

THE CONRAD GREBEL REVIEW



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The Conrad Grebel Review (CGR) is a multi-disciplinary peer-reviewed journal of Christian inquiry devoted to advancing thoughtful, sustained discussions of theology, peace, society, and culture from broadly-based Anabaptist/Mennonite perspectives. It is published three times a year. We welcome submissions of articles, reflections, and responses. Accepted papers are subject to Chicago style and copy editing, and are submitted to authors for approval before publication.

Articles

Articles are original works of scholarship engaged with relevant disciplinary literature, written in a style appealing to the educated non-specialist, and properly referenced. Length limit: 7500 words, excluding notes. Manuscripts are typically sent in blind copy to two peer-reviewers for assessment.

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Foreword

This CGR issue features an argument for renewing a traditional Mennonite ecclesial practice, an exploration of scholarly involvement with the Amish tourist-book market, a conference discussion of two important new books on political theology and apocalyptic, and a panel discussion of Mennonites and the media, plus an array of book reviews. All these items are an expression of CGR's mandate to "advance thoughtful, sustained discussions of theology, peace, society, and culture from broadly-based Anabaptist/Mennonite perspectives." We extend our hearty thanks to Guest Editors P. Travis Kroeker and Kyle Gingerich Hiebert for preparing the conference discussion material.

We welcome submissions of articles or reflections in keeping with the journal's mandate, and brief responses to published articles. Submissions in response to the Calls for Papers appearing in this issue are included in this welcome.

W. Derek Suderman
Editor

Stephen A. Jones
Managing Editor

Being Formed in the Time of Jesus Christ: Towards a Renewal of Footwashing in a High-Speed Age

Jason Reimer Greig

Introduction

Recent decades have seen a plethora of writing on the late modern experience of time, particularly its accelerated character.¹ Whether academic or popular, many of these works speak of the contemporary age as one in which people experience a “time-squeeze,” or feel as if they live their life on a “hamster wheel” of speed, or find the western pace of life to be a “race against the clock.” While some describe the accelerated late modern “times” as liberating, others regard this sped-up temporality as pathological and demoralizing. In this essay I consider the nature of time in a Christian, liturgical framework, and how this time differs from the time of accelerated contemporary societies.

In this study, human bodies will play a central part. While I discuss bodies labelled as “disabled,” I do so mainly to highlight some pathological elements of contemporary temporality, not to categorize these bodies as “special.” Worship and liturgy also play a central role in the discussion. I argue that the sacramental practice of footwashing exemplifies a contrasting, more authentically Christian time to that of high-speed society, one that does not erase, deny, or forget the body in an accelerated age of virtuality and disembodied relationships. While footwashing has held an important place in some streams of Anabaptist and Mennonite ecclesial life, scholars see a

¹ For a sample, see Stephen Bertman, *Hyperculture: The Human Cost of Speed* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998); John Tomlinson, *The Culture of Speed: The Coming of Immediacy* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2007); Hartmut Rosa and William E Scheuerman, eds., *High-Speed Society: Social Acceleration, Power, and Modernity* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 2009); Hartmut Rosa, *Alienation and Acceleration: Towards a Critical Theory of Late-Modern Temporality* (Malmö, Sweden: NSU Press, 2010); Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*, trans. Jonathan Trejo-Mathys (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2013); Mark C. Taylor, *Speed Limits: Where Time Went and Why We Have so Little Left* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2014).

significant recent decline in its practice among these communities.² Whether the decline comes through the growing infrequency of footwashing rites, or the lack of participation by church members in regular services, they observe a growing discomfort with, and an incomprehension of, the practice. Against that background, I claim that L'Arche communities—networks comprising people considered intellectually disabled and nondisabled persons who all share their life and faith together—and the L'Arche practice of footwashing offer the church not only an alternative interpretation of worship and liturgy but also a pattern of life that is in keeping with Christian time.

High-Speed Society and Social Acceleration

The German social theorist Hartmut Rosa has written extensively on the social acceleration at the heart of the contemporary world. In *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*, Rosa elucidates how at the core of modernity lies an impulse towards growth and speed that is fundamental to its moral project to empower individuals and foster human autonomy. At its heart lies an “impatience” towards static conceptions of history and time, and the employment of conceptions of progress and accelerating technological advancement to facilitate its utopian goals. While modernity from its inception grew out of, and evolved with, speeded-up social processes, Rosa sees a new phase of acceleration occurring in late modernity. Although the accelerating speed of transportation, international trade, and technological development can be discerned as early as the 18th century, he regards its increased velocity and ubiquity to be quantitatively and qualitatively different today. “The exchange or movement of information, money, commodities, and people, or even of ideas and diseases, across large distances is not new,” he says, explaining that “what is new is the *speed* and *lack of resistance* with which such processes transpire.”³

For Rosa, what ensues is a massive, pervasive experience of alienation at all levels of society, from the inner life of the individual to national political

² See Keith Graber-Miller, “Mennonite Footwashing: Identity Reflections and Altered Meanings,” *Worship* 66, no. 2 (March 1992): 159; Bob Brenneman, “Embodied Forgiveness: Yoder and the (Body) Politics of Footwashing,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 83, no. 1 (2009): 14-15; Harvey Leddy, “Adaptation and Contestation: Feet Washing in the Church of the Brethren,” *Brethren Life & Thought* 61, no. 1 (2016): 53-54.

³ Rosa, *Social Acceleration*, 214.

systems and broader social institutions. At the level of the individual, Rosa sees alienation happening in various ways: people become alienated from *space* through the eroding of distance through accelerated transportation and the proliferation of computer-driven virtuality; with disposability, a dominant mode of relationship with *things*, people become alienated from, and far less knowledgeable about, objects; late modernity's valorization of virtues such as multitasking produces an alienation from personal *actions*, whereby people never really know what they are doing; the multiplicity of episodes that can be garnered and valued alienates people from *time*, because memory cannot hold and process events into personal experience; people become alienated from *self and others*, because of a proliferation of relationships, leading to a superficiality that impedes the belonging necessary for a stable self.⁴ Social acceleration compels people to live lives not of their choosing, and often in ways that do not lead to flourishing and enjoyment.

Although Rosa never mentions it, the human body is implicated in all these dimensions of alienation. Rather than serving as mere tools for the self's race to keep up, bodies participate in the practices and social imaginaries that facilitate and draw from the drive towards speed. The fragmentation and disengagement from reality accompanying late modernity not only impact disembodied selves but are inscribed in bodies of whole persons.

Globalization and Information Technologies: Drivers of Acceleration

Social acceleration is a complex process encompassing a multitude of personal and social aspects. In order to highlight the body's place in this dynamic, I will focus on two drivers of this acceleration, globalization and information technologies. Media and information theorist Robert Hassan points out how a globalization driven by neoliberal capitalism and the rise of information and computer technologies (ICTs) have acted both as tools and drivers of "high-speed society."⁵ It is hard to overestimate the influence of

⁴ Rosa, *Alienation and Acceleration*, 83-97.

⁵ Hassan has written extensively on the dynamic of speed within modernity and late modernity. See Robert Hassan, *The Chronoscopic Society: Globalization, Time, and Knowledge in the Network Economy* (New York: P. Lang, 2003); Robert Hassan, *The Information Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008); Robert Hassan, *Empires of Speed: Time and the Acceleration of Politics and Society* (Leiden: Brill, 2009); Robert Hassan, *The Age of Distraction: Reading, Writing, and Politics in a High-Speed Networked Economy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction

the industrial revolution and the birth of capitalism as progenitors of the late modern impulse towards speed and progress. While pre-modern peoples and cultures would have understood time in a more “lived” way, as centered in events and relationships, the capitalist class emerging in modernity focused on time as a measurable, abstract quantity totally separated from the social world. This measurable time was a boon for factory owners, who could now assess and orient their workers towards producing as much in as little time as possible. From this form of telling time comes the birth of Benjamin Franklin’s now commonplace aphorism: “time is money.” In modernity time moves from being embedded in social relationships to becoming a commodifiable, abstract exchange value.

By the 19th century social commentators already knew that capital cannot remain still but must continually expand at ever higher speeds.⁶ Capitalism’s expansionist and accelerating logic demands a reach into more and more of the world, injecting speed into the time and space of emerging global “markets.” Hassan views this acceleration as reaching its peak in late-modern “network society” with its orientation toward “pure speed,” which seeks to reduce everything to “flows” of information and commodities.⁷ The liquidity inherent in network time extends not only to data and material products but to people as well. Characteristics of “flexibility” and “mobility” stand as key attributes for the late modern worker, who must move at the same speed of globalized flows.⁸ The advent of ICTs grew out of this neoliberal time and continues to drive it forward. Computing takes the time of the clock and speeds it up into previously unheard-of new fractions: “The meter of the clock that drove the industrial revolution is now being compressed and accelerated by the infinitely more rapid time-loaded functions of high-speed computerization.”⁹ The network time that accompanies the compression of

Publishers, 2012).

⁶ As Marx and Engels wrote in *The Communist Manifesto*, capital must “nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions everywhere” at ever greater speeds, to the point where “all that is solid melts into air.” Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, ed. Jeffrey C. Isaac (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2012), 77.

⁷ Hassan, *Empires of Speed*, 67.

⁸ See Richard Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism* (New York: Norton, 1998).

⁹ Robert Hassan and Ronald E. Purser, “Introduction,” in *24/7: Time and Temporality in the*

time and space increasingly takes the form of virtuality, where fast minds win out over cumbersome bodies. As Nicholas Negroponte notes, the information-based digital age “is about the global movement of weightless bits at the speed of light.”¹⁰

Hassan argues that lying behind the rise of ICTs is a market-based logic of efficiency and pragmatism. Rather than argue for a hard technological determinism, Hassan understands computers as encoded and designed with a particular politics. ICTs are “entimed” with a particular type of temporality, one that serves the interest of global capital:

Networks are expressed now in a different kind of logic: a *pragmatic logic*.... [C]omputers and computer development is encoded with a pragmatism that derives from the market-based politics of neoliberalism, the principal force behind ICT development since the 1970s.¹¹

This combination of neoliberalism and computer development creates societies of “ubiquitous computing,” and entimes not only technologies but also social processes and personal forms of identity in its logic of speed.

Machine Clocks and Body Clocks

For Hassan, the great loss of living in “network time” is forgetting that other times than that of the computer exist.

[W]e adapt to new forms of compressed space-time, and adapt our lives in order to synchronize with its machine-time rhythms, thereby displacing or sublimating or forgetting or having no opportunity to discover, what time actually is and where it actually resides: in us.¹²

Social theorist Barbara Adam views the commodification of time as emanating from the abstraction of time into a measurable quantity that arose with the rise of “machine time” or “clock time.” As opposed to seeing

Network Society, ed. Robert Hassan and Ronald E. Purser (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2007), 11.

¹⁰ Nicholas Negroponte, *Being Digital* (New York: Knopf, 1995), 12.

¹¹ Hassan, *The Age of Distraction*, 76.

¹² *Ibid.*, 40.

“clock time” as merely one form of time-telling, western societies have made the measurable time of the clock into time *per se*.¹³ With this shift has come a conception of time as a scarce resource, continuously “running out” and thus demanding control and management. Adam contrasts clock time with the time of the body. Human bodies are a kind of clock in that they have a certain rhythm and keep a certain time—but it is not the same as clock time, which is measurable, regular, and moves in a straight line. Body clocks vary in speed and intensity, and are highly context-dependent. The difference is between “*being* time [the body] and *symbolising* it [the clock].”¹⁴ In modernity, time conceived as the clock was designed with Newtonian mechanics and a measurable, abstract conception of time in mind. However, “[w]e live Newtonian and thermodynamic theory but we are biological clocks and organic beings.”¹⁵ When the body cannot adapt or keep up with the speed and logic of clock and network time, it develops pathologies and sicknesses.¹⁶

While Rosa, Hassan, and Adam never articulate the character of the bodies susceptible to the pathologies resulting from late modern time, they seem to assume fully functioning and non-impaired ones. Yet if the nondisabled body risks a loss of humanity in the time-pressure of a neoliberal logic, how much more might this apply to bodies labelled as “disabled”? For people not infinitely flexible or able to multitask at sufficient rates, life in high-speed society may appear not merely stressful but downright dangerous. The requirement to “keep up to speed” for bodies having limited control of motor function or using wheelchairs can be experienced as a quixotic task, with the nondisabled often understanding this form of embodiment as deeply defective. This stigma can particularly affect people labelled as intellectually disabled. For the pragmatic logic of acceleration, many of these folk represent everything regrettable in a human being: slowness, unproductiveness, immobility, silence, lack of intelligence, and dependency. Their bodies refuse to be “transcended” for the virtuality surfing within a world of instantaneity and disembodied selves. While the challenges that the cognitively impaired

¹³ Barbara Adam, *Timewatch: The Social Analysis of Time* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 52.

¹⁴ Barbara Adam, *Time and Social Theory* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1990), 75.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹⁶ See Adam, *Timewatch*, 53. Rosa also understands depression as the illness that most fits an accelerated, late modern society. See Rosa, *Social Acceleration*, 248–50.

face may appear anomalous or “special,” *all bodies* experience the alienation and pathologies that can emanate from the processes of social acceleration.

For those considered intellectually disabled, as for all who consider themselves nondisabled, might there be another “time” that can recognize them as persons with gifts to share? Does time in high-speed society cohere with a time understood as redeemed by Jesus Christ? If not, into what practices and social imaginaries must Christians be formed, so that they can live and tell time truthfully? In the light of these questions, I will now briefly explore the sacramental time of footwashing as a temporality that is potentially more hospitable and faithful than the time of high-speed society.

Footwashing and Christian Time

Certain streams within Christianity have historically performed the rite of footwashing and kept this ancient tradition alive in the post-Reformation period. While various traditions practice the rite, its depth and use in Anabaptist-Mennonite communities has been unique. While in some traditions the use of footwashing is perfunctory, a “liturgical drama” meant more to be observed than participated in, the Anabaptist-Mennonite and free church tradition of making footwashing a communal ordinance means that *everyone* participates—and shares in the grace and formation involved.

The hermeneutical “majority report” on footwashing, especially in recent Anabaptist-Mennonite theologizing, presents the rite as one of humble service.¹⁷ In this interpretive framework, Christians are invited to follow Jesus as he humbles himself and serves others rather than exercising authority over them. Other interpretations stress forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with others in the body of Christ. Yet, as Keith Graber-

¹⁷ For examples, see Graber-Miller, “Mennonite Footwashing,” 148-70; Tripp York, “Dirty Basins, Dirty Disciples, and Beautiful Crosses,” *Liturgy* 20, no. 1 (2005): 11-18; Mark Thiessen Nation, “Washing Feet: Preparation for Service,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 441-51. Works on the historical interpretations of footwashing are few and far between. See G. A. Frank Knight, “Feet Washing,” in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. 5, ed. James Hastings (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1912), 814-23; Peter Jeffrey, *A New Commandment: Toward a Renewed Rite for the Washing of Feet* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992); Katherine Gabler Henn, “Emancipatory Inversion and Ecclesial Identity: Text, Context and Ritual Interpretations of Johannine Footwashing,” Ph.D. diss., Drew University, 2006.

Miller notes, the servant theme has predominated in North American congregations as the Mennonite church has become more activist and less sectarian in its relationship with the wider society.¹⁸ This has consequences not only for how people interpret footwashing but also for how Christians perceive and experience time.

Liturgy and Time

I now want to consider footwashing as a mode of liturgical action, and I will try to explicate the kind of time involved in this action. This involves framing it as a rite that brings the whole body unambiguously within a sacramental temporality, offering a pattern for living Christianly in late modern high-speed societies. New ways of understanding, interpreting, and living footwashing open up as authentic modes of discipleship and alternatives to cultures that prize an accelerated and pragmatically entimed temporality.

As a people born out of divine events both of the past and yet to come, Christians understand their faith as essentially “timeful.” Liturgical theologian Emma O’Donnell, for instance, argues that time is crucial for Christian faith because it involves both memory and hope.¹⁹ Christians found their belief on the memory of Jesus’ work accomplished in his earthly ministry, on the cross, and with his resurrection. Additionally, they understand faith to be infused with the hope of Jesus’ second coming and the instantiated fullness of the Kingdom of God. In this way, Christian time is both “anamnetic”—grounded in and sourced from the memory of Jesus, which makes the past present—and eschatological, which draws the present into the redeemed glory of God’s future. For O’Donnell, the memory and hope at the heart of Christian faith represent more than abstract states of subjective awareness. On the contrary, they are “inherently performative” and thus they “do things.”²⁰ The performance of memory and the hope in the work of the Trinity draws Christians “into a relationship with the past and the future, and even more, into an experiential *participation* in these temporal elements.”²¹

¹⁸ Graber-Miller, “Mennonite Footwashing.”

¹⁹ Emma O’Donnell, *Remembering the Future: The Experience of Time in Jewish and Christian Liturgy* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015), 129.

²⁰ O’Donnell here draws on J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1962).

²¹ O’Donnell, *Remembering the Future*, 174.

A primary place where this faith happens is in worship. O'Donnell sees worship as "the liturgical performance of time" where the past and future are brought into dialogue with the present.²² When Christians gather to remember Jesus and hope for the Holy Spirit's presence, they let themselves become formed in a new way of telling and living time. In worship they experience time as "saved," i.e., redeemed by Jesus and incorporated into the temporality of the Trinity. As the Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann writes,

"It is time [καίρος] to begin the service to the Lord," the deacon announces to the celebrant. This is not simply a reminder that it is now "opportune" or "convenient" for the performance of the sacrament. It is an affirmation and confession that the *new time*, the time of the kingdom of God and its fulfillment in the Church, now enters into the fallen time of "this world" in order that we, the Church, might be lifted up to heaven, and the Church transfigured into "that which she is" – the body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit.²³

The liturgy acts as a kind of *ordo* or pattern of reality that orients lives to God's time. Liturgical performance assists participants in becoming transformed into "the new time," thereby entiming them further into the shape of the Trinity's story.

In the performative actions of the liturgy the present time of the celebrating community (today), the past (salvation history), and the fulfillment of salvation (the future) coalesce. But in the liturgy these temporal modi are not a series of chronological sections; they are the expression of human-temporal existence in the face of the eternity of God. In the temporal modi of the liturgy God allows the celebrating community to participate in the divine fullness of being. This sharing is a pneumatic event that is carried out in the symbolic action of liturgy.²⁴

²² Ibid., 6.

²³ Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom*, trans. Paul Kachur (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1987), 48.

²⁴ Albert Gerhards and Benedikt Kranemann, *Introduction to the Study of Liturgy*, trans. Linda

Understanding temporality in this fashion gives Christians a distinctive way of telling and living time. Theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar sees Jesus' saving work as qualitatively transforming time without quantitatively changing it. The tension between eternity and temporality in Jesus means that his "double temporal horizon" has transformed time into a time of salvation, where there is no "delay" but "a vision of time in which the expectation continues in the Church while its fulfillment has already been achieved."²⁵ Through incorporation into the Trinity's narrative, the church learns to take on the shape of this same temporal horizon, living faithfully "between the times." O'Donnell notes how liturgical performance demonstrates and inculcates believers in the "eschatologically transparent" nature of Christian time. Liturgy orients Christians to the true *telos* or "end" of time, making it present to the liturgical assembly.

Eschatologically transparent time, therefore, is a quality of time that has been transformed through liturgy into the unified form of eschatological time. It is this unified sense of time that characterizes the liturgical present and that allows the liturgical community to "remember the future" through liturgical performance of "eschatological memory." For, in liturgical performance, memory and eschatological anticipation link together the disparate fragments of temporality into a unity, creating a unique liturgical present which is eschatologically – and anamnetically – transparent.²⁶

In the memory and hope performed in worship, believers bring the many disparate and competing times of the world together into the saving time of God.

M. Maloney (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2017), 218.

²⁵ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 7, *Theology: The New Covenant*, trans. Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 171, quoted in O'Donnell, *Remembering the Future*, 131.

²⁶ O'Donnell, *Remembering the Future*, 152. For more on the "eschatologically transparent" time of liturgy, see Alexander Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, trans. Asheleigh E. Moorhouse (Portland, ME: The Faith Press, 1966), 56-57.

Liturgical Action as “Inoperative Time”

Liturgical theologian John Allyn Melloh writes of the difference between liturgical time and the time of secular-oriented cultures. Western cultures tend to understand time as an empty resource that must be controlled, managed, and conquered for the sake of fulfilling self-determined human projects. Time becomes merely “a relentless succession of moments,” as distinct from liturgical time—“eternity as the ripening fruit of time.”²⁷

Culture views time pragmatically. Time is money. As the national treadmill speeds up, exhaustion and collapse become more prevalent, but time is for productivity. Daily prayer, however, offers non-pragmatic praise and intercession, celebrating time as God’s gift.²⁸

Philosopher of religion Joseph Ballan agrees, understanding liturgy as exemplifying religious “inoperative time.” For Ballan, inoperative time refuses to submit to the logic of capitalist production; it is a time that cannot be reduced to utility. Capitalism advocates a kind of turbo-charged *chronos*, where time is money and the greatest sin is to “waste” time. “Against the backdrop of this system,” he writes, “worship is a gratuitous expenditure of time, a loss of a precious resource. The gratuitousness with which human worshipers give their time can be understood as a response to the time they have been graciously given by God.”²⁹

As a liturgical performance, footwashing opens up an opportunity to experience and give thanks for God’s gracious gift of time. In contrast to the many late-modern tools and social practices grounded in the pragmatic, sped-up logic of neoliberalism, footwashing is entimed with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. In theologian Ghislain Lafont’s words, this is the “time of Jesus Christ,” in which “sonship [is] pure relationship.”³⁰ For

²⁷ John Allyn Melloh, “Liturgical Time, Theology of,” in *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, ed. Peter E. Fink (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990), 734.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 739.

²⁹ Joseph Ballan, “Liturgy, Inoperativity, and Time,” in *Impossible Time: Past and Future in the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Marius Timmann Mjaaland, Ulrik Houliind Rasmussen, and Philipp Stoellger (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 227.

³⁰ Ghislain Lafont, *God, Time, and Being* (Petersham, MA: Saint Bede’s Publications, 1992), 167.

Christians, the paschal mystery is the “founding time” that “renders testimony to the economy of time” as an ever-deepening communion between God and humanity.³¹ That this founding time includes both Jesus’ passion and his life and ministry is exemplified in his performance of footwashing. Not only does the rite invite Christian participation in Jesus’ humbling death and promise of resurrection, it also invites believers to receive the grace to walk as disciples and to live the communion with others in the body characteristic of the Body of Christ. While service remains an aspect of footwashing, themes of communion and relationship endow the practice with a receptive dimension.

Crucial to entering into this “time of Jesus Christ” through footwashing is the human body. As in all the ordinances and sacramental practices of Christian worship, material reality participates in the communication of God’s grace to believers. Liturgical practices such as baptism and the Lord’s Supper not only validate the earthly but also make it an essential part of God’s real presence to the Body. This kind of communication exists in a particular way with footwashing. Here the body not only refuses to be ignored, but, as Brethren theologian Anna Lisa Gross points out, “To confront another’s body in this stark way and to reveal one’s body to others could be an opportunity to reclaim the goodness of the body.”³² No “virtual” presence exists in footwashing, or a need to forget the body in order to receive and participate in divine communion. This kind of presence has special relevance for people considered to be disabled, many of whom live in a particular way with bodies often thought of as defective or pathological. Footwashing does not require that their bodies “keep up” with the speed of neoliberal logic, but that they slowly and patiently receive God’s gift of presence and time. The deceleration inherent in the rite reminds others that “the time of Jesus Christ” cannot be controlled or managed, but rather must be entered into and acceded to.

The inoperativity involved in footwashing opens up space for the body to communicate, and thus has the potential of being hospitable towards people with cognitive impairments. Gross mentions how ritual practice

³¹ Ibid., 168.

³² Anna Lisa Gross, “Body Theology in the Love Feast,” *Brethren Life and Thought* 55, no. 3-4 (2010): 61.

speaks when words cannot. “It honors the body to say that actions can speak for themselves without the rational mind controlling the discourse, tone, or mood.”³³ As opposed to an abstracted measured time, the liturgical time lived in footwashing allows for non-rational communication to form others in authentic discipleship. While an aspect of this formation can be seen as didactic, through liturgical repetition footwashing also works through grace to form Christians *habitually* in “the time of Jesus Christ.” Mennonite sociologist Bob Brenneman describes footwashing as a practice of “embodied forgiveness” that trains believers in a particular story and politics. He describes footwashing as

a powerful rite – an embodied confession that incorporates embodied, vulnerable interaction and facilitates reconciliation even while it provides a script and rehearsal for politics within the Christian body.... It is an embodied politics that runs entirely against the grain of power and earned status in the wider society.³⁴

Practicing footwashing shows how grace works through transforming both the intellect and the body, entiming disciples with the non-productive and inoperative time of the Kingdom.

L’Arche and Footwashing

One network of communities that might offer a new, yet traditional, way of practicing footwashing as a formative rite is L’Arche, a movement born in France in the 1960s. This international federation of local communities, where people with cognitive impairments and nondisabled assistants share life and faith together, provides the church with a parable of what it could mean to live in God’s time. While never claiming to be perfect exemplars of discipleship, L’Arche communities who practice footwashing can testify to how the rite leads people into the inoperative and eschatologically transparent time of Jesus Christ.

Many persons involved in L’Arche originally understood the Eucharist as the primary sacramental practice uniting persons and

³³ Ibid., 65.

³⁴ Brenneman, “Embodied Forgiveness,” 28.

sustaining communities. However, persistent debates about denominational intercommunion, particularly in the UK, made communities seek for other liturgical rites in their worship. At first homes and then whole communities in the UK began to practice footwashing as an element of worship. Participants discovered that it not only provided an opportunity to pray in common but spoke profoundly to living and continuing life together as people, labeled as disabled or nondisabled. Footwashing has now become a practice stretching across the global federation of L'Arche, even in non-Christian settings in India and parts of Africa.

The embodied nature of the rite became readily apparent and relevant for many living in L'Arche communities. In the midst of communal life, bodies are pervasive in everything that happens daily: washing, eating, meetings, work, prayer, and so on. Both for disabled persons stigmatized by nonnormative bodies and for nondisabled persons formed to forget the body in the virtuality of high-speed time, L'Arche founder Jean Vanier discovered that footwashing revealed the body as the place where God comes to dwell and communicate: "The way Jesus touched his disciples must have made them understand, even if only later, the sacredness of their own bodies. The body is the place where the Father dwells."³⁵ Being guided by liturgical time means that persons decelerate enough to recognize their bodies as sites of communion with God and others.

This discovery is exemplified by the exclamation at a footwashing service made by a Ukrainian core member named Myrou. Witness Bernard Figarol, a nondisabled assistant, writes of how "Myrou, who had so obviously undervalued himself, exclaimed, '*Look at my beautiful feet. Haven't I got beautiful feet?*' This acceptance of himself was like an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. God saying to each one of us: '*You are beautiful and I love you just the way you are.*'"³⁶ Through the ritual practice of footwashing, people discover a love and friendship communicated through non-verbal and non-rational means. Myrou illustrates how the inoperativity and non-pragmatic dimension of God's communication in footwashing might assist everyone in recognizing their bodies and entire lives as gifts grafted onto the Trinity's

³⁵ Jean Vanier, *The Scandal of Service: Jesus Washes our Feet* (Toronto: Novalis, 1998), 36.

³⁶ Bernard Figarol, "Treading in Holy Ground: L'Arche '96," *Letters of L'Arche*, no. 90 (Dec. 1996): 14.

sacred narrative.

Receiving the gift of Jesus's friendship in footwashing further forms L'Arche members in a pattern of life consistent with "the time of Jesus Christ." While multitasking may represent the virtue most prized in high-speed society, Vanier and others in L'Arche speak of tenderness or gentleness as a gift most amenable to helping persons grow toward their end, namely being in communion with God and others. The time and deliberateness inherent in liturgical performance trains persons in L'Arche in a nonviolent way of encountering other bodies and the natural world.

If the body is truly the dwelling-place of God, a holy ground, then all our relationships are transformed. When we meet and touch others, we do so with even more respect as we realize their life is holy. When Jesus washes his disciples' feet and asks us to do the same, is he not showing us the importance of meeting each other, touching each other, with simplicity, gentleness and great respect, because each person is precious?³⁷

L'Arche members see footwashing as requiring a non-utilitarian kind of time, because the rite must happen with the slowness and thoroughness that characterizes tenderness. The transformative possibilities of performing footwashing in this kind of time hold not just for those considered intellectually disabled but for the nondisabled as well. As Jacob, a L'Arche assistant, says of a core member washing his feet, "My feet were washed gently and tenderly. . . . It is a strong memory like a blessing and marked something for me in my own faith. . . . Time stood still . . . it is close to me."³⁸

Jacob's experience of time standing still suggests how footwashing could assist people in entering into "the time of Jesus Christ" that defies neoliberal high-speed time. Vanier often speaks of needing to learn how to "befriend time" as an aspect of discipleship. Becoming followers of Jesus requires living a human time, one that decelerates enough to understand faith as a pilgrimage rather than a race. Thus, in addition to tenderness, Vanier regards patience as a crucial virtue in living and telling time rightly:

³⁷ Vanier, *The Scandal of Service*, 38.

³⁸ Catherine Anderson and Sandra Carroll, "The Footwashing in John 13:1-20, in the Context of L'Arche," *Australian eJournal of Theology* 20, no. 3 (2013): 192.

“Perhaps the essential quality for anyone who lives in community is patience: a recognition that we, others, and the whole community take time to grow. Nothing is achieved in a day. If we are to live in community, we have to be friends of time.”³⁹ As a rite performed in the inoperativity of the Trinity’s time, footwashing opens a way for people to discover the Gospel priorities of relationship over commodity and bodily presence over virtuality. Being and becoming friends of time through footwashing thus has the potential not only to inoculate Christians from high-speed society but also to witness to another Lord and another time.

Conclusion

I have attempted to portray footwashing as a rite performed in the inoperativity of the Trinity’s time that opens a way for people to discover the Gospel priorities of relationship over speed and bodily presence over virtuality. Rather than a defunct practice better relegated to a bygone era, footwashing instead exists as a practice given by Jesus to the church as a means of divine communication and communal formation. The speed entimed within global capitalism and ICTs can form late-modern persons into alienated and fragmented individuals. This conception of telling time is especially dangerous for those labelled as intellectually disabled, as they represent everything antithetical to the “network man” prized in high-speed societies. By contrast, footwashing as a form of liturgical action brings Christians within the “eschatologically transparent” and saving time of Jesus Christ, and relativizes the seeming dominance of clock or network time. As I have sought to show with the example of footwashing in L’Arche communities, this mode of time is potentially more hospitable not only for those labelled as intellectually disabled but for everyone in late modernity. People like Myrou and others with cognitive impairments might even lead the nondisabled in being and becoming “friends of time” who witness to another way of being and telling time.

The recent decline in the practice of footwashing by Anabaptist-Mennonite congregations not only evades Jesus’ command to celebrate the rite, it also prevents the church from being formed in, and witnessing, to a nonviolent temporality. By becoming “entimed” with “the time of Jesus

³⁹ Jean Vanier, *Community and Growth*, rev. ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 134.

Christ,” Christians answer a fundamental political question, namely: Whose time do we follow and order life by? Living amidst an accelerated, globalized world can make people lose sight of different patterns of life and modes of being. As a sacramental practice, footwashing is an ecclesial activity that could form disciples into the gentle, relational time of Jesus Christ, one decelerated enough to love the enemy and welcome the stranger. In a world desperate for signs of peace and examples of hospitality, the renewal of an Anabaptist-Mennonite performance of footwashing could offer the church—and the world—a practice that is both faithful and inspiring.

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Telling Tales Out of School: Scholars of Amish Life and the Tourist-Book Market

David L. Weaver-Zercher

Introduction

The production by scholars of Old Order Amish life of short, illustrated books and booklets aimed largely at tourists has characterized the field of Amish studies from its earliest days. Long before his first edition of *Amish Society* appeared in 1963, John A. Hostetler, the most prolific Amish studies scholar in the 20th century, published *Amish Life*, a 32-page booklet written for non-specialists that in its various editions sold nearly a million copies.¹ Hostetler's *Amish Life* had come out in 1952. In the fifteen years that followed, another university-trained sociologist, Elmer Lewis Smith, published three tourist books of his own, two of them general treatments of Amish life and one devoted largely to Amish bundling practices.² Such efforts continued through the 20th century and into the 21st, most recently with Donald B. Kraybill's *Simply Amish*, published in 2018 and subtitled "An Essential Guide from the Foremost Expert on Amish Life."³

This essay explores the propensity of scholars of Amish life to package information about Amish life into descriptive, tourist-oriented books. When did this practice begin? Why has it continued over the years? Who have been the primary players, and what stories about the Amish have they told along the way? Because these popularizing endeavors emerged in a particular context, I begin my consideration with a brief history of what I call the "Amish culture market." I then outline a case for popularization—five interrelated factors that compelled scholars of Amish life to enter the culture market—before finally,

¹ John A. Hostetler, *Amish Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1963); John A. Hostetler, *Amish Life* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1952).

² Elmer Lewis Smith and Melvin J. Horst, *Among the Amish* (Akron, PA: Applied Arts, 1959); Elmer L. Smith, *Bundling Among the Amish* (Akron, PA: Applied Arts, 1961); Elmer Lewis Smith and Melvin Horst, *The Amish* (Witmer, PA: Applied Arts, 1966).

³ Donald B. Kraybill, *Simply Amish: An Essential Guide from the Foremost Expert on Amish Life* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2018).

in the last section of this essay, outlining their “habits of popularization.” In many respects this essay is a defense of these popularizing efforts, which I consider a reasonable response to the cultural marketplace. At the same time I want to highlight the constraints, predilections, and compromises inherent in packaging Amish life for popular consumption. Taking one’s message to market inevitably shapes the story one tells, not simply altering the message’s breadth and depth but also modifying its contours and even its essence. At the very least these popular treatments have pushed beyond explaining Amish practices to offering a defense of these practices against critiques. In that respect, popular treatments of Amish life have tended toward apologies for the Amish lifestyle, a rhetorical approach that sets the stage for lesson-oriented sections that frequently conclude the works.

Some definitional clarity is in order. First, by “scholars of Amish life” I mean university-trained scholars who are not Amish themselves but have studied and written academic works on Amish or Mennonite life. Incidentally, these scholars have mostly been sociologists, though not exclusively so; they have mostly been Mennonites, but again not exclusively so. What links them together is their academic training, their scholarly productivity, and their determination to translate their expertise into the tourist book genre. Second, by “tourist books” I mean relatively short nonfiction books or booklets that, for purposes of the market, assume little or no knowledge about Amish life, are simply written, generously illustrated, attractively packaged, and free of footnotes. Of course, the publishers of tourist books are happy to sell them to anyone, including people who never leave their homes; in any case, the target market is ordinary people who want straightforward, accessible information about the Amish—and not too much of it. To narrow my scope even further, I will limit my analysis to tourist books published in the United States that seek to provide a general overview of Amish life, as opposed to those that focus on a single feature of Amish life, such as bundling, quilting, or the Pennsylvania Dutch language.

Before I begin, self-disclosure is also appropriate. First, as a scholar of Amish life, I have myself undertaken popular writing about the Amish, books and articles aimed at a readership that extends far beyond the academic community. Second, I have co-published books with Donald B. Kraybill, whose tourist books I explore in this essay and who, more importantly, I

consider a friend.⁴ Third, my spouse is a book editor at Herald Press, which has published many of the materials I consider below.

Scholars of Amish Life and the Amish Culture Market: A Short History

One hundred years ago, the Old Order Amish were not a renowned religious group, let alone a precious cultural commodity. Journalists produced occasional stories about them in the 1910s and 1920s, and a few local merchants produced Amish-themed postcards, but as a distinct cultural phenomenon, the Amish were largely ignored in the first third of the 20th century.⁵ This relative anonymity began to wane in the late 1930s, partly because of a conflict the Amish themselves incited. In 1937, a group of Amish leaders in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania sought to defend their communities' one-room schoolhouses against the forces of school consolidation. The conflict, covered by *The New York Times* and other national media outlets, awarded the Amish a new measure of attention and, in some circles, heightened esteem.⁶ Publishers and other merchants were quick to capitalize on this clash between the proponents of social progress and those who would preserve an icon of America's rural past. In 1939, for instance, a New York City publisher released Ella Maie Seyfert's children's book, *Little Amish Schoolhouse* that, with other popular publications, set the stage for a full-blown Amish culture industry to emerge in subsequent decades.⁷

The first book-length academic studies of Amish life appeared shortly thereafter. In 1942, Walter M. Kollmorgen, a researcher for the US Department of Agriculture, produced a 100-page study titled *Culture of a Contemporary Rural Community: The Old Order Amish of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania*.⁸

⁴ Donald B. Kraybill, Steven M. Nolt, and David L. Weaver-Zercher, *Amish Grace: How Forgiveness Transcended Tragedy* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007); and Donald B. Kraybill, Steven M. Nolt, and David L. Weaver-Zercher, *The Amish Way: Patient Faith in a Perilous World* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010).

⁵ One example of this early journalism was Katherine Haviland Taylor, "Pennsylvania Dutch," *Travel*, June 1929, 10-11, 42.

⁶ See David Weaver-Zercher, *The Amish in the American Imagination* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2001), 60-78.

⁷ Ella Maie Seyfert, *Little Amish Schoolhouse* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1939).

⁸ Walter M. Kollmorgen, *Culture of a Contemporary Rural Community: The Old Order Amish of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania* (Washington, DC: US Department of Agriculture, 1942).

That same year, the Reformed minister Calvin George Bachman published *The Old Order Amish of Lancaster County*, a 294-page monograph published by the Pennsylvania German Society.⁹ These two works, both concerned with the persistence of Amish life in an age of assumed assimilation, anticipated the production of other full-length books: Elmer Lewis Smith's *The Amish People: Seventeenth-Century Tradition in Modern America* (1958); Smith's *The Amish Today: An Analysis of Their Beliefs, Behavior, and Contemporary Problems* (1961); William Schreiber's *Our Amish Neighbors* (1962); and John A. Hostetler's *Amish Society* (1963).¹⁰ All of these monographs had their strengths, but it was Hostetler's *Amish Society*, more than the others, that would become the standard reference work for decades to come.¹¹

Although Hostetler, who had grown up in an Amish family but opted not to join the Amish church, was not the first writer to perceive a market for an Amish-themed tourist book, he was the first university-trained scholar to produce one.¹² His publication of *Amish Life* in 1952, when he was three years into a graduate program in rural sociology at Pennsylvania State University, came at the urging of both his professors and his academically-minded

⁹ Calvin George Bachman, *The Old Order Amish of Lancaster County* (Norristown, PA: Pennsylvania German Society, 1942).

¹⁰ Elmer Lewis Smith, *The Amish People: Seventeenth-Century Tradition in Modern America* (New York: Exposition Press, 1958); Elmer Lewis Smith, *The Amish Today: An Analysis of Their Beliefs, Behavior, and Contemporary Problems* (Allentown, PA: Pennsylvania German Folklore Society, 1961); and William Schreiber, *Our Amish Neighbors* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1962). For a recent consideration of these works, see Joseph Donnermeyer, "Of Shoulders and Shadows: Selected Amish Scholarship before 1963," *Journal of Plain and Anabaptist Studies* 5, no. 2 (2017): 162-95.

¹¹ Published by Johns Hopkins University Press, *Amish Society* would eventually go through four editions (1963, 1968, 1980, 1993). For the dominance of *Amish Society* and Hostetler more generally, see Cory Anderson, "Seventy-Five Years of Amish Studies, 1942 to 2017: A Critical Review of Scholarship Trends (with an Extensive Bibliography)," *Journal of Plain and Anabaptist Studies* 5, no. 1 (2017): 1-65.

¹² In 1937, Berenice Steinfeldt produced *The Amish of Lancaster County*, a 32-page booklet she and her father sold in and around Lancaster, Pennsylvania. In a related vein, Joseph W. Yoder published *Rosanna of the Amish* in 1940. *Rosanna* was not a tourist book *per se* but a book-length narrative based on his mother's life. See Berenice Steinfeldt, *The Amish of Lancaster County* (Lancaster, PA: Arthur G. Steinfeldt, 1937); Joseph W. Yoder, *Rosanna of the Amish* (Huntingdon, PA: Yoder Publishing Company, 1940); Julia Kasdorf, *Fixing Tradition: Joseph W. Yoder, Amish-American* (Telford, PA: Pandora Press, 2002), 137-65.

friends in the Mennonite Church.¹³ Reluctant at first—academics without tenure popularize their scholarship at their own risk—Hostetler eventually gave in to their advice. In an article published in the *Pennsylvania Dutchman* in 1951, one year before *Amish Life* appeared, he made a case for people like himself occupying exactly the right position for interpreting Amish life to the larger public. In his view, his dual identity—Amish farm boy, university-educated sociologist—helped him chart a safe route between the Scylla of “superficial interest” demonstrated by mainstream social scientists and the Charybdis of “idolization” demonstrated by untrained aficionados.¹⁴

Hostetler’s decision to write *Amish Life* had an adversarial impetus as well: the seemingly endless series of Pennsylvania Dutch-themed booklets produced by A. Monroe Aurand Jr. Beginning in the late 1920s, Aurand, who operated a bookstore in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, produced more than two dozen such booklets, which he eventually sold by the thousands to travelers along the Pennsylvania Turnpike. Although he cast his cultural net wider than the Amish *per se*, his Pennsylvania Dutch booklets (especially after 1937) often highlighted Amish people and their practices.¹⁵ Aurand showed a particular interest in bundling, a traditional courtship practice in which a courting couple enjoyed one another’s company in bed. This practice, more widespread in Amish communities in the 1940s than it is today, piqued the interest of outsiders, who found it curious that Amish church leaders would tolerate a practice so rife with sexual temptation. That Aurand would feature this phenomenon, link it to the Amish, and season it with salacious details irked Hostetler, who knew there was much more to Amish life than this.¹⁶

¹³ In unpublished reflections written in the 1990s, Hostetler recalled that the encouragement to write *Amish Life* came from Mennonites Guy Hersherberger and Melvin Gingerich. See David L. Weaver-Zercher, “An Uneasy Calling: John A. Hostetler and the Work of Cultural Mediation,” in *Writing the Amish: The Worlds of John A. Hostetler*, ed. David L. Weaver-Zercher (University Park, PA: Penn State Univ. Press, 2005), 144 n72.

¹⁴ John A. Hostetler, “Toward a New Interpretation of Sectarian Life in America,” *Pennsylvania Dutchman* 3, no. 4 (1951): 1-2, 7.

¹⁵ For instance, Ammon Monroe Aurand Jr., *Little Known Facts about the Amish and the Mennonites: A Study of the Social Customs and Habits of Pennsylvania’s “Plain People”* (Harrisburg, PA: Aurand Press, 1938).

¹⁶ For example, in Mifflin County, Pennsylvania, where Hostetler was born, Aurand wrote that “unusual incidents” take place in Amish communities that require “a delicate touch in the retelling.” When pregnancy can no longer be denied, the young Amish woman appears

When Hostetler failed to get vendors to stop selling Aurand's booklets, he decided to enter the Amish culture market himself. *Amish Life* was the result.

Chances are good that Hostetler would have entered this market even if Aurand had never published anything. By the early 1950s, popular interest in the Amish was ascendant, as was the willingness of outsiders to offer their interpretations of Amish life, some more serious-minded than others. *Plain and Fancy*, a Broadway musical that followed a sprightly New York City couple as they explored Lancaster County's Amish region, debuted in 1955 to enthusiastic audiences and strong reviews. Amish Farm and House, the first Amish-themed tourist attraction in Lancaster County, opened that same year, paving the way for what became by the mid-1960s a thriving Amish-themed tourist industry. These entrepreneurs, drawing on a long tradition of cultural tourism, knew there was money to be made by selling information about exotic people, regardless of the information's accuracy. Not all these endeavors played fast and loose with Amish reality, but some clearly did. Perhaps more upsetting to Hostetler, many portrayals demonstrated a dismissive attitude toward Amish spiritual sensibilities. Even as he praised *Plain and Fancy's* theme song, "Plain We Live," as the "best statement of Amish credo coming from a secular source," he must have noticed that the musical's urban protagonists held deeper reserves of moral wisdom than did its boorish Amish patriarch.¹⁷

In the decade following the debut of *Amish Life*, Hostetler was joined by other scholars who used popular modes of expression to disseminate their own interpretations of Amish life. In contrast to Hostetler, who downplayed bundling in his *Amish Life* booklet, a Madison College (Virginia) social scientist, Elmer Lewis Smith, addressed the practice head-on with *Bundling Among the Amish*.¹⁸ Smith's goal was apparently to woo the same audience that Aurand had captured but then provide them with a more nuanced interpretation of bundling.¹⁹ In a similar fashion, Franklin & Marshall

before church leaders and confesses everything ("with whom, where, when, and under what circumstances"). A. Monroe Aurand Jr., *Bundling Prohibited!* (Harrisburg, PA: Aurand Press, 1928), 21-22.

¹⁷ John A. Hostetler, "Why Is Everybody Interested in the Pennsylvania Dutch?" *Christian Living*, August 1955, 8.

¹⁸ See footnote 2.

¹⁹ "Although we can question the wisdom of bundling among the Amish," Smith wrote, "there

College folklorist Alfred L. Shoemaker tried to capitalize on the marketing successes of others—Lancaster County tourism entrepreneurs—to provide an informed interpretation of Amish life. Shoemaker entered this market with *A Peek at the Amish* in 1954, but his most creative interpretive vehicle was the Dutch Harvest Frolic, a weeklong potpourri of lectures, demonstrations, and activities that debuted in Lancaster in 1961.²⁰ Much like Aurand in the 1920s and 1930s, Shoemaker was interested in a range of Pennsylvania Dutch groups and practices, but given the Amish's rising celebrity, he increasingly devoted his efforts to the Amish slice of Pennsylvania Dutch ethnic pie.

The popularizing efforts of these scholars—Hostetler, Shoemaker, Smith, and eventually Hostetler's protégé, Donald Kraybill—were both creative and effective at reaching wide audiences, but their work could scarcely keep pace with other endeavors that educated people about Amish life. By the late 1970s, three million tourists were flocking to Lancaster County annually, with other Amish-absorbed travelers heading to Holmes County, Ohio, and Elkhart County, Indiana. In each locale, tourists were greeted with a plethora of informational sources, from tour guides to films, and from "working farms" to glossy pamphlets. Not coincidentally, other entrepreneurial media began to pop up and multiply. In 1985, Paramount Pictures released the Amish-themed feature film *Witness*, a star-studded action flick that filled cinema seats from coast to coast and, in the course of two hours, introduced moviegoers to certain features of Lancaster County Amish life. Other Amish-themed movies and television shows would follow, including *Harvest of Fire*, which aired on CBS in 1996, and *For Richer or Poorer*, which debuted in theaters the following year. By the early 21st century, two other popular media—reality television and romance novels—had enfolded the Amish in their warm and lucrative embrace.²¹ Some reality

is little evidence to support the assumption that it results in sex delinquency [i.e., premarital sex], for their sex problems [i.e., out-of-wedlock pregnancies] seem fewer than experienced by our national population." Smith, *Bundling Among the Amish*, 30.

²⁰ Alfred L. Shoemaker, *A Peek at the Amish* (Lancaster, PA: Pennsylvania Dutch Folklore Center, 1954). Shoemaker began his festival work in Kutztown, Pennsylvania, in 1950. In 1961, he organized a festival near Lancaster that, according to advance publicity, was "dedicated to the Plain Dutch," that is, the Old Order Amish and other conservative Anabaptist groups. The festival drew nearly 100,000 people, but it lost money and was not repeated.

²¹ For an analysis of Amish romance novels, see Valerie Weaver-Zercher, *Thrill of the Chaste*:

offerings, most notably the Discovery Channel's "Amish Mafia," stretched reality to the breaking point, but they did exactly what their producers hoped they would do: they attracted wide audiences. Not unlike Aurand's booklets in the 1930s, they succeeded in shaping at least some people's perceptions of Amish life—and in rankling scholars who held accuracy and nuance in higher regard.²²

As with any quick survey of Amish-themed media in the 20th and 21st centuries, this sketch is incomplete, but it suffices to show that the dilemma Hostetler faced in 1950 only grew more complicated over time. In 1950, he could start with the relatively reasonable goal of stanching the flow of bad information (by convincing venders to stop selling Aurand's booklets) and replacing it with something better (i.e., *his* books). No scholars of Amish life would be so optimistic today. Still, some continue to share Hostetler's conviction that shaping popular perceptions of Amish life is an integral part of their work. Producing tourist books continues to be one way to advance that objective.

The Case for Popularization

The case for scholars of Amish life to disseminate their ideas in popular media, including tourist books, cannot be separated from the foregoing contextual considerations. In particular, this case hinges on five interrelated factors.

First, *outsiders have long found the Amish both fascinating and confounding, a curiosity that made the emergence of an Amish culture industry practically inevitable.* Touristic forays through Amish regions date to the early years of the 20th century and, along with journalistic accounts that reported about Amish life, set the stage for commercial endeavors that burgeoned over time—from Aurand's booklets in the 1930s and Amish Country tourism in the 1960s, to *Witness* in the 1980s and Amish romance novels and reality television in the 2000s. Near the end of his life, Hostetler wondered if his scholarly output had contributed to the growth of the Amish

The Allure of Amish Roman Novels (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2013).

²² Marie Cusick, "A Growing Backlash Against 'Amish Exploitation' in Pennsylvania," National Public Radio, August 24, 2014; <https://www.npr.org/2014/08/24/342474911/a-growing-backlash-against-amish-exploitation-in-pennsylvania>; accessed January 31, 2019.

culture industry, but there is no reason to think that the commodification of the Amish was dependent on the work of Hostetler or any other scholar. To the contrary, America's free market, multiplied by its commitment to free speech, provides plenty of room to make money by telling other people's stories. In this environment, it was only a matter of time until an Amish culture industry would develop.

Second, *the Amish themselves have not been major players in this industry, refusing (for the most part) to explain themselves to the larger world.* There are exceptions to their informational reticence, to be sure, but these have been modest in scope, late in coming, or both.²³ One needs only to spend a day in Salt Lake City, Utah to see what is possible in terms of an exceptional religious group taking control of its own story and mediating it to outsiders. There are many reasons why the Amish have not gone the way of the Latter-Day Saints and their theatrical Temple Square, but for our purposes the reasons for this reticence are less important than the plain fact of it, which has created considerable space for others to enter the informational marketplace.

Third, *the chief aim of the Amish culture market is to produce representations of Amish life that sell, an objective that has sometimes run roughshod over other representational values such as close correspondence to reality.* Granted, many of these productions have demonstrated both accuracy and nuance, but many have not, and this deficiency has contributed to some scholars' willingness to enter the informational marketplace. This can be seen most clearly in the case of Hostetler, who produced *Amish Life* in direct response to Aurand's pamphleteering and later provided ameliorative commentary to a host of media outlets in response to *Witness*.²⁴ For Hostetler, allowing others to control the marketplace was to forsake his scholarly vocation, which was to advance people's understanding of Amish

²³ The most obvious exception to this is Herald Press's *Plainspoken* series, in which plain Anabaptists offer accounts of their lives. Two entries in this series are Loren Beachy, *Chasing the Amish Dream: My Life as a Young Amish Bachelor* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2014), and Marlene C. Miller, *Called to Be Amish: My Journey from Head Majorette to the Old Order* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2015).

²⁴ For instance, Dawn Clayton, "John Hostetler Bears Witness to Amish Culture and Calls the Movie *Witness* 'a Mockery,'" *People Weekly*, March 11, 1985, 64; and John A. Hostetler, "Marketing the Amish Soul," *Gospel Herald*, June 26, 1984, 452-53.

life.²⁵ Hostetler may be the most obvious example, but other scholars have felt similarly responsible to counter deficient portrayals of Amish life, especially when those portrayals can potentially reach wide audiences.

Fourth, *24/7 news coverage about everything, including events that affect real-life Amish people, means that opportunities abound for both good and bad information to circulate.* The cocaine trafficking arrests in 1998, the Nickel Mines Amish school shooting in 2006, and the strange case of Amish men forcibly cutting other men's beards in some Ohio Amish communities in 2011—each of these events was reported widely in the media. More significantly, each event raised questions that begged for answers. Do Amish young people buy and sell illegal drugs? Can Amish people forgive grievous wrongs in just a matter of minutes? Are there rival Amish groups that despise one another so much that they resort to violence? Journalists from many quarters sought to answer these questions, and although some did an excellent job, others missed the mark. Even the best journalistic accounts raised additional questions about Amish life, ones that scholars thought they could answer, even as they realized most people would not want to read long, dense academic treatises.

Finally, *the production of much popular literature, and especially tourist books, rests on the assumption that many consumers have short attention spans.* To be sure, there are many points along the reading spectrum between a five-hundred-page treatise and a tourist booklet; and there are many other media besides print by which people can learn about Amish culture. Nevertheless, there continues to be a market for explanatory books that can be stuffed into purses, backpacks, or glove compartments, and that can be read quickly or even on the run. Publishers of Amish romance novels have recognized this ongoing reality and have thus sought to enter the tourist book market themselves, sometimes drawing on their most popular authors to compose the text.²⁶ Still other publishers are looking to scholars to produce this sort of literature.

These five factors have convinced some Amish scholars to devote

²⁵ Hostetler, "An Amish Beginning," in Weaver-Zercher, ed., *Writing the Amish*, 32-35.

²⁶ For instance, Mindy Starns Clark, *Plain Answers About Amish Life* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2013); Richard Brunstetter and Wanda E. Brunstetter, *A Portrait of Amish Life* (Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour Publishing, 2012).

themselves to producing popular works on Amish life. This endeavor is entirely reasonable to undertake if one is convinced that (a) ideas matter; (b) filling the minds of ordinary people with accurate information is a public good; and (c) one is well-positioned to produce that kind of information. This is not to deny that other motives, including public recognition and financial gain, may influence a scholar's decision to produce a popular work. Still, if scholars of Amish life are convinced that they have the ability to advance the public's understanding of Amish life, entering the tourist book marketplace makes more sense than standing on the sidelines and lamenting what they see.

That said, entering this marketplace comes with particular constraints. Putting one's ideas into an accessible form necessarily requires the sacrifice of nuance, a sacrifice that runs counter to the academic enterprise. In addition, people who seek to merchandise their ideas need to be attentive to consumer desires, a reality that can sometimes lead to other practices, tendencies, and even compromises. To these habits of popularization we now turn.

Habits of Popularization

By referring to "habits of popularization," I do not intend to be either prescriptive or pejorative. My intent is quite straightforward, namely to ask what representational practices characterize the tourist books produced by scholars during this period. These practices may ensue from an author's own sense of what it takes to capture the Amish culture market, or may emerge at the behest of the publisher, whose marketing staff may shape the product in ways the author did not conceive—and perhaps does not like. Indeed, authors who sign publishing contracts agree to relinquish some degree of control over the final product, a deal they strike on the assumption that their publishers can reach wider markets than they could reach themselves. For some authors this contractual relationship feels like a deal with the devil. For others it feels like a blessing from above. For most it feels like a combination of the two.

The first habit of popularization is *answering the questions about Amish life that ordinary people are asking* (or at least are perceived to be asking). In the original edition of *Amish Life*, Hostetler cast many section headings in the interrogative, posing questions such as "Are They Flush with

Money?” and “Do They Know World Affairs?”²⁷ Forty years later, Kraybill and his publisher titled his first tourist-oriented work *The Puzzles of Amish Life*, underscoring that it took seriously the questions of ordinary folk.²⁸ Taken as a whole, outsiders’ questions are legion, but tourists are most apt to be curious about what they see as they travel through Amish regions—horses and buggies, people in plain dress, farms and farming practices—topics that, along with courtship and marriage, appear almost without fail in tourist booklets.

Of course, some questions gain more prominence in certain eras than in others. In his early tourist book offerings, Hostetler devoted attention to bundling, a topic altogether absent in later tourist booklets.²⁹ As for *Rumspringa*, the period in Amish teenagers’ lives when they “run around” with other teens, early tourist booklets mention it only in passing, if at all, whereas later booklets, especially in the aftermath of the cocaine trafficking arrests of two Lancaster County Amish men in 1998, award it significant space.³⁰ Similarly, information about the forgiveness of evildoers appeared in these booklets only after the 2006 Amish school shooting in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania, a horrific and internationally reported event that was followed by gestures of forgiveness from the local Amish community. In the case of Kraybill’s *Simply Amish*, published in 2018, a section on “Forgiveness at Nickel Mines” runs to nearly six pages.³¹

The second habit is *making Amish life visible*, an inherently challenging endeavor given the Amish aversion to being photographed. In some cases,

²⁷ Hostetler, *Amish Life* (1952), 13, 30.

²⁸ Donald B. Kraybill, *The Puzzles of Amish Life* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 1990). Each of the book’s eighteen chapters are subtitled with a question, for instance, “Why are horses used to pull modern farm machinery?” (65).

²⁹ Compare Hostetler, *Amish Life* (1952), which devotes two pages to bundling, to Donald B. Kraybill, *The Amish: Why They Enchant Us* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2003), which doesn’t address it at all.

³⁰ Compare Hostetler, *Amish Life* (1952) to John A. Hostetler, *The Amish*, 3rd ed., revised by Steven M. Nolt and Ann E. Hostetler (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2013). The latter work has an additional section titled “Becoming Adults” (30-31) that focuses on *Rumspringa*. See also Kraybill, *The Amish: Why They Enchant Us*, 21-24; and Donald B. Kraybill, *The Amish of Lancaster County* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Press, 2008), 42-44.

³¹ Kraybill, *Simply Amish*, 38-43; see also “Forgiveness and Peace,” in Hostetler, *Amish Life* 3rd ed., 46-48.

this aversion seems not to have troubled the booklets' producers. Both Shoemaker's *A Peek at the Amish* (1954) and Smith's *Among the Amish* (1959) were little more than photo essays, with the scholars providing captions or short paragraphs to accompany the images, many showing Amish people at close range. In Shoemaker's *Peek at the Amish*, the first nine pages are devoted to Amish dress, with fifteen close-up photographs by Charles Rice filling the 5.5 x 8.5-inch pages. For his part, Smith worked with photographer Melvin Horst to produce an 8.5 x 11-inch spread, advertised on the cover as "a pictorial presentation." Both booklets were produced in black-and-white, and neither offered any justification for photographing Amish subjects. Consumer interest in "the bearded and bonneted people" inhabiting an "American fairyland" was assumed to be justification enough.³²

Compared to both Shoemaker and Smith, the Amish-raised Hostetler took the Amish taboo against photography seriously. In the first edition of *Amish Life* (1952), nearly half of the images featuring Amish people were ink drawings, not photographs. Of the thirteen photographs that appeared in the thirty-two-page booklet, six were entirely devoid of human subjects, focusing instead on animals, farmsteads, and technology. Of the seven photographs that did include Amish people, only two included adults: one of a barn raising and one of a horse-drawn wagon, both taken so remotely that individuals are hard to identify. The other five human-subject photographs were photos of children: two candid shots showing children doing farm work, and three close-ups, clearly posed, including a cover photograph of Hostetler and his brother Jacob.

Here, then, we see the genesis of a representational ethic that some publishers and scholars would adopt in the years ahead: the determination that, despite the Amish taboo against posing for photographs, it was permissible to publish close-up photos of Amish children and teens. This halfway covenant had some basis in reality—Amish adults were more likely to avoid or even scold potential photographers than were Amish children—but in many ways it was more exploitive than snapping pictures of reluctant adults. In time, scholars and publishers would find other ways to justify using intimate Amish photographs, including the photographer's sensitivity to his

³² Smith, *Among the Amish*, 4 ("bearded and bonneted"); Shoemaker, *Peek at the Amish*, [3] ("fairyland").

or her subjects, the fact that a given photograph was already in circulation (it hadn't been taken for *this* particular book), or both. Of course, the ultimate reason for such photographic images was economic: consumers would more likely buy books that included such images than those that did not. Just as important from an economic standpoint, the Amish were known to abstain from filing lawsuits. Gaining permission from an Amish subject to publish a photograph may have been possible, and perhaps even ideal, but without the threat of lawsuits it was never really necessary. In sum, the Amish were—and remain—an easy target.

The third habit is *making Amish life appear rational, even defensible*. Many questions that these books seek to address are the why-questions of ordinary people, some of which carry implicit charges of irrationality, even hypocrisy. Why do the Amish ban telephones from their homes, a ban they do not apply to their barns or shops? In *Puzzles of Amish Life*, Kraybill suggests it is because overreliance on telephone talk would in time “remove conversation from the rich symbolism of face-to-face interaction.” More specifically, “body language, facial expression, and dress codes—all so important in Amish culture—would be stripped away in phone conversations.”³³ Why do the Amish refuse to own cars, even as they are happy to ride in them? In *Lessons for Living*, a trio of Amish scholars notes that cars “make people go in opposite directions, and by doing so, people spread out and no longer need neighbors.”³⁴ Answers such as these, clearly and confidently stated, do two correlated things. First, they conceal the simplest explanation behind a particular practice: because the Amish community have always done it that way, and defying a community tradition can be socially ruinous. Second, they suggest that Amish life operates according to a deep logic that many fail to see.³⁵

More than just giving rational explanations, however, tourist booklets are prone to suggest that the Amish approach to a given feature of life has

³³ Kraybill, *Puzzles of Amish Life*, 67.

³⁴ Joseph F. Donnermeyer, George M. Kreps, and Marty W. Kreps, *Lessons for Living: A Practical Approach to Daily Life from the Amish Community* (Walnut Creek, OH: Carlisle Press, 1999), 13.

³⁵ For a critique of this rational approach, see Michael S. Billig and Elam Zook, “The Functionalist Problem in Kraybill’s *Riddle of Amish Culture*,” *Journal of Amish and Plain Anabaptist Studies* 5, no. 1 (2017): 82-95.

more to offer than the standard American approach, the latter of which can thus be cast in a negative light. Take, for instance, the Amish practice of limiting personal dress options. What contemporary North American has not fretted over his or her wardrobe, wishing for more options to choose from? The Amish live free of that consumerist angst. In fact, community-imposed fashion restrictions make them freer than their faddish neighbors, whose limitless aspirations lead to becoming “arrogant, conceited, and self-destructive.”³⁶ As for the Amish rejection of modern technologies, readers are reminded that these technologies often have adverse effects on their users. Here again the Amish have wisdom to offer. “By restraining the trends toward large and costly machines,” wrote Hostetler in *Amish Life* (1983), the Amish have escaped “the disintegrating aspects of modern society—haste, waste, aimlessness, and violence.”³⁷

The fourth habit flows logically from the third: *urging readers to learn from the Amish and bend their lives in the Amish direction*. The lessons presented to readers vary widely, but include valuing “communal wisdom” over the will of the individual,³⁸ taking control of technology,³⁹ fostering personal, face-to-face relationships,⁴⁰ slowing down one’s pace of life,⁴¹ and placing more value on “self-reflection about who we are, why we are here, and where we are going.”⁴² These lessons almost always come near the end of the book, introduced by dramatic chapter titles or section headings, such as: “What Good Are They?” in Hostetler’s first edition of *Amish Life* (1952) and “Joys and Satisfaction,” in his revised edition of *Amish Life* (1981); “The Amish Challenge,” in the tri-authored *Lessons for Living* (1999); “Amish Wisdom,” in Kraybill’s *The Amish: Why They Enchant Us* (2003); and “Hope for the Future,” in Hostetler’s posthumously revised *Amish Life* (2013). In all

³⁶ Kraybill, *Simply Amish*, 92.

³⁷ Hostetler, *Amish Life* (1983), 15-16. Kraybill concurs: “In many ways [the Amish] are more thoughtful and cautious about the impact of technology on social interaction than many of the rest of us, who eagerly gobble up all the gadgetry that energizes our high tech society.” Kraybill, *Simply Amish*, 75. See also Hostetler, *The Amish*, 3rd ed., 51; and Donnermeyer, Kreps, and Kreps, *Lessons for Living*, 141.

³⁸ Kraybill, *The Amish: Why They Enchant Us*, 46.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁴⁰ Hostetler, *The Amish*, 3rd ed., 52.

⁴¹ Donnermeyer, Kreps, and Kreps, *Lessons for Living*, 170.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 171.

these cases, scholars seek to remind readers that the Amish are more than a curious feature on the North American landscape, more than a people frozen in time. They are thoughtful critics of modern life, with reservoirs of wisdom that could benefit their less critical neighbors.

Conclusion

These four habits of popularization—answering readers’ most pressing questions about Amish life, making Amish life visible, making Amish life rational, and commending Amish wisdom—are not necessary to writing a tourist book on Amish life. In fact, Smith’s early contributions to this genre, *Among the Amish* (1959) and *The Amish* (1966), were descriptive but not apologetic, and rather than leading readers to consider the lessons the Amish had to offer, they concluded with sections on “An Amish Funeral” (1959) and “Death” (1966). While concluding a book on Amish life with a consideration of Amish death has a certain logic to it, in the scholar-produced tourist books produced since then, Amish death and dying have received relatively little attention and certainly do not provide the last word on Amish life. To the contrary, the last word has increasingly trended toward answering this question: How can the Amish help the rest of us lead more satisfying lives on this side of the grave? In this light, Hostetler was ahead of his time, concluding his first edition of *Amish Life*—published in 1952, just seven years after Hiroshima, at the dawn of the nuclear age—with an open-ended sermon, yet a sermon nonetheless: “Perhaps the modern hurried, worried, and fearful world could learn something from the Amish.”⁴³

Using the Amish to remedy non-Amish people’s lives comes with built-in drawbacks, even conundrums. How does one draw benefits from a comprehensive way of life without adopting that way of life *in toto*? How does one secure the blessings of a peculiar way of life while also avoiding its pitfalls? More to the point, how does one distinguish between what Kraybill generously calls “communal wisdom” and a communally sanctioned authoritarianism that quashes people’s spirits, the latter of which is cited in nearly every narrative written by people who left the Amish church?⁴⁴

⁴³ Hostetler, *Amish Life* (1952), 32.

⁴⁴ For one of many examples, see Saloma Miller Furlong, *Why I Left the Amish: A Memoir* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State Univ. Press, 2011).

Tourist booklets cannot begin to answer these questions in a few concluding paragraphs, and for this reason, it is fair to criticize the habit of celebrating “Amish wisdom” as a final, takeaway point. That said, cultural tourism has always been about the desires of tourists, who inevitably use the Other as a mirror by which to reflect on their own lives.⁴⁵ Although some Amish-themed tourist books abstain from that sort of reflection, most scholars who have spent time in Amish communities have become unsettled by what they have seen. As they have witnessed the ebb and flow of Amish daily living, they have also wondered about the patterns and assumptions of their own lives. In that sense, their musings about Amish wisdom are just as much autobiographical as sermonic. Indeed, when Hostetler wondered in 1952 about a “hurried, worried, and fearful world” learning from the Amish, he was thinking about more than a world with the recently acquired ability to blow itself up. He was also thinking about himself.

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⁴⁵ For one consideration, see David Picard and Michael A. Di Giovine, ed., *Tourism and the Power of Otherness: Seductions of Difference* (Bristol, UK: Channel View Publications, 2014).

REFLECTION

Mennonites and the Media: Telling Mennonite Stories Today

Introduction

As part of the 2018 Bechtel Lectures on “Representing Mennonites Past and Present,” four panelists reflected on their experiences portraying Mennonite culture and faith on several platforms in today’s dynamic media environment. In keeping with *CGR*’s mandate to present thoughtful discussion on matters of theological, social, and cultural interest from broadly-based Anabaptist-Mennonite perspectives, the editors are pleased to bring together observations and insights from: Johnny Wideman, Artistic Director of Theatre of the Beat, a drama troupe that performs original plays across Canada and the United States; Sherri Klassen, creator of the satirical blog and social media persona “The Drunken Mennonite”; Katie Steckly, videographer and communications consultant with an active YouTube presence; and Sam Steiner, Associate Managing Editor of the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO) and blogger.

In addition to their observations as creators of Mennonite media content, the panelists were asked to describe the nature of their audience/s, to consider the rationale for telling Mennonite stories, and to reflect on who should tell these stories and how to respond when non-Mennonite media “get it wrong.” Overall, this joint Reflection shines a particular light on North American cultural stereotypes of Mennonites, which the panelists variously identify and play with, question, reinforce, and push back against. These perspectives offer insight into diverse modes of Mennonite expression and representation, as well as the challenges of addressing both “internal” and “external” audiences.

It is important to note that the voices gathered here come from Mennonites of European descent, and as such represent only one element of the richly varied community that makes up North American Mennonites today, let alone the cultural breadth and diversity that characterizes the

worldwide Mennonite community.

We hope that this Reflection stimulates interest in, and the continued study of, Mennonites and the media—both in North America and beyond.
— *Editors*

I

Theater of the Beat: Catalyst for Conversation

Johnny Wideman

Theatre of the Beat is a Canadian touring theater company working to catalyze conversations on social justice. Since 2011, Theatre of the Beat has been staging change across North America by creating original social justice theater and workshops for under-represented populations. Members perform in churches, theaters, community centers, high schools, universities, and prisons. Through an immersive cultural exchange of grassroots theater, hospitality, and philosophy, the company empowers audiences to work towards a just future.

As a grassroots, social justice theater company, Theatre of the Beat (TOTB) performs original plays that serve as a catalyst for conversation on important, and often difficult, issues. Although not religiously affiliated, TOTB has operated predominantly within the Mennonite community thus far, performing for audiences who are not typical theatergoers but who are passionate about social justice topics. Our audience is composed of a mixture of church-attending boomers and senior Mennonites, post-Christians, agnostics, Mennonite millennials, and a small percentage of people interested solely in the issue of a particular drama, namely activists and social justice advocates. Non-Mennonite audiences seem to fall into this last category: they are less interested in the kitsch factor of buggies and bonnets typically associated with a stereotyped Mennonite image, but more interested in the thought-provoking content that our plays wrestle with. We aim to work with the communities where we perform, at the intersection of their beliefs and the issues they are struggling with. Our work provides

unique insight into Mennonite concerns and uses the community's beliefs as a backdrop to explore issues that both Mennonites and non-Mennonite theatergoers find interesting or challenging.

However, theaters and churches are suffering today from dwindling attendance. In churches, many young people are looking for new forms of faith-wrestling communities and are exploring their beliefs outside traditional Sunday services. In theaters, older audiences want feel-good musicals, big-budget Shakespeare productions, and Broadway hits, while young people seem to be thirsting for more interactive experiences than can be obtained online. Our audiences, both theater attenders and churchgoers, stand at a crossroads that could leave TOTB in the middle of a dwindling market. Often—to get biblical—TOTB becomes the lukewarm water that gets spit out: our work is deemed too religious by the theater community and too secular by the Mennonite community.

Nevertheless, even with this strange, seemingly shrinking market, we have achieved record audiences for a company of our size. As of 2018, TOTB has reached approximately 20,000 people across North America, and has attracted donors in various provinces and states. Although we have an atypical audience for a theater company, we have what many companies yearn for: a loyal and engaged constituency that continues to support us in many ways. We have been billeted in Mennonite homes, churches have fed us, individuals have bought tickets and merchandise, and Mennonite organizations have commissioned and financially supported our work. It is a beautiful and rare thing to be taken care of and appreciated for your form of artistic expression.

To some people, this relationship seems confusing. TOTB creates shows that in many ways are critical of the church. My personal methodology is steeped in the traditions of political theater. Thus I write plays ideologically, with different characters representing different worldviews. The most common criticism from our audiences is rooted in how we portray pastors. However, as in the political theater tradition, I often use characters such as pastors to represent bigger structures or ideas. A pastor might represent the church as an institution—the “big-C church”—and is not meant to negatively portray individual persons but rather the structures that support them with power. In this way, our work is designed to be prophetic—not prophetic as

in “seeing the future” but by depicting what the future could look like if we don’t change our ways.

Our approach is to depict a call to action. With an audience that seems constantly striving to better themselves, the response to such calls have been overwhelming. Through my experience touring social justice plays in Mennonite communities, I believe that anyone would be hard-pressed to find another group of people so willing to be pushed and to re-examine their attitudes on topics so close to the heart of their community. Mennonites want to be educated about injustice and want to be involved in making changes. It is part of their belief system—and it is this, alongside their passion for justice, that drew me into the Mennonite community in the first place.

Although my last name may deceive you, I was not raised Mennonite and I didn’t really know anything about Mennonites until I attended Conrad Grebel University College. I left the Evangelical Missionary Church in 2007, hurt and scarred from my experiences there and wanted no place in a church community after that. However, as I was introduced to the Mennonite community, I was intrigued by their approach to living out their beliefs. I was surprised to be welcomed despite being an agnostic, and have now surrounded myself with many Mennonite friends and am active in the Mennonite community.

This leads me to the point of the Mennonites and the Media panel discussion: Who should be able to tell Mennonite stories? In some ways I’m in no place to answer this question. I did not start out to create a Mennonite theater company, yet Mennonites make up the largest part of our audience. As a grassroots organization, TOTB tells Mennonite stories that cater to their interests and questions. However, this also means that I get to tackle topics that I am personally passionate about from a social justice perspective, with an audience who will actually do something in response to “calls to action.” I consider myself quite lucky to have such a direct outcome to my work as an artist and activist.

But I also know that, when dealing with a community that knows itself as well as Mennonites do, audiences can tell when outsiders try to speak their story back to them. Outsiders miss nuances. Outsiders oversimplify. Outsiders generalize to a point of caricature. Personally, having married a Mennonite woman, surrounded myself with Mennonite friends, and sharing

many Mennonite beliefs with the community, I have come to understand this community in many ways. A good example of this occurred when we began reading through the script of *This Will Lead to Dancing* (a play about wholeness, belonging, and LGBTQ inclusion) with our non-Mennonite actors. They were confused by many of the jokes and references, and I tried desperately to assure them that our audience would find them funny. Waiting backstage on opening night, I was relieved to hear I hadn't gotten it wrong! But this same play, when performed for non-Mennonite audiences, barely evokes any laughter, and the laughs that do come are often at jokes that receive little response from Mennonite audiences.

Ted Swartz (a Mennonite playwright, actor, and Eastern Mennonite Seminary graduate) once told me that if you are outside a wall pushing against it, the community will reinforce the wall with all their might to protect what they cherish. However, if you are on the inside pushing out, the community may work with you, stretching the boundaries of the wall until it grows to include more. I have come to believe that if Mennonites feel you are speaking out of love, they will listen and allow themselves to be challenged. But, much as Ted said, if you are on the outside pushing in, being critical without caring, they are more resistant to protect their identity.

Perhaps anyone *can* tell Mennonite stories, but Mennonites, like any cultural group, are complex and nuanced, and if you get their story wrong, they will tell you. For in the same way that Mennonites are willing to change, if you are working and living within the Mennonite community, the same willingness to change is expected of you as well.

I strongly believe that there is merit to having outside perspectives looking in. It is for the same reason we hire dramaturgs in theater. Often playwrights are so close to their work, so ingrained personally, that they can miss where a script goes off track. A dramaturg works with a playwright to understand their hopes and goals for the play. Then, coming in with a new set of eyes, the dramaturg can point out what seems out of place and work with the playwright to reshape and refocus the material. If the Mennonite community is the playwright, they have written a strong and beautiful piece of theater. Certainly it will have its flaws, but these do not negate the masterpiece as a whole. If TOTB has been welcomed in as the dramaturg,

we are honored to work alongside such a passionate and caring writer to reshape this piece of theater.

Johnny Wideman is the founder and artistic director of Theatre of the Beat.

II

Making Schputt of Mennonites

Sherri L. Klassen

My topic is making schputt of Mennonites.¹ I recognize that there are people who might not find making fun of Mennonites to be an enjoyable or respectable activity. Some of you in the audience might be the sort who shook your finger at your children and told them “No Schputting!” Well, here I am, trying to make the case for making schputt of Mennonites. We can all imagine the arguments against making schputt: it could be profaning the sacred; it might mean that people’s feelings get hurt; and the kicker—it might give the outside world the wrong impression of us and thus diminish our evangelistic potential.

I don’t hold much stock in the concern for profaning the sacred. That may just reflect my personal irreverence or have broader theological underpinnings. Since I have only ten minutes, I can’t go into a long disputation on the theology of schputting, but I will say that in my case profaning the sacred means putting things together like the words “drunken” and “Mennonite,” and writing rambling discussions on Mennonite stuff matched with cocktail recipes. Which, yes, is what I write. My corner of the internet has me taking on the persona of a disaffected Mennonite who writes and tweets about Mennonite stuff—and provides Mennonite-themed cocktail recipes. I call myself “The Drunken Mennonite” on Twitter, and I maintain “The Drunken Mennonite” blog. I’m not usually drunk when I write or tweet, but I do let my inhibitions down a bit.

¹ Because my parents used the word “schputt” when I was growing up, I always assumed it was a Low German word but I have since learned that the Pennsylvania Dutch Mennonites claim it as their own. In either case, to “make schputt” is to tease or make fun of someone, or to mock someone by offering undeserved or exaggerated praise.

This tweet encapsulates some of the humor in my irreverence:



Those who were here last night [for David Weaver-Zercher’s lecture, “One Generation Away: *Martyrs Mirror* and the Survival of Anabaptist Christianity”] might appreciate this tweet as representing the dilemma of the assimilated Mennonite confronting the legacy of martyrdom. I recognize that not everyone will find it funny. Here I want to pause for a moment and say that if any are offended at the notion of a Mennonite cocktail blog or someone calling herself “The Drunken Mennonite,” I suggest that you avert your eyes from the screen, quickly stop up your ears, and spend the rest of my time talking imagining yourself singing your favorite hymn. Don’t actually sing it—that would be disruptive—but it would be more pleasant for all of us if you gave the appearance of enjoying yourself!

Okay, now that all my family members have their fingers in their ears, let’s get back to my argument with the imaginary people saying no to making schputt of Mennonites. You’ll remember that the second argument was that I might hurt people’s feelings. I actually try not to, and I mostly avoid mocking real, living, and identifiable individuals. I stick to institutions, historical figures, archetypes, general trends, the content of writings, and myself. This gives me plenty of material. This probably doesn’t mean that I never ruffle anyone’s feathers. But I do think that the name of the blog should serve as fair warning to anyone expecting nothing but glowing reports of Mennonite perfection. I assume that the easily offended will not appreciate the humor of a project titled “The Drunken Mennonite” and will stay away from my little

piece of the internet. For the most part, I think they have.

Certainly, the stats on the number of people who regularly read my blog suggests that I have pretty much a niche audience. When I started writing, I didn't imagine that my audience would be people so embedded in the Mennonite world that they show up to public lectures at Conrad Grebel University College. I imagined them to be on the fringes of the Mennonite universe. While I do have a number of readers and Twitter followers who fit that description, I have also found that some readers are less fringe than I expected. Maybe that's because everyone feels a bit on the fringes from time to time, or maybe I'm just not as edgy as I thought. I know that some of my readers still feel a bit subversive when they log onto The Drunken Mennonite site or follow me on Twitter (especially the pastors). I hope they enjoy that little frisson of rebellion.

I initially thought the blog might also be fun for non-Mennonites who are just curious about Mennoniteness. That didn't work. Except on rare occasions, my audience is almost entirely Mennonite. Non-Mennonites who love us don't read me lest I tarnish their image of us with my "drunkenness" (which is really what I'm calling *irreverence*), and those who hate us are uninterested in hearing about our Mennoniteness. This should put to rest the third objection to publicly schputting about Mennonites, namely that non-Mennonites reading my blog or tweets might get the so-called "wrong impression" of us. Because they're not reading me.

I don't think the "wrong impression" issue relates only to non-Mennonites. I think we want the world to see us as peacemaking-hardworking-harmonizing-Mennonite relief sale-attending good Christians-willing-to-die-for-our-faith *because that's how we want to see ourselves*. We don't want to see ourselves as a bickering people, as a people very sensitive to what outsiders think of us, as a people with a past as messy as any other people's, as a people who aren't always good to each other. Even though it's so much funnier—in the way that the lives and efforts of all ordinary flawed people are funny. Anyway, you can usually count on the official Mennonite sources to turn the world away from seeing our flaws. Nobody needs me for that.

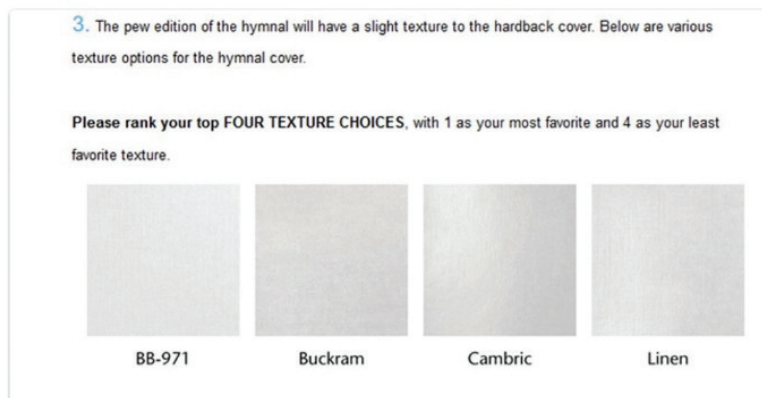
I'm afraid that none of this will convince anyone how much fun it is to make schputt of Mennonites. So I want to close with a couple of tweets that I hope will do a better job. My blog, on the one hand, is long form and it's just

me speaking; usually I pick a topic and then ramble on about it. I hope you'll take a look. Mennonite Twitter, on the other hand, is a community and a conversation. This makes it particularly fun. The tweets I'm showing are my own, but you should know that they are embedded in larger conversations.



Drunken Mennonite 🍷 @TheDrunkenMenno · Feb 11

Latest: Mennonite Church schism predicted over hymnbook texture choice.
#TeamVicuna @Herald_Press



I like this one because I got to bring together something current and fairly funny with our history of breaking into schisms. Mennonite Twitter in general had a certain amount of fun with Herald Press sending out an internet survey that asked people to rank cover textures for the new Mennonite hymnbook. What I love about this is that we don't know whether Herald Press was in on the joke—playing a prank on us by including the question on texture or just feeling themselves in a culture that demands internet consultation on everything. I could ask them, but I prefer not knowing.

A lot of my tweets are inside jokes that only fellow Mennonites appreciate—and often only a subset of Mennonites.



I included this tweet on the assumption that we wouldn't get through yesterday's lecture without at least one mention of Dirk Willems. Really, there is no limit to the number of Dirk Willems jokes that the internet can hold. I made this one because it was National Dog Day, and on that day a lot of people were posting pictures of their dogs with some cute or clever saying. Now you could say that inside jokes just work to exclude people who aren't in the know. But Twitter is just full of things like this. Everybody is an outsider and an insider there.

One of the most enjoyable parts of Mennonite Twitter happens when we have a hashtag game. We did one last Christmas that was "Make a Christmas Movie Mennonite." Quite a number of people jumped in and altered the name of a Christmas movie to make it reflect something Mennonite. That ranged from puns on ethnic Mennonite names to church jokes.

This next one is from another hashtag game which wasn't quite as successful but was still fun.



This tweet riffs on my own ethnic background, but one of the fun things about this game is that as others chime in we get variations from different ethnic traditions and variations within religious culture. Which is neat, because I know that we don't all have *zwiebach*. But if we try hard enough, I believe that we can all have fun.

Sherri L. Klassen maintains the satirical blog The Drunken Mennonite at sklassen.com.

III Creating Mennonite Content on YouTube

Katie Steckly

What is it like to be a creator of Mennonite media content? For me, it's about striking a balance between humor and education, as well as between speaking to Mennonites and non-Mennonites. One of the biggest challenges I have found in being a Mennonite creator is often feeling like the default representative of Mennonites on YouTube. YouTube is my platform of choice for posting my videos and, as you may have guessed, there are not many of us making videos there. Often I am one of the few Mennonites that my non-

Mennonite viewers have ever come across. So I struggle with being a bit of an assumed ambassador for all Mennonites, which I certainly do not feel qualified to be.

On the flip side, one great advantage I have found in being a Mennonite content creator is that I have an audience almost already built in. While on one hand I struggle to find a large audience in the online world in general because of how niche a topic “Mennonite media” is, on the other hand I have found a lot of success within Mennonite circles. I’ve really enjoyed the feedback from Mennonite viewers, and I always love meeting someone at a Mennonite event or at a new church who recognizes me from my videos.

My audience is a really interesting mix of people. Estimates that I’ve gathered from comments are that about half of my audience are Mennonites and half are not. The Mennonites watching my videos are seeking out content that they feel represents their experience. I think they get the most out of it by being in on the joke. They can relate to the misconceptions and stereotypes that my videos debunk. The other half of my audience are interested in Mennonite faith and culture, and they are seeking out information online. They search “Mennonite” on YouTube—and I come up as the top result. So they often find themselves confronted with a person who is not at all what they expected. Sometimes this leads to positive feedback, and other times to negative feedback. Based on the data gathered from pursuing my comments, it seems that a fair number of my non-Mennonite viewers do not believe that I am Mennonite. Actually, when I think about it, a fair number of my Mennonite viewers also don’t believe that I am Mennonite!

The biggest challenge of telling Mennonite stories is that I can really tell only my own. In my particular realm, I might be the only Mennonite my viewers ever “meet,” if you can call watching a video of someone online “meeting” them. Either way, I might be the only or the first representation of Mennonites that someone comes across online, and that feels like a pretty big responsibility. When I tell my story as a Mennonite, sometimes I worry that it erases or diminishes the stories of other Mennonites. For instance, a number of my videos focus on the stereotype that all Mennonites are plain people. The number one question I got asked when people found out that I was a Mennonite was whether I drove a horse and buggy or had electricity in my house. It’s that sense of misrepresentation or misconception that led

me to start my YouTube series in the first place. So, while a lot of my videos focus on telling people the story of assimilated Mennonites, pointing out that we don't all drive buggies, sometimes I worry that I am diminishing the experiences or the value of the plain lifestyle for many Mennonites. However, I can only tell my own story. I don't think that I have the authority to speak to other Mennonite experiences unless I can somehow directly use their voices in my videos, which has not often been the case so far.

Why tell Mennonite stories? Something that I am really passionate about is media representation in general. Outside the Mennonite context, that means television shows and movies providing representation for women and people of color as well as other minority groups. Seeing oneself in the media one consumes can be important for self-esteem, especially for young people. I feel the same way about Mennonites. I have always found it rewarding to see Mennonites or Anabaptists in general represented in media. I remember clearly an episode of the children's TV show "Arthur," where a fourth-grade class went on a field trip to an Amish barnraising. One of the characters, Buster Baxter, tried to become Amish following the experience. Even when young I was thrilled to see something that was part of my local community and my culture represented on a TV show that I watched everyday—even if the portrayal was a bit inaccurate. I want to be able to provide that kind of representation to other people—but, I hope, a somewhat more accurate and relatable one.

I often get comments that speak to this issue from people who have moved away from their Mennonite community and have found comfort and familiarity with the content that I post online. I always find this rewarding, because for many people their Mennonite background is an important part of their story, and it can be something they can be easily disconnected from if they are no longer living in areas with Mennonite churches. It is a privilege to be able to help people reconnect with their background, even through something as small as a YouTube video.

Obviously, many times non-Mennonites have told Mennonite stories but made considerable errors in accuracy. However, I'm not sure that this means only Mennonites should be able to tell Mennonite stories. The definition of a "Mennonite" story is important as well. Is any story about me "Mennonite" by definition because I am Mennonite? Or does it require some

additional content? I'm not sure I have a good answer to this question. In general, where Mennonite stories are told there ought to be some Mennonite input somewhere along the line of production, but I would not take a hard stance that only Mennonites have the right to tell stories about Mennonites.

How should we respond when the non-Mennonite media "gets it wrong"? We can all think of a number of times when the media has misrepresented Anabaptists, or Mennonites in particular, in some way. This phenomenon of seemingly constant misrepresentation is partly what inspired me to start my YouTube channel. In my case, when the non-Mennonite media gets it wrong, I usually make a video about it. I like to counter misrepresentations by sharing my own perspectives in videos. These types of videos are usually well received because people are interested in knowing what "real Mennonites" think.

However, the issue that I frequently run into is that I can't personally debunk every misrepresentation. Many times I can't guarantee that it is necessarily misrepresentation, because Mennonite/Anabaptist faith and culture vary significantly by region and even by church. In general, I feel that every time the non-Mennonite media gets the Mennonite story "wrong" is just another opportunity for me to get it right or, in other words, to present another perspective.

Katie Steckly is a videographer and communications consultant with an active YouTube presence.

IV

Ontariomennonitehistory.org—A Blog

Sam Steiner

My blog at ontariomennonitehistory.org started strictly as a commercial venture. I began it in December 2014, several months before my book, *In Search of Promised Lands: A Religious History of Mennonites in Ontario*, was to be published by Herald Press. So the title of the blog that people saw reflected the title of the book. I had never done a blog before, but one of the

promotional avenues that Herald Press wanted me to pursue was the use of social media. I was already active on Facebook, so posting the blog there was a piece of cake. I also opened a Twitter account, became an author on the “Goodreads” website with a link to the blog, and fed into “LinkedIn,” the business-oriented social media site.

I thought the target audience for the blog would be similar to what I imagined it to be for the book—Mennonites with roots in Ontario who were interested in the story of their history, non-Mennonites who had a Mennonite heritage they wanted to explore, people interested in the background of religious movements, and students mostly at the university level or beyond. In some ways I saw the book and the blog as “insider” writing because of the specific detail that was included.

For the first year or so, I included mostly small stories or themes out of the book. Most of the early blogs got 100-200 views. Some, particularly when I was talking about an individual leader or early pioneer, got fewer than 100. Most of the feedback I received, and this was true throughout the life of the blog, came through Facebook—either through “likes” or through comments about the respective blog’s content. Twitter was a very distant second. The number of responses on the blog itself were relatively minimal, though one included a threat against the Low German Mennonite community in the Leamington, Ontario area that a friend of mine thought should be reported to the police (he eventually did so himself). I also received feedback in personal conversation from a surprising number of people who would refer to a particular blog posting when I had no idea that they were reading it.

In 2015 and 2016 I had about 11,500 views in total during each year. This changed in 2017, when I had over 30,000 views. This increase was primarily traceable to my response to a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) TV drama series called “Pure.” The six-episode series told the story of a horse-and-buggy Mennonite-like group in Southern Ontario that was heavily involved in drug dealing, with the community’s pastor and wife playing large roles in the criminal activity. I wrote a review after each episode, and I became progressively more irate as the violence increased and some of the symbolism used seemed to mock the Old Order Mennonite community, a group I knew would not defend itself in the public sphere. Even more disgusting to me was a program by CBC’s flagship news feature program,

“The Fifth Estate,” that presumed to analyze Low German Mennonite involvement in drug activity between Mexico and Southern Ontario. It was badly researched, was little more than a shill for the “Pure” drama series running at the same time, and conflated Old Order Mennonites and Low German Mennonites. My blog on The Fifth Estate program has been one of my favorites.

These blogs generated quite a lot of response, primarily from people who agreed with my perspective. I was reminded that social media really is mostly an echo chamber that brings together like-minded people.

It was interesting to look back at the 144 blogs I’ve written to see which have been the most-read items and the least-read items. Consistently I learned that blogs about individual people or institutions, including my blog on Conrad Grebel University College, received relatively little readership. I’m sure part of this is attributable to my style—I write historical narrative and summary with not a lot of stories. My more successful blogs have been on themes or particular topics, especially when related to matters that have a profile in the popular news world. You will see this as I review the ten blog posts that have received the highest readership since December 2014:

1. “Pure,” the CBC Drama—Episode 1—3,500 views

I’ve already discussed the background of this blog.

2. It Can Happen in Canada—Immigration by Mennonites Prohibited—2,500 views

This blog recounted the Canadian government’s decision in 1919 after World War I to prohibit Hutterite and Mennonite immigration into Canada. This ban was only rescinded in 1922. This is the blog that saw a reader make a threat against the Low German Mennonite community in the Leamington area. President Donald Trump’s exclusion of Muslims from the United States was much in the news at the time this blog appeared. The reader said he didn’t want Mennonites in Canada and made reference to a gun that would help solve the problem.

3. CBC, The Fifth Estate, and the Mennonite Mob—2,300 views

I've also already mentioned this blog. That the news department of Canada's national broadcaster would produce such bad news analysis still makes me mad when I think about it.

4. Ontario Mennonites and Aboriginal Residential Schools—2,200 views

This was a relatively early blog post that I think benefited from all the publicity about residential schools over the last number of years. It discussed the Mennonite-run Poplar Hill Development School in northwestern Ontario.

5. Menno-Pause, a Personal Reflection—1,700 views

This was an outlier post, since it was a personal, autobiographical reflection on part of my experience that ended up with my living in Canada. It benefited from the broader appeal it had to US Mennonites who had been connected to Goshen College in Indiana in the late 1960s, when I was an editor of an underground newspaper there known as *Menno-Pause*.

6. The Explosive Growth of the Old Colony Mennonites—1,200 views

This was another early blog post that I assume benefited from the publicity around the "Pure" drama series, and people's interest in a Mennonite group that is not as well known as the Old Order Mennonites who live in more geographically compact areas of Ontario. I suspect it may also have been used by students learning about this group.

7. The Old Colony Mennonite School System in Ontario—800 views

The same factors about the last blog would also apply to this one. The Old Colony school system is less well known than the Old Order Mennonite parochial system, and extends into high school.

8. Mennonites, Slavery and Black Immigration to Canada—700 views

The post was made in early 2015 and has had steady but not great readership over time. I suspect these views come from web searches on Mennonites and Blacks. It comments on the 19th-century Ontario Mennonite experience with African Americans who immigrated to Canada.

9. The Amish on Prince Edward Island—650 views

This is a post from summer 2017 that tapped into the large interest in North America on the Old Order Amish.

10. Mennonite Church Eastern Canada and Diversity—630 views

This one actually surprised me, since it is a very “inside” Mennonite blog about one regional Mennonite Conference primarily based in Ontario. It references Mennonite Church USA and the travails it has gone through the past couple of years, which may have broadened the appeal of the article.

Other blog posts on the CBC “Pure” episodes finished 11th, 13th, and 17th on the list. A fairly new article from October 2017 on Mennonites and homosexuality sits at number 14, and will likely move into the top 10 in the coming months. Further observations about the popular posts: (1) About half of them are rooted in content from my book and half of them are not; (2) Certainly the most “successful” posts were related to content that was also in the public eye in the mainstream or public media.

Writing a regular blog is hard work. Sometimes I took shortcuts featuring articles from the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO), usually about leading Mennonite figures from Ontario, especially from articles I had written. These were never as popular, probably because the encyclopedia style is not as engaging.

I’m not certain that I’ll return to blogging—I essentially stopped a couple of months ago—because of the time involved in generating content, but I enjoyed the three years that I worked on it.

Sam Steiner is Associate Editor of the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO).

POLITICAL THEOLOGY AND APOCALYPTIC

Guest Editors: P. Travis Kroeker and Kyle Gingerich Hiebert

Introduction

Philip G. Ziegler

As part of its program during the 2018 annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical Literature (AAR/SBL) in Denver, Colorado, the Explorations in Theology and Apocalyptic working group hosted two book discussion panels. The three independent responses to Travis Kroeker's *Messianic Political Theology and Diaspora Ethics* and Kyle Gingerich Hiebert's *The Architectonics of Hope*—as well as the authors' replies—arose from one of these sessions.¹ It is delightful to see them published here for the benefit of the wider readership of *The Conrad Grebel Review*.

For almost a decade now, the Explorations in Theology and Apocalyptic group has facilitated conversation among a group of scholars on the theological and ethical significance of the phenomena of biblical apocalyptic in general, and of recent accounts of “Pauline apocalyptic” in particular. The work of J. Louis Martyn has provided a specific and continuing impulse to our work, as have essays on the theme by Walter Lowe.² At the heart of the conversation is a running exchange between theologians and New Testament scholars. One of the chief joys and benefits

¹ P. Travis Kroeker, *Messianic Political Theology and Diaspora Ethics: Essays in Exile* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017); Kyle Gingerich Hiebert, *The Architectonics of Hope: Violence, Apocalyptic, and the Transformation of Political Theology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017).

² See J. Louis Martyn, *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997) and his magisterial commentary *Galatians* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), and for concise comment, Beverly Gaventa, “The Legacy of J. Louis Martyn: The Interpreter and His Legacy,” *Journal for the Study of Paul and His Letters* 7, nos.1-2 (2017): 94-100. Cf. also Walter Lowe, “Prospects for a Postmodern Christian Theology: Apocalyptic without Reserve,” *Modern Theology* 15, no. 1 (1999): 17-24, and “Prospects for a Postmodern Christian Theology: Apocalyptic without Reserve,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 63, no. 1 (2010): 41-53.

of our work is to facilitate close collaboration between scripturally-minded theologians and theologically-minded exegetes. While our ambition has chiefly been to stimulate the diverse range of scholarship undertaken by individual members, nevertheless several collaborative publications related to our program have emerged over the years.³

Critical discussion of new books is a regular feature of our activity. Previous book panels have considered a diverse array of works, including: James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*; Theodore W. Jennings Jr., *Outlaw Justice: The Messianic Politics of Paul*; Stanislas Breton, *A Radical Philosophy of Saint Paul*; Samuel V. Adams, *The Reality of God and Historical Method: Apocalyptic Theology in Conversation with N.T. Wright*; and Philip G. Ziegler, *Militant Grace: The Apocalyptic Turn and the Future of Christian Theology*. The panel discussion of the new volumes by Kroeker and Gingrich Hiebert published below maintains this tradition of wide-ranging, searching, and constructive conversation. The material questions of theological ethics and theopolitics at the core of these two fine books have been integral to the group's program from its inception; so too has engagement with contemporary philosophy, especially as it concerns the rediscovery of Paul as a provocation to thought. Such engagement is an important feature of both these new works as well.⁴

For reasons that remain obscure, at least to me, Canadian theologians have played an outsized role in our group and its discussions, not least Douglas Harink, whose book *Paul among the Postliberals: Pauline Theology beyond Christendom and Modernity* has provided many young theologians with their entrée into J. Louis Martyn's interpretation of the apostle Paul and its significance. It is very good to see this trend continued here: Kroeker has been involved in the conversations of the working group since the beginning, and this first book by Gingerich Hiebert happily presses into the terrain of our ongoing discussions.

³ See, for example, Joshua B. Davis and Douglas Harink, eds., *Apocalyptic and the Future of Theology: With and Beyond J. Louis Martyn* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012), and Beverly Roberts Gaventa, ed., *Apocalyptic Paul: Cosmos and Anthropos in Romans 5-8* (Waco, TX: Baylor Univ. Press, 2013).

⁴ For this sort of engagement, see Douglas Harink, ed., *Paul, Philosophy, and the Theopolitical Vision: Critical Engagements with Agamben, Badiou, Zizek, and Others* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2010).

On behalf of the convenors of the Explorations in Theology and Apocalyptic working group, allow me to express my gratitude once more for the contributions of Nancy Bedford, Elizabeth Phillips, and Paul Martens to this rich session, as well as my thanks to Travis Kroeker and Kyle Gingerich Hiebert for their willingness to engage with, and offer replies to, the three reviewers' important comments and questions.

Philip G. Ziegler is Professor of Christian Dogmatics at the University of Aberdeen in Aberdeen, Scotland.

I To See and to Inhabit

Nancy Elizabeth Bedford

Thank you very much to both authors for sharing their work. I found much to ponder in both books. They challenged me to engage fruitfully with thinkers who, for different reasons, I sometimes feel that I would rather dispense with yet cannot help encountering again and again, such as Carl Schmitt and John Howard Yoder. They also dealt with the writings of people I do enjoy engaging with, such as Paul and Augustine.⁵ They provided theological categories I find insightful, in particular the notion of *seeing* or *vision* in Kyle's *Architectonics*, and of *disincarnation* in Travis's *Messianic Political Theology*. I'll organize my remarks loosely around those two themes.

⁵ It would be rewarding to examine further how both authors converse with Augustine. I'd be interested in exploring how their insights might shed light on my own Latin American/Latinx reading of Augustine as a "Latin-African," considering Gingerich Hiebert's emphasis on vision/optics/contemplation and Kroeker's thoughtful treatment of Augustine, especially in chapter 3. His comment on page 54 *contra* the notion of Augustine's sense of inner selfhood as disembodied is a key one. I make a similar point from another angle in my essay "Liberating Augustine: Rethinking Augustine's emphasis on interiority" in *Theology Today* 74 (2017): 149-56, but I hadn't thought of the matter from the perspective of Augustine's apocalypticism.

Vision in *The Architectonics of Hope*

I loved the title of this book, and therefore opened it with anticipation. The first surprise I experienced as I began to read was that the author takes “architectonics” not in a spatial direction, but in a visual or optic one by the construction of a “theological metaphors of vision” (6). From the very title of the first chapter onwards, he links political theology to reading the signs of the times (4) and thus to the task of seeing. What he hopes we will be able to *see* is the relation of violence with the apocalyptic, through the lens of political theology, in a variegated, multifaceted manner. For the author, though the scopic is not neutral or innocent, it is not necessarily implicated in an abusive exercise of power; it can also function as part of the economy of grace (cf. 5). The author ultimately wants us to “see” in order then to “speak,” that is, to give an account of our hope in the midst of a violent world (6).

We encounter various modes of seeing throughout the book. Carl Schmitt’s vision of an “apocalyptically inflected aesthetics of violence” haunts the pages throughout, as it does in much of political theology—a term that Schmitt himself coined (16). For Kyle, Johann Baptist Metz’s vision of a new political theology ultimately lacks clarity because Metz cannot see how imbricated his approach is with the categories of modernity and secularization (31). Significantly, Schmitt and Metz have visions that cannot be described as simply in opposition to each other (48)—in part because both see violence as necessary (50), something Kyle frames as “an apocalyptically inflected aesthetics of violence” (51). Metz’s theopolitical vision thus ultimately cannot help us see the way beyond Schmitt (53). Hans Urs von Balthasar moves the discussion of vision toward the dimension of the contemplation of the Trinity (55) and consequently to aesthetics. In turn, David Bentley Hart and John Milbank want us to discover new “vistas” for political theology in ways that do not reify violence, though they do not fully succeed (56ff).

Milbank “considers himself an apocalyptic seer of the highest order” (83), yet his polemical approach does not allow him to see the points of view of others with sufficient subtlety. Nonetheless, he makes the important point that as “watchers of violence” within the logic of modernity we are not removed from violence (97) and that beauty has its own violence, one that can muddy our vision of Christ (101). Hart, who elaborates a metaphysics of

vision by which the beauty of God can be seen even in the midst of creaturely sinfulness and imperfection (108), is limited by his incapacity to distinguish between passivism and pacifism (114). John Howard Yoder also provides a vision, for his account of political theology allows us to “see” the power of nonviolence more clearly than the visions of the other political theologians discussed (119). Yoder’s approach can thus be described as a doxological way of seeing history that integrates patience and nonviolence into its vision (128). The title of the final chapter of the Kyle’s book once again refers to vision: “Retrospect and Prospect.” Each of the visions described in the author’s genealogy of political theologies is complex, and none is to be discarded wholesale: each sheds light on the others (cf. 161).

The theme of vision is very rich and is one that I personally love, for instance as it appears in the Gospel of John and in the contemplative traditions of the Christian mystics. As I pondered the thinkers and theologians in Kyle’s generous and careful account, I found myself thinking of a saying we have in Spanish: *no hay más ciego que el que no quiere ver*—there is no one blinder than the person who does not wish to see (this folk saying is coincidentally—or not—similar to some of what the Johannine Jesus has to say, e.g., John 9:41). What is it that these variations in political theology do not significantly consider in their “optics” or their “architectonics?” What is it that they do *not* see, though they seem to posit their visions with such confidence as trustworthy lenses for looking at reality? Two blind spots came to mind immediately: on the one hand, the “wound of coloniality”⁶ and, on the other, the reality of the lives of women.⁷

The first blind spot has to do with the ease with which certain North Atlantic thinkers (à la Milbank) ignore or scornfully dismiss thinkers who

⁶ By “coloniality” I’m thinking specifically of the distinction Walter Mignolo (alongside other decolonial theorists) makes between the historical *colonial period* (the time of Iberian colonization in the Americas) and the *coloniality of power* (meaning the kind of colonialism still at work in the current processes of capitalist globalization). Any consideration of European or North Atlantic (i.e., “Western”) political theology is incomplete without taking seriously the “colonial wound” of Latin America, which is also in the “West.” Cf. for instance Walter Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006).

⁷ Of course, these are not really two discrete topics, as they intersect at many points: thus María Lugones can speak of “The Coloniality of Gender” in *Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise* (Spring 2008): 1-17.

are from and/or write from the perspective of the global South—more specifically from a Latin American and Caribbean context—often without even having read or engaged their work in Spanish and Portuguese. How can one be so blind to the shadowscast by one's trajectory and tradition? Kyle lays some of the groundwork for needed repairs in this direction in his awareness of thinkers such as Ernesto Laclau,⁸ as well as in his critique of Milbank for not grasping Gutiérrez's engagement with Blondel (73).⁹ But more needs to be done. North Atlantic political theology has to be able to "see" its imbrication with coloniality more clearly if it is not to remain trapped in an infertile (and arrogant) solipsism: a kind of *theologia politica incurvata in se* that is sinful and death-dealing.

The second blind spot—the effect on the lives and bodies of women of a given political theology—is one salient reason why Yoder's particular vision of a "peaceful political theology" (including his notion of "revolutionary subordination") in the end has very little traction with me, though I am an Anabaptist theologian and therefore inevitably influenced by his work.¹⁰ It

⁸ Ernesto Laclau is influenced by Carl Schmitt, as Gingerich Hiebert points out (page 48) and in turn influences North Atlantic theory, an example of the circularity of intellectual influences between Latin America and the North Atlantic. It is not only a matter of the shadows cast by the European tradition, but of the light emitted from the direction of the Global South, one that Eurocentric approaches are largely blind to.

⁹ It might be fruitful to bring the work on political theology of thinkers such as Boaventura de Sousa Santos into the conversation; cf. for instance "If God Were a Human Rights Activist: Human Rights and the Challenge of Political Theologies," in *Law, Social Justice and Global Development Journal* 1 (2009): 3-42. De Sousa Santos argues that the subaltern God, the God of the subalterns, clashes with the God invoked by oppressors—and imagines a "monotheistic God pleading for a polytheistic set of Gods" (29) in order to respond to what in this context we might call the apocalyptic dimensions of the present. I don't agree with his premise as stated, and he doesn't claim to be a theologian, but I think it is important to listen to his underlying concerns (the distress of the world and the importance of complex thought experiments), putting it in conversation with trinitarian political theology. From a confessional Christian perspective, it is also worth paying attention to the political theology (*teología pública*, as they usually prefer) of the group of thinkers around GEMRIP in Latin America, such as Nicolás Panotto.

¹⁰ As Gingerich Hiebert points out, Yoder had direct knowledge of Latin American thought, unlike most of the other thinkers reviewed in the book (117, footnote 9), thus falling less readily than some into the first blind spot I mention. This covered a multitude of sins for me, until it didn't any more, given the way Mennonite (and other) institutions long enabled his abuse.

is not just about Yoder's incapacity to embody fully his own insights (119), something of which we are all culpable. What I am speaking of is a kind of willful blindness to the fact that one cannot truly give glory to God (doxology) while sinning against or taking advantage of one's brother or, in this case, of one's "sisters in Christ."¹¹ What is it about a particular theopolitics that so readily closes its eyes to the way the bodies of concrete human beings—for instance, young women—are treated by (usually male) theologians or other academics who claim to speak for peace? If the criterion of how a given vision affects people in its material consequences is not addressed head-on, the material result of its "architectonics" (not just what one sees but where one lives in the quotidian) will inevitably be noxious or uninhabitable for many.

In pondering Kyle's visually-oriented architectonics I was left wondering about the spatial, material dimensions of our lives. What does all of this that we "see" mean for materiality, for concrete lives, for incarnation (especially that of the subaltern subjects Jesus so often puts at the center of his ministry and teaching)? Incarnation is a theme I encountered throughout my reading of Travis's book.

Disincarnation in *Messianic Political Theology and Diaspora Ethics*

I've been thinking a lot lately about a problem I call "Protestant docetism," which is manifested in many ways in American society, but perhaps lately most notably in the cult of the toxic white Jesus that seems to undergird much of white supremacy and white nationalism in the United States.¹² I was therefore immediately struck, a few pages into Travis's book, when I encountered his notion of *disincarnation* alongside his use of "messianic materialism," the "quotidian embodiment of divine love," and similar concepts (11, *et passim*). I find that his diaspora ethics turns out to be a consistent (and to me, helpful) attempt—on whatever front he is dealing with in a given essay—to push back against moves toward disincarnation

¹¹ Cf. Rachel Waltner Goossen, "Mennonite Bodies, Sexual Ethics: Women Challenge John Howard Yoder," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 24 (2016): 243-55 and Rachel Waltner Goossen, "Defanging the Beast: Mennonite Responses to John Howard Yoder's Sexual Abuse," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 89 (2015): 7-80.

¹² Cf. my essay "A Narrow Gate? Proceeding along the Way of Jesus by the Spirit," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 92 (October 2018): 43-55.

and to tease out what incarnation means for a particular time and place.

I was struck by several themes in the book that are traversed by the question of incarnation and disincarnation. Three strands are particularly worthy of mention and are ultimately intertwined:

1. A Pauline strand, including Paul's dynamic of an emptying that leads to fullness (predicated on the paradox of the incarnation), the Pauline instruction from 1 Corinthians 7 to live "as if not" (32, 78, 167, 184), and the related idea of "weak messianic power" adapted from Walter Benjamin and likewise deployed throughout the book (e.g., 75);
2. A hermeneutical strand, namely the retrieval and re-reading of sources such as Plato (e.g., Chapter 2), Augustine (Chapter 3), Paul, and the Hebrew Bible, incorporating an existential incarnational hermeneutic and, when relevant, Apocalyptic categories (e.g., 68);
3. A strand dealing with cultural embodiment, such as the embodied cultural testimony of Amish communities (88).¹³ In tension with such options are the parallel problems of conformity and acculturation to hegemony as well as the dehumanizing consequences of a technological utopia of disembodiment.

One aspect of incarnation—of our bodies, of our particularity—that I often ponder is that it is necessarily constrained in space and time. There is something humble and small about it that is beautiful. It is itself and no more or less than that. It is not a generic, abstract, and thus inhuman and even

¹³ I don't quite know what to make of the "identity politics" dimension of this (e.g., 216). My encounters with ethnic Mennonites in Latin America (for instance in Paraguay) have not been reassuring; the "urban Mennonites" I knew in Argentina growing up (in La Falda, Córdoba) and now living in Evanston, Illinois have been invested in a counterhegemonic, non-assimilated approach to faith, and have been quite creative liturgically as well. Their (our) Anabaptist particularity has been quite clear in matters having to do with both Mammon and the cult of the military. But I do see the problem in the kind of assimilation to evangelicalism and neo-charismatic forms among many Latin American Mennonites and Latinx Mennonites in the United States. I wonder how a relationship to the "land" (even in the form of the urban community gardening some of us do in Evanston) and of course to economics (frugality, intentional community) connects to all of this.

diabolical (disincarnate) generality. To engage in disincarnation means to try to be free of the demands of the body, something increasingly acceptable and indeed seen as desirable in much of mainstream understandings in an age of robotics and artificial intelligence. So much of that is deeply antithetical to a faith anchored in the incarnation, the particular life of Jesus, and resurrection of the body, and yet we are deeply colonized in our imaginations and our habits by what we tell ourselves are simply neutral tools to help us achieve our ends. Disincarnation ends up being a false, alternative incarnation that is violent and manipulative.

Of course, to commit to an incarnational or embodied, particular, and faithful way to be in the world means figuring out how to do so honestly, meeting head-on the ways in which our traditions (e.g., Mennonite traditions) may have become distorted, unfaithful—indeed, disincarnate. This leads me back to my concerns about the concrete implications of these ideas for the bodies of the vulnerable. For instance, when I think both about the life of rural Amish girls in Indiana and that of my own daughters, Latinas in an urban Mennonite church in the Chicago area: What kinds of ways of embodying the Christian faith are life-giving for them? Will discourses of living “as if not” truly allow them to experience life abundant in the way of Jesus? Do we ask those kinds of concrete questions (which are also questions of incarnation) often enough as we construct our theologies and our ethics?

Next Sunday

One final question to both authors: What else might you say about the role of the (particular, localized, embodied) community of faith in all of this? Both of you mention church at various points but in somewhat general terms, not so much as active and very particular sites for doing theology in community in the here and now. I wonder what the insights in these books might mean for specific churches, such as my own Mennonite community in Evanston, Illinois. I’m imagining a scene next Sunday. Folks will ask: “Where were you last week?” I might answer: “Oh, in Denver at a panel talking about the apocalyptic and about political theologies from an Anabaptist lens.” “Huh . . .” they might respond. They like to know what I’m up to theologically and what the point of it is. Will they at least get a decent sermon out of it eventually? Or an insight about how better to do ministry in our community? I was thinking that perhaps one take-away for my own church community might

be the challenge to remember the log in our own eyes as we try to refine our visions of the world (Kyle), whilst also finding the courage to cultivate our “scandalous oddities” (Travis) in the face of technologically driven erasures of embodiment and particularity.

But I still wonder: Are either/both of the authors thinking of church as a *locus theologicus* or not so much? And in what concrete (insightful, incarnate) ways might the vision of an architectonics of hope and the incarnational emphasis of diaspora ethics respectively be expressed as good news for specific communities of faith?

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II

Apocalyptic, Anabaptism, and Political Theology¹⁴

Elizabeth Phillips

In *Messianic Political Theology and Diaspora Ethics*, Travis explores what it means for political theology and ethics to be messianic, apocalyptic, and exilic, and what it means to be Anabaptist in a modern, pluralist, liberal democracy. The density of readings and insights in this collection is immense, and I have no doubt that I, like many of his readers, will return to this book repeatedly as we write and teach on topics and thinkers considered here, finding in the author a worthy, challenging interlocutor for our own work. It is a gift to have these diverse essays gathered together for our consideration and reconsideration. Anyone who does political theology or Christian ethics, or does theology from within or sympathetically alongside Anabaptist traditions, will be enriched by the wide-ranging explorations of these essays. In this collection, Travis exhibits a generosity of engagement with traditions and approaches outside Anabaptism as well as a firm

¹⁴ Portions of this text are taken from a review of the two books together which I have written for the *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 92 (October 2018): 600-602. Reprinted here by permission of *Mennonite Quarterly Review*.

grounding in a thoroughly Anabaptist commitment to the messianic and the ethical.

In some ways it is unfair to assess this volume alongside *The Architectonics of Hope*, as they are vastly different types of books. Travis's is the work of an established scholar, which arose from decades of publishing. It brings together fifteen diverse essays with their own topics and arguments (and we could not begin to evaluate these fifteen different arguments here). The other is the work of an early career scholar, which arose from his doctoral thesis. It sustains a central argument across the monograph, which can therefore be evaluated in a much more direct way. I want to clearly acknowledge that significant asymmetry before assessing Kyle's work.

In *The Architectonics of Hope*, Kyle traces a genealogical trajectory of apocalyptic and aesthetics through the course of contemporary political theologies, through the works of Carl Schmitt, Johann Baptist Metz, John Milbank, David Bentley Hart, and John Howard Yoder. Through this genealogy, he argues that an "apocalyptically inflected aesthetics of violence" characterizes Schmitt's work (Chapter 2), and that subsequent theologians sought to oppose or overcome Schmitt, but did not succeed due to their lack of actual engagement with his work. Instead, they each remain unwittingly Schmittian.

The development of this genealogy takes the reader through some impressively sophisticated close readings that also engage with a variety of interlocutors. The breadth of engagement with, and knowledge of, the terrain of a certain tradition of political theologies is considerable, and the readings offered by Kyle are often astute. Particularly strong are the sections on the function of violence in political theologies; critiques of Milbank and Hart in this regard are incisive and important for readers of their work. There is no question that in this book Kyle has established himself as a formidable reader and analyst of theopolitical texts and concepts.

The structure of the argument is a series of audacious claims—of which Kyle readily and routinely acknowledges the audacity. I have no problem with audacity, myself. However, as I came to the end of the dense, detailed readings of these authors, the audacity of how and why they are being cast in this genealogy becomes so qualified and softened, I had to wonder why the genealogical claim is needed. It is unclear why Schmitt is necessary in order

to explain Metz's negative anthropology, Milbank's rhetorical style, or the resort to the necessity of violence in Metz, Milbank, and Hart.

The first chapter suggests that the genealogy will show how "the discipline of theology has prematurely bid *adieu* to Schmitt to its own detriment" and that "Schmitt's work deserves more sustained and charitable theological engagement" (3). By the end, however, the sharp edge of this argument is removed, when it is concluded that it has "by no means" been suggested that "any reconfiguration of political theology that does not explicitly engage Schmitt's work does so at its own peril" or that "explicit engagement with Schmitt is some kind of unqualified theological good" (180). So, then, why Schmitt?

I want to turn now to what draws these two volumes together and makes sense of our conversation about them together today in this particular group: that they are both situated as works of political theology grounded in the authors' Anabaptist tradition, in which apocalyptic is somehow central. I would like to ask both authors a question about each of these shared aspects of their work, beginning with apocalyptic then turning to Anabaptist political theology.

Defining Apocalyptic

In his introduction, Travis carefully unpacks how he is (and is not) using "messianic," "diaspora," and "exile"—key terms from the title which exemplify the entire collection. I found myself wishing that "apocalyptic" had found its way into the title so that we could also have a succinct explanation of how the term is being used. Although he relates both "messianic" and "diaspora" to the apocalyptic, the content of the term is assumed rather than explicated. In many places it was not clear how or whether the term meant something more or other than "eschatological"; in other places it seemed to be specifically about exceeding the natural; in one place it is about contingency (50f.); in relation to Augustine it is peculiarly agonistic (49-55). The clearest elaborations occur where Travis summarizes others. He says that "Dostoevsky sees the Christ of the Gospels as a cosmic apocalyptic figure who tears open the hidden meaning of everyday life and exposes it as spiritual crisis (*krisis*, in the literal sense of judgment or decision; in a metaphysical and theological, not just a socio-political or moral, manner)"

(91). And he says that for Benjamin “Messianic becoming is apocalyptic, an interruption of the natural that suspends its immanent laws . . . so as to point to its hidden divine passage through it, its truest becoming and indeed its truest, eternal ‘happiness’” (25).

Kyle, too, assumes rather than explicitly defines the meaning of “apocalyptic” in his work. He seems to suggest in the introduction, via a quotation from Annie Dillard about blindness, that apocalyptic has to do with what is hidden and seen. He responds to the quotation with “I can think of no better way of describing the mysterious apocalyptic interplay of veiling and unveiling that is necessarily bound up with what it means to learn to see” (6). Yet when it comes to establishing the “apocalyptically inflected aesthetics of violence” central to his reading of Schmitt, Kyle seems to mean something more peculiarly agonistic by “apocalyptic.” And in his own usage, the term seems especially associated with interruption, sometimes violent interruption.

I am not being obtuse here. I am fully aware of the denotations and connotations of “apocalyptic” in political theology. Nor am I being pedantic, as if these books would have been improved by placing a dictionary definition at the beginning as in a bad student essay. Rather, if one is to argue for the centrality of the apocalyptic in a Christian political theology, what apocalyptic is and is not is precisely what is at stake, and failure to clearly define the range of the concept obscures rather than clarifies the importance of this very contested term. Precisely because it is so contested it demands utter clarity instead of presumption. For me, the unveiling of true and false power is central to what I mean by apocalyptic, whereas I surmise that for Travis exceeding or suspending the natural is central, and for Kyle a decisive, even violent, interruption is central. Have I got that right? If not, is there room for more specificity and precision in our use of “apocalyptic”?

Anabaptist Political Theology

Turning to the authors’ shared Anabaptist tradition and the place of their work within it, I want to pose a question motivated by genuine curiosity, one that I would like to hear their thoughts on rather than one of critique. I have written a new chapter for the forthcoming second edition of the *Blackwell Companion to Political Theology* on Anabaptism. In it, I note that

although an emerging group of Anabaptist theologians embrace the phrase “political theology” as a descriptor of their work, of which these two authors are obvious exemplars, I still wonder about the prospects of specifically Anabaptist political theology. I do not raise this question for the standard reasons others might, namely based either on the mistaken assumption that “sectarian” traditions such as Anabaptism are “apolitical” or on the mistaken assertion that these traditions have opted out of “responsible” public discourse and practice, and are therefore irrelevant to genuine political theology. On the contrary, you will always find me arguing on Anabaptism’s side in such theological skirmishes.

However, if we focus on what distinguishes the ethical from the theopolitical, do we not find that the former sits far more comfortably within most Anabaptist frameworks than the latter?

Ted Smith helps clarify the distinction when he says that ethics is concerned with “moral obligations that play out within immanent networks of cause and effect,” and that although this “immanent frame” may be able to “accommodate many kinds of moral reasoning,” focused on acts, consequences, or virtues, it cannot readily imagine, recognize, or accommodate that which exceeds the frame and/or is exceptional to it.¹⁵ He argues that we need theological ways of reasoning about politics that exceed these limits, that we need political theology. This is not about the superiority of one theological discipline over another, but about the limits of the ethical without the possibility of the theopolitical. Theopolitics without attention to the ethical is likewise undesirable.

My question is this: Can Anabaptism itself (as opposed to Anabaptist individuals drawing largely on sources outside of Anabaptism) speak beyond questions of what we should do and how we should live in relation to political realities and imperatives, into relentlessly metaphysical questions about the meaning of politics in the eschatological life of the Triune God? Can Anabaptism allow the latter questions and answers to trouble the former? Or is Anabaptism too thoroughly “ethical” to practice “political theology”? I pose these questions to you both, not only because of your shared Anabaptism, but because *Architectonics* seems more resolutely, self-

¹⁵ Ted A. Smith, *Weird John Brown: Divine Violence and the Limits of Ethics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2015), 5.

consciously theopolitical, and *Messianic Political Theology* seems more comfortable sitting at the intersection of political theology and ethics (indeed, two of the three sections of this book are explicitly more ethical than theopolitical).

My final comment on the commonalities of these two books is more pointedly critical. Again, it could be said that my criticism is slightly unfair because it can be levelled against a great deal of political theology, and is, I believe, a problem in our shared practice that we must urgently address. It is this urgency that compels me to name the problem here. Both authors engage at length with a vast number of interlocutors in these books. Travis engages with Paul, Friedrich Nietzsche, Walter Benjamin, Martin Buber, Eric Voegelin, Plato, Isaiah, Augustine, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Wendell Berry, Chaim Potok, Martin Luther, Thomas Müntzer, Michael Sattler, John Howard Yoder, Oliver O'Donovan, Karl Barth, and Michael Ignatieff. Kyle engages with Carl Schmitt, Johann Baptist Metz, Max Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, John Milbank, David Bentley Hart, Hans Urs von Balthasar, John Howard Yoder, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Nathan Kerr.¹⁶

There are ways in which we can commend the sorts of breadth and diversity exhibited in these interlocutors. However, there are obvious aspects of diversity which are entirely absent in such a long list of thinkers, including gender and ethnicity. Reading the two books in close succession, I felt distinctly like a female outsider listening in on a conversation between men, about men, for men (with the important exception of Travis's co-authored essay with Carole Leclair). So I put it to these authors that they, and indeed very many of our colleagues in political theology, must work harder to choose to seek out, listen to, and engage with the voices, experiences, and scholarship of women and others excluded from these conversations, both historical and contemporary.

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¹⁶ Both authors do refer occasionally to women; it is not as if women are ignored entirely. However, this is *very* occasional. The list of male interlocutors each received sustained, focused attention over several paragraphs or many pages; the women mentioned and cited do not receive that level of attention.

III

Metaphysics, Desire, and the Challenges of Embodied Apocalyptic

Paul Martens

I want to say thank you to Kyle and Travis for two absolutely fascinating texts, exceptionally ambitious and vulnerable texts that seek to illuminate that concern for peace is not a unique Anabaptist digression but is at the core of all theopolitical visions.¹⁷ I also want to offer an apology. For several years now (not nearly as many as would have been fitting) I have tried to avoid appropriating or advocating on behalf of the theology bequeathed to us by John Howard Yoder because of the tremendous abuse and trauma perpetrated by this person. That said, both these texts reveal that any post-late-20th-century theopolitical vision that entails peace—especially an apocalyptic one—simply cannot sidestep the fundamental, ground-forming role that Yoder has played in the discourse. Therefore, he will also play a significant role in my response, though an ambiguous one.

So, to the difficult task at hand: providing an insightful, critical, yet constructive series of comments that treat these books individually yet synthetically in a context that will inevitably not do justice to their richness.

Shared Visions

Let me dive directly to what I take to be the shared task of both texts: to provide a theopolitical account of embodied apocalyptic, of what participation in the “cosmic drama” of God’s creative Spirit¹⁸ looks like when ends and means are unified. Kyle gives us a daring and somewhat devious genealogy that redefines apocalyptic vision, while Travis gives us a text that at first glance looks a bit like a collage, but, if given a second look, inevitably draws the reader to the heart of the matter with incredible centripetal force.

Kyle’s primary concern, in my phrasing of it, is to develop a metaphysics

¹⁷ I take both to be building idiosyncratically on the notion of God’s peace as the ontological truth of creation, which has been articulated powerfully by John Milbank and Oliver O’Donovan. For a succinct account of how ontological peace founds a theopolitical vision that is not pacifist, see Oliver O’Donovan, *The Just War Revisited* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003), 1–3.

¹⁸ Kroecker, *Messianic Political Theology and Diaspora Ethics*, 96.

of peace that displays an aesthetic of peace, “a poetic art” in which doxology, nonviolence, and patience are inextricably bound together and anchored in the apocalyptic politics of Jesus.¹⁹ Just as roughly summarized, Travis’s primary concern is to attend to the constitutive nature of desire, of rightly ordered and dependent love in diaspora ethics properly practiced. To the extent that they are successful, both threaten the perceived confines of what have become familiar and somewhat canonical formulations of Anabaptist theology. In doing so, both draw freely from a broad range of resources—Plato, Paul, Augustine, Luther, Hegel, Metz, and Milbank, to name just a few—while also paying the almost necessary toll at the narrow gate that is the theological legacy of John Howard Yoder.

There is much more to say about the interplay between the two texts, but at this point I will turn to them separately in turn to press further into their internal logics.

The Architectonics of Hope

Kyle’s title is fantastic and rightly allusive. However, what I take to be the heart of his argument is displayed clearly in the middle of the text with reference to Yoder’s “To Serve Our God”: “Hope is not a reflex rebounding from defeat but a reflection of theophany”(128). It seems to me that this quotation rightly captures your concern that hope—a reflection of the patient nonviolence of Christ’s cross and resurrection—and its underlying metaphysic cannot be framed as a reaction, as an agonistic dialectic, or in terms of a friend/enemy dualism that must be managed. Rather, this must be the foundational reality in which form and content are united. I take this to name the precise structural flaw you want to point to in the entire genealogy you sketch from Schmitt through Milbank and Hart—even if agonism is self-consciously denied in metaphysical terms, it is implicit in aesthetic performance. To my mind, you capture this best when you offer the following assessment of Milbank:

However, in the end, the aesthetic potentials that Milbank attempts to harness here are finally parasitic on his attempt to unthink the necessity of violence because it remains—

¹⁹ Gingerich Hiebert, *Architectonics of Hope*, 128.

perhaps tragically but nevertheless positively—committed to its educative function. Violence is thereby authorized to operate as more than merely a king of “malign transcendental,” and Milbank’s aesthetic reconfiguration of political theology secretly participates in a manipulable economy in which peace, while certainly capable of being obscurely anticipated in time, is ultimately deferred and merely names the eschaton. (96)

Of course, my initial comments may seem rather pedantic until one pauses to reflect on what it means that Kyle’s corrective articulation of hope and its architectonic is attributed, at least in large part, to Yoder. He is certainly circumspect and refuses a whole-hearted embrace of Yoder. But it seems that Yoder is “indispensable” (118) for his genealogy for several reasons: (i) Yoder provides the methodological style—that of vision that is open-ended and enables a constructive looping-back (120), a constant potential for reformation (134); (ii) He offers the underlying meaning of history—“the cross and not the sword” determines the meaning of history (125); (iii) Yoder gives the framework for human action—the relationship between “the obedience of God’s people” and the victory of the Lamb is “not a relationship between cause and effect but one of cross and resurrection” (126). Therefore, on the shoulders of Yoder, he arrives at the declaration that, if hope is to be Christian, it must be conformed to what it proclaims (127).

I am with Kyle in all of this, and I am willing to go along even further when he suggests that all of this actually betrays that Yoder, contrary to his own declamations, is a metaphysician of sorts. Yoder is, after all, interested in claiming that his apocalyptic style entails a commitment to working “with the grain of the cosmos” (141), the closest he gets to claiming an explicit theological metaphysic. As Kyle rightly notes, this claim is justified by Yoder’s recognition that the kinds of practices Christians practice give a clue to the grain of the cosmos “because Jesus is both Word (the inner logic of things) and the Lord” (143).

However, it is also precisely at this point that I want to press further on two issues that are related to Yoder and also relevant to the broader delineations of Christian apocalyptic theology: (i) Is it really possible for Yoder’s—or any apocalyptic theopolitical vision—to escape a fundamentally agonistic aesthetic? (ii) to what extent does refusing an agonistic metaphysic

also weaken the disjunctive force of any apocalyptic claims?

Let me take these questions in order. First, in his theology, Yoder eventually comes around to articulating a little more directly what he takes to be “the grain of the cosmos.” He eventually distills a basic logic that captures the grain of the universe: borrowing from Tolstoy—“the cure for evil is suffering”²⁰—or later, echoing some liberation themes—“the oppressed are the bearers of the meaning of history.”²¹ These reflect the logic of “a universe—that is, a single system—in which God acts and we act, with our respective actions relating to each other.”²² Yet, in all of these descriptions, including the notion of diaspora that Travis takes up more fully, Yoder’s apocalyptic peaceableness, too, suffers from a necessary and seemingly permanent aesthetic dualism that is always and definitively predicated on the pre-existence of evil, death, and oppression.

If you think there may be occasions where Yoder slips into a violent aesthetics (and by that I gesture to the manner in which he codes suffering and oppression into peaceableness), it may be that he just goes wrong here. Or, might the confines of the category of apocalyptic betray at least an aesthetic need for some form of antagonism, in order to elicit the sort of possibilities that it celebrates?

Of course, one could appropriate Yoder’s polyphonic corpus (polyphonic, as I read it) in the opposite direction. Yoder seems to be a little anxious about the radical disjunction between Jesus’ cross and resurrection and all that came before, because of his commitment to a single cosmos with a consistent logic. I’m thinking particularly about his hesitation to separate the logic of Judaism and the logic of Christianity. Or, to rephrase, his increasing wariness of qualitatively separating Jeremianic Judaism from first-century Christianity. He even goes so far as claiming that the peaceful apocalyptic ethos that Jesus displayed was “already well established” in Judaism prior to Jesus’ arrival in the first century.²³

²⁰ John Howard Yoder, *Nonviolence—A Brief History: The Warsaw Lectures* (Waco, TX: Baylor Univ. Press, 2010), 21.

²¹ John Howard Yoder, *For the Nations: Essays Evangelical and Public* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 35.

²² John Howard Yoder, *Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 242.

²³ Yoder, *For the Nations*, 69.

Therefore, perhaps Yoder, against himself, can also be instructive in our reflection here. Might it be the case that to avoid slipping into a violent aesthetic, one may inevitably give up the force of the disjunctive claims that are part and parcel of the concept of apocalyptic?

Stepping back for a moment, a third issue or question that I am raising in the above concerns the precise relationship between a violent metaphysic and a violent aesthetic. Before pressing that question further, allow me to take up Travis's text and then loop back.

Messianic Political Theology and Diaspora Ethics

If Milbank is the cipher that animates or at least occasions Kyle's argument, it might be fair to say that Oliver O'Donovan plays something like the same role for Travis. Of course, O'Donovan is not really a villain and in fact is rather generously engaged in the middle of the volume. Yet his characterization of the relationship between the church and state—different yet balanced²⁴—haunts the overall shape of the text. Contra O'Donovan, Travis audaciously recruits Augustine among others to cast a theopolitical vision in which “citizenship is not to be identified with any earthly republic but rather with the messianic body on pilgrimage in this age,”²⁵ While they are working in slightly different genres, there are many instances when the consonance between Travis and Kyle is closer than the 38 miles that separate Toronto and Hamilton. That said, Travis attends more directly to the everydayness of apocalyptic embodiment:

Messianic ethics will focus less upon the legitimating claims of defining institutions (law courts, parliaments, churches, etc) than upon the embodied practices of the communities that shape the public polis in the saeculum, the everyday of the present age—but always with witness-bearing reference to the parabolic passage of the divine through it. (79)

In doing so, he recognizes what has so often been the orienting and/or motivating element missing in appeals to Yoder's theopolitical vision: affection. I take this to be one of the most important aspects of Travis's text

²⁴ Gingerich Hiebert, *Architectonics of Hope*, 2.

²⁵ Ibid.

and offer the following comments as an attempt to illuminate its significance more fully.

First, as an Anabaptist of a certain generation with historical roots to “the land” and apparently genetic yearnings for farmer sausage and *rollkuchen*, I find the juxtaposition between our Mennonite articulations of asceticism and our worldly enjoyments paradoxical, or at least unconvincingly thematized by our tradition. I fully support what Travis is driving at in an attempt to gesture toward Anabaptist existential theology. However, I wonder whether his choice of short reflections on disparate texts serially presented unconsciously exhibits something like an inchoate guilt or critical posture towards the world, one that haunts even our constructive apocalyptic visions because of our deep skepticism about the temptations of the world. I mean there is wine and Tweeback, but the good life seems to be defined by being pulverized in a mill and baked in the heat of fire (96). A sense of humor in the Mennonite tradition, even if dark, is important here, because that’s how many of us paper over incongruities that we do not otherwise know how to address synthetically.

Perhaps the issue is whether Augustine or Yoder are sufficient guides for sustaining apocalyptic affections in the everydayness of our lives. Do either have a sufficiently strong account of the goodness of creation that affirms our bodies, families, friends, and non-human creation as other than temptation? Second, this question is intended to set the table for an engagement with your concerns about technology and its dehumanizing, disembodiment, and “death-dealing” nature (244). You argue:

What we need in the first place, rather, is an account of spiritual causality, if I may put it this way, in the language of poetic, dramatic experience, a return to our personhood—which is particular, limited, embodied, passing away, and yet inhabited, indeed inspired, by divine mystery. (244)

I couldn’t agree more! But I also worry that this logic of the sufferings and passing away of the body can all too easily be accepted for the bodies of others and of creation, full stop. Again, and perhaps echoing some of what I indicated in relation to Kyle, I wonder whether the apocalyptic vision is still too negatively defined. Certainly, our hope is not “an otherworldly hope but the enactment of a hope that takes place in quiet, embodied service of

others in everyday life” (245), but to what end? To put it most crassly, I’m not sure ending the book with Dostoevsky’s monastic way adequately captures the end to which we ought to be oriented: a flourishing human community. Without that end, is it possible to properly embrace the affections necessary for existential Anabaptism? I ask this question not with a preconceived notion of what the right answer is, because it is also, as you well know, a question that is ripped open anew after Yoder.

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IV

RESPONSE

Agonism, Aesthetics, and Apocalyptic

Kyle Gingerich Hiebert

I want to begin by expressing my sincere thanks to each of the panelists for their provocative and challenging engagements. To have one’s work read in this way is nothing short of a gift for which I remain truly grateful. Although I did add material to make what began as a Ph.D. thesis potentially more interesting and relevant to a wider audience, I never expected this work to find a hearing in this kind of forum. I assumed it would be primarily collecting dust in the stacks of the Rylands library in Manchester. It is difficult to know what to say in response to such wide-ranging and thoughtful readings. While I certainly won’t be able to do justice to the richness of any of your engagements, I want to try to say something in response to each of you. Hopefully, this will be something that signals the extent to which your engagements have come to me as gifts that helpfully and rightly trouble the avowedly incomplete theopolitical vision I haltingly attempt to offer in the book, and that will provoke wider conversation. I would also like to express thanks to Phil Ziegler for his initial invitation and for organizing this panel, to Travis for his willingness to share the stage, and to Wipf and Stock not only for publishing the book but also for sponsoring this session.

Elizabeth Phillips

I have heard loud and clear that while my ability to choose an interesting title may not be in question, my ability to explain it in an introduction certainly is! Fair enough and duly noted, although I suspect this may be something of a perennial failure on my part. In her response, Elizabeth points toward the contested nature of apocalyptic in particular, and suggests that what is needed is more specificity and precision in our use of the term. Part of my reticence to include a definition of “apocalyptic” from the outset lies in the fact that I wanted to try to let such a definition emerge from the different voices in the text themselves, instead of having whatever initial definition I might have offered hijack the different apocalyptic inflections that emerge in the genealogy. Of course, as Elizabeth notes, I do hint at a definition by making reference to Annie Dillard’s discovery of a work by Marius von Senden that details the sometimes startling responses of blind patients who, after cataract surgery, were able to see for the first time. For the benefit of those who aren’t familiar with the passage from Dillard’s *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* I’ll quote some of it here:

A twenty-two-year-old girl was dazzled by the world’s brightness and kept her eyes shut for two weeks. When at the end of that time she opened her eyes again, she did not recognize any objects, but, “the more she now directed her gaze upon everything about her, the more it could be seen how an expression of gratification and astonishment overspread her features; she repeatedly exclaimed: ‘Oh God! How beautiful!’”²⁶

As I say in the book, I can think of no better way of describing the mysterious apocalyptic interplay of veiling and unveiling that is bound up with what it means to learn to see. This way of putting the matter is doubly helpful for the argument I seek to make, because apocalyptic and aesthetic modes of theology are inseparable. Of course, we do not learn to see in isolation, which is why it is also important for my argument that “the education of the eye” is not a violent subjugation imposed from without but rather is shaped by a mutuality of gazes that supplement and shape one’s own vision in ever new and surprising ways. And so, perhaps—although

²⁶ Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (Norwich, UK: Canterbury Press, 2011), 27-31.

this may be a case of my wishing to absolve myself of a bad habit—the lack of an overriding definition of apocalyptic can be read as an attempt not only to highlight the sense in which there are different kinds of apocalyptic at work here that would be obscured when measured against a pre-existing definition, but also to deflate an overwrought sense of the explanatory power that apocalyptic theology often claims for itself.

I'm not arguing that apocalyptic is central for political theology but that it is not solely or even mainly a discourse of the margins. In this respect I have quite deliberately opted for the weaker thesis, which I have also done in qualifying the extent to which the genealogy that begins with Schmitt does *not* explain why subsequent voices *must* be understood with reference to him. Rather, if we attend to the Schmittian aporetics that are unwittingly repeated in subsequent debates, we will be able to detect hidden resonances between ostensibly opposed political theologies that would otherwise remain invisible. So, even though I don't want to claim that Schmitt is *necessary* to explain Metz's negative theological anthropology, to take one example, reading Metz as in some sense repeating Schmitt even while resisting him yields significant theological insights that might otherwise be left veiled.

Paul Martens

Part of what is at issue is helpfully articulated by Paul in his question about whether any apocalyptic theopolitical vision is capable of escaping a fundamentally agonistic framework. I hope it is clear in the book that *none* of the five voices at its heart, Yoder included, manages to do this. I'm happy to grant that Yoder's apocalyptic politics can promote, and does in fact embody, violent postures. I'm still not as sure as you seem to be that Yoder's basic logic can be boiled down to something like Tolstoy's dictum that the cure for evil is suffering, but the precise reasons for that are beside the point here.²⁷ I want to push back on this question in two directions that force me to clarify some things perhaps not as well formulated or explicitly foregrounded as they could be.

First, the genealogy I construct tries to work against the notion that we might eventually, finally (mercifully?!) be able to articulate a theopolitical vision devoid of agonism, and instead seeks to be instructed by failures to

²⁷ See Paul Martens, *The Heterodox Yoder* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012).

subvert such an agonistic framework. I want to refuse the question entirely, at least insofar as definitively escaping an agonistic framework isn't precisely what I'm driving toward, although I admit that there are places that could be read to imply that escape is the goal. However, in the course of my reading of Metz, for example, I suggest that such an attempt to understand his *new* political theology over and against Schmitt in this way is doomed to fail.

Secondly, and perhaps more significantly, part of what I attempt to do in the book is to imagine the possibility of a nonviolent theopolitical vision that does not extricate us from the struggle to remain in those agonistic spaces but willingly seeks them out and enters them, not to escape or destroy but to reconcile. The kind of theological metaphysics that must accompany such an account is one that is habitually seized by the beauty of Christ and can therefore proclaim with confidence, as I think Yoder does, that "there is no enemy to be destroyed; there is an adversary to be reconciled."²⁸ This also begins to complicate your second question about the extent to which rejecting an agonistic metaphysics weakens the disjunctive force of apocalyptic. On the one hand, I don't want to reject an agonistic metaphysics *tout court*, just a particular kind. On the other hand, I want to question the extent to which the disjunctive force of apocalyptic is always necessarily violent. Part of the key for me is that whatever interruptive function apocalyptic serves to illuminate corrupt forms of power must also be turned back on itself. Put another way, because all our creaturely modes of vision are subject to forms of blindness, whether willful or not, all our attempts to see not only must be aware of the *potential* for self-deception but must actively cultivate a positive capacity for self-criticism.

Nancy Bedford

Cultivating such a positive capacity for self-criticism is undoubtedly one of the key insights I take from Yoder and, in this sense, Nancy is exactly right to point to the sense in which the case of Yoder is deeply troubling. It goes well beyond a simple failure to embody one's own best insights, and is rather a form of willful blindness with devastating and ongoing material consequences that made life itself, as she puts it, "uninhabitable" for scores of women. I continue to be at a loss about how to move forward in the light of

²⁸ Yoder, *Nonviolence—A Brief History*, 46.

Yoder's destructive and violent sexual experiments. However, I believe that it is incumbent upon those of us who have inherited his legacy to continue to wrestle with the difficult questions about the links between its perceived achievements and its glaring failures, which we so often do not wish to see. Nancy is absolutely right to suggest that this is a blind spot in the theopolitical vision I articulate in the book, although I hope that my recognition of Yoder's sexual violence against women means that it is not a form of willful blindness on my part. I also take it that Elizabeth's suggestion that I (we) must work harder to seek out and engage women's voices to be one way of addressing such a blind spot. Although there are seeds of such engagements in the book with voices like Chantal Mouffe, Catherine Pickstock, Grace Jantzen, and Gillian Rose, I completely agree that more needs to be done.

After reading the book a number of months ago, a Catholic friend made a provocative suggestion that Mary can profitably be read as an exemplar of nonviolence who was not martyred. That suggestion has stayed with me. This kind of reading requires a kind of leap, perhaps more so for Protestants for whom Mary is not even associated with private devotion but, in my experience, is most memorably trotted out as the meek and mild mother of the nativity play and mostly forgotten after December 25. In a Christmas story I read to my kids over and over last year, Mary is so incidental that the donkey carrying her plays a bigger role in the narrative. However, the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) stands as a majestic theopolitical witness, should we have ears to listen. I also wonder if John's portrayal of Mary at the foot of the cross (John 19:25-26), in what must be described as a moment of pure anguish, isn't just as troublingly powerful. After all, as the poet Frances Croake Frank poignantly reminds us, it is Mary who is able to authentically say, "this is my body, this is my blood."²⁹ If this is what creaturely nonviolence looks like, then the recovery of the figure of the martyr to which I draw attention in the book is in danger of missing this completely unless it can take Mary seriously.

As for the first blind spot that Nancy identifies, the "wound of coloniality": while I'm grateful that she took note of a few occasions in

²⁹ As quoted in Susan A. Ross, "God's Embodiment and Women," in *Freeing Theology—The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*, ed. Catherine Mowry LaCugna (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1993), 185.

which I gesture in the direction of a repair in this regard, this is too generous because, as she points out, much more needs to be done here too, not only in excavating the shadows of the North Atlantic legacy but in becoming attuned to see the light coming from the global South.

In any case, all of this response barely scratches the surface. There is much more I could say and, certainly, much more work must be done in the light of the challenges issued by each of you. I'll end by entering another note of thanks to you all; your engagements will stay with me, and I very much look forward to further conversation. Thanks.

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V

RESPONSE

Messianic Theology and Apocalyptic Political Economy

P. Travis Kroeker

Many thanks to each of the respondents for such generous and thoughtful engagement. I second every word of thanks and appreciation that Kyle so eloquently expressed in his response. The event itself in Denver was a remarkable engagement, and I'm delighted that it will find a wider audience through *The Conrad Grebel Review*. I shall respond to each panelist in the order in which I received their responses, since that became the de facto structure for crafting this reply, and it ended up working (at least for me)! I also respond more fully to some respondents in other sections and will on occasion signal that by highlighting their name when I do so.

Elizabeth Phillips

Elizabeth helpfully asks, How is “apocalyptic” present in my work? I agree with Ivan Illich that we live in an apocalyptic world in which the mystical body of Christ is being crucified every day, not least for its own role in bringing

about the world of modernity.³⁰ I have thought of using the term more prominently, but instead have chosen to focus upon the term “messianic,” because it is more scandalous in illuminating that this apocalyptic world is charged with the revelation or unveiling of the war between Messiah and anti-Messiah, in which there are no innocent parties—though there are plenty of victims—and where the question of allegiance is of both ultimate and penultimate significance. That is, as messianic language entails political and theological and ethical questions, these may not be divided; in fact to divide them is antichrist (though to be clear, I’m not saying that Ted Smith is that!). Christ and Anti-Christ come into being (*parousia*, 2 Thess. 2) *together* in an apocalypse that unveils both simultaneously. The mystery of love and the mystery of evil are agonistically coincident in the human world that includes both nature and history. Incidentally, in this same apocalyptic text Paul says, “if anyone will not work, let them not eat” (2 Thess. 3:10), and of all people maybe Mennonites should get that apocalyptic joke, quietist as it is.

The point is that we completely receive our lives, the fulfillment of our desires, by grace, and yet are impelled by the example of the “Lord Messiah” to “work in quietness”—work like *hesychasts*, in that mystical tradition of prayer and labor in the everyday to bring about the mysterious economy of divine love which may only be received in gratitude—or not! This remains a critical apocalyptic *wager* and is anything but a catastrophic, pessimistic, or hostile stance against the lived world (as apocalyptic is so often depicted). In my work I’m trying to bring as much of the world I inhabit in my particular “point”³¹ as possible into this apocalyptic messianic field of vision so as to allow the ordinary, hidden mystery of the divine economy to “awake, and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death” (as the apocalyptic seer says in Revelation 3:2).

Thanks, Elizabeth, for pointing out where I say regarding Walter

³⁰ Ivan Illich, *The Rivers North of the Future: The Testament of Ivan Illich as told to David Cayley* (Toronto, ON: Anansi Press, 2005), 169-70, 177-80.

³¹ Here I’m making reference to Julian of Norwich’s apocalyptic “point,” where the work of divine love is present to all creatures in every “point” or instant of time and at the “mid-point” or centre of all things. See especially the third revelation in Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, trans. Elizabeth Spearing (London: Penguin, 1998).

Benjamin that apocalyptic is about “exceeding or interrupting the natural.”³² I should have said “exceeding modern *conventions* of nature and history that reduce them to purely immanent homogeneous inanimate natural and anthropocentric historical processes in triumphalistic progressivist narratives”—to which various forms of Christendom politics and philosophy have contributed their fair share. Benjamin’s “weak” messianic power, rooted in Kabbalistic mystical messianism, may help Christians, including Mennonites, recover a messianism rooted in the foolish power of the cross in a narrative of “failure” not success, a mystical political theology of the everyday. Here I can make a segue to Paul Martens, who wonders if all of this isn’t just a bit too ascetic and world-denying.

Paul Martens

I do think that a recovery of this apocalyptic messianism must focus on the suffering of the cross rather than a glorying in our triumphalistic love of the world, which is currently very quickly killing that world. We should be aware that temptation arises precisely in our most glorious spaces of intimacy, enjoyment, and love—Augustine locates temptation precisely in the claim that “all that is is good,” the gratuitous gift of beauty, truth, goodness in a world that is “contingently” fashioned out of love. The biblical narratives say this too, beginning with that famous garden motif that moves so quickly toward disordered possessive desire, rivalry, murder, and the world-historical tower. The Johannine theology of “Word made flesh” opens us to the vulnerability and ubiquitous suffering this entails in how to love a mortal world intent on securing itself against the pain of love. John’s gospel is central not only for Dostoevsky, Flannery O’Connor, and Annie Dillard, but also for the Radical Reformers and for Miriam Toews.

Elizabeth, I’m gratefully aware of your critique that the domain of political theology can be a very male-centered one. My recent work in theology and literature takes up this approach to political theology also in relation to female writers, including medieval mystics such as Marguerite Porete (in conversation with Simone Weil) and Julian of Norwich’s apocalypse of divine love in the suffering cosmic messiah (in conversation with Annie Dillard). I’ve just published an article on Miriam Toews’s novel

³² Kroecker, *Messianic Political Theology and Diaspora Ethics*, 25.

Irma Voth that argues for a figural theological reading of John's gospel in this novel that unveils the scandalous implications of the Word made flesh also for patriarchal religion, the deadness of which (as Toews shows us) must be overcome.³³

Let me make a bald bold claim here: all of these works are bound together figurally in relation to the messianic apocalypse. John's gospel is itself like all scripture related figurally to the whole of scripture and beyond that to the cosmic ("worldly") revelation of the poetics of creation that John claims to see and follow in Jesus. The early radical reformers also preferred the Gospel of John and a vision of salvation as rebirth into the restoration of the divine image, a process of divinization or deification,³⁴ which I suggest is also a politics. This vision of love as life constitutes an ontological scandal rooted in failure insofar as the world does not receive it, and yet it continues in the enfleshed practices of love that suffers failure to "abide in love." There is a mystical materialism in this vision of the "bride of Christ" begotten of the seed of the divine Word that becomes a literal extension of the incarnation in the lived world. Anabaptists may only recover it figurally in everyday practices that do not divide the ethical from the political from the religious.

Paul, I end my book with a gesture toward Dostoevsky just as he ended his most famous novel with an iconic gesture: the possibility of the new community of children that may flourish only if it forgives. Remember, the epilogue of *The Brothers Karamazov* is an icon of a worldly community or polis ordered by the slain lamb. It is an unveiling at the gravesite of young Ilyusha, whose suffering brings the gang of kids together who are liberated from their violent self-asserting eros by forgiveness so as to declare their love for one another and their remembered friend (who also caused suffering). Alyosha, whom the elder has commissioned to live the monastic life not in a cloister but in the everyday secular world (also an Anabaptist trope), gives a "speech at the stone"—that "heathenish stone" (what an idea, to bury the kid there "like some hanged man"!)—about the stone of stumbling, the vicious and merciless treatment of others, especially the most vulnerable.

³³ Kroeker, "Scandalous Displacements: 'Word' and 'Silent Light' in *Irma Voth*," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 36 (2018): 89-100.

³⁴ See Alvin J. Beachy, *The Concept of Grace in the Radical Reformation* (Nieuwkoop, NL: De Graaf, 1977).

As Søren Kierkegaard also points out, the messianic body is built on a rock of offence, of scandal—not least the scandal that the prescribed cure for a broken world in all its beauty seems infinitely worse than the illness it claims to heal. For Christian love in the everyday world, everything turns on how one responds to life-destroying deeds of offense rooted in self-assertion, possessive rivalries, retributive fantasies (all of which are intimately tied to the trials of human desire, love—both individual and socially mediated, and these are inseparable). Read that epilogue where young Kolya confesses: “It’s all so strange, Karamazov, such grief and then pancakes all of a sudden—how unnatural it all is in our religion!” Stories of suffering love educate us in how to seek out what is precious in the world and commit ourselves to loving that goodness more fully in all its lived mortal precarity.

Nancy Bedford

It’s Sunday and I don’t go to church anymore, so I have to find places to preach. I was going to end with that line. Then I got Nancy Bedford’s lovely response, late and on the run. She’s calling me to account on a sore spot that I wanted to disguise with lame humor. Let me end confessionally, then. I find myself living in institutional exile these days, as much in the church as in the university—though I continue to have professional obligations in the latter. I will respond with reference to one of the founders of my McMaster department of Religious Studies, George Grant, and his relation to Simone Weil, who has become one of my cherished mentors on living in diaspora within messianic bonds that hold across de-institutionalized practices of sacramental love.

Grant was a critic of the technocratic historicism/progressivism of liberal modernity in whose disincarnating grip we remain firmly grasped. For Grant it is Weil who gets us closest to the theological question of incarnation and disincarnation. Here is Grant’s claim: “In the full sense of the word she was incarnate in the twentieth century—that is, she knew it not only as an observer, but its afflictions became her flesh.”³⁵ Grant could not have said this without having Paul’s words in Colossians 1:24-25: “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in

³⁵ George Grant, “Simone Weil,” in *The George Grant Reader*, ed. William Christian and Sheila Grant (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1998), 251.

Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, of which I became a *diakonos* according to the divine economy." Paul considers this to be the economy of divine mystery revealed in the crucified Christ, a mystery to which Weil was deeply attuned, even to the point of not being baptized or taking the Roman Catholic eucharist—so sacramental was she! I say that with what Kierkegaard called the passion of faith, not the detachment of irony. That is, the sacraments may not be exclusivistic—sociologically, doctrinally, or on the grounds of any other immanent reductionism; they are not under human control as possessions. The question then becomes for Weil how to participate in this economy without a possessive imagination fettered in the cave of the social Beast (as she calls it, following Plato) by an "I." For her this is possible only through the cruciform process of kenosis.

No theological or doctrinal formula can penetrate the depths of this mystery; it can only be lived in obedience to the one who displays the distance love must cross to redeem the world in redemptive suffering. Weil is not offended by the scandalous mystery of foolish messianic materialism, and for that reason she displays the offence of the gospel, also in the refusal to countenance the illusory optimism and pleasure-inducing fantasies of technological progressivism, the god of our age. That offence is also required if the invented Christian God who smiles on us and our self-contented safe religious techné unable to face up to reality can be identified as the Christendom idolatry it has become—unable to suffer, unable to die, and therefore unable to be reborn to real life. Unable, that is, to do battle with the god of this (and of every) age. Weil was very attuned to this.

It will be impossible here for me to convey the divine mystery of kenosis that becomes humanly incarnate as a slave. Weil says: "We must get rid of the illusion of possessing time. We must become incarnate. Man has to perform *l'acte de s'incarner*, for he is *désincarné* by his imagination. What comes to us from Satan is our imagination."³⁶ The only way to do this is to likewise empty ourselves, literally uproot ourselves from clinging to false divinity that imagines we possess anything. This is what the cross is for Weil, "*crux*" (the curse-word of criminals and prostitutes in the ancient world³⁷) as the death

³⁶ Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Arthur Wills (Lincoln, NB: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1997), 102-103.

³⁷ Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion: In the Ancient World and the Folly of the Cross*, trans. John

that uproots our desire from false objects of possession, in order to liberate attached energy for a loving attunement to the true relationship of things.³⁸ Only affliction, which is our lived experience of slavery to the suffering of the cross, can accomplish this incarnation. “My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me,” says Jesus in John 4:34. “There is no good apart from this capacity” says Weil,³⁹ and by it she refers to the Eucharistic exchange at the heart of real life: “God did not only make himself flesh for us once, every day he makes himself matter in order to give himself to man and to be consumed by him. Reciprocally, by fatigue, affliction, and death, man is made matter and is consumed by God. How can we refuse this reciprocity?”⁴⁰ This is in fact the messianic meaning of work in John 4:34—“Time entering into the body. Through work man turns himself into matter, as Christ does . . . Work is like a death,”⁴¹ and it begins by taking the form of the slave without rights, without a possessed identity, without an imagined self, without attention to the future fruits of my action which are anyway not in my control.

Attention in these carnal ways may help relate us religiously to the beauty of the world: attention to the real world such that the ego, the “I”, disappears and simply dwells in the mortal moment. Here we become aware of the limit between the mortal and the immortal, the passage of eternal divine love in a world that is passing away. To discern this requires a mortification of the flesh symbolized in all sacramental attention and makes way for love. Grant loved Weil’s love of George Herbert’s “Love III”—“‘You must sit down,’ says Love, ‘and taste my meat.’ So I did sit and eat”—but it is a love born of affliction, a humble love that serves the lowly created things forgotten and despised by the grandiose visions of the techno-imagination. This is what it means to be a part of the body of Christ incarnate in the daily life of a suffering world.

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Bowden (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1977), 9.

³⁸ Ibid., 81, cf. 67.

³⁹ Ibid., 48.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 80.

⁴¹ Ibid., 235.

Walter Sawatsky. *Going Global with God as Mennonites for the 21st Century* (North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 2017).

I first encountered Walter Sawatsky's provocative, unconventional thinking in a history survey course that I took at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in the late 1980s. The course was less about historical details and much more about rethinking the ways that we typically view the church and world. I remember Sawatsky talking passionately about the importance of the global church, especially its Eastern and Southern expressions. He was critical of Mennonite fixations with 16th-century Anabaptist beginnings and argued for a study of Mennonite history that would take seriously the 500-year story. More generally, he wanted students to rethink the dominant and standard interpretations of Christian history. Over the years the learnings from that class stuck with me and continue to shape my teaching, research, and writing. I was pleased to encounter Sawatsky's passion again in this publication, which encapsulates his thinking and raises important questions for the church, especially the Mennonite community as it seeks to find its way in the 21st century.

Based on the 2014 Menno Simons lectures at Bethel College in North Newton, Kansas, the volume begins with a sermon, arguing for a reading of history that has a capacity "to absorb the whole story, warts and all." Eschewing hubris, Sawatsky directs readers to the *Missio Dei*, the mission of God that calls Christians always to seek reform and renewal, and to practice genuine love by welcoming strangers and minority persons.

Next, Sawatsky turns to the Russian Mennonite story, noting the way in which the standard accounts typically highlight the rise of the Russian Mennonite Commonwealth, or focus attention on those groups that became a part of the westward migrations to North America. The problem with these narratives, according to Sawatsky, is that they tend to overlook the majority of Mennonites of southern Russia and the Ukraine, who ended up living in central Asia, Siberia, and the Ural regions of Russia. In looking eastward, he finds a vibrant missionary-oriented church in a persistent state of vulnerability that has a simple commitment to doing what is required without fanfare. Sawatsky maintains that this is a story worth telling because it does not reflect a static or essentialist way of thinking about the history of

a people, but rather narrates a story that is dynamic, always evolving, and adapting to changing contexts.

In the remaining three chapters, the author further elaborates on this dynamic nature of history, and the importance of interpreting the Christian story well. He takes aim at sectarian thinking, especially the kind of history writing and theologizing that focuses solely on pre-Constantinian Christianity or 16th-century Anabaptism, or that assumes God is interested only in what the Mennonite tradition has sometimes identified as the “faithful remnant.” Attempting to retrieve the purity of some golden age will not do, and failing to tell the larger story of faithfulness during the Middle Ages is irresponsible and limits the way in which God works in the world. Mennonites need a public theology that takes into account society as a whole. Sawatsky insists that our horizons must include the two-thousand-year story of Christian history, and our mission must include the reconciliation of the entire divided Christian family.

A persistent thread running through the book is that Mennonites should not succumb to historical amnesia. They need to hone their skills at interpreting history responsibly, and to find ways of telling the Christian story from multiple perspectives. Leaving history behind and uniting around common core theological assumptions is problematic, because theological formulas do not pay sufficient attention to differences within and between faith communities. Sawatsky doubts that a “common theology” called “Anabaptist” or “Mennonite” can truly unite. Mennonites should invest in fraternal relationships, learn to narrate their histories humbly and honestly, and invest in gatherings that bring divergent peoples together. He insists that the church must demonstrate a capacity to agonize over important issues in spite of the reality that differences abound.

Having spent numerous years relating to Christians in the East and West in his capacity as mission worker, editor, teacher, and scholar, Sawatsky brings much breadth and depth to his writing. Although the text would have benefited from a stronger editorial hand, the impulses that emanate from this volume are prophetic and penetrating. Church leaders, mission workers, and educators will discover much wisdom and insight in its pages.

Karl Koop, Professor of History and Theology, Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Ryan Andrew Newson, *Inhabiting the World: Identity, Politics, and Theology in Radical Baptist Perspective*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2018.

Near the beginning of this stimulating new book, Ryan Newson observes that “a central *theological* task in the current context is not really to provide a ‘new Christian theology,’ whatever that means, but to describe a ‘new world’ that can be inhabited by Christians seeking to be faithful therein” (2). That description involves both an account of “the current context,” which he develops in terms of certain postmodern intellectual and cultural shifts, and a picture of ecclesial identity as it might emerge in relation to these shifts. Newson, a Baptist theologian and professor, wants to claim his picture of the church fits a “radical” construal of his own tradition, and thus he dialogues extensively with sympathetic Baptist and Anabaptist theologians, above all Nancey Murphy and James McClendon. In fact, this volume works both as a compelling proposal in its own right and as a major study of McClendon’s *oeuvre*.

Newson sketches his understanding of postmodernity in the first chapter, drawing on Murphy and McClendon’s depiction of epochal philosophical transformations—toward epistemological holism, linguistic pragmatism, and metaphysical complexity—and Stephen Toulmin’s vision of the reemergence of community-based “cosmopolitics” after the decline of the nation-state. The author suggests that “the desire [of the broad culture, or ‘world’] is no longer for *stability and uniformity* but the need to protect *diversity and adaptability*” (19).

The question for Newson is then the shape of Baptist life in such a world, and his answer centers on listening “to oneself and one’s embodied, organic desires; to one’s neighbors; and to the untamed voice of God” (21). A listening church, he suggests, is diverse and adaptable, refusing the safety of theological or organizational systems worked out in advance of concrete encounters with speaking or expressing others (including, here, one’s own body).

Newson’s answer bears the marks of McClendon’s understanding of Christian theology and ethics as comprising three interwoven strands—the body, society, and resurrection. In his second chapter, Newson surveys McClendon’s project, focusing on his philosophical “perspectivism” and

his notion of the three strands. McClendon's conceptual resources enable Newson to embrace the particularity of Baptist Christian identity while avoiding imperialism and relativism, and to conceive of that identity as irreducibly involving Baptist bodies, social relations, and receptivity to the in-breaking reign of God.

The remaining chapters are organized in three sections of two chapters each, with each section corresponding to one of the three strands. In the first section, on the body strand, Newson treats personal identity as a complex phenomenon (chapter three) that is formed—even at the neurological level—by social practices (chapter four). These chapters engage political theory and neuroscience alongside McClendon to portray an embodied, social self whose inherent multiplicity can be (re)oriented via communal social practices to Jesus Christ.

The second section focuses on the social strand. Here Newson insists that the church is “formed at the border of encounter” (chapter five). The communal context of Christian identity formation need not be hopelessly insular or exclusivist if practices of humble listening are central to the church's witness. Of course, the church has often been insular and exclusivist, and the author explores how Christian practices can go wrong by examining race relations in the United States (chapter six).

The third section, on resurrection, outlines the nature of the Baptist radicalism Newson recommends (chapter seven) and the tension between an emphasis on Christian formation via regular practices and openness to apocalyptic surprise (chapter eight). On the one hand, Baptist radicalism is a mode of bold listening and responding to God subject to communal discernment normed by Scripture; on the other, discernment—the subject of Newson's 2017 book, *Radical Friendship: The Politics of Communal Discernment*—and other church practices should be regarded as training for surprise, not for reproduction of ecclesial structures.

Newson's excellent work challenges readers to inhabit the world by cultivating communal habits of listening to the multiplicity, diversity, dynamism, and vulnerability contained within ourselves, our relations within and without the church, and with God. Guided by McClendon, Newson avoids incoherence by construing this listening as rooted in trust and hope in Jesus Christ and commitment to Scripture and the church.

Going beyond McClendon, as he does on the subject of race, Newson might further consider the challenges of inhabiting gendered and sexed bodies in a stolen, ecologically devastated land.

Jamie Pitts, Associate Professor of Anabaptist Studies, Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana.

Bridget Heal and Anorthe Kremers, eds. *Radicalism and Dissent in the World of Protestant Reform*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017.

Radicalism and Dissent in the World of Protestant Reform, edited by Bridget Heal and Anorthe Kremers, makes available a series of papers originally presented at a symposium on “The Protestant Reformation and its Radical Critique,” held in 2016 at the German Historical Institute in London. Topics addressed in this volume span a broad temporal and geographical range: the various chapters cover the 16th through 18th centuries and deal not only with religious movements on both sides of the English Channel but also with developments in the Americas and in India. Together, the essays form a valuable addition to scholarship on the history of early modern Protestantism in Europe and beyond.

A central question is the usefulness of the categories of “Magisterial Reformation” (the strains of Protestantism, such as Lutheranism or Calvinism, that received support from secular authorities and became entrenched as official state churches) and “Radical Reformation” (the strains of Protestantism that lacked state sanction, subdivided into Anabaptists, Spiritualists, and Evangelical Rationalists—intellectuals who questioned doctrines such as the Trinity). These categories were established by George Huntston Williams in his seminal work, *The Radical Reformation*, first published in 1962. The classification has become entrenched in 20th- and 21st-century literature on the Reformation(s) and, while providing an easily understandable heuristic for making sense of the messy religious landscape of early modern Europe, it has limitations, as essays in this volume attest.

Michael Driedger’s chapter, “Against ‘the Radical Reformation’: On the Continuity between Early Modern Heresy-Making and Modern

Historiography,” most overtly challenges Williams’s “Radical Reformation” and argues persuasively that it is simply a positive reframing of a category created by early modern anti-heresy polemicists, who described a broad variety of religious nonconformists as a single, interrelated threat. Kat Hill’s chapter on naming and identity addresses the ways in which the study of minority religious groups in early modern Europe relies on names and identities given those groups by their ideological opponents, even as it explores the names that Anabaptists chose for themselves.

Other chapters likewise highlight ongoing conversations within and between radical religious groups. Gary Waite examines Dutch Doopgezind (liberal Mennonite) debates on the relative importance of the inner word of divine illumination and the outer word of Scripture, and Alec Ryrie examines the same interplay of Scripture and Spirit in the English Revolution. Lionel Laborie and John Coffey examine relationships between radical groups in England and on the continent. Laborie analyzes how French *Couflaires* [those “inflated by the Spirit” in Provençal dialect] forged a relationship with English Quakers and reinterpreted the story of their origins to distance themselves from more violent groups, and Coffey examines the question of whether continental Anabaptists and Spiritualists helped to give rise to English Baptists and Quakers in the 17th century.

The concept of radicalism, moreover, is broad enough to accommodate far more than just the individuals and groups encompassed by Williams’s “Radical Reformation,” as several chapters make clear. Thomas Kauffman addresses how Luther’s own political thought, particularly in his earliest writings, was profoundly radical, and Gerd Schwerhoff examines Luther’s use of invective as a form of linguistic radicalism. Ethan Shagan and Susan Royal similarly highlight radical qualities of “magisterial” Protestants in England, while Mirjam van Veen examines how Reformed historians adopted aspects of radical interpretations of the death of Servetus, even as Anabaptists adopted aspects of magisterial interpretations. Additionally, people and groups could be radical in some ways while upholding the status quo in others, as demonstrated in Dmitri Levin’s chapter on John Beale and in Jon Sensbach’s chapter on radical religious groups’ responses to slavery in the Black Atlantic.

This volume is an excellent resource for scholars of the Reformation(s)

and the legacy in the early modern period. The effort to bring together scholarship from historians of Protestantism (radical or otherwise) in both continental Europe and the British Isles, and even Asia and the Americas, is particularly welcome. The scholarship advanced here is sure to spur further discussion on the various strains of Reformation-era Protestantism, their interactions with each other, and the ways they variously upheld and threatened the political and religious status quo. It has certainly caused me to reflect more deeply on how I categorize my own research subjects.

Christina Moss, Ph.D. candidate, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario.

Ruth Krall. *Living on the Edge of the Edge: Letters to a Younger Colleague*. Victoria, BC: Friesen Press, 2017.

Ruth Krall writes this book from a number of edges: she is on the edge of the Anabaptist Mennonite community, on the edge of a long and varied academic career, and on the edge of a life of peace advocacy around abuse issues. From this vantage point, she has written a series of letters to her scholarly friend and fellow peace advocate Lisa Schirch.

The letters are not half of an actual real-time correspondence. Rather, themes suggested in correspondence with Schirch prompted Krall to write these reflective letters. Schirch is the named reader, but they were written for a wider audience. This volume is peace theology in autobiographical form. The term “memoir” aptly describes it on several levels.

It is a spiritual memoir, for in it Krall reflects on a lifetime of spiritual influences, ranging from her childhood Mennonite faith community, to influential people she has met, to interfaith voices that have impacted her life. Her purpose is to encourage future feminists to pay attention to their own spirituality as they pursue peace advocacy.

It is also a theological memoir, where the author charts her own thinking about God, the church, and the problem of evil in the world, and how this has changed over time. Her theological reflections are notably interdisciplinary, drawing on experiences from her diverse career and wide reading in the fields of nursing, psychology, trauma theory, theology, and

world religions.

In addition it is a memoir of peace advocacy, recounting the costs and trials of being a voice for survivors of pastoral sexual misconduct, and offering tips and strategies for how to be effective and resilient as a peacemaker. Krall surveys the landscape of sexism and patriarchy in her lifetime, outlining the nature of violence that affects not only women and children but people of color, gender and sexual minorities, people who are differently abled, and others.

The letters are very personal. Krall tells stories of what she has seen and heard and experienced, believing that particularity and knowledge of oneself is a path to true dialogue and community. Her vulnerability, particularly in describing the pain of being shunned by the Mennonite community, is searing. By writing so personally, she speaks the pain of many who have been silenced and edged out of Mennonite communities because they dared to name violence.

The author encourages her readers to work on peace, not just in the world or in the church, but in their own psyches: “our own lives become the experiment in peace from which we can reach out to a world filled with violation and pain” (262). Themes of community come up frequently, and brokenness in community and shunning are recurrent themes, as are strength, resilience, hope, and healing.

Krall is an eloquent and insightful writer whose voice has been marginalized in the Mennonite community. She has charted her own course for some time, and this book is self-published (as is her excellent “The Elephants in God’s Living Room” on John Howard Yoder and clergy sexual abuse, which is available for free download at ruthkrall.com).

Some will find the book frustrating because it meanders and seems repetitive at points. Krall’s writing takes a spiral rather than a linear form. She begins discussion of a subject and then touches on it again in subsequent letters, each time coming at it from a slightly different angle. This reflects the trajectory of ideas in her life. I think feminist scholars will find it revelatory. I fear that the majority of Mennonite theologians, who tend to separate the personal from the theological, will find it irrelevant. And that is precisely why she wrote the book.

Living on the Edge of the Edge: Letters to a Younger Colleague will be a

book that women tell each other about, and it will sit on bedside tables for many years as feminists try to make sense of their lives. Its various letters will be useful for both graduate and undergraduate classes because Krall's engaging and poignant writing will speak to students, encouraging them to examine their own lives and beliefs, and spurring them to envision new directions for a world broken by abuses of power.

Carol Penner, Assistant Professor of Theological Studies, Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ontario.

Peter Frick. *Understanding Bonhoeffer*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017.

In *Understanding Bonhoeffer*, Peter Frick—theologian and New Testament scholar—offers a collection of broad-ranging essays on the life and thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Frick begins with a brief introduction to his subject's life and thought, and divides the rest of the volume into three main sections. In the first of the two largest sections, titled "Backgrounding Bonhoeffer," the author explores Bonhoeffer's theological and philosophical influences, ranging from Thomas à Kempis to Rudolf Bultmann, Paul Tillich, Gerhard Ebeling, and Friedrich Nietzsche. This section is followed by "Foregrounding Bonhoeffer," in which Frick engages Bonhoeffer's thought in the service of contemporary theological issues such as racism, economics, and politics.

Before Frick turns to the two sections on Bonhoeffer's influences and his contemporary theological significance, he offers two essays in a short section titled "Reading Bonhoeffer." Here he engages a central issue in contemporary Bonhoeffer interpretation: the limits of unrecognized perspective. Readers of secondary works on Bonhoeffer will quickly recognize the importance of this issue: the field is littered with partial readings where Bonhoeffer is leveraged in the service of irreconcilable political, social, and ecclesiastical projects, many of them revealing more about the author and interpreter than about Bonhoeffer. Hence Frick's interest in acknowledging his own perspective early on, and interrogating it; this both reveals his intellectual honesty and acts as an implied critique of those who fail to recognize their

own perspectives and put Bonhoeffer into political and theological camps in which he does not belong.

Perspective, however, need not be a bad thing. Specialized areas of knowledge can offer opportunities to expand the field in a direction faithful to Bonhoeffer's own patterns of life and thought. Frick was a member of the editorial board of the critical English editions of Bonhoeffer, a role he took up after discovering a multiplicity of errors in an early volume; in this case his background in New Testament scholarship added much needed perspective to the editorial board. This background makes Frick sensitive to particular strands of inquiry into Bonhoeffer: hermeneutics, exegesis, and the theological interpretation of Scripture in particular. This is seen in his brief theological and biographical sketch of his subject. It comes into even sharper focus in his thoughts on Bultmann (128-40) and Ebeling (152-55), and in an essay on Bonhoeffer, peace, and social responsibility (250-64). Rather than being a limiting factor, this expertise is a welcome aspect of Frick's work, bringing clarity to the way Bonhoeffer engaged with Scripture in his theology.

The Scriptural thread does not comprise the whole tapestry of this volume. Frick also shows great facility in philosophy, both ancient and contemporary; in fact, he begins to fill a number of gaps in our understanding of Bonhoeffer's philosophical influences. The volume also contains accounts of the early reception of some of Bonhoeffer's work. While the complete works have been available in German since the late 1990s, the critical English translation has only just been completed. Some of this work—particularly the volume comprising Bonhoeffer's writings, letters, and sermons from his time teaching at the Finkenwalde preachers seminary—is ripe for challenging or adding to conventional readings of, for example, *Life Together* and *Discipleship*. In engaging with this newly available material in English, Frick takes part in an important development in the ongoing reception of Bonhoeffer.

Many of these threads come together in Frick's penultimate, and for this reader the most important, piece in the collection, namely the essay on Bonhoeffer's preaching (265-82). The general thrust of the whole collection—Bonhoeffer's background in philosophy, his contemporary influences, his reading of Scripture, and his continuing significance for

theological reflection—comes together in an integrated whole in this essay, where Frick contends that Bonhoeffer's work as a theologian, philosopher, churchman, and interpreter of Scripture united to serve his ultimate vocation as a preacher.

The book is aimed at a scholarly reader and is intended for Bonhoeffer specialists. It fills a number of gaps in Bonhoeffer interpretation and as such it will be an important volume for specialists to consult. While some of the scholarly conventions—such as the occasional untranslated passage in German—may be off-putting to some readers, Bonhoeffer enthusiasts will be well served by reading this work by such a careful and self-aware interpreter.

Preston D.S. Parsons, Instructor, Martin Luther University College (formerly Waterloo Lutheran Seminary), Waterloo, Ontario.

Call for Papers

LAND

Despite the Mennonite tradition's centuries-long association with agriculture, "land" has not received a great deal of attention within Mennonite academic discourse. *The Conrad Grebel Review* (CGR) welcomes original article submissions from biblical, theological, historical, cultural, literary, or ethical perspectives on the many-faceted theme of land.

Possible topics include—but are not limited to—the following:

- Perspectives on land
- Challenges of "creation care" and/or "stewardship"
- Perspectives on environmentalism
- Historical and/or contemporary interactions with Indigenous peoples (relationships, treaties, ownership)
- Consideration of the "Doctrine of Discovery"
- Depictions of land and people
- Ethical considerations regarding land use
- Migration (forced, voluntary) and exile.

LENGTH: 5000-7500 WORDS

DEADLINE: JULY 31, 2019

For more details:

Derek Suderman, CGR Editor (dsuderman@uwaterloo.ca)

Send submissions to:

Stephen A. Jones, CGR Managing Editor (cgredit@uwaterloo.ca)

Call For Papers

THEOLOGY AND POLITICS/POLITICS AND THEOLOGY

While Mennonites have traditionally been reticent to participate in state politics, they have long been involved in community organization and governance at congregational, local, and even municipal levels. More recently, Mennonites have gained prominence in national politics, including current Cabinet ministers in Canada and the former Finance Minister of Paraguay. Recent years have also seen the publication of works in Political Theology by several Mennonite authors. In an apparently post-Schleitheim era, it is worth reconsidering the relationships between Mennonites, Theology, and Politics.

To advance this conversation, *The Conrad Grebel Review* (CGR) invites submissions for a special theme issue from scholars in theology, history, political science, philosophy, and other fields, as well as from practitioners, advocates, political figures, journalists, and public servants. Submissions may take the form of articles or reflections, and could focus on such areas as the following (this list is not exhaustive or prescriptive):

- Role of advocacy
- Political theology
- Alternative politics/ecclesiology
- Ecclesial polity/politics
- Contextual considerations
- Opportunities and challenges
- Perspectives on Mennonites and/in government.

LENGTH: 5000-7500 WORDS

DEADLINE: JULY 31, 2019

For more details:

Derek Suderman, CGR Editor, dsuderman@uwaterloo.ca.

To view CGR's general requirements (document format, citation style, etc.):
<https://uwaterloo.ca/grebel/publications/conrad-grebel-review/submissions>.

Send submissions to:

Stephen A. Jones, CGR Managing Editor, cgredit@uwaterloo.ca

Call for Proposals

MENNONITES, SERVICE, AND THE HUMANITARIAN IMPULSE: MCC AT 100

**October 23-24, 2020
Winnipeg, Manitoba**

In 1920 Mennonites from different ethnic and church backgrounds formed Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) to respond collaboratively to the famine ravaging Mennonite communities in the Soviet Union (Ukraine). Since then MCC has grown to embrace disaster relief, development, and peacebuilding in more than 60 countries. One of the most influential Mennonite organizations of the 20th and 21st centuries, MCC has facilitated cooperation among various Mennonite groups, constructing a broad inter-Mennonite, Anabaptist identity, and bringing Mennonites into global ecumenical and interfaith partnerships.

This centennial conference invites proposals for papers examining MCC's past, present, and future, and reflecting on Mennonite response to the biblical call to love one's neighbor through practical acts of service. Proposals are welcome from various academic perspectives, including but not limited to anthropology, conflict transformation and peacebuilding, cultural studies, development studies, economics, history, political science, sociology, and theology.

The conference will be hosted by the Chair of Mennonite Studies, University of Winnipeg, in collaboration with Canadian Mennonite University.

DEADLINE FOR PROPOSALS: DECEMBER 1, 2019

Send proposals or questions to Royden Loewen, Chair in Mennonite Studies,
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Limited research grants are available to help defray costs related to research in MCC's archives in Akron, Pennsylvania or at other MCC sites. Queries, with a brief two-paragraph description of the proposed research, should be sent to Alain Epp Weaver: aew@mcc.org. Requests for research grants will be assessed on an ongoing, rolling basis.