us this peace. Huebner skillfully calls into question our assumptions. Some debates evaporate under his critique, as in a chapter on Milbank and Barth called "Can a Gift be Commanded?" Others condense as the author brings together questions not typically asked at the same time, as in a chapter where he employs contemporary philosophers and cultural critics to show how martyrdom shapes the gift of peace.

I close with questions offered in response to a quotation at the end of a wonderful chapter on [Paul] Virilo and Yoder: "But because this good news involves a breaking of the cycle of violence that includes the renunciation of logistical effectiveness and possessive sovereignty, it can *only* be offered as a gift whose reception cannot be guaranteed or enforced" (130, emphasis mine). Here Huebner seems to want to guarantee a certain shape to peace. But if peace is always precarious, is it also true that only peace is precarious? Isn't there also precariousness to the exercise of power, the attempt to govern, or the attempt to communicate in the language of culture and not only gospel? Can we not recognize peace and precariousness even when they occur (miraculously) in spite of force, clumsy intervention, or misguided attempts to control? Or must peace, in order to remain precarious, guard against alliances threatening that precariousness?

At points Huebner eagerly recognizes that those practicing peace are also always implicated in the violent exercise of power (see chapters

8 and 12). But at other points the shape of the peace he avers seems overdetermined by the demand of precariousness. Isn't a truly precarious peace also willing to explore the possibility of remaining settled, existing in a happy exchange, or flourishing for a moment in effectiveness?

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Tripp York. *The Purple Crown: The Politics of Martyrdom*. Scottsdale: Herald, 2007.

*The Purple Crown: The Politics of Martyrdom* engages questions that have preoccupied Anabaptists for centuries: What is the appropriate posture of peace-loving Christians in a violent world? Should Christians be political?

As a work of historical theology, this book will appeal most to theologians and church historians. But York's prose, if repetitive at times, is accessible (and gender inclusive). Anyone who finds the subject matter compelling can approach this study. Some will find it inspiring; others will find it most valuable as a representative piece of a particular kind of Christian dogma. At the least, it will provoke passionate conversation.

According to York, Christians must be politically active earthly citizens, but with an important caveat: their political posture is one of exile. They are here on earth to represent heaven. Thus "martyrdom is *the* political act because it represents the ultimate imitation of Christ, signifying a life lived in obedience to, and participation in, the triune God" (23).

Beginning with a discussion of the early Christian martyrs under Rome, York interprets martyrdom as a public performance that bears witness to the triumph of Christ through a means superior to rhetoric or argument. Indeed, martyrdom is a cosmic battle "between God's people and God's enemies"

(29-30). From the early Christians, the author moves to a discussion of the 16th-century Anabaptist martyrs, and finishes with a biography of martyred Salvadoran archbishop Oscar Romero that is likely to be engaging even for those who dislike York's theology.

York deserves much credit for writing one of the more ecumenical martyrdom studies available from a Mennonite source. He focuses always on the broader Christian context and resists Anabaptist tribalism. But readers who value interfaith cooperation may find his work problematic.

*The Purple Crown* is peppered with references to "the people of God," and while York acknowledges that this group is hard to define, he remains rigid in his Christian understanding of the phrase. "Only where the triune God is worshipped can there be true sociality," he asserts (110). This claim is typical of York's language throughout. He consistently dismisses any social or political reality outside of Christianity by labeling it "false," an ideological tactic that adds no meat to his arguments. *The Purple Crown* is hardly the first theological work to claim that Christianity is inherently political by virtue of its alleged superiority to everything else, and if York is to be faulted for excessive reliance on a "church" vs. "world" binary, it must be said that he did not invent it. Still, he does little to make it fresh.

The author includes almost no discussion of contemporary politics or how Christians might shoulder their accountability in a modern democracy. Rather, government is simply "the state," an ill-defined monolith that kills and oppresses Christians. Christians are political because as followers of Christ they stand in opposition to the state, even unto death. This circular argument is the heart of *The Purple Crown*, thereby confining the book's appeal to those who share York's dualistic worldview.

York comes closest to undermining his own dualism in his chapter on 16th-century Europe – the strongest in the book – in which he discusses with admirable nuance how battles over semantics led Christians to kill one another. Recognizing the difficulty of resolving these doctrinal issues, York points us instead to the martyrdoms; such performances "give us something by which we can discern which acts are good, beautiful, and true. Maybe then it is possible to distinguish the difference between a pseudo-politics located in earthly regimes and an authentic politics constituted by nothing other than the broken yet risen body of Christ" (97).

The definition of “politics” is contested territory, and my frustration with York’s theocratic version may reveal little beyond my own partisanship. Nonetheless, the labels “pseudo-politics” and “authentic politics” strike me as ironically self-defeating. Nothing is more endemic to the politics of “earthly regimes” than claims of purity and authenticity that serve to discredit some peoples while elevating others to positions of supposed greatness. “The visible church is important not just so the elect can know each other, but because God has promised not to leave the world without a witness to God,” York continues; “This is the sort of gift that exposes false cities from the true city in an effort to bring all cities under the rule of Christ” (98).

This crusader-like language leaves us no room to approach non-Christians with any humility. Despite its nonviolent intent, I doubt York’s chauvinist theology will bring us closer to the “peace of the earthly city.”

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Hans Küng. *The Beginning of All Things: Science and Religion*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007.

Hans Küng has put together in *The Beginning of All Things* a remarkable synthesis of philosophical, theological, and scientific reasoning about our universe. He argues that religious views of the universe (understood as symbolic expressions of the meaning of this reality) are compatible with scientific explanations.

This does not mean that science proves theology or that theology undergirds scientific exploration, but that each has its own distinctive procedure for understanding reality. Küng believes this reality is more than what science can explain, which is precisely why we need religion in order to understand reality fully. He emphasizes the limits of scientific knowledge. "If science is to remain faithful to its method," he says, "it may not extend its judgment beyond the horizon of experience" (52). He outlines the way cosmology cannot examine the constraints of the cosmos in which we find ourselves.

The author acknowledges that science has its own procedures that give reliable and comprehensive knowledge about the world around us. But he goes further and defines physics as follows: "Its theories and models are not literal descriptions of reality at the atomic level (naive realism) but are symbolic and selective attempts that depict the structure of the world" (8). By stressing the symbolic character of scientific explanations, Küng attempts to gain a foothold for religious explanations of the same reality. One wonders if the parallel can be drawn too closely. Surely the symbolic nature of religious explanations differs from the highly mathematical and theoretical symbols of science, which are tested by experimental data and cause/effect analysis.

In his discussion of creation, Küng stresses the symbolic character of the creation narratives of the Hebrew Bible and repudiates any attempt to gain scientific knowledge from them. However, he feels justified in interpreting evolution in religious terms, as a creation by the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition. He tries to use the fine-tuning of the cosmological constants to suggest the intelligent design of the universe. This argument is tempting to theologians, but if the universe has evolved to produce life, the

constants of the universe are merely those that we experience. It is impossible to extrapolate to other possible universes, since we have no experience of any alternatives.

Küng proposes that scientists consider God as a hypothesis. Here it seems to me that he is stepping beyond his own wise thesis that science and religion should retain separate procedures. He does acknowledge that there is no deductive or inductive proof of God. Rather, he insists on a practical and holistic rational approach to God (including the whole experience of the human being, especially subjective awareness). Küng argues that the human being is more than the body, more than brain processes, and still a mystery to neurologists. This ignorance, however, is used as a logical leap towards the “mystery” of the cosmos, which is too easily filled by the idea of God as the primal ground of our existence.

In the plethora of books about science and religion, this one stands out as more comprehensive than most because it puts the discussion in the context of a philosophical argument about reality and the way we perceive it. Küng relies on a depiction of theology as a metaphysical principle that goes beyond the limits of scientific theories. He is too well-versed in the global religions to describe this as a necessary leap and instead depicts it as a choice. But such a choice would need to be justified in comparison with other religious or metaphysical explanations of the ultimate reality. It would be interesting to see Küng use his wide knowledge of other religions to compare the various religious cosmologies with current scientific descriptions of the origins of the universe and life.

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Robert W. Brimlow, *What About Hitler? Wrestling with Jesus' Call to Nonviolence in an Evil World*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006.

In *What About Hitler?* Robert Brimlow devotes considerable time to a critique of the Just War tradition. He wrestles vigorously with George Orwell's critique of pacifism; he argues pointedly that the Christian's first concern must be to obey Jesus, not to escape death or be successful according to some short-term definition. And he points out effectively that rejecting killing makes sense only if it is part of a personal and communal lifestyle committed to peacemaking.

There is a good deal in this book that is helpful. Brimlow brings a philosopher's sharp mind to his extensive critique of the Just War tradition. I will not try to decide here whether his critique is finally successful, but his sophisticated objections to central arguments of important Just War advocates (St. Augustine, Michael Walzer, Jean Bethke Elshtain) offer challenges that no Just War advocate should ignore. "Just war theory contradicts itself in that it sanctions the killing of innocents, which it at the same time prohibits. In addition, just war theory can also be used effectively to justify all wars" (105).

Brimlow is surely right that pacifism is impossible unless it is rooted in Christian community and prayer, and that it has no integrity unless it is part of a personal and communal lifestyle that not only rejects violence but actively engages in works of compassion and mercy toward the poor and neglected.

That said, I must confess that I found the book inadequate, disappointing, and occasionally annoying. The rambling Scriptural meditations at the beginning of each chapter were not very helpful, at least not for me. The argument that Just War theory validates Osama bin Laden as much as it does military resistance to terrorism was not convincing. Equally unsatisfactory was Brimlow's lengthy argument (139-46) that Jesus was a failure. Even his final chapter arguing for the importance of a personal and communal lifestyle of peacemaking was inadequate. Jesus called for works of mercy – feeding the hungry, caring for the homeless and naked, giving alms to the poor. That is all good and true. But what about going beyond charity to understanding the structural causes of poverty and injustice

and working vigorously to overcome institutional injustice? What about activist kinds of peacemaking – whether Victim-Offender Reconciliation Programs, sophisticated mediation efforts bringing together warring parties, or Christian Peacemaker Teams?

Most important, Brimlow’s answer to the basic question, “What About Hitler?” is woefully inadequate. He opens Chapter 7 (“The Christian Response”) with the comment that “it is time for me to respond to the Hitler question.” His answer takes three paragraphs. Just one page. He had already said near the beginning that his answer to this question is absurd (10). I think that answer is fundamentally inadequate. It is certainly true that the Christian pacifist believes that she must follow Jesus, even when this leads to death. Brimlow makes the point very well. If Jesus is God become flesh, if God raised Jesus from the dead on the third day, then it simply will not do to say, “Sorry, Jesus, your ideas do not work in a world of Hitlers and Osama bin Ladens.”

We must follow Jesus even when that means death. But there is a lot more to be said to make this position less implausible than Brimlow does. It is wrong and misleading to label it “absurd.” If Jesus is the Incarnate God who announced the inauguration of the Messianic kingdom of peace and justice, called his disciples to start living in that kingdom now, and promised to return to complete the victory over evil, then it makes sense to obey his call to nonviolence now, even when Hitlers still stalk the earth. This book does not offer a convincing answer to the question it raises.

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Stanley E. Porter, ed. *Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006.

Drawn from a 2003 colloquium at McMaster Divinity School, this collection of essays tackles how New Testament writers use the Old Testament. An introductory essay by Stanley E. Porter and a concluding scholarly response to the papers by Andreas J. Köstenberger provide a helpful orienting perspective and summation.

Two essays dedicated to general topics introduce the volume. Dennis L. Stamps seeks to clarify terminology, contrasts “author-centered” and “audience-centered” approaches, and describes persuasive rhetoric in the early church period. R. Timothy McLay introduces issues concerning canon and scripture, and identifies “pluriformity” as “an essential characteristic of the Scriptures of the early church” (55).

Michael P. Knowles (Matthew) and Porter (Luke-Acts) both argue that the evangelists’ interpretive perspectives not only center on but derive from Jesus himself. Craig A. Evans (Mark) and Sylvia C. Keesmaat (Ephesians, Colossians, and others) place these documents within the political milieu of the Roman Empire to striking effect. Paul Miller (John) and Kurt Anders Richardson (James) describe the use of OT characters, while James W. Aageson (Romans, Galatians, and others) and Köstenberger (pastorals, Revelation) provide contrasting perspectives on reading epistles.

The range of foci engages the reader, and Köstenberger’s responses prove helpful, providing additional information or a contrasting perspective. His adamant response to Aageson’s paper is particularly striking and underscores significantly divergent methods and assumptions, as well as perspectives on the implications of Paul’s hermeneutics for the contemporary Christian community.

This said, the volume’s overarching author-centered perspective prompts an uncritical assumption of continuity that, in my view, should be reconsidered. Early in the volume Stamps appropriately criticizes the idea that “NT writers use the OT” because it is “anachronistic to speak of the OT when referring to the perspective of the NT writers since the differentiation between old and new had not yet occurred” (11). Though he suggests “Jewish sacred writings” (11) as an improvement, repeated statements in the rest of the volume about how NT writers, and even Jesus himself, use the “OT”

reflect the prominence of such anachronism.

Indeed, the difficulty runs deeper than Stamps suggests. While the writers in this book attempt to uncover the intentions and hermeneutics of Luke, Paul, and even Jesus, these biblical figures neither read an OT (which implies a NT) nor consciously wrote Scripture (they sought to interpret the one(s) they had). Even the common designation “NT writers” proves historically anachronistic; the most that can accurately be said is that these people wrote what later *became* the NT. More attention to how Scripture is designated within the NT would have raised this issue and strengthened the volume.

The book’s orientation leaves potentially significant *discontinuities* unexplored. For instance, what should we make of Paul’s distinction between his own opinion and elements “from the LORD,” once his writing becomes part of a NT? Should our reading of his epistles be affected by this transformation into scripture, a shift that transcends his “original intent”? The description of “Paul’s shorter epistles” as “rang[ing] from Paul’s supposedly earliest epistle to those seemingly written so late that Paul was dead when he composed them” (182) suggests further difficulties with an exclusively author-centered approach. What of the shift from Luke’s two-volume work (Luke-Acts) to a “gospel” and a non-“gospel” separated by John, or the Emmaus story’s claim that the disciples see Jesus in “the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms” only through an impromptu Bible study led by the *risen* Lord? Unfortunately these writers do not address such discontinuities at historical, literary, and canonical levels.

A collection of essays has the benefit of various perspectives and the drawback of limited flow. The papers here are well written, engaging, and accessible for interested people with some background in the subject matter. While most essays do not focus on implications for contemporary interpretation, individual chapters would be helpful as supplements or orientation for studying a specific NT book. Several essays also situate themselves within broader scholarship, which proves particularly beneficial for the non-specialist.

Overall, these writers do an admirable job of tackling a significant, complex issue. However, although the volume explores how “NT writers used the OT,” it proves less satisfying for “Hearing the OT in the NT.”

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While the latter implies the perspective of a two-testament Scripture, most essays here seek to uncover the *pre*-NT use of Scripture (not OT!) by writers of what later became the NT. Thus, this volume serves an author-centered approach well, but it does not address discontinuity in the transformation from “authorial writings” to Christian Scripture.

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Stanley Hauerwas and Romand Coles. *Christianity, Democracy and the Radical Ordinary: Conversations between a Radical Democrat and a Christian*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2007.

It is not only Christians who find difficult the practice of engaging the world in constructive ways; not just believing that engagement should happen, but engaging the complicated issues of how to proceed, occupies all kinds of people. In this volume we observe a Christian theologian (Stanley Hauerwas) and a political theorist who is not Christian (Romand Coles) grapple with such issues in ways that try to think about the right questions and display fruitful practices within a mutual pursuit of the transformation and development of a flourishing political imagination.

The purpose of this collection of essays, letters, lectures, and conversation is to exhibit a politics that refuses to let death dominate our lives, resists fear, and seeks to uncover the violence at the heart of liberal political doctrine. Not only does this book discuss such matters, it seeks to display some of the very practices it brings into view. Practices central to this ongoing conversation include attention, engagement, vulnerability, receptive patience, tending, “microdispositions” and “micropractices,” waiting, and gentleness. Such practices, patiently pursued, might make up a life that is political, claim the authors, yet not beholden to conventional politics.

We witness Coles and Hauerwas engage each other as well as a vast array of interlocutors in an attempt to cultivate a politics of “wild patience”: Sheldon Wolin, Cornell West, Ella Baker, John Howard Yoder, Will Campbell, Rowan Williams, Jean Vanier, Samuel Wells, and Gregory of Nanzianzus. Both authors here are exemplary in their own openness and vulnerability to learning from traditions outside their own, and Coles especially so as he provides insightful readings of a number of Christian theological voices.

Nonetheless, in the midst of their respectful and deep mutual engagement, Hauerwas and Coles exhibit at times a certain wariness in relation to each other. Hauerwas worries that radical democracy will be an end in itself for which God becomes an afterthought, a superfluous placeholder, domesticated and tamed in service of some other agenda. But he also worries that Christians do something very similar when they mistake the Christian faith for a garden variety of humanism. Coles, on the other hand, is concerned that Christian jealousy regarding Jesus may prevent proper vulnerability and underwrite a kind of territoriality. He further believes that no matter how sincere the upside-down practices of the church may be, these kinds of practices have a way of turning themselves right side up – and without appropriate discernment on the part of the church.

I have my own worries. Sometimes it feels as though Coles comes close to equating the insurgent grassroots political practices of radical democracy with the politics of Jesus. Coles also seems tempted to turn the church and its practices into an instance of radical democracy. Perhaps this is one reason he claims to be so “haunted” by John Howard Yoder, who himself is open to the criticism that he thinks the church’s practices can be translated into the world without loss.

Further, the extended conversation in this volume, while richly informed by a wide variety of interlocutors – political theorists, activists of many kinds, theologians, a number of Mennonite thinkers, and so on – is in the end strangely thin on the Christian exegetical tradition. While we see close, nuanced readings of Wolin, West, Campbell, et al., we search in vain for the same kind of close attention to sustained readings of the Biblical text. This is not to say that the conversation between Coles the radical democrat and Hauerwas the Christian is not informed by biblical ideas. However, I



wonder if Coles's concern for Christian jealousy of Jesus also extends to Christian privileging of the Scriptural text and, if so, what implications this might have for a long-term continuing conversation.

Jeffrey Stout, who in his own effort to revitalize the American democratic tradition often converses with Christian theologians such as Hauerwas, claims that this book gives him hope, since it takes the conversation between Christianity and democracy in a most welcome direction. This book also gives me hope as a Christian, because it seeks to find ways for people to engage in the world that resist the violence and death that have been inscribed deeply into the story of our shared lives. And part of that hopefulness includes paying close attention to practices that can be embodied on a human scale, whether as a radical democrat or a Christian.

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Laura Ruth Yordy. *Green Witness: Ecology, Ethics, and the Kingdom of God*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2008.

Laura Yordy has a vision for churches engaging holistically in ecological discipleship. She begins her discourse in *Green Witness* by briefly describing a fantasy congregation that fully integrates earth-friendly practices into its worship and daily actions. Yordy illustrates her vision by using examples from real churches that are implementing ecological practices. According to her, the greening of the church in North America has been limited because of the ineffectiveness of education, difficulties with real change, powerlessness of leadership, individualism in church life, the magnitude of the environmental crisis, and the hope of technological fixes: "The point is not to make the church a participant in the 'environmental movement,'" she says, "but to make the church more faithful by including the eschatological import of creation in its performance of worship, ... a 'way' of life that praises and witnesses to Father Son, and Holy Spirit" (161).

The author develops her thesis around the need for the church to

renew its understanding of the eschaton – “the fulfillment of God’s promises for creation” (2). The church is to be a witness to the coming Kingdom of Heaven, the result of Christ’s redemption of all of creation. Christians are not to be managers trying to fix the environmental crisis but witnesses of Christ’s relationship to creation through faithful ecological practice.

Yordy critiques the positions of three eco-theologians – Larry Rasmussen, Catherine Keller, and Rosemary Radford Ruether – by observing that they reject several central doctrines of Christian eschatology. She notes the losses that occur when eschatology does not include Jesus, the sovereignty of God, or the concept of an afterlife. She writes that our practices today in relation to ecology witness to our belief in the fullness of the Kingdom of God. The doctrine of creation should be examined from an eschatological framework, says the author; God’s future view of redeemed creation is what makes the Christian creation story distinct from views found in the “common creation story.”

Yordy carefully states that it is God’s love that generated the universe (57), and proceeds with helpful insights into the concepts of God creating the world out of nothing, the Trinitarian role in creation, the goodness of creation, and the “Fall.” Christian ethics is described as discipleship – where the lives of Christ’s followers witness to the Kingdom through worship, action, and character. Yordy provides stimulating insights into eco-discipleship by probing key characteristics of the Kingdom: peace, justice, abundance, righteousness, and communion with God. The resulting praxis is summarized well by her statement that “Christians’ witness to the Kingdom is not simply watching, but pointing toward God’s gracious creating and redeeming activity with the activity of their own lives” (112).

Yordy sees the church serving as a “demonstration plot” for ecological discipleship. She develops the view that everything the church practices – here specifically its relation to the earth – should witness to Christ’s coming redemption of all creation. It is from within community that the witness and practice will best occur. The concluding concept centers on the ecological virtue, patience. Yordy lifts it up as a key virtue while not excluding other much-needed virtues. She says it is our impatience that plays a major factor in our dominance over the natural world. But patience is woven into the web of the universe and reflects the character of God. “Part of the human need

for patience (as well as other virtues) is the imperative for humans to realign themselves with the patient character of God's creation" (155). From this framework Yordy calls us to practice eco-discipleship.

The author develops logical arguments throughout her discourse, though at points the writing style recalls the doctoral dissertation on which the book is based. The work is in the frame of a constructive theology, and it leans heavily on arguments between various theological and philosophical positions. Yordy formulates her thesis based on a broad array of authors along with insights of her own.

This volume would serve well as the basis for serious discussion by adults interested in articulating a biblical and theological response to today's environmental crisis, but it doesn't include an extensive list of examples of creation care actions. (It would also be helpful if there were an index in addition to the bibliography.) Upper-level college students in environmental studies would benefit from exploring the intersection between faith and ecological praxis found in this text.

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Conrad L. Kanagy. *Road Signs on the Journey: A Profile of Mennonite Church USA*. Waterloo, ON: Herald, 2007.

Conrad Kanagy's profile of Mennonite Church USA is a good addition to earlier similar studies of Mennonites in 1972 and 1989.<sup>1</sup> Preferring biblical to sociological categories of analysis, Kanagy presents the data as "road signs and guideposts" in order to help Mennonites find their social, political, spiritual, and theological location, and to help Mennonite churches consider the direction of their further "journey toward the reign of God" (24).

The first two chapters set a reading of the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah as the base for Kanagy's data analysis. These chapters test the

data for evidence of a *missional* intention and vision in Mennonite church life. Succeeding chapters profile Mennonite Church USA; explore church structure, polity and self-understanding; test consistency and orthodoxy of belief and ritual; survey management of resources; review recent disruptions of Mennonite “Christendom”; and assess the relation between the church and greater society. The author’s summary conclusion shares the testimony of respondents as they reflect on the quality of congregational life and challenge the church toward greater missional identity and activity.

Kanagy’s prognosis for Mennonite Church USA is disquieting yet hopeful. While the author predicts a “bleak future” (57), among “Racial/Ethnic Mennonites” he discovered signs of growth and renewal. Other signs of hope include relatively high rates of giving, marital stability, strong beliefs about Jesus, active personal piety, and greater support of women in ministry (183ff.).

At least two issues emerge that deserve greater discussion and thought. The first is how to refer to the diversity of ethnic and racial groups comprising Mennonite Church USA. Throughout the report Kanagy uses the generic term “Racial/Ethnic” to refer to African-American, Hispanic/Latino, diverse Asian, and various Native American congregations and members. Yet “Racial/Ethnic” would also apply to the various Caucasian groups comprising the church. One of the challenges in working out the tension between the margin and middle of Mennonite church has to do with how we refer to one another. The tendency to reduce our ethnic diversity to one generic category, or an implicit us/them polarity, is a pernicious problem with no easy solution.

This problem is endemic to descriptive sociological summaries, but even more, it bespeaks the difficulty that Mennonite church organizations have in dealing with an ethnic diversity that refuses to be ‘settled.’ I wonder if this reflects the broader influence of theories of assimilation as opposed to theories of ethnic pluralism in the American context. It seems to me that one of the significant challenges in combatting racism in the church is to celebrate our chaotic ethnicity in all its glorious detail. This will demand imaginative justice in reconfiguring current structures of privilege. Our commitment to such justice will help us find better, more expressive, language with which to understand the multi-ethnic fullness of Mennonite Church USA.

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The second challenge concerns Kanagy's exile hypothesis. This hypothesis interprets the changes Mennonites have undergone as assimilation to a broader society; that is, that Mennonites as exiles in American culture and society are losing their true identity and becoming more like their host society. This interpretation might be more cogent if Kanagy had presented comparative data from a larger control group than conservative Protestants (171). Increased levels of education, wealth, professional vocation, and urban living, together with changes in various beliefs, support "the argument that Mennonites are becoming more conforming to the values and attitudes of the larger society" (170, 171). However, Anabaptism has looked more educated and urban before.<sup>2</sup>

Putting a slight twist on Kanagy's question of exile, the data may be suggesting that Mennonites are finally returning from an almost 200-year exile in rural America. The changes Kanagy traces may be instances of increased biblical fidelity. Engagement with surrounding society, however messy that might be, could be a truer expression of Anabaptist peoplehood than the isolationist posture of most recent memory.

It may be necessary to resist and even critique assimilation theories based on the deeper resonance between Mennonites and various values of American society and culture, such as freedom of religion, freedom of conscience, and participatory governance of group life. The isolationist interpretation of Mennonite life from the 16th through the 18th centuries has had something of a privileged status<sup>3</sup> and may need to give way to a more socially engaged and integrated understanding of Mennonite life as normative.

This may be why Kanagy is so firmly convinced that the future of Mennonite Church USA lies with congregations comprising various minority racial and ethnic groups. Indeed, it may be impossible to find future vitality in the church without following such leadership into social engagement. For observing these provocative issues in such a way as to raise further discussion of the future of Mennonite communities, we can be grateful to Kanagy for an insightful analysis of Mennonite Church USA.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> J. Howard Kaufmann and Leland Harder, *Anabaptists: Four Centuries Later* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1975). J. Howard Kaufmann and Leo Driedger, *The Mennonite Mosaic: Identity and Modernization* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Richard K. MacMaster, *Land, Piety, Peoplehood, The Establishment of Mennonite Communities in America, 1683-1790* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1985), 138.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

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Earl Zimmerman. *Practicing the Politics of Jesus: The Origin and Significance of John Howard Yoder's Social Ethics*. Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2007.

Interest in the theological ethics of John Howard Yoder shows no signs of slowing down. I am delighted – and sometimes amazed – at the level of scholarly interest in Yoder's writings today. *Practicing the Politics of Jesus: The Origin and Significance of John Howard Yoder's Social Ethics* is composed of seven chapters. The first six attempt to identify what shaped Yoder in ways that gave rise to his most influential book, *The Politics of Jesus*. The last chapter, which seems rather artificially connected to the others, provides Earl Zimmerman with an opportunity to state the significance of “the politics of Jesus,” as he sees it, for peace-building efforts today.

This book's unique contribution is that it offers the fullest account to date of the influences on Yoder during the years he was in Western Europe (1949-1958). Having named some of the North American Mennonite influences, the book attributes most of the “background” to his *Politics* to these European influences.

Zimmerman is right to say that the realities of post-World War II Europe were quite significant for the young Yoder, who arrived in France in April 1949 to serve orphans and help French Mennonites recover their

commitment to pacifism. And undoubtedly the debates about war in which he engaged during those years were shaped by memories of Nazism and the horrors of the war.

The author's discussion of Barth's influence on Yoder is framed differently from that of Craig Carter [see his *The Politics of the Cross*]. My sense is that Carter knows Barth's thought better than Zimmerman does. But probably the careful examination of Yoder in light of his studies with Barth (as compared to other influences) will continue to generate discussion and debate. Zimmerman has certainly provided a fuller account of NT scholar Oscar Cullmann's influence on Yoder than has been done before. This is helpful.

The chapter on Yoder's doctoral work on sixteenth-century Anabaptism is also the fullest summary we have of that work and its connections to his *Politics of Jesus*, although it would have had greater significance before the recent publication of an English translation of Yoder's dissertation. But Zimmerman's work will help those who haven't noticed these connections before to see them now. We are fortunate with *The Politics of Jesus* because, aside from his doctoral work, it is Yoder's most heavily footnoted book. However, in addition to his wide reading and formal teachers, it is important to say, as Zimmerman does, that *Politics* did not simply emerge from a study. According to accounts from French Mennonites, young Yoder empathized with those who had lived through several years of Nazi invasions.

Zimmerman could also have included Yoder's exposure to Latin America. In the mid-'60s and again when working on *Politics*, Yoder spent time with Latin American Christians living in the midst of revolution. According to theologians Samuel Escobar and René Padilla, he empathized deeply with them while delivering timely, biblical messages (thus Yoder's being made an honorary member of the Latin American Theological Fraternity).

One might get the impression that Yoder did not engage Reinhold Niebuhr's writings nearly as seriously as, say, J. Lawrence Burkholder (26, 57ff, 107). That impression would be wrong. While in high school, Yoder took a course with a former student of Niebuhr's at the College of Wooster, in which Niebuhr himself lectured once. Approximately fifteen years later, Yoder did significant research on Niebuhr at the University of Basel before

he gave his first lecture on him, and that produced an article. Finally, years later, Yoder wrote two substantial lectures on Niebuhr that were included in the informally published *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace and Revolution: A Companion to Bainton* (soon to be formally published).

Again, one could get the wrong impression from the statement that Yoder “basically depended on Roland Bainton’s historical survey of Christian attitudes toward war and peace for his historical scheme” regarding the “Constantinian shift” (198). Yoder was an historical theologian. For many years he taught courses surveying the history of Christian attitudes toward war, peace, and revolution; he read numerous and varied primary and secondary sources germane to those lectures. He had therefore studied relevant sources well before publishing the main essay articulating his claims.

I don’t have space to discuss issues raised in the last two chapters of summary and interpretation for contemporary peace-building. Here serious questions emerge regarding contemporary appropriations of Yoder.

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Amy Laura Hall. *Conceiving Parenthood: American Protestantism and the Spirit of Reproduction*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.

Churchly discussions of reproductive bioethics usually take place in the third person. The major actors – those advocating for so-called “designer babies” or for prenatal testing designed to enable selective termination of pregnancies – remain distinct from *us*, the narrators, who can respond from a distance and with disgust. Such conversations also usually occur in the future tense, in anticipation of a brave new world in which parents shop for their unborn child’s hair color, IQ, and personality type.

Yet for readers with any connection to middle-class, mainline Protestantism, Christian ethicist Amy Laura Hall’s new book requires a shift



from third person to first and from future tense to past. Her study requires readers to ask not “What will *they* come up with *next*?” but “How have *we* contributed to the ethos that has engendered such technologies?”

Hall’s wide-ranging survey of 20th-century Protestant ideas about family, social status, and scientific innovation suggests that the seeds of troubling technologies were sown closer to our ecclesial home than many Christians like to admit. As she writes, “a tradition that had within it the possibility of leveling all believers as orphaned and gratuitously adopted kin came instead to baptize a culture of carefully delineated, racially encoded domesticity” (10). By uncritically blessing both scientific advancement and an idealized portrait of the nuclear family, Hall claims, 20th-century Protestantism set the stage for technologies that would enable aspiring American parents to engineer the perfect child.

The “germ-free home” stands at the center of Hall’s first chapter, which mines mid-century issues of *Parents* magazine and its Methodist cognate, *Together*. The war on germs, made possible by products like Lysol, sedimented racial and class differences between the “hygienic” families of the assumed readers and *other* people’s children.

The author’s second chapter looks at how the marketing of infant formula and baby food encouraged parents to shift their trust from informally and familiarly transmitted know-how to dictates of the medical establishment. This chapter’s examination of the bizarre “Baby-Incubators—With Living Babies!” exhibit at the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago in 1933-34, which allowed visitors to view premature infants struggling for survival inside oven-like incubators, drives home the point that Americans were beginning to employ a technological gaze to a macabre extent.

Hall turns in the third chapter to the eugenics movement in the United States, which was endorsed by many progressive Protestants. She counters the prevailing idea that the American movement withered as the horrors of Nazi-era eugenics became public knowledge. Instead, she suggests, “there are links between current hopes for genius and past attempts to vaccinate the social body against the menace of poverty, disability, and deviance” (217). Hall’s final chapter moves into current bioethical debates by tracing connections between the promises of the atomic age and the claims of the current genomic revolution.

The narrative throughout *Conceiving Parenthood* is provocative and thorough. The book teems with illustrations and advertisements from magazines from the last century and this one, and all are accompanied by painstakingly close readings. At times, however, the contour of Hall's argument buckles under the weight of the evidence she presents; she seems unwilling to weigh, rank, and especially discard data that distracts from the trajectory of her main point. Unfortunately, chapters averaging 100 pages each will likely intimidate some readers who otherwise would benefit from her analysis.

The author's voice alternates between the scholarly, the pastoral, and the autobiographical. Sometimes the shift can be jarring, although none of the voices by itself would have been up to the great task Hall sets for herself. Calling herself a pro-life feminist, Hall moves beyond historical investigation and critical analysis to pastoral and prophetic challenge. "I do indeed target for moral interrogation women like myself," she writes, "for our complicity in the narrations that render other women's wombs as prodigal" (400). Hall takes her call to action beyond protesting the eugenic whiff of some modern reproductive technologies and questioning the "meticulously planned procreation" of the elite classes. She suggests a much broader program of compassionate valuing of those who, for whatever reason, are deemed outside the realm of "normal."

Anabaptist readers will find much resonance with this book, especially with its call to resist market-driven definitions of what – and who – constitutes a productive life.

The challenge for Christian parents today, Hall says, is "to see the children in their homes, neighborhoods, and churches as unqualified gifts rather than projects, to identify 'downward' rather than to climb, and to allow their strategically protected and planned lives to become entangled in the needs of families and children judged to be at risk and behind the curve" (250).

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Donald Capps. *Jesus, the Village Psychiatrist*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2008.

Early in this book Donald Capps describes the behavior of a squirrel darting across a busy street, then suddenly freezing midway and racing back, only to dart again. He calls this a “living parable” (xv) and says we are intrigued because we see ourselves in the squirrel’s dilemma. I couldn’t agree more. In fact, I felt like that squirrel as I was reading this volume, at times running quickly to reach what I hoped was food for thought, and then retreating swiftly as the author’s beliefs and mine clashed.

I started the book intrigued by the title, only to freeze in the introduction at comments such as these: people with mental illnesses are “doing it to themselves” (xii), mental illnesses are “a form of coping and ... therefore typical ... today” (xii), and “the methods which Jesus employed are congruent ... with methods ... demonstrably effective ... today” (xxv). These statements portend what becomes clear in the rest of the book. Capps is a believer in Freudian psychoanalysis, a school of therapy formulated by Sigmund Freud in the late 1800s and popular in the US in the mid-1900s. It treats patients with psychotherapy in the belief that insight into conflicts which precede the illness will result in healing.

That paradigm of mental illness is rejected or at least highly suspect in the field of modern psychiatry. With the increasing use of brain scans and molecular research, psychiatry is moving in a biological direction in which mental illnesses are seen as dysfunctional states of the normal brain. Psychoanalysis has not proven effective in most mental illnesses.

Despite my momentary freeze I dashed on. The book is short, only 131 pages, and is divided into two parts. Part I is an academic explanation of psychoanalytic terms such as conversion and hysteria, and Part II is an analysis of seven cases of Jesus’ healing. The cases (two paralyzed men, two blind men, the demon-possessed boy, Jairus’s daughter, and the hemorrhaging woman) are used to illustrate Capps’s thesis that Jesus did not use magic to heal medical illnesses but employed therapeutic techniques to heal psychosomatic illnesses. Full understanding of Part I requires some prior knowledge of and belief in psychoanalytic principles, and thus may not be of interest to the general audience that Capps targets in his introduction. Part

2 may be easier for general readers but still requires some background.

It was surprising to me that Capps uses a blend of psychoanalytic descriptions and more modern diagnostic criteria from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (the “DSM,” with DSM IV being the fourth version, published in 1994). I was in psychiatric residency in the late 1970s when the first draft of the DSM was published and thus my training focused heavily on it. The DSM was known to be an attempt to describe conditions objectively, replacing the psychoanalytic model of mental illness that theorizes about etiology or cause.

Capps’s review of the minute details of diagnostic criteria of conversion disorder, factitious disorder, and somatization disorder from DSM IV was difficult to read through. His attempt to apply them to persons who lived 2000 years ago and whom the Bible describes only in barest detail was simply perplexing. Reading the cases, I found myself skimming through the academic material to get to the insights about Jesus. This is where I found the book provocative; for short periods I actually enjoyed myself, not feeling like a squirrel at all. Capps’s suggestion that Jesus did not use supernatural powers to cure people but actually listened to them challenged me to stop discounting Jesus’ healing stories as easy for him because he was divine.

Capps’s insights regarding the healing of Jairus’s daughter are excellent. For example, he points out that Jairus’s daughter was twelve, thus on the cusp of marriageability, representing to her father an opportunity to increase his wealth by marrying her off well. The author’s thoughts on Jesus’ understanding of the social context of illnesses and the implications of wellness are tantalizing but too brief. Each time I would begin thinking “Now he’s getting somewhere,” the chapter would end.

I finished the book hungering for more. Completing the analogy of the squirrel, I had braved all the academic traffic, only to find that the delectable pile of insightful spiritual nuts I was hoping for was small.

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Chris K. Huebner. *A Precarious Peace*. Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2006.

One realizes quickly upon reading *A Precarious Peace* that a desire for a solid thesis argued with clean, crisp, logical warrants and brought “together into some final programmatic statement of a position” (29) will be entirely frustrated. No last word can be given because words and positions, no less than politics and power, are precarious for those in the Christian community (58).

The precariousness that Chris K. Huebner places at the center of his Yoderian study of Mennonite theology, knowledge, and identity de-centers any attempt to offer a last word. This is a book whose project is “disestablishing, disowning, dislocating” (23) without reconstructing its subject theoretically. As such there is no argument that Huebner could be criticized for not showing adequately. He has promised not to provide an account of what peace *is*, and no one account of peace is given here. Instead, in a random sampling, there are stories about Alzheimer’s, Atom Egoyan’s films, friendship, speed, and Zizek.

The argument – or, as Huebner says, “common theme” (30) – is simply that peace is characterized by being precarious. For peace to be anything else would require a coercive intervention. Peace comes to us as a gift, given by Christ, and like all gifts it is both radically ours and out of our control.

While the political and ecclesiological ramifications of Yoder’s vision have been noticed, applied, and extended in various contexts, the epistemological questions that his investigations suggest have drawn less attention. This is what Huebner is about in this volume. I particularly like the description of his approach: “Let us group this collection of impulses together under the heading of standard epistemology.... What follows ... is a series of gestures toward a counter-epistemology that arises from the church’s confession that Christ is the truth. Here truth will appear to be unsettled rather than settled.... It arises from an excessive economy of gift, and thus it exists as a seemingly unnecessary and unwarranted donation” (133-34).

This language of gift gives much of Huebner’s discussion a “spatial” feel. To elaborate his conception of peace he invokes words like diaspora, settled, patience, gesture, scattered, speed, or territory. I am strongly impressed by how Huebner is able to move, and to move me, in space and

time throughout this book. The discussion has an embodiedness missing from much of the theological endeavor.

The book's biggest strength is the reworking of our perceptions, actions, emotions, and disposition towards precariousness. I teach Christian ethics at a small Mennonite liberal arts institution to students who are mostly not convinced pacifists in either action or epistemology. I find this an enormously difficult and somewhat stressful task. This is not surprising, because many of them are just beginning their education in the ethos of Christian community. While reading this book I noticed that in class my statements were clearer, my mode of engagement more patient and less anxious, and my answers more characterized by the open-endedness that characterizes the gift.

Huebner has written a course of therapy for those who believe in peace that will, if we let it, deepen our engagement with peace, make us more comfortable with its precariousness, and orient us towards the Christ who gives us this peace. Huebner skillfully calls into question our assumptions. Some debates evaporate under his critique, as in a chapter on Milbank and Barth called "Can a Gift be Commanded?" Others condense as the author brings together questions not typically asked at the same time, as in a chapter where he employs contemporary philosophers and cultural critics to show how martyrdom shapes the gift of peace.

I close with questions offered in response to a quotation at the end of a wonderful chapter on [Paul] Virilo and Yoder: "But because this good news involves a breaking of the cycle of violence that includes the renunciation of logistical effectiveness and possessive sovereignty, it can *only* be offered as a gift whose reception cannot be guaranteed or enforced" (130, emphasis mine). Here Huebner seems to want to guarantee a certain shape to peace. But if peace is always precarious, is it also true that only peace is precarious? Isn't there also precariousness to the exercise of power, the attempt to govern, or the attempt to communicate in the language of culture and not only gospel? Can we not recognize peace and precariousness even when they occur (miraculously) in spite of force, clumsy intervention, or misguided attempts to control? Or must peace, in order to remain precarious, guard against alliances threatening that precariousness?

At points Huebner eagerly recognizes that those practicing peace are also always implicated in the violent exercise of power (see chapters

8 and 12). But at other points the shape of the peace he avers seems overdetermined by the demand of precariousness. Isn't a truly precarious peace also willing to explore the possibility of remaining settled, existing in a happy exchange, or flourishing for a moment in effectiveness?

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Tripp York. *The Purple Crown: The Politics of Martyrdom*. Scottsdale: Herald, 2007.

*The Purple Crown: The Politics of Martyrdom* engages questions that have preoccupied Anabaptists for centuries: What is the appropriate posture of peace-loving Christians in a violent world? Should Christians be political?

As a work of historical theology, this book will appeal most to theologians and church historians. But York's prose, if repetitive at times, is accessible (and gender inclusive). Anyone who finds the subject matter compelling can approach this study. Some will find it inspiring; others will find it most valuable as a representative piece of a particular kind of Christian dogma. At the least, it will provoke passionate conversation.

According to York, Christians must be politically active earthly citizens, but with an important caveat: their political posture is one of exile. They are here on earth to represent heaven. Thus "martyrdom is *the* political act because it represents the ultimate imitation of Christ, signifying a life lived in obedience to, and participation in, the triune God" (23).

Beginning with a discussion of the early Christian martyrs under Rome, York interprets martyrdom as a public performance that bears witness to the triumph of Christ through a means superior to rhetoric or argument. Indeed, martyrdom is a cosmic battle "between God's people and God's enemies"

(29-30). From the early Christians, the author moves to a discussion of the 16th-century Anabaptist martyrs, and finishes with a biography of martyred Salvadoran archbishop Oscar Romero that is likely to be engaging even for those who dislike York's theology.

York deserves much credit for writing one of the more ecumenical martyrdom studies available from a Mennonite source. He focuses always on the broader Christian context and resists Anabaptist tribalism. But readers who value interfaith cooperation may find his work problematic.

*The Purple Crown* is peppered with references to "the people of God," and while York acknowledges that this group is hard to define, he remains rigid in his Christian understanding of the phrase. "Only where the triune God is worshipped can there be true sociality," he asserts (110). This claim is typical of York's language throughout. He consistently dismisses any social or political reality outside of Christianity by labeling it "false," an ideological tactic that adds no meat to his arguments. *The Purple Crown* is hardly the first theological work to claim that Christianity is inherently political by virtue of its alleged superiority to everything else, and if York is to be faulted for excessive reliance on a "church" vs. "world" binary, it must be said that he did not invent it. Still, he does little to make it fresh.

The author includes almost no discussion of contemporary politics or how Christians might shoulder their accountability in a modern democracy. Rather, government is simply "the state," an ill-defined monolith that kills and oppresses Christians. Christians are political because as followers of Christ they stand in opposition to the state, even unto death. This circular argument is the heart of *The Purple Crown*, thereby confining the book's appeal to those who share York's dualistic worldview.

York comes closest to undermining his own dualism in his chapter on 16th-century Europe – the strongest in the book – in which he discusses with admirable nuance how battles over semantics led Christians to kill one another. Recognizing the difficulty of resolving these doctrinal issues, York points us instead to the martyrdoms; such performances "give us something by which we can discern which acts are good, beautiful, and true. Maybe then it is possible to distinguish the difference between a pseudo-politics located in earthly regimes and an authentic politics constituted by nothing other than the broken yet risen body of Christ" (97).



The definition of “politics” is contested territory, and my frustration with York’s theocratic version may reveal little beyond my own partisanship. Nonetheless, the labels “pseudo-politics” and “authentic politics” strike me as ironically self-defeating. Nothing is more endemic to the politics of “earthly regimes” than claims of purity and authenticity that serve to discredit some peoples while elevating others to positions of supposed greatness. “The visible church is important not just so the elect can know each other, but because God has promised not to leave the world without a witness to God,” York continues; “This is the sort of gift that exposes false cities from the true city in an effort to bring all cities under the rule of Christ” (98).

This crusader-like language leaves us no room to approach non-Christians with any humility. Despite its nonviolent intent, I doubt York’s chauvinist theology will bring us closer to the “peace of the earthly city.”

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Hans Küng. *The Beginning of All Things: Science and Religion*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007.

Hans Küng has put together in *The Beginning of All Things* a remarkable synthesis of philosophical, theological, and scientific reasoning about our universe. He argues that religious views of the universe (understood as symbolic expressions of the meaning of this reality) are compatible with scientific explanations.

This does not mean that science proves theology or that theology undergirds scientific exploration, but that each has its own distinctive procedure for understanding reality. Küng believes this reality is more than what science can explain, which is precisely why we need religion in order to understand reality fully. He emphasizes the limits of scientific knowledge. "If science is to remain faithful to its method," he says, "it may not extend its judgment beyond the horizon of experience" (52). He outlines the way cosmology cannot examine the constraints of the cosmos in which we find ourselves.

The author acknowledges that science has its own procedures that give reliable and comprehensive knowledge about the world around us. But he goes further and defines physics as follows: "Its theories and models are not literal descriptions of reality at the atomic level (naive realism) but are symbolic and selective attempts that depict the structure of the world" (8). By stressing the symbolic character of scientific explanations, Küng attempts to gain a foothold for religious explanations of the same reality. One wonders if the parallel can be drawn too closely. Surely the symbolic nature of religious explanations differs from the highly mathematical and theoretical symbols of science, which are tested by experimental data and cause/effect analysis.

In his discussion of creation, Küng stresses the symbolic character of the creation narratives of the Hebrew Bible and repudiates any attempt to gain scientific knowledge from them. However, he feels justified in interpreting evolution in religious terms, as a creation by the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition. He tries to use the fine-tuning of the cosmological constants to suggest the intelligent design of the universe. This argument is tempting to theologians, but if the universe has evolved to produce life, the

constants of the universe are merely those that we experience. It is impossible to extrapolate to other possible universes, since we have no experience of any alternatives.

Küng proposes that scientists consider God as a hypothesis. Here it seems to me that he is stepping beyond his own wise thesis that science and religion should retain separate procedures. He does acknowledge that there is no deductive or inductive proof of God. Rather, he insists on a practical and holistic rational approach to God (including the whole experience of the human being, especially subjective awareness). Küng argues that the human being is more than the body, more than brain processes, and still a mystery to neurologists. This ignorance, however, is used as a logical leap towards the “mystery” of the cosmos, which is too easily filled by the idea of God as the primal ground of our existence.

In the plethora of books about science and religion, this one stands out as more comprehensive than most because it puts the discussion in the context of a philosophical argument about reality and the way we perceive it. Küng relies on a depiction of theology as a metaphysical principle that goes beyond the limits of scientific theories. He is too well-versed in the global religions to describe this as a necessary leap and instead depicts it as a choice. But such a choice would need to be justified in comparison with other religious or metaphysical explanations of the ultimate reality. It would be interesting to see Küng use his wide knowledge of other religions to compare the various religious cosmologies with current scientific descriptions of the origins of the universe and life.

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Robert W. Brimlow, *What About Hitler? Wrestling with Jesus' Call to Nonviolence in an Evil World*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006.

In *What About Hitler?* Robert Brimlow devotes considerable time to a critique of the Just War tradition. He wrestles vigorously with George Orwell's critique of pacifism; he argues pointedly that the Christian's first concern must be to obey Jesus, not to escape death or be successful according to some short-term definition. And he points out effectively that rejecting killing makes sense only if it is part of a personal and communal lifestyle committed to peacemaking.

There is a good deal in this book that is helpful. Brimlow brings a philosopher's sharp mind to his extensive critique of the Just War tradition. I will not try to decide here whether his critique is finally successful, but his sophisticated objections to central arguments of important Just War advocates (St. Augustine, Michael Walzer, Jean Bethke Elshtain) offer challenges that no Just War advocate should ignore. "Just war theory contradicts itself in that it sanctions the killing of innocents, which it at the same time prohibits. In addition, just war theory can also be used effectively to justify all wars" (105).

Brimlow is surely right that pacifism is impossible unless it is rooted in Christian community and prayer, and that it has no integrity unless it is part of a personal and communal lifestyle that not only rejects violence but actively engages in works of compassion and mercy toward the poor and neglected.

That said, I must confess that I found the book inadequate, disappointing, and occasionally annoying. The rambling Scriptural meditations at the beginning of each chapter were not very helpful, at least not for me. The argument that Just War theory validates Osama bin Laden as much as it does military resistance to terrorism was not convincing. Equally unsatisfactory was Brimlow's lengthy argument (139-46) that Jesus was a failure. Even his final chapter arguing for the importance of a personal and communal lifestyle of peacemaking was inadequate. Jesus called for works of mercy – feeding the hungry, caring for the homeless and naked, giving alms to the poor. That is all good and true. But what about going beyond charity to understanding the structural causes of poverty and injustice

and working vigorously to overcome institutional injustice? What about activist kinds of peacemaking – whether Victim-Offender Reconciliation Programs, sophisticated mediation efforts bringing together warring parties, or Christian Peacemaker Teams?

Most important, Brimlow’s answer to the basic question, “What About Hitler?” is woefully inadequate. He opens Chapter 7 (“The Christian Response”) with the comment that “it is time for me to respond to the Hitler question.” His answer takes three paragraphs. Just one page. He had already said near the beginning that his answer to this question is absurd (10). I think that answer is fundamentally inadequate. It is certainly true that the Christian pacifist believes that she must follow Jesus, even when this leads to death. Brimlow makes the point very well. If Jesus is God become flesh, if God raised Jesus from the dead on the third day, then it simply will not do to say, “Sorry, Jesus, your ideas do not work in a world of Hitlers and Osama bin Ladens.”

We must follow Jesus even when that means death. But there is a lot more to be said to make this position less implausible than Brimlow does. It is wrong and misleading to label it “absurd.” If Jesus is the Incarnate God who announced the inauguration of the Messianic kingdom of peace and justice, called his disciples to start living in that kingdom now, and promised to return to complete the victory over evil, then it makes sense to obey his call to nonviolence now, even when Hitlers still stalk the earth. This book does not offer a convincing answer to the question it raises.

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Stanley E. Porter, ed. *Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006.

Drawn from a 2003 colloquium at McMaster Divinity School, this collection of essays tackles how New Testament writers use the Old Testament. An introductory essay by Stanley E. Porter and a concluding scholarly response to the papers by Andreas J. Köstenberger provide a helpful orienting perspective and summation.

Two essays dedicated to general topics introduce the volume. Dennis L. Stamps seeks to clarify terminology, contrasts “author-centered” and “audience-centered” approaches, and describes persuasive rhetoric in the early church period. R. Timothy McLay introduces issues concerning canon and scripture, and identifies “pluriformity” as “an essential characteristic of the Scriptures of the early church” (55).

Michael P. Knowles (Matthew) and Porter (Luke-Acts) both argue that the evangelists’ interpretive perspectives not only center on but derive from Jesus himself. Craig A. Evans (Mark) and Sylvia C. Keesmaat (Ephesians, Colossians, and others) place these documents within the political milieu of the Roman Empire to striking effect. Paul Miller (John) and Kurt Anders Richardson (James) describe the use of OT characters, while James W. Aageson (Romans, Galatians, and others) and Köstenberger (pastorals, Revelation) provide contrasting perspectives on reading epistles.

The range of foci engages the reader, and Köstenberger’s responses prove helpful, providing additional information or a contrasting perspective. His adamant response to Aageson’s paper is particularly striking and underscores significantly divergent methods and assumptions, as well as perspectives on the implications of Paul’s hermeneutics for the contemporary Christian community.

This said, the volume’s overarching author-centered perspective prompts an uncritical assumption of continuity that, in my view, should be reconsidered. Early in the volume Stamps appropriately criticizes the idea that “NT writers use the OT” because it is “anachronistic to speak of the OT when referring to the perspective of the NT writers since the differentiation between old and new had not yet occurred” (11). Though he suggests “Jewish sacred writings” (11) as an improvement, repeated statements in the rest of the volume about how NT writers, and even Jesus himself, use the “OT”

reflect the prominence of such anachronism.

Indeed, the difficulty runs deeper than Stamps suggests. While the writers in this book attempt to uncover the intentions and hermeneutics of Luke, Paul, and even Jesus, these biblical figures neither read an OT (which implies a NT) nor consciously wrote Scripture (they sought to interpret the one(s) they had). Even the common designation “NT writers” proves historically anachronistic; the most that can accurately be said is that these people wrote what later *became* the NT. More attention to how Scripture is designated within the NT would have raised this issue and strengthened the volume.

The book’s orientation leaves potentially significant *discontinuities* unexplored. For instance, what should we make of Paul’s distinction between his own opinion and elements “from the LORD,” once his writing becomes part of a NT? Should our reading of his epistles be affected by this transformation into scripture, a shift that transcends his “original intent”? The description of “Paul’s shorter epistles” as “rang[ing] from Paul’s supposedly earliest epistle to those seemingly written so late that Paul was dead when he composed them” (182) suggests further difficulties with an exclusively author-centered approach. What of the shift from Luke’s two-volume work (Luke-Acts) to a “gospel” and a non-“gospel” separated by John, or the Emmaus story’s claim that the disciples see Jesus in “the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms” only through an impromptu Bible study led by the *risen* Lord? Unfortunately these writers do not address such discontinuities at historical, literary, and canonical levels.

A collection of essays has the benefit of various perspectives and the drawback of limited flow. The papers here are well written, engaging, and accessible for interested people with some background in the subject matter. While most essays do not focus on implications for contemporary interpretation, individual chapters would be helpful as supplements or orientation for studying a specific NT book. Several essays also situate themselves within broader scholarship, which proves particularly beneficial for the non-specialist.

Overall, these writers do an admirable job of tackling a significant, complex issue. However, although the volume explores how “NT writers used the OT,” it proves less satisfying for “Hearing the OT in the NT.”

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While the latter implies the perspective of a two-testament Scripture, most essays here seek to uncover the *pre*-NT use of Scripture (not OT!) by writers of what later became the NT. Thus, this volume serves an author-centered approach well, but it does not address discontinuity in the transformation from “authorial writings” to Christian Scripture.

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Stanley Hauerwas and Romand Coles. *Christianity, Democracy and the Radical Ordinary: Conversations between a Radical Democrat and a Christian*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2007.

It is not only Christians who find difficult the practice of engaging the world in constructive ways; not just believing that engagement should happen, but engaging the complicated issues of how to proceed, occupies all kinds of people. In this volume we observe a Christian theologian (Stanley Hauerwas) and a political theorist who is not Christian (Romand Coles) grapple with such issues in ways that try to think about the right questions and display fruitful practices within a mutual pursuit of the transformation and development of a flourishing political imagination.

The purpose of this collection of essays, letters, lectures, and conversation is to exhibit a politics that refuses to let death dominate our lives, resists fear, and seeks to uncover the violence at the heart of liberal political doctrine. Not only does this book discuss such matters, it seeks to display some of the very practices it brings into view. Practices central to this ongoing conversation include attention, engagement, vulnerability, receptive patience, tending, “microdispositions” and “micropractices,” waiting, and gentleness. Such practices, patiently pursued, might make up a life that is political, claim the authors, yet not beholden to conventional politics.



We witness Coles and Hauerwas engage each other as well as a vast array of interlocutors in an attempt to cultivate a politics of “wild patience”: Sheldon Wolin, Cornell West, Ella Baker, John Howard Yoder, Will Campbell, Rowan Williams, Jean Vanier, Samuel Wells, and Gregory of Nanzianzus. Both authors here are exemplary in their own openness and vulnerability to learning from traditions outside their own, and Coles especially so as he provides insightful readings of a number of Christian theological voices.

Nonetheless, in the midst of their respectful and deep mutual engagement, Hauerwas and Coles exhibit at times a certain wariness in relation to each other. Hauerwas worries that radical democracy will be an end in itself for which God becomes an afterthought, a superfluous placeholder, domesticated and tamed in service of some other agenda. But he also worries that Christians do something very similar when they mistake the Christian faith for a garden variety of humanism. Coles, on the other hand, is concerned that Christian jealousy regarding Jesus may prevent proper vulnerability and underwrite a kind of territoriality. He further believes that no matter how sincere the upside-down practices of the church may be, these kinds of practices have a way of turning themselves right side up – and without appropriate discernment on the part of the church.

I have my own worries. Sometimes it feels as though Coles comes close to equating the insurgent grassroots political practices of radical democracy with the politics of Jesus. Coles also seems tempted to turn the church and its practices into an instance of radical democracy. Perhaps this is one reason he claims to be so “haunted” by John Howard Yoder, who himself is open to the criticism that he thinks the church’s practices can be translated into the world without loss.

Further, the extended conversation in this volume, while richly informed by a wide variety of interlocutors – political theorists, activists of many kinds, theologians, a number of Mennonite thinkers, and so on – is in the end strangely thin on the Christian exegetical tradition. While we see close, nuanced readings of Wolin, West, Campbell, et al., we search in vain for the same kind of close attention to sustained readings of the Biblical text. This is not to say that the conversation between Coles the radical democrat and Hauerwas the Christian is not informed by biblical ideas. However, I

wonder if Coles's concern for Christian jealousy of Jesus also extends to Christian privileging of the Scriptural text and, if so, what implications this might have for a long-term continuing conversation.

Jeffrey Stout, who in his own effort to revitalize the American democratic tradition often converses with Christian theologians such as Hauerwas, claims that this book gives him hope, since it takes the conversation between Christianity and democracy in a most welcome direction. This book also gives me hope as a Christian, because it seeks to find ways for people to engage in the world that resist the violence and death that have been inscribed deeply into the story of our shared lives. And part of that hopefulness includes paying close attention to practices that can be embodied on a human scale, whether as a radical democrat or a Christian.

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Laura Ruth Yordy. *Green Witness: Ecology, Ethics, and the Kingdom of God*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2008.

Laura Yordy has a vision for churches engaging holistically in ecological discipleship. She begins her discourse in *Green Witness* by briefly describing a fantasy congregation that fully integrates earth-friendly practices into its worship and daily actions. Yordy illustrates her vision by using examples from real churches that are implementing ecological practices. According to her, the greening of the church in North America has been limited because of the ineffectiveness of education, difficulties with real change, powerlessness of leadership, individualism in church life, the magnitude of the environmental crisis, and the hope of technological fixes: "The point is not to make the church a participant in the 'environmental movement,'" she says, "but to make the church more faithful by including the eschatological import of creation in its performance of worship, ... a 'way' of life that praises and witnesses to Father Son, and Holy Spirit" (161).

The author develops her thesis around the need for the church to

renew its understanding of the eschaton – “the fulfillment of God’s promises for creation” (2). The church is to be a witness to the coming Kingdom of Heaven, the result of Christ’s redemption of all of creation. Christians are not to be managers trying to fix the environmental crisis but witnesses of Christ’s relationship to creation through faithful ecological practice.

Yordy critiques the positions of three eco-theologians – Larry Rasmussen, Catherine Keller, and Rosemary Radford Ruether – by observing that they reject several central doctrines of Christian eschatology. She notes the losses that occur when eschatology does not include Jesus, the sovereignty of God, or the concept of an afterlife. She writes that our practices today in relation to ecology witness to our belief in the fullness of the Kingdom of God. The doctrine of creation should be examined from an eschatological framework, says the author; God’s future view of redeemed creation is what makes the Christian creation story distinct from views found in the “common creation story.”

Yordy carefully states that it is God’s love that generated the universe (57), and proceeds with helpful insights into the concepts of God creating the world out of nothing, the Trinitarian role in creation, the goodness of creation, and the “Fall.” Christian ethics is described as discipleship – where the lives of Christ’s followers witness to the Kingdom through worship, action, and character. Yordy provides stimulating insights into eco-discipleship by probing key characteristics of the Kingdom: peace, justice, abundance, righteousness, and communion with God. The resulting praxis is summarized well by her statement that “Christians’ witness to the Kingdom is not simply watching, but pointing toward God’s gracious creating and redeeming activity with the activity of their own lives” (112).

Yordy sees the church serving as a “demonstration plot” for ecological discipleship. She develops the view that everything the church practices – here specifically its relation to the earth – should witness to Christ’s coming redemption of all creation. It is from within community that the witness and practice will best occur. The concluding concept centers on the ecological virtue, patience. Yordy lifts it up as a key virtue while not excluding other much-needed virtues. She says it is our impatience that plays a major factor in our dominance over the natural world. But patience is woven into the web of the universe and reflects the character of God. “Part of the human need

for patience (as well as other virtues) is the imperative for humans to realign themselves with the patient character of God's creation" (155). From this framework Yordy calls us to practice eco-discipleship.

The author develops logical arguments throughout her discourse, though at points the writing style recalls the doctoral dissertation on which the book is based. The work is in the frame of a constructive theology, and it leans heavily on arguments between various theological and philosophical positions. Yordy formulates her thesis based on a broad array of authors along with insights of her own.

This volume would serve well as the basis for serious discussion by adults interested in articulating a biblical and theological response to today's environmental crisis, but it doesn't include an extensive list of examples of creation care actions. (It would also be helpful if there were an index in addition to the bibliography.) Upper-level college students in environmental studies would benefit from exploring the intersection between faith and ecological praxis found in this text.

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Conrad L. Kanagy. *Road Signs on the Journey: A Profile of Mennonite Church USA*. Waterloo, ON: Herald, 2007.

Conrad Kanagy's profile of Mennonite Church USA is a good addition to earlier similar studies of Mennonites in 1972 and 1989.<sup>1</sup> Preferring biblical to sociological categories of analysis, Kanagy presents the data as "road signs and guideposts" in order to help Mennonites find their social, political, spiritual, and theological location, and to help Mennonite churches consider the direction of their further "journey toward the reign of God" (24).

The first two chapters set a reading of the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah as the base for Kanagy's data analysis. These chapters test the

data for evidence of a *missional* intention and vision in Mennonite church life. Succeeding chapters profile Mennonite Church USA; explore church structure, polity and self-understanding; test consistency and orthodoxy of belief and ritual; survey management of resources; review recent disruptions of Mennonite “Christendom”; and assess the relation between the church and greater society. The author’s summary conclusion shares the testimony of respondents as they reflect on the quality of congregational life and challenge the church toward greater missional identity and activity.

Kanagy’s prognosis for Mennonite Church USA is disquieting yet hopeful. While the author predicts a “bleak future” (57), among “Racial/Ethnic Mennonites” he discovered signs of growth and renewal. Other signs of hope include relatively high rates of giving, marital stability, strong beliefs about Jesus, active personal piety, and greater support of women in ministry (183ff.).

At least two issues emerge that deserve greater discussion and thought. The first is how to refer to the diversity of ethnic and racial groups comprising Mennonite Church USA. Throughout the report Kanagy uses the generic term “Racial/Ethnic” to refer to African-American, Hispanic/Latino, diverse Asian, and various Native American congregations and members. Yet “Racial/Ethnic” would also apply to the various Caucasian groups comprising the church. One of the challenges in working out the tension between the margin and middle of Mennonite church has to do with how we refer to one another. The tendency to reduce our ethnic diversity to one generic category, or an implicit us/them polarity, is a pernicious problem with no easy solution.

This problem is endemic to descriptive sociological summaries, but even more, it bespeaks the difficulty that Mennonite church organizations have in dealing with an ethnic diversity that refuses to be ‘settled.’ I wonder if this reflects the broader influence of theories of assimilation as opposed to theories of ethnic pluralism in the American context. It seems to me that one of the significant challenges in combatting racism in the church is to celebrate our chaotic ethnicity in all its glorious detail. This will demand imaginative justice in reconfiguring current structures of privilege. Our commitment to such justice will help us find better, more expressive, language with which to understand the multi-ethnic fullness of Mennonite Church USA.

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The second challenge concerns Kanagy's exile hypothesis. This hypothesis interprets the changes Mennonites have undergone as assimilation to a broader society; that is, that Mennonites as exiles in American culture and society are losing their true identity and becoming more like their host society. This interpretation might be more cogent if Kanagy had presented comparative data from a larger control group than conservative Protestants (171). Increased levels of education, wealth, professional vocation, and urban living, together with changes in various beliefs, support "the argument that Mennonites are becoming more conforming to the values and attitudes of the larger society" (170, 171). However, Anabaptism has looked more educated and urban before.<sup>2</sup>

Putting a slight twist on Kanagy's question of exile, the data may be suggesting that Mennonites are finally returning from an almost 200-year exile in rural America. The changes Kanagy traces may be instances of increased biblical fidelity. Engagement with surrounding society, however messy that might be, could be a truer expression of Anabaptist peoplehood than the isolationist posture of most recent memory.

It may be necessary to resist and even critique assimilation theories based on the deeper resonance between Mennonites and various values of American society and culture, such as freedom of religion, freedom of conscience, and participatory governance of group life. The isolationist interpretation of Mennonite life from the 16th through the 18th centuries has had something of a privileged status<sup>3</sup> and may need to give way to a more socially engaged and integrated understanding of Mennonite life as normative.

This may be why Kanagy is so firmly convinced that the future of Mennonite Church USA lies with congregations comprising various minority racial and ethnic groups. Indeed, it may be impossible to find future vitality in the church without following such leadership into social engagement. For observing these provocative issues in such a way as to raise further discussion of the future of Mennonite communities, we can be grateful to Kanagy for an insightful analysis of Mennonite Church USA.

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> J. Howard Kaufmann and Leland Harder, *Anabaptists: Four Centuries Later* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1975). J. Howard Kaufmann and Leo Driedger, *The Mennonite Mosaic: Identity and Modernization* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Richard K. MacMaster, *Land, Piety, Peoplehood, The Establishment of Mennonite Communities in America, 1683-1790* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1985), 138.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

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Earl Zimmerman. *Practicing the Politics of Jesus: The Origin and Significance of John Howard Yoder's Social Ethics*. Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2007.

Interest in the theological ethics of John Howard Yoder shows no signs of slowing down. I am delighted – and sometimes amazed – at the level of scholarly interest in Yoder's writings today. *Practicing the Politics of Jesus: The Origin and Significance of John Howard Yoder's Social Ethics* is composed of seven chapters. The first six attempt to identify what shaped Yoder in ways that gave rise to his most influential book, *The Politics of Jesus*. The last chapter, which seems rather artificially connected to the others, provides Earl Zimmerman with an opportunity to state the significance of “the politics of Jesus,” as he sees it, for peace-building efforts today.

This book's unique contribution is that it offers the fullest account to date of the influences on Yoder during the years he was in Western Europe (1949-1958). Having named some of the North American Mennonite influences, the book attributes most of the “background” to his *Politics* to these European influences.

Zimmerman is right to say that the realities of post-World War II Europe were quite significant for the young Yoder, who arrived in France in April 1949 to serve orphans and help French Mennonites recover their

commitment to pacifism. And undoubtedly the debates about war in which he engaged during those years were shaped by memories of Nazism and the horrors of the war.

The author's discussion of Barth's influence on Yoder is framed differently from that of Craig Carter [see his *The Politics of the Cross*]. My sense is that Carter knows Barth's thought better than Zimmerman does. But probably the careful examination of Yoder in light of his studies with Barth (as compared to other influences) will continue to generate discussion and debate. Zimmerman has certainly provided a fuller account of NT scholar Oscar Cullmann's influence on Yoder than has been done before. This is helpful.

The chapter on Yoder's doctoral work on sixteenth-century Anabaptism is also the fullest summary we have of that work and its connections to his *Politics of Jesus*, although it would have had greater significance before the recent publication of an English translation of Yoder's dissertation. But Zimmerman's work will help those who haven't noticed these connections before to see them now. We are fortunate with *The Politics of Jesus* because, aside from his doctoral work, it is Yoder's most heavily footnoted book. However, in addition to his wide reading and formal teachers, it is important to say, as Zimmerman does, that *Politics* did not simply emerge from a study. According to accounts from French Mennonites, young Yoder empathized with those who had lived through several years of Nazi invasions.

Zimmerman could also have included Yoder's exposure to Latin America. In the mid-'60s and again when working on *Politics*, Yoder spent time with Latin American Christians living in the midst of revolution. According to theologians Samuel Escobar and René Padilla, he empathized deeply with them while delivering timely, biblical messages (thus Yoder's being made an honorary member of the Latin American Theological Fraternity).

One might get the impression that Yoder did not engage Reinhold Niebuhr's writings nearly as seriously as, say, J. Lawrence Burkholder (26, 57ff, 107). That impression would be wrong. While in high school, Yoder took a course with a former student of Niebuhr's at the College of Wooster, in which Niebuhr himself lectured once. Approximately fifteen years later, Yoder did significant research on Niebuhr at the University of Basel before



he gave his first lecture on him, and that produced an article. Finally, years later, Yoder wrote two substantial lectures on Niebuhr that were included in the informally published *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace and Revolution: A Companion to Bainton* (soon to be formally published).

Again, one could get the wrong impression from the statement that Yoder “basically depended on Roland Bainton’s historical survey of Christian attitudes toward war and peace for his historical scheme” regarding the “Constantinian shift” (198). Yoder was an historical theologian. For many years he taught courses surveying the history of Christian attitudes toward war, peace, and revolution; he read numerous and varied primary and secondary sources germane to those lectures. He had therefore studied relevant sources well before publishing the main essay articulating his claims.

I don’t have space to discuss issues raised in the last two chapters of summary and interpretation for contemporary peace-building. Here serious questions emerge regarding contemporary appropriations of Yoder.

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Amy Laura Hall. *Conceiving Parenthood: American Protestantism and the Spirit of Reproduction*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.

Churchly discussions of reproductive bioethics usually take place in the third person. The major actors – those advocating for so-called “designer babies” or for prenatal testing designed to enable selective termination of pregnancies – remain distinct from *us*, the narrators, who can respond from a distance and with disgust. Such conversations also usually occur in the future tense, in anticipation of a brave new world in which parents shop for their unborn child’s hair color, IQ, and personality type.

Yet for readers with any connection to middle-class, mainline Protestantism, Christian ethicist Amy Laura Hall’s new book requires a shift

from third person to first and from future tense to past. Her study requires readers to ask not “What will *they* come up with *next*?” but “How have *we* contributed to the ethos that has engendered such technologies?”

Hall’s wide-ranging survey of 20th-century Protestant ideas about family, social status, and scientific innovation suggests that the seeds of troubling technologies were sown closer to our ecclesial home than many Christians like to admit. As she writes, “a tradition that had within it the possibility of leveling all believers as orphaned and gratuitously adopted kin came instead to baptize a culture of carefully delineated, racially encoded domesticity” (10). By uncritically blessing both scientific advancement and an idealized portrait of the nuclear family, Hall claims, 20th-century Protestantism set the stage for technologies that would enable aspiring American parents to engineer the perfect child.

The “germ-free home” stands at the center of Hall’s first chapter, which mines mid-century issues of *Parents* magazine and its Methodist cognate, *Together*. The war on germs, made possible by products like Lysol, sedimented racial and class differences between the “hygienic” families of the assumed readers and *other* people’s children.

The author’s second chapter looks at how the marketing of infant formula and baby food encouraged parents to shift their trust from informally and familiarly transmitted know-how to dictates of the medical establishment. This chapter’s examination of the bizarre “Baby-Incubators—With Living Babies!” exhibit at the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago in 1933-34, which allowed visitors to view premature infants struggling for survival inside oven-like incubators, drives home the point that Americans were beginning to employ a technological gaze to a macabre extent.

Hall turns in the third chapter to the eugenics movement in the United States, which was endorsed by many progressive Protestants. She counters the prevailing idea that the American movement withered as the horrors of Nazi-era eugenics became public knowledge. Instead, she suggests, “there are links between current hopes for genius and past attempts to vaccinate the social body against the menace of poverty, disability, and deviance” (217). Hall’s final chapter moves into current bioethical debates by tracing connections between the promises of the atomic age and the claims of the current genomic revolution.

The narrative throughout *Conceiving Parenthood* is provocative and thorough. The book teems with illustrations and advertisements from magazines from the last century and this one, and all are accompanied by painstakingly close readings. At times, however, the contour of Hall's argument buckles under the weight of the evidence she presents; she seems unwilling to weigh, rank, and especially discard data that distracts from the trajectory of her main point. Unfortunately, chapters averaging 100 pages each will likely intimidate some readers who otherwise would benefit from her analysis.

The author's voice alternates between the scholarly, the pastoral, and the autobiographical. Sometimes the shift can be jarring, although none of the voices by itself would have been up to the great task Hall sets for herself. Calling herself a pro-life feminist, Hall moves beyond historical investigation and critical analysis to pastoral and prophetic challenge. "I do indeed target for moral interrogation women like myself," she writes, "for our complicity in the narrations that render other women's wombs as prodigal" (400). Hall takes her call to action beyond protesting the eugenic whiff of some modern reproductive technologies and questioning the "meticulously planned procreation" of the elite classes. She suggests a much broader program of compassionate valuing of those who, for whatever reason, are deemed outside the realm of "normal."

Anabaptist readers will find much resonance with this book, especially with its call to resist market-driven definitions of what – and who – constitutes a productive life.

The challenge for Christian parents today, Hall says, is "to see the children in their homes, neighborhoods, and churches as unqualified gifts rather than projects, to identify 'downward' rather than to climb, and to allow their strategically protected and planned lives to become entangled in the needs of families and children judged to be at risk and behind the curve" (250).

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Donald Capps. *Jesus, the Village Psychiatrist*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2008.

Early in this book Donald Capps describes the behavior of a squirrel darting across a busy street, then suddenly freezing midway and racing back, only to dart again. He calls this a “living parable” (xv) and says we are intrigued because we see ourselves in the squirrel’s dilemma. I couldn’t agree more. In fact, I felt like that squirrel as I was reading this volume, at times running quickly to reach what I hoped was food for thought, and then retreating swiftly as the author’s beliefs and mine clashed.

I started the book intrigued by the title, only to freeze in the introduction at comments such as these: people with mental illnesses are “doing it to themselves” (xii), mental illnesses are “a form of coping and ... therefore typical ... today” (xii), and “the methods which Jesus employed are congruent ... with methods ... demonstrably effective ... today” (xxv). These statements portend what becomes clear in the rest of the book. Capps is a believer in Freudian psychoanalysis, a school of therapy formulated by Sigmund Freud in the late 1800s and popular in the US in the mid-1900s. It treats patients with psychotherapy in the belief that insight into conflicts which precede the illness will result in healing.

That paradigm of mental illness is rejected or at least highly suspect in the field of modern psychiatry. With the increasing use of brain scans and molecular research, psychiatry is moving in a biological direction in which mental illnesses are seen as dysfunctional states of the normal brain. Psychoanalysis has not proven effective in most mental illnesses.

Despite my momentary freeze I dashed on. The book is short, only 131 pages, and is divided into two parts. Part I is an academic explanation of psychoanalytic terms such as conversion and hysteria, and Part II is an analysis of seven cases of Jesus’ healing. The cases (two paralyzed men, two blind men, the demon-possessed boy, Jairus’s daughter, and the hemorrhaging woman) are used to illustrate Capps’s thesis that Jesus did not use magic to heal medical illnesses but employed therapeutic techniques to heal psychosomatic illnesses. Full understanding of Part I requires some prior knowledge of and belief in psychoanalytic principles, and thus may not be of interest to the general audience that Capps targets in his introduction. Part

2 may be easier for general readers but still requires some background.

It was surprising to me that Capps uses a blend of psychoanalytic descriptions and more modern diagnostic criteria from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (the “DSM,” with DSM IV being the fourth version, published in 1994). I was in psychiatric residency in the late 1970s when the first draft of the DSM was published and thus my training focused heavily on it. The DSM was known to be an attempt to describe conditions objectively, replacing the psychoanalytic model of mental illness that theorizes about etiology or cause.

Capps’s review of the minute details of diagnostic criteria of conversion disorder, factitious disorder, and somatization disorder from DSM IV was difficult to read through. His attempt to apply them to persons who lived 2000 years ago and whom the Bible describes only in barest detail was simply perplexing. Reading the cases, I found myself skimming through the academic material to get to the insights about Jesus. This is where I found the book provocative; for short periods I actually enjoyed myself, not feeling like a squirrel at all. Capps’s suggestion that Jesus did not use supernatural powers to cure people but actually listened to them challenged me to stop discounting Jesus’ healing stories as easy for him because he was divine.

Capps’s insights regarding the healing of Jairus’s daughter are excellent. For example, he points out that Jairus’s daughter was twelve, thus on the cusp of marriageability, representing to her father an opportunity to increase his wealth by marrying her off well. The author’s thoughts on Jesus’ understanding of the social context of illnesses and the implications of wellness are tantalizing but too brief. Each time I would begin thinking “Now he’s getting somewhere,” the chapter would end.

I finished the book hungering for more. Completing the analogy of the squirrel, I had braved all the academic traffic, only to find that the delectable pile of insightful spiritual nuts I was hoping for was small.

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Chris K. Huebner. *A Precarious Peace*. Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2006.

One realizes quickly upon reading *A Precarious Peace* that a desire for a solid thesis argued with clean, crisp, logical warrants and brought “together into some final programmatic statement of a position” (29) will be entirely frustrated. No last word can be given because words and positions, no less than politics and power, are precarious for those in the Christian community (58).

The precariousness that Chris K. Huebner places at the center of his Yoderian study of Mennonite theology, knowledge, and identity de-centers any attempt to offer a last word. This is a book whose project is “disestablishing, disowning, dislocating” (23) without reconstructing its subject theoretically. As such there is no argument that Huebner could be criticized for not showing adequately. He has promised not to provide an account of what peace *is*, and no one account of peace is given here. Instead, in a random sampling, there are stories about Alzheimer’s, Atom Egoyan’s films, friendship, speed, and Zizek.

The argument – or, as Huebner says, “common theme” (30) – is simply that peace is characterized by being precarious. For peace to be anything else would require a coercive intervention. Peace comes to us as a gift, given by Christ, and like all gifts it is both radically ours and out of our control.

While the political and ecclesiological ramifications of Yoder’s vision have been noticed, applied, and extended in various contexts, the epistemological questions that his investigations suggest have drawn less attention. This is what Huebner is about in this volume. I particularly like the description of his approach: “Let us group this collection of impulses together under the heading of standard epistemology.... What follows ... is a series of gestures toward a counter-epistemology that arises from the church’s confession that Christ is the truth. Here truth will appear to be unsettled rather than settled.... It arises from an excessive economy of gift, and thus it exists as a seemingly unnecessary and unwarranted donation” (133-34).

This language of gift gives much of Huebner’s discussion a “spatial” feel. To elaborate his conception of peace he invokes words like diaspora, settled, patience, gesture, scattered, speed, or territory. I am strongly impressed by how Huebner is able to move, and to move me, in space and

time throughout this book. The discussion has an embodiedness missing from much of the theological endeavor.

The book's biggest strength is the reworking of our perceptions, actions, emotions, and disposition towards precariousness. I teach Christian ethics at a small Mennonite liberal arts institution to students who are mostly not convinced pacifists in either action or epistemology. I find this an enormously difficult and somewhat stressful task. This is not surprising, because many of them are just beginning their education in the ethos of Christian community. While reading this book I noticed that in class my statements were clearer, my mode of engagement more patient and less anxious, and my answers more characterized by the open-endedness that characterizes the gift.

Huebner has written a course of therapy for those who believe in peace that will, if we let it, deepen our engagement with peace, make us more comfortable with its precariousness, and orient us towards the Christ who gives us this peace. Huebner skillfully calls into question our assumptions. Some debates evaporate under his critique, as in a chapter on Milbank and Barth called "Can a Gift be Commanded?" Others condense as the author brings together questions not typically asked at the same time, as in a chapter where he employs contemporary philosophers and cultural critics to show how martyrdom shapes the gift of peace.

I close with questions offered in response to a quotation at the end of a wonderful chapter on [Paul] Virilo and Yoder: "But because this good news involves a breaking of the cycle of violence that includes the renunciation of logistical effectiveness and possessive sovereignty, it can *only* be offered as a gift whose reception cannot be guaranteed or enforced" (130, emphasis mine). Here Huebner seems to want to guarantee a certain shape to peace. But if peace is always precarious, is it also true that only peace is precarious? Isn't there also precariousness to the exercise of power, the attempt to govern, or the attempt to communicate in the language of culture and not only gospel? Can we not recognize peace and precariousness even when they occur (miraculously) in spite of force, clumsy intervention, or misguided attempts to control? Or must peace, in order to remain precarious, guard against alliances threatening that precariousness?

At points Huebner eagerly recognizes that those practicing peace are also always implicated in the violent exercise of power (see chapters

8 and 12). But at other points the shape of the peace he avers seems overdetermined by the demand of precariousness. Isn't a truly precarious peace also willing to explore the possibility of remaining settled, existing in a happy exchange, or flourishing for a moment in effectiveness?

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Tripp York. *The Purple Crown: The Politics of Martyrdom*. Scottsdale: Herald, 2007.

*The Purple Crown: The Politics of Martyrdom* engages questions that have preoccupied Anabaptists for centuries: What is the appropriate posture of peace-loving Christians in a violent world? Should Christians be political?

As a work of historical theology, this book will appeal most to theologians and church historians. But York's prose, if repetitive at times, is accessible (and gender inclusive). Anyone who finds the subject matter compelling can approach this study. Some will find it inspiring; others will find it most valuable as a representative piece of a particular kind of Christian dogma. At the least, it will provoke passionate conversation.

According to York, Christians must be politically active earthly citizens, but with an important caveat: their political posture is one of exile. They are here on earth to represent heaven. Thus "martyrdom is *the* political act because it represents the ultimate imitation of Christ, signifying a life lived in obedience to, and participation in, the triune God" (23).

Beginning with a discussion of the early Christian martyrs under Rome, York interprets martyrdom as a public performance that bears witness to the triumph of Christ through a means superior to rhetoric or argument. Indeed, martyrdom is a cosmic battle "between God's people and God's enemies"



(29-30). From the early Christians, the author moves to a discussion of the 16th-century Anabaptist martyrs, and finishes with a biography of martyred Salvadoran archbishop Oscar Romero that is likely to be engaging even for those who dislike York's theology.

York deserves much credit for writing one of the more ecumenical martyrdom studies available from a Mennonite source. He focuses always on the broader Christian context and resists Anabaptist tribalism. But readers who value interfaith cooperation may find his work problematic.

*The Purple Crown* is peppered with references to "the people of God," and while York acknowledges that this group is hard to define, he remains rigid in his Christian understanding of the phrase. "Only where the triune God is worshipped can there be true sociality," he asserts (110). This claim is typical of York's language throughout. He consistently dismisses any social or political reality outside of Christianity by labeling it "false," an ideological tactic that adds no meat to his arguments. *The Purple Crown* is hardly the first theological work to claim that Christianity is inherently political by virtue of its alleged superiority to everything else, and if York is to be faulted for excessive reliance on a "church" vs. "world" binary, it must be said that he did not invent it. Still, he does little to make it fresh.

The author includes almost no discussion of contemporary politics or how Christians might shoulder their accountability in a modern democracy. Rather, government is simply "the state," an ill-defined monolith that kills and oppresses Christians. Christians are political because as followers of Christ they stand in opposition to the state, even unto death. This circular argument is the heart of *The Purple Crown*, thereby confining the book's appeal to those who share York's dualistic worldview.

York comes closest to undermining his own dualism in his chapter on 16th-century Europe – the strongest in the book – in which he discusses with admirable nuance how battles over semantics led Christians to kill one another. Recognizing the difficulty of resolving these doctrinal issues, York points us instead to the martyrdoms; such performances "give us something by which we can discern which acts are good, beautiful, and true. Maybe then it is possible to distinguish the difference between a pseudo-politics located in earthly regimes and an authentic politics constituted by nothing other than the broken yet risen body of Christ" (97).

The definition of “politics” is contested territory, and my frustration with York’s theocratic version may reveal little beyond my own partisanship. Nonetheless, the labels “pseudo-politics” and “authentic politics” strike me as ironically self-defeating. Nothing is more endemic to the politics of “earthly regimes” than claims of purity and authenticity that serve to discredit some peoples while elevating others to positions of supposed greatness. “The visible church is important not just so the elect can know each other, but because God has promised not to leave the world without a witness to God,” York continues; “This is the sort of gift that exposes false cities from the true city in an effort to bring all cities under the rule of Christ” (98).

This crusader-like language leaves us no room to approach non-Christians with any humility. Despite its nonviolent intent, I doubt York’s chauvinist theology will bring us closer to the “peace of the earthly city.”

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Hans Küng. *The Beginning of All Things: Science and Religion*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007.

Hans Küng has put together in *The Beginning of All Things* a remarkable synthesis of philosophical, theological, and scientific reasoning about our universe. He argues that religious views of the universe (understood as symbolic expressions of the meaning of this reality) are compatible with scientific explanations.

This does not mean that science proves theology or that theology undergirds scientific exploration, but that each has its own distinctive procedure for understanding reality. Küng believes this reality is more than what science can explain, which is precisely why we need religion in order to understand reality fully. He emphasizes the limits of scientific knowledge. "If science is to remain faithful to its method," he says, "it may not extend its judgment beyond the horizon of experience" (52). He outlines the way cosmology cannot examine the constraints of the cosmos in which we find ourselves.

The author acknowledges that science has its own procedures that give reliable and comprehensive knowledge about the world around us. But he goes further and defines physics as follows: "Its theories and models are not literal descriptions of reality at the atomic level (naive realism) but are symbolic and selective attempts that depict the structure of the world" (8). By stressing the symbolic character of scientific explanations, Küng attempts to gain a foothold for religious explanations of the same reality. One wonders if the parallel can be drawn too closely. Surely the symbolic nature of religious explanations differs from the highly mathematical and theoretical symbols of science, which are tested by experimental data and cause/effect analysis.

In his discussion of creation, Küng stresses the symbolic character of the creation narratives of the Hebrew Bible and repudiates any attempt to gain scientific knowledge from them. However, he feels justified in interpreting evolution in religious terms, as a creation by the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition. He tries to use the fine-tuning of the cosmological constants to suggest the intelligent design of the universe. This argument is tempting to theologians, but if the universe has evolved to produce life, the

constants of the universe are merely those that we experience. It is impossible to extrapolate to other possible universes, since we have no experience of any alternatives.

Küng proposes that scientists consider God as a hypothesis. Here it seems to me that he is stepping beyond his own wise thesis that science and religion should retain separate procedures. He does acknowledge that there is no deductive or inductive proof of God. Rather, he insists on a practical and holistic rational approach to God (including the whole experience of the human being, especially subjective awareness). Küng argues that the human being is more than the body, more than brain processes, and still a mystery to neurologists. This ignorance, however, is used as a logical leap towards the “mystery” of the cosmos, which is too easily filled by the idea of God as the primal ground of our existence.

In the plethora of books about science and religion, this one stands out as more comprehensive than most because it puts the discussion in the context of a philosophical argument about reality and the way we perceive it. Küng relies on a depiction of theology as a metaphysical principle that goes beyond the limits of scientific theories. He is too well-versed in the global religions to describe this as a necessary leap and instead depicts it as a choice. But such a choice would need to be justified in comparison with other religious or metaphysical explanations of the ultimate reality. It would be interesting to see Küng use his wide knowledge of other religions to compare the various religious cosmologies with current scientific descriptions of the origins of the universe and life.

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Robert W. Brimlow, *What About Hitler? Wrestling with Jesus' Call to Nonviolence in an Evil World*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006.

In *What About Hitler?* Robert Brimlow devotes considerable time to a critique of the Just War tradition. He wrestles vigorously with George Orwell's critique of pacifism; he argues pointedly that the Christian's first concern must be to obey Jesus, not to escape death or be successful according to some short-term definition. And he points out effectively that rejecting killing makes sense only if it is part of a personal and communal lifestyle committed to peacemaking.

There is a good deal in this book that is helpful. Brimlow brings a philosopher's sharp mind to his extensive critique of the Just War tradition. I will not try to decide here whether his critique is finally successful, but his sophisticated objections to central arguments of important Just War advocates (St. Augustine, Michael Walzer, Jean Bethke Elshtain) offer challenges that no Just War advocate should ignore. "Just war theory contradicts itself in that it sanctions the killing of innocents, which it at the same time prohibits. In addition, just war theory can also be used effectively to justify all wars" (105).

Brimlow is surely right that pacifism is impossible unless it is rooted in Christian community and prayer, and that it has no integrity unless it is part of a personal and communal lifestyle that not only rejects violence but actively engages in works of compassion and mercy toward the poor and neglected.

That said, I must confess that I found the book inadequate, disappointing, and occasionally annoying. The rambling Scriptural meditations at the beginning of each chapter were not very helpful, at least not for me. The argument that Just War theory validates Osama bin Laden as much as it does military resistance to terrorism was not convincing. Equally unsatisfactory was Brimlow's lengthy argument (139-46) that Jesus was a failure. Even his final chapter arguing for the importance of a personal and communal lifestyle of peacemaking was inadequate. Jesus called for works of mercy – feeding the hungry, caring for the homeless and naked, giving alms to the poor. That is all good and true. But what about going beyond charity to understanding the structural causes of poverty and injustice

and working vigorously to overcome institutional injustice? What about activist kinds of peacemaking – whether Victim-Offender Reconciliation Programs, sophisticated mediation efforts bringing together warring parties, or Christian Peacemaker Teams?

Most important, Brimlow’s answer to the basic question, “What About Hitler?” is woefully inadequate. He opens Chapter 7 (“The Christian Response”) with the comment that “it is time for me to respond to the Hitler question.” His answer takes three paragraphs. Just one page. He had already said near the beginning that his answer to this question is absurd (10). I think that answer is fundamentally inadequate. It is certainly true that the Christian pacifist believes that she must follow Jesus, even when this leads to death. Brimlow makes the point very well. If Jesus is God become flesh, if God raised Jesus from the dead on the third day, then it simply will not do to say, “Sorry, Jesus, your ideas do not work in a world of Hitlers and Osama bin Ladens.”

We must follow Jesus even when that means death. But there is a lot more to be said to make this position less implausible than Brimlow does. It is wrong and misleading to label it “absurd.” If Jesus is the Incarnate God who announced the inauguration of the Messianic kingdom of peace and justice, called his disciples to start living in that kingdom now, and promised to return to complete the victory over evil, then it makes sense to obey his call to nonviolence now, even when Hitlers still stalk the earth. This book does not offer a convincing answer to the question it raises.

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Stanley E. Porter, ed. *Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006.

Drawn from a 2003 colloquium at McMaster Divinity School, this collection of essays tackles how New Testament writers use the Old Testament. An introductory essay by Stanley E. Porter and a concluding scholarly response to the papers by Andreas J. Köstenberger provide a helpful orienting perspective and summation.

Two essays dedicated to general topics introduce the volume. Dennis L. Stamps seeks to clarify terminology, contrasts “author-centered” and “audience-centered” approaches, and describes persuasive rhetoric in the early church period. R. Timothy McLay introduces issues concerning canon and scripture, and identifies “pluriformity” as “an essential characteristic of the Scriptures of the early church” (55).

Michael P. Knowles (Matthew) and Porter (Luke-Acts) both argue that the evangelists’ interpretive perspectives not only center on but derive from Jesus himself. Craig A. Evans (Mark) and Sylvia C. Keesmaat (Ephesians, Colossians, and others) place these documents within the political milieu of the Roman Empire to striking effect. Paul Miller (John) and Kurt Anders Richardson (James) describe the use of OT characters, while James W. Aageson (Romans, Galatians, and others) and Köstenberger (pastorals, Revelation) provide contrasting perspectives on reading epistles.

The range of foci engages the reader, and Köstenberger’s responses prove helpful, providing additional information or a contrasting perspective. His adamant response to Aageson’s paper is particularly striking and underscores significantly divergent methods and assumptions, as well as perspectives on the implications of Paul’s hermeneutics for the contemporary Christian community.

This said, the volume’s overarching author-centered perspective prompts an uncritical assumption of continuity that, in my view, should be reconsidered. Early in the volume Stamps appropriately criticizes the idea that “NT writers use the OT” because it is “anachronistic to speak of the OT when referring to the perspective of the NT writers since the differentiation between old and new had not yet occurred” (11). Though he suggests “Jewish sacred writings” (11) as an improvement, repeated statements in the rest of the volume about how NT writers, and even Jesus himself, use the “OT”

reflect the prominence of such anachronism.

Indeed, the difficulty runs deeper than Stamps suggests. While the writers in this book attempt to uncover the intentions and hermeneutics of Luke, Paul, and even Jesus, these biblical figures neither read an OT (which implies a NT) nor consciously wrote Scripture (they sought to interpret the one(s) they had). Even the common designation “NT writers” proves historically anachronistic; the most that can accurately be said is that these people wrote what later *became* the NT. More attention to how Scripture is designated within the NT would have raised this issue and strengthened the volume.

The book’s orientation leaves potentially significant *discontinuities* unexplored. For instance, what should we make of Paul’s distinction between his own opinion and elements “from the LORD,” once his writing becomes part of a NT? Should our reading of his epistles be affected by this transformation into scripture, a shift that transcends his “original intent”? The description of “Paul’s shorter epistles” as “rang[ing] from Paul’s supposedly earliest epistle to those seemingly written so late that Paul was dead when he composed them” (182) suggests further difficulties with an exclusively author-centered approach. What of the shift from Luke’s two-volume work (Luke-Acts) to a “gospel” and a non-“gospel” separated by John, or the Emmaus story’s claim that the disciples see Jesus in “the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms” only through an impromptu Bible study led by the *risen* Lord? Unfortunately these writers do not address such discontinuities at historical, literary, and canonical levels.

A collection of essays has the benefit of various perspectives and the drawback of limited flow. The papers here are well written, engaging, and accessible for interested people with some background in the subject matter. While most essays do not focus on implications for contemporary interpretation, individual chapters would be helpful as supplements or orientation for studying a specific NT book. Several essays also situate themselves within broader scholarship, which proves particularly beneficial for the non-specialist.

Overall, these writers do an admirable job of tackling a significant, complex issue. However, although the volume explores how “NT writers used the OT,” it proves less satisfying for “Hearing the OT in the NT.”



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While the latter implies the perspective of a two-testament Scripture, most essays here seek to uncover the *pre*-NT use of Scripture (not OT!) by writers of what later became the NT. Thus, this volume serves an author-centered approach well, but it does not address discontinuity in the transformation from “authorial writings” to Christian Scripture.

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Stanley Hauerwas and Romand Coles. *Christianity, Democracy and the Radical Ordinary: Conversations between a Radical Democrat and a Christian*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2007.

It is not only Christians who find difficult the practice of engaging the world in constructive ways; not just believing that engagement should happen, but engaging the complicated issues of how to proceed, occupies all kinds of people. In this volume we observe a Christian theologian (Stanley Hauerwas) and a political theorist who is not Christian (Romand Coles) grapple with such issues in ways that try to think about the right questions and display fruitful practices within a mutual pursuit of the transformation and development of a flourishing political imagination.

The purpose of this collection of essays, letters, lectures, and conversation is to exhibit a politics that refuses to let death dominate our lives, resists fear, and seeks to uncover the violence at the heart of liberal political doctrine. Not only does this book discuss such matters, it seeks to display some of the very practices it brings into view. Practices central to this ongoing conversation include attention, engagement, vulnerability, receptive patience, tending, “microdispositions” and “micropractices,” waiting, and gentleness. Such practices, patiently pursued, might make up a life that is political, claim the authors, yet not beholden to conventional politics.

We witness Coles and Hauerwas engage each other as well as a vast array of interlocutors in an attempt to cultivate a politics of “wild patience”: Sheldon Wolin, Cornell West, Ella Baker, John Howard Yoder, Will Campbell, Rowan Williams, Jean Vanier, Samuel Wells, and Gregory of Nanzianzus. Both authors here are exemplary in their own openness and vulnerability to learning from traditions outside their own, and Coles especially so as he provides insightful readings of a number of Christian theological voices.

Nonetheless, in the midst of their respectful and deep mutual engagement, Hauerwas and Coles exhibit at times a certain wariness in relation to each other. Hauerwas worries that radical democracy will be an end in itself for which God becomes an afterthought, a superfluous placeholder, domesticated and tamed in service of some other agenda. But he also worries that Christians do something very similar when they mistake the Christian faith for a garden variety of humanism. Coles, on the other hand, is concerned that Christian jealousy regarding Jesus may prevent proper vulnerability and underwrite a kind of territoriality. He further believes that no matter how sincere the upside-down practices of the church may be, these kinds of practices have a way of turning themselves right side up – and without appropriate discernment on the part of the church.

I have my own worries. Sometimes it feels as though Coles comes close to equating the insurgent grassroots political practices of radical democracy with the politics of Jesus. Coles also seems tempted to turn the church and its practices into an instance of radical democracy. Perhaps this is one reason he claims to be so “haunted” by John Howard Yoder, who himself is open to the criticism that he thinks the church’s practices can be translated into the world without loss.

Further, the extended conversation in this volume, while richly informed by a wide variety of interlocutors – political theorists, activists of many kinds, theologians, a number of Mennonite thinkers, and so on – is in the end strangely thin on the Christian exegetical tradition. While we see close, nuanced readings of Wolin, West, Campbell, et al., we search in vain for the same kind of close attention to sustained readings of the Biblical text. This is not to say that the conversation between Coles the radical democrat and Hauerwas the Christian is not informed by biblical ideas. However, I

wonder if Coles's concern for Christian jealousy of Jesus also extends to Christian privileging of the Scriptural text and, if so, what implications this might have for a long-term continuing conversation.

Jeffrey Stout, who in his own effort to revitalize the American democratic tradition often converses with Christian theologians such as Hauerwas, claims that this book gives him hope, since it takes the conversation between Christianity and democracy in a most welcome direction. This book also gives me hope as a Christian, because it seeks to find ways for people to engage in the world that resist the violence and death that have been inscribed deeply into the story of our shared lives. And part of that hopefulness includes paying close attention to practices that can be embodied on a human scale, whether as a radical democrat or a Christian.

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Laura Ruth Yordy. *Green Witness: Ecology, Ethics, and the Kingdom of God*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2008.

Laura Yordy has a vision for churches engaging holistically in ecological discipleship. She begins her discourse in *Green Witness* by briefly describing a fantasy congregation that fully integrates earth-friendly practices into its worship and daily actions. Yordy illustrates her vision by using examples from real churches that are implementing ecological practices. According to her, the greening of the church in North America has been limited because of the ineffectiveness of education, difficulties with real change, powerlessness of leadership, individualism in church life, the magnitude of the environmental crisis, and the hope of technological fixes: "The point is not to make the church a participant in the 'environmental movement,'" she says, "but to make the church more faithful by including the eschatological import of creation in its performance of worship, ... a 'way' of life that praises and witnesses to Father Son, and Holy Spirit" (161).

The author develops her thesis around the need for the church to

renew its understanding of the eschaton – “the fulfillment of God’s promises for creation” (2). The church is to be a witness to the coming Kingdom of Heaven, the result of Christ’s redemption of all of creation. Christians are not to be managers trying to fix the environmental crisis but witnesses of Christ’s relationship to creation through faithful ecological practice.

Yordy critiques the positions of three eco-theologians – Larry Rasmussen, Catherine Keller, and Rosemary Radford Ruether – by observing that they reject several central doctrines of Christian eschatology. She notes the losses that occur when eschatology does not include Jesus, the sovereignty of God, or the concept of an afterlife. She writes that our practices today in relation to ecology witness to our belief in the fullness of the Kingdom of God. The doctrine of creation should be examined from an eschatological framework, says the author; God’s future view of redeemed creation is what makes the Christian creation story distinct from views found in the “common creation story.”

Yordy carefully states that it is God’s love that generated the universe (57), and proceeds with helpful insights into the concepts of God creating the world out of nothing, the Trinitarian role in creation, the goodness of creation, and the “Fall.” Christian ethics is described as discipleship – where the lives of Christ’s followers witness to the Kingdom through worship, action, and character. Yordy provides stimulating insights into eco-discipleship by probing key characteristics of the Kingdom: peace, justice, abundance, righteousness, and communion with God. The resulting praxis is summarized well by her statement that “Christians’ witness to the Kingdom is not simply watching, but pointing toward God’s gracious creating and redeeming activity with the activity of their own lives” (112).

Yordy sees the church serving as a “demonstration plot” for ecological discipleship. She develops the view that everything the church practices – here specifically its relation to the earth – should witness to Christ’s coming redemption of all creation. It is from within community that the witness and practice will best occur. The concluding concept centers on the ecological virtue, patience. Yordy lifts it up as a key virtue while not excluding other much-needed virtues. She says it is our impatience that plays a major factor in our dominance over the natural world. But patience is woven into the web of the universe and reflects the character of God. “Part of the human need

for patience (as well as other virtues) is the imperative for humans to realign themselves with the patient character of God's creation" (155). From this framework Yordy calls us to practice eco-discipleship.

The author develops logical arguments throughout her discourse, though at points the writing style recalls the doctoral dissertation on which the book is based. The work is in the frame of a constructive theology, and it leans heavily on arguments between various theological and philosophical positions. Yordy formulates her thesis based on a broad array of authors along with insights of her own.

This volume would serve well as the basis for serious discussion by adults interested in articulating a biblical and theological response to today's environmental crisis, but it doesn't include an extensive list of examples of creation care actions. (It would also be helpful if there were an index in addition to the bibliography.) Upper-level college students in environmental studies would benefit from exploring the intersection between faith and ecological praxis found in this text.

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Conrad L. Kanagy. *Road Signs on the Journey: A Profile of Mennonite Church USA*. Waterloo, ON: Herald, 2007.

Conrad Kanagy's profile of Mennonite Church USA is a good addition to earlier similar studies of Mennonites in 1972 and 1989.<sup>1</sup> Preferring biblical to sociological categories of analysis, Kanagy presents the data as "road signs and guideposts" in order to help Mennonites find their social, political, spiritual, and theological location, and to help Mennonite churches consider the direction of their further "journey toward the reign of God" (24).

The first two chapters set a reading of the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah as the base for Kanagy's data analysis. These chapters test the

data for evidence of a *missional* intention and vision in Mennonite church life. Succeeding chapters profile Mennonite Church USA; explore church structure, polity and self-understanding; test consistency and orthodoxy of belief and ritual; survey management of resources; review recent disruptions of Mennonite “Christendom”; and assess the relation between the church and greater society. The author’s summary conclusion shares the testimony of respondents as they reflect on the quality of congregational life and challenge the church toward greater missional identity and activity.

Kanagy’s prognosis for Mennonite Church USA is disquieting yet hopeful. While the author predicts a “bleak future” (57), among “Racial/Ethnic Mennonites” he discovered signs of growth and renewal. Other signs of hope include relatively high rates of giving, marital stability, strong beliefs about Jesus, active personal piety, and greater support of women in ministry (183ff.).

At least two issues emerge that deserve greater discussion and thought. The first is how to refer to the diversity of ethnic and racial groups comprising Mennonite Church USA. Throughout the report Kanagy uses the generic term “Racial/Ethnic” to refer to African-American, Hispanic/Latino, diverse Asian, and various Native American congregations and members. Yet “Racial/Ethnic” would also apply to the various Caucasian groups comprising the church. One of the challenges in working out the tension between the margin and middle of Mennonite church has to do with how we refer to one another. The tendency to reduce our ethnic diversity to one generic category, or an implicit us/them polarity, is a pernicious problem with no easy solution.

This problem is endemic to descriptive sociological summaries, but even more, it bespeaks the difficulty that Mennonite church organizations have in dealing with an ethnic diversity that refuses to be ‘settled.’ I wonder if this reflects the broader influence of theories of assimilation as opposed to theories of ethnic pluralism in the American context. It seems to me that one of the significant challenges in combatting racism in the church is to celebrate our chaotic ethnicity in all its glorious detail. This will demand imaginative justice in reconfiguring current structures of privilege. Our commitment to such justice will help us find better, more expressive, language with which to understand the multi-ethnic fullness of Mennonite Church USA.

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The second challenge concerns Kanagy's exile hypothesis. This hypothesis interprets the changes Mennonites have undergone as assimilation to a broader society; that is, that Mennonites as exiles in American culture and society are losing their true identity and becoming more like their host society. This interpretation might be more cogent if Kanagy had presented comparative data from a larger control group than conservative Protestants (171). Increased levels of education, wealth, professional vocation, and urban living, together with changes in various beliefs, support "the argument that Mennonites are becoming more conforming to the values and attitudes of the larger society" (170, 171). However, Anabaptism has looked more educated and urban before.<sup>2</sup>

Putting a slight twist on Kanagy's question of exile, the data may be suggesting that Mennonites are finally returning from an almost 200-year exile in rural America. The changes Kanagy traces may be instances of increased biblical fidelity. Engagement with surrounding society, however messy that might be, could be a truer expression of Anabaptist peoplehood than the isolationist posture of most recent memory.

It may be necessary to resist and even critique assimilation theories based on the deeper resonance between Mennonites and various values of American society and culture, such as freedom of religion, freedom of conscience, and participatory governance of group life. The isolationist interpretation of Mennonite life from the 16th through the 18th centuries has had something of a privileged status<sup>3</sup> and may need to give way to a more socially engaged and integrated understanding of Mennonite life as normative.

This may be why Kanagy is so firmly convinced that the future of Mennonite Church USA lies with congregations comprising various minority racial and ethnic groups. Indeed, it may be impossible to find future vitality in the church without following such leadership into social engagement. For observing these provocative issues in such a way as to raise further discussion of the future of Mennonite communities, we can be grateful to Kanagy for an insightful analysis of Mennonite Church USA.

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> J. Howard Kaufmann and Leland Harder, *Anabaptists: Four Centuries Later* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1975). J. Howard Kaufmann and Leo Driedger, *The Mennonite Mosaic: Identity and Modernization* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Richard K. MacMaster, *Land, Piety, Peoplehood, The Establishment of Mennonite Communities in America, 1683-1790* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1985), 138.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

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Earl Zimmerman. *Practicing the Politics of Jesus: The Origin and Significance of John Howard Yoder's Social Ethics*. Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2007.

Interest in the theological ethics of John Howard Yoder shows no signs of slowing down. I am delighted – and sometimes amazed – at the level of scholarly interest in Yoder's writings today. *Practicing the Politics of Jesus: The Origin and Significance of John Howard Yoder's Social Ethics* is composed of seven chapters. The first six attempt to identify what shaped Yoder in ways that gave rise to his most influential book, *The Politics of Jesus*. The last chapter, which seems rather artificially connected to the others, provides Earl Zimmerman with an opportunity to state the significance of “the politics of Jesus,” as he sees it, for peace-building efforts today.

This book's unique contribution is that it offers the fullest account to date of the influences on Yoder during the years he was in Western Europe (1949-1958). Having named some of the North American Mennonite influences, the book attributes most of the “background” to his *Politics* to these European influences.

Zimmerman is right to say that the realities of post-World War II Europe were quite significant for the young Yoder, who arrived in France in April 1949 to serve orphans and help French Mennonites recover their



commitment to pacifism. And undoubtedly the debates about war in which he engaged during those years were shaped by memories of Nazism and the horrors of the war.

The author's discussion of Barth's influence on Yoder is framed differently from that of Craig Carter [see his *The Politics of the Cross*]. My sense is that Carter knows Barth's thought better than Zimmerman does. But probably the careful examination of Yoder in light of his studies with Barth (as compared to other influences) will continue to generate discussion and debate. Zimmerman has certainly provided a fuller account of NT scholar Oscar Cullmann's influence on Yoder than has been done before. This is helpful.

The chapter on Yoder's doctoral work on sixteenth-century Anabaptism is also the fullest summary we have of that work and its connections to his *Politics of Jesus*, although it would have had greater significance before the recent publication of an English translation of Yoder's dissertation. But Zimmerman's work will help those who haven't noticed these connections before to see them now. We are fortunate with *The Politics of Jesus* because, aside from his doctoral work, it is Yoder's most heavily footnoted book. However, in addition to his wide reading and formal teachers, it is important to say, as Zimmerman does, that *Politics* did not simply emerge from a study. According to accounts from French Mennonites, young Yoder empathized with those who had lived through several years of Nazi invasions.

Zimmerman could also have included Yoder's exposure to Latin America. In the mid-'60s and again when working on *Politics*, Yoder spent time with Latin American Christians living in the midst of revolution. According to theologians Samuel Escobar and René Padilla, he empathized deeply with them while delivering timely, biblical messages (thus Yoder's being made an honorary member of the Latin American Theological Fraternity).

One might get the impression that Yoder did not engage Reinhold Niebuhr's writings nearly as seriously as, say, J. Lawrence Burkholder (26, 57ff, 107). That impression would be wrong. While in high school, Yoder took a course with a former student of Niebuhr's at the College of Wooster, in which Niebuhr himself lectured once. Approximately fifteen years later, Yoder did significant research on Niebuhr at the University of Basel before

he gave his first lecture on him, and that produced an article. Finally, years later, Yoder wrote two substantial lectures on Niebuhr that were included in the informally published *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace and Revolution: A Companion to Bainton* (soon to be formally published).

Again, one could get the wrong impression from the statement that Yoder “basically depended on Roland Bainton’s historical survey of Christian attitudes toward war and peace for his historical scheme” regarding the “Constantinian shift” (198). Yoder was an historical theologian. For many years he taught courses surveying the history of Christian attitudes toward war, peace, and revolution; he read numerous and varied primary and secondary sources germane to those lectures. He had therefore studied relevant sources well before publishing the main essay articulating his claims.

I don’t have space to discuss issues raised in the last two chapters of summary and interpretation for contemporary peace-building. Here serious questions emerge regarding contemporary appropriations of Yoder.

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Amy Laura Hall. *Conceiving Parenthood: American Protestantism and the Spirit of Reproduction*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.

Churchly discussions of reproductive bioethics usually take place in the third person. The major actors – those advocating for so-called “designer babies” or for prenatal testing designed to enable selective termination of pregnancies – remain distinct from *us*, the narrators, who can respond from a distance and with disgust. Such conversations also usually occur in the future tense, in anticipation of a brave new world in which parents shop for their unborn child’s hair color, IQ, and personality type.

Yet for readers with any connection to middle-class, mainline Protestantism, Christian ethicist Amy Laura Hall’s new book requires a shift

from third person to first and from future tense to past. Her study requires readers to ask not “What will *they* come up with *next*?” but “How have *we* contributed to the ethos that has engendered such technologies?”

Hall’s wide-ranging survey of 20th-century Protestant ideas about family, social status, and scientific innovation suggests that the seeds of troubling technologies were sown closer to our ecclesial home than many Christians like to admit. As she writes, “a tradition that had within it the possibility of leveling all believers as orphaned and gratuitously adopted kin came instead to baptize a culture of carefully delineated, racially encoded domesticity” (10). By uncritically blessing both scientific advancement and an idealized portrait of the nuclear family, Hall claims, 20th-century Protestantism set the stage for technologies that would enable aspiring American parents to engineer the perfect child.

The “germ-free home” stands at the center of Hall’s first chapter, which mines mid-century issues of *Parents* magazine and its Methodist cognate, *Together*. The war on germs, made possible by products like Lysol, sedimented racial and class differences between the “hygienic” families of the assumed readers and *other* people’s children.

The author’s second chapter looks at how the marketing of infant formula and baby food encouraged parents to shift their trust from informally and familiarly transmitted know-how to dictates of the medical establishment. This chapter’s examination of the bizarre “Baby-Incubators—With Living Babies!” exhibit at the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago in 1933-34, which allowed visitors to view premature infants struggling for survival inside oven-like incubators, drives home the point that Americans were beginning to employ a technological gaze to a macabre extent.

Hall turns in the third chapter to the eugenics movement in the United States, which was endorsed by many progressive Protestants. She counters the prevailing idea that the American movement withered as the horrors of Nazi-era eugenics became public knowledge. Instead, she suggests, “there are links between current hopes for genius and past attempts to vaccinate the social body against the menace of poverty, disability, and deviance” (217). Hall’s final chapter moves into current bioethical debates by tracing connections between the promises of the atomic age and the claims of the current genomic revolution.

The narrative throughout *Conceiving Parenthood* is provocative and thorough. The book teems with illustrations and advertisements from magazines from the last century and this one, and all are accompanied by painstakingly close readings. At times, however, the contour of Hall's argument buckles under the weight of the evidence she presents; she seems unwilling to weigh, rank, and especially discard data that distracts from the trajectory of her main point. Unfortunately, chapters averaging 100 pages each will likely intimidate some readers who otherwise would benefit from her analysis.

The author's voice alternates between the scholarly, the pastoral, and the autobiographical. Sometimes the shift can be jarring, although none of the voices by itself would have been up to the great task Hall sets for herself. Calling herself a pro-life feminist, Hall moves beyond historical investigation and critical analysis to pastoral and prophetic challenge. "I do indeed target for moral interrogation women like myself," she writes, "for our complicity in the narrations that render other women's wombs as prodigal" (400). Hall takes her call to action beyond protesting the eugenic whiff of some modern reproductive technologies and questioning the "meticulously planned procreation" of the elite classes. She suggests a much broader program of compassionate valuing of those who, for whatever reason, are deemed outside the realm of "normal."

Anabaptist readers will find much resonance with this book, especially with its call to resist market-driven definitions of what – and who – constitutes a productive life.

The challenge for Christian parents today, Hall says, is "to see the children in their homes, neighborhoods, and churches as unqualified gifts rather than projects, to identify 'downward' rather than to climb, and to allow their strategically protected and planned lives to become entangled in the needs of families and children judged to be at risk and behind the curve" (250).

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Donald Capps. *Jesus, the Village Psychiatrist*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2008.

Early in this book Donald Capps describes the behavior of a squirrel darting across a busy street, then suddenly freezing midway and racing back, only to dart again. He calls this a “living parable” (xv) and says we are intrigued because we see ourselves in the squirrel’s dilemma. I couldn’t agree more. In fact, I felt like that squirrel as I was reading this volume, at times running quickly to reach what I hoped was food for thought, and then retreating swiftly as the author’s beliefs and mine clashed.

I started the book intrigued by the title, only to freeze in the introduction at comments such as these: people with mental illnesses are “doing it to themselves” (xii), mental illnesses are “a form of coping and ... therefore typical ... today” (xii), and “the methods which Jesus employed are congruent ... with methods ... demonstrably effective ... today” (xxv). These statements portend what becomes clear in the rest of the book. Capps is a believer in Freudian psychoanalysis, a school of therapy formulated by Sigmund Freud in the late 1800s and popular in the US in the mid-1900s. It treats patients with psychotherapy in the belief that insight into conflicts which precede the illness will result in healing.

That paradigm of mental illness is rejected or at least highly suspect in the field of modern psychiatry. With the increasing use of brain scans and molecular research, psychiatry is moving in a biological direction in which mental illnesses are seen as dysfunctional states of the normal brain. Psychoanalysis has not proven effective in most mental illnesses.

Despite my momentary freeze I dashed on. The book is short, only 131 pages, and is divided into two parts. Part I is an academic explanation of psychoanalytic terms such as conversion and hysteria, and Part II is an analysis of seven cases of Jesus’ healing. The cases (two paralyzed men, two blind men, the demon-possessed boy, Jairus’s daughter, and the hemorrhaging woman) are used to illustrate Capps’s thesis that Jesus did not use magic to heal medical illnesses but employed therapeutic techniques to heal psychosomatic illnesses. Full understanding of Part I requires some prior knowledge of and belief in psychoanalytic principles, and thus may not be of interest to the general audience that Capps targets in his introduction. Part

2 may be easier for general readers but still requires some background.

It was surprising to me that Capps uses a blend of psychoanalytic descriptions and more modern diagnostic criteria from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (the “DSM,” with DSM IV being the fourth version, published in 1994). I was in psychiatric residency in the late 1970s when the first draft of the DSM was published and thus my training focused heavily on it. The DSM was known to be an attempt to describe conditions objectively, replacing the psychoanalytic model of mental illness that theorizes about etiology or cause.

Capps’s review of the minute details of diagnostic criteria of conversion disorder, factitious disorder, and somatization disorder from DSM IV was difficult to read through. His attempt to apply them to persons who lived 2000 years ago and whom the Bible describes only in barest detail was simply perplexing. Reading the cases, I found myself skimming through the academic material to get to the insights about Jesus. This is where I found the book provocative; for short periods I actually enjoyed myself, not feeling like a squirrel at all. Capps’s suggestion that Jesus did not use supernatural powers to cure people but actually listened to them challenged me to stop discounting Jesus’ healing stories as easy for him because he was divine.

Capps’s insights regarding the healing of Jairus’s daughter are excellent. For example, he points out that Jairus’s daughter was twelve, thus on the cusp of marriageability, representing to her father an opportunity to increase his wealth by marrying her off well. The author’s thoughts on Jesus’ understanding of the social context of illnesses and the implications of wellness are tantalizing but too brief. Each time I would begin thinking “Now he’s getting somewhere,” the chapter would end.

I finished the book hungering for more. Completing the analogy of the squirrel, I had braved all the academic traffic, only to find that the delectable pile of insightful spiritual nuts I was hoping for was small.

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Chris K. Huebner. *A Precarious Peace*. Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2006.

One realizes quickly upon reading *A Precarious Peace* that a desire for a solid thesis argued with clean, crisp, logical warrants and brought “together into some final programmatic statement of a position” (29) will be entirely frustrated. No last word can be given because words and positions, no less than politics and power, are precarious for those in the Christian community (58).

The precariousness that Chris K. Huebner places at the center of his Yoderian study of Mennonite theology, knowledge, and identity de-centers any attempt to offer a last word. This is a book whose project is “disestablishing, disowning, dislocating” (23) without reconstructing its subject theoretically. As such there is no argument that Huebner could be criticized for not showing adequately. He has promised not to provide an account of what peace *is*, and no one account of peace is given here. Instead, in a random sampling, there are stories about Alzheimer’s, Atom Egoyan’s films, friendship, speed, and Zizek.

The argument – or, as Huebner says, “common theme” (30) – is simply that peace is characterized by being precarious. For peace to be anything else would require a coercive intervention. Peace comes to us as a gift, given by Christ, and like all gifts it is both radically ours and out of our control.

While the political and ecclesiological ramifications of Yoder’s vision have been noticed, applied, and extended in various contexts, the epistemological questions that his investigations suggest have drawn less attention. This is what Huebner is about in this volume. I particularly like the description of his approach: “Let us group this collection of impulses together under the heading of standard epistemology.... What follows ... is a series of gestures toward a counter-epistemology that arises from the church’s confession that Christ is the truth. Here truth will appear to be unsettled rather than settled.... It arises from an excessive economy of gift, and thus it exists as a seemingly unnecessary and unwarranted donation” (133-34).

This language of gift gives much of Huebner’s discussion a “spatial” feel. To elaborate his conception of peace he invokes words like diaspora, settled, patience, gesture, scattered, speed, or territory. I am strongly impressed by how Huebner is able to move, and to move me, in space and

time throughout this book. The discussion has an embodiedness missing from much of the theological endeavor.

The book's biggest strength is the reworking of our perceptions, actions, emotions, and disposition towards precariousness. I teach Christian ethics at a small Mennonite liberal arts institution to students who are mostly not convinced pacifists in either action or epistemology. I find this an enormously difficult and somewhat stressful task. This is not surprising, because many of them are just beginning their education in the ethos of Christian community. While reading this book I noticed that in class my statements were clearer, my mode of engagement more patient and less anxious, and my answers more characterized by the open-endedness that characterizes the gift.

Huebner has written a course of therapy for those who believe in peace that will, if we let it, deepen our engagement with peace, make us more comfortable with its precariousness, and orient us towards the Christ who gives us this peace. Huebner skillfully calls into question our assumptions. Some debates evaporate under his critique, as in a chapter on Milbank and Barth called "Can a Gift be Commanded?" Others condense as the author brings together questions not typically asked at the same time, as in a chapter where he employs contemporary philosophers and cultural critics to show how martyrdom shapes the gift of peace.

I close with questions offered in response to a quotation at the end of a wonderful chapter on [Paul] Virilo and Yoder: "But because this good news involves a breaking of the cycle of violence that includes the renunciation of logistical effectiveness and possessive sovereignty, it can *only* be offered as a gift whose reception cannot be guaranteed or enforced" (130, emphasis mine). Here Huebner seems to want to guarantee a certain shape to peace. But if peace is always precarious, is it also true that only peace is precarious? Isn't there also precariousness to the exercise of power, the attempt to govern, or the attempt to communicate in the language of culture and not only gospel? Can we not recognize peace and precariousness even when they occur (miraculously) in spite of force, clumsy intervention, or misguided attempts to control? Or must peace, in order to remain precarious, guard against alliances threatening that precariousness?

At points Huebner eagerly recognizes that those practicing peace are also always implicated in the violent exercise of power (see chapters



8 and 12). But at other points the shape of the peace he avers seems overdetermined by the demand of precariousness. Isn't a truly precarious peace also willing to explore the possibility of remaining settled, existing in a happy exchange, or flourishing for a moment in effectiveness?

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Tripp York. *The Purple Crown: The Politics of Martyrdom*. Scottsdale: Herald, 2007.

*The Purple Crown: The Politics of Martyrdom* engages questions that have preoccupied Anabaptists for centuries: What is the appropriate posture of peace-loving Christians in a violent world? Should Christians be political?

As a work of historical theology, this book will appeal most to theologians and church historians. But York's prose, if repetitive at times, is accessible (and gender inclusive). Anyone who finds the subject matter compelling can approach this study. Some will find it inspiring; others will find it most valuable as a representative piece of a particular kind of Christian dogma. At the least, it will provoke passionate conversation.

According to York, Christians must be politically active earthly citizens, but with an important caveat: their political posture is one of exile. They are here on earth to represent heaven. Thus "martyrdom is *the* political act because it represents the ultimate imitation of Christ, signifying a life lived in obedience to, and participation in, the triune God" (23).

Beginning with a discussion of the early Christian martyrs under Rome, York interprets martyrdom as a public performance that bears witness to the triumph of Christ through a means superior to rhetoric or argument. Indeed, martyrdom is a cosmic battle "between God's people and God's enemies"

(29-30). From the early Christians, the author moves to a discussion of the 16th-century Anabaptist martyrs, and finishes with a biography of martyred Salvadoran archbishop Oscar Romero that is likely to be engaging even for those who dislike York's theology.

York deserves much credit for writing one of the more ecumenical martyrdom studies available from a Mennonite source. He focuses always on the broader Christian context and resists Anabaptist tribalism. But readers who value interfaith cooperation may find his work problematic.

*The Purple Crown* is peppered with references to "the people of God," and while York acknowledges that this group is hard to define, he remains rigid in his Christian understanding of the phrase. "Only where the triune God is worshipped can there be true sociality," he asserts (110). This claim is typical of York's language throughout. He consistently dismisses any social or political reality outside of Christianity by labeling it "false," an ideological tactic that adds no meat to his arguments. *The Purple Crown* is hardly the first theological work to claim that Christianity is inherently political by virtue of its alleged superiority to everything else, and if York is to be faulted for excessive reliance on a "church" vs. "world" binary, it must be said that he did not invent it. Still, he does little to make it fresh.

The author includes almost no discussion of contemporary politics or how Christians might shoulder their accountability in a modern democracy. Rather, government is simply "the state," an ill-defined monolith that kills and oppresses Christians. Christians are political because as followers of Christ they stand in opposition to the state, even unto death. This circular argument is the heart of *The Purple Crown*, thereby confining the book's appeal to those who share York's dualistic worldview.

York comes closest to undermining his own dualism in his chapter on 16th-century Europe – the strongest in the book – in which he discusses with admirable nuance how battles over semantics led Christians to kill one another. Recognizing the difficulty of resolving these doctrinal issues, York points us instead to the martyrdoms; such performances "give us something by which we can discern which acts are good, beautiful, and true. Maybe then it is possible to distinguish the difference between a pseudo-politics located in earthly regimes and an authentic politics constituted by nothing other than the broken yet risen body of Christ" (97).

The definition of “politics” is contested territory, and my frustration with York’s theocratic version may reveal little beyond my own partisanship. Nonetheless, the labels “pseudo-politics” and “authentic politics” strike me as ironically self-defeating. Nothing is more endemic to the politics of “earthly regimes” than claims of purity and authenticity that serve to discredit some peoples while elevating others to positions of supposed greatness. “The visible church is important not just so the elect can know each other, but because God has promised not to leave the world without a witness to God,” York continues; “This is the sort of gift that exposes false cities from the true city in an effort to bring all cities under the rule of Christ” (98).

This crusader-like language leaves us no room to approach non-Christians with any humility. Despite its nonviolent intent, I doubt York’s chauvinist theology will bring us closer to the “peace of the earthly city.”

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