Book Reviews

Richard A. Kauffman and Gayle Gerber Koontz, eds. *Theology for the Church: Writings by Marlin Miller*. Institute for Mennonite Studies, 1997.

Theology for the Church is a collection of previously published articles by the late Marlin Miller. The time frame for the original articles ranges from the mid-1970s through 1995. Many represent sermons or addresses published later in popular periodicals, e.g., *Gospel Herald*, *Christianity Today*. Some are scholarly papers presented in various forums and then published in academic journals. The original oral mode of these pieces is evident.

The articles are organized into three sections: The Church and Its Witness (eight chapters), Pastoral Leadership and Theological Education (four chapters), and Theology in a Believers Church Perspective (seven chapters). As the editors suggest, the three sections focus Miller's major concerns and scholarly interests.

At one level the book outlines standard Mennonite theology. But at another level it advocates changes or hints at new directions. The theme of the essays is the church as an alternative community of faith in the world. This community is entered at baptism by adult believers; all its members are accountable to each other on matters of lifestyle and biblical interpretation.

The central theme is supported by a series of sub-themes. (1) Church members are to follow Christ in all of life. The life, teachings, and death of Jesus are normative. Christianity ethics is an ethic for the minority–believers, not for the majority–unbelieving society. (2) The gospel is the gospel of peace. Christians should reject violence in all forms, and work for peace and justice. (3) The church is gifted with leaders. The 1960s-'70s Mennonite theology of "the giftedness of all believers" is not sufficiently nuanced. The theology of the "priesthood of all believers" is a borrowed Lutheran concept that has no basis in earlier Anabaptist-Mennonite literature or theology. Leadership is a particular gift given to the church for the well-being of the whole. (4) The Bible should be read and interpreted in the context of the church.

One sub-theme is hinted at several times but not developed. Anabaptist ecclesiology, Miller suggests, is built on a christology different from the Chalcedonian two-nature doctrine. The shape of such a christology is not spelled out; nor are the implications for atonement, a theme Miller was exploring at the time of his death, developed in any form.

The purpose of the original sermons, addresses, papers was either the renewal of the Mennonite Church or a dialogue with a variety of ecumenical groups about peace or believers church theology. Both audiences reflect the world in which Miller worked, as well as his passion for a more faithful Mennonite Church and a better understanding of the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition among other Christian traitions.

This collection shows Miller at his best as preacher, teacher, and bridge builder with other Christians. The chapters would be considerably more useful if the editors had provided the historical setting for each item, e.g., Mennonite conferences or consultations, ministers' workshops, or ecumenical consultations. Each chapter has a specific context and agenda which the reader must now guess at.

Theology for the Church would be much more significant if the editors had also provided an introductory or concluding essay outlining Miller's theology and showing how these chapters reflect it. The book makes clear that Miller was breaking at important points with H.S. Bender and John Howard Yoder. Where does Miller fit into the contemporary Mennonite theological conversation and the search for a theology that will give direction to the Mennonite Church in a postmodern world? Miller was a major Mennonite theological figure and leader in the last quarter of this century. Where was he leading the church, and why? How do these essays reflect that journey and that stance?

JOHN E. TOEWS, Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo, ON

Jesus at Thirty: A Psychological and Historical Portrait. John W. Miller. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997.

In *Jesus at Thirty*, John Miller opens a fascinating interdisciplinary window onto the study of the historical Jesus. He offers a "psychohistorical" account which builds not only on the biblical evidence of the canonical gospels but also on the scientific insights of developmental psychology. In Miller's view, "Just as it is no longer possible . . . to read the Gospels without an increasingly acute awareness of the historicity and humanity of Jesus, it is likewise no

longer possible to read them without attention to the personal developmental dynamics of the one who meets us there" (7).

In the Introduction Miller defines his interdisciplinary approach and identifies his methodological presuppositions. In succeeding chapters he assesses what he views as primary contributing factors to the personal identity of the historical Jesus: his estrangement from his biological family (ch. 2, "The Starting Point"); the events surrounding his baptism (ch. 3, "The Turning Point"); his relationships with his parents (ch. 4, "Jesus and His Father"; ch. 5, "Jesus and his Mother"); his awareness of the power of evil (ch. 6, "Satan") and his sexual orientation (ch. 7, "Sexuality"). In chapter 8 ("Generativity") Miller analyzes Jesus' public ministry in his search for a "more encompassing psychological perspective that might contribute to [an] understanding of Jesus' *vocational* achievement as an evangelist among the disaffiliated" (79). Miller concludes his portrait in chapter 9 ("Jesus at Thirty") with a summary assessment of "The Man Who Emerges." In a seventeen-page appendix he offers a brief history of psychology of Jesus studies.

The author's conclusions prove as fascinating as they are vulnerable, grounded as they are in an argument from silence. For Miller, "Jesus at thirty" is a man deeply shaped by the unique circumstances of his family of origin, circumstances which must be inferred from the otherwise unexplained silence of the New Testament records: (1) the premature death of Jesus' "father" when Jesus was still young and unmarried, and (2) Jesus' subsequent need to assume the role of primary provider for his mother and his siblings. This set of inferences assists Miller in making sense not only of Jesus' apparent alienation from his mother (John. 2:1-11; 19:25-27) but also of his apparent and surprising status as a celibate heterosexual in a society where marriage was the definitive norm.

Against this backdrop Miller portrays Jesus as a man who experiences profound personal transformation through the discovery of God as "gracious Father" (31) at the time of his baptism. The Satanic temptations which Jesus encounters following his baptism are "the consequence of [this] gracious revelation of the 'father' that broke in upon Jesus at the Jordan" (55). For Miller these temptations are not, as commonly construed, Satanic attacks upon Jesus Messiah, whose messianic identity has just been confirmed by the voice from heaven. Rather, it is Jesus, *beloved son of his father,* who is "sorely

tempted by Satan to *think of himself as the long-awaited Messiah who by signs and wonders would one day deliver his people and rule the world*" (59, emphasis mine). But Jesus decisively rejects this "negative, dark side of [his] identity" (93), commits himself "to do only what God will[s] for his life" (64), and enters into "his own new-found 'calling' as 'generative' prophet-evangelist of God's love for the 'lost' (99).

Miller's work is delightfully insightful, judiciously argued, and solidly documented on both the exegetical and psychological levels. The author shows himself equally conversant in the fields of exegesis and developmental psychology. In an area where studies exhibit sharp divergences and tend toward vivid extremes, his conclusions are sober and non-spectacular. Yet Miller is not afraid to challenge scholarly consensus. Undoubtedly the most controversial elements of his argument are (1) his exegetical conclusions concerning the non-messianic character of Jesus' mission, and (2) his overwhelming reliance on a Freudian paradigm for understanding personality development.

DOROTHY JEAN WEAVER, Eastern Mennonite Seminary, Harrisonburg, VA

Who Do You Say That I AM? Christians Encounter Other Religions. Calvin E. Shenk. Scottsdale, PA and Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1997.

Shenk's central question is "Can we respect other religions and still view Christ as normative for all?" His answer, presented in the thirteen chapters of this volume–beginning with an "introduction to religious plurality" and concluding with "style of witness"–is yes. But I was not persuaded. My problem was both the question–is this the question that is central to Christians as they encounter other religions?–and the response, one that I found laced with troubling ambiguities if not self-contradictory.

In the Preface, the author describes his academic and missionary background. It begins in 1961 in Ethiopia, where his teaching included African traditional religions and comparative religious philosophy, and moves through "religious study tours" in India, Nepal, Taiwan, Japan, and Turkey (to name a few) to his current teaching at Eastern Mennonite University and research at

the Tantur Ecumenical Institute in Jerusalem. In this long career, Shenk candidly acknowledges that "my interest in religions is not merely academic . . . I bring a missiological perspective to other religions" (17). Shenk encounters other religions from the perspective of an evangelical Christian faith which has as its core confession the "uniqueness," "finality," and "normativity" of Christ.

Thus in the first chapter Shenk moves quickly from an awareness of religious plurality to a critique of the "ideology" of religious pluralism. This ideology is a "theological or philosophical assessment of other religions which celebrates plurality" (29) and "relativizes all claims that any religion makes about the truth of its doctrine or practices" (30). Thus, "religious plurality forces us to rethink the uniqueness of Jesus Christ" (31) and to ask "Is Jesus Christ merely a savior, one among many, or is he the unique Savior of humankind?" This seems to require us "either to accept religious pluralism and thereby cast doubt on the uniqueness of Christian faith, or to reject religious pluralism to remain faithful to the Christian tradition."

But are these the alternatives? Shenk believes so, I do not. Chapters 2 and 3 then discuss responses to religious plurality – exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. None of these responses is adequate for Shenk, but pluralism is especially reprehensible. The reasons are that pluralism "disavows the uniqueness and particularity of Jesus as the definitive, final, and normative revelation of God for salvation" (53), "assumes that everyone will be saved by whatever means available" (58), "leads to a relative understanding of truth" (62), "seeks to accommodate Christian faith to other religions by discarding distinctive doctrines of Christian faith" (66), "makes a judgment that all religions are true" (67), and "undermines a traditional understanding of mission" (71).

Such reasons would be sufficient to reject pluralism, if this were what pluralists affirmed. But no writer that I know favoring a pluralist approach holds all, most, or even any of the positions Shenk ascribes to pluralism. At the same time, Shenk affirms that "Christians do not claim too fully and finally comprehend God . . . we don't pretend to exhaust the divine nature" (65) and that Christians "need to be loving and tolerant" (70). How do these assertions hang together?

Chapters 4 and 5 deal with biblical perspectives on religion. Other religions are not "merely human fantasy. There is something of God in them"

(99). But finally we must avoid "Jewish perversions" (110), "false gospels," and "syncretism" (111) and come to affirm the uniqueness of Christ. These themes are again taken up in chapter 6, "Theological Issues Concerning Religious Plurality." Here Shenk says that "the Bible provides convincing evidence that human beings have awareness of God" and that there is a "general revelation" (115). But "special revelation uses the light of Christ, who is the fullness and pinnacle of revelation, to discover and unveil what is hidden in other religions" (117). This allows Shenk to turn to "Assessment of the Religions" in chapter 7. Here he again affirms that "we can believe in the finality of Christ and still value positive aspects of other religions" (142). But what these positive aspects are never comes into view.

Moreover, Shenk argues that affirming these aspects does not mean that "all religions are the same" (who argues this? I don't know). While he rightly points out that "religions not only face in different directions, they also ask different questions" (144), this insight is not developed. Nor does he heed his own advice to avoid overgeneralizing about other religions. Instead, he says the Hindu belief in cyclical time is wrong (145), Buddhists don't have revelation from God, and Muslims wrongly understand it (146). The Quran is "silent about redemption" and there is"a lack of ethical sensitivity" in Hinduism (147). This discussion leads back to Shenk's central question "Who is Christ?" in Chapter 8. Not surprisingly, he reaffirms his understanding of Christ as "final" and "normative" as he turns in the remaining chapters to discuss Christian witness in the context of other religions.

According to Shenk, witness to Christ is the first–and apparently only–duty of the Christian in relation to others: "our task is to witness to Christ as the center of our faith" (178). Since all are called to follow Jesus, then all Christians must all the time be inviting others to that end: "when Jesus is the norm, all other claims are relativized" (176). Yet Shenk says that "this does not deny the reality of the knowledge of God that people had before Jesus came, or the true knowledge which people have today where he has not been named" (181). But such knowledge is seemingly unimportant since "the task of Christian mission is to interact with other religions so there can be an encounter with the Christian message" (183). This theme is pursued in chapter 10 on the "Forms of Witness: Church, Presence, Service, Evangelism." Shenk argues that "the Christian gospel is conversionist" (204); indeed, it is for him

the only theme of the Good News.

Even dialogue is, in Shenk's view, a "form of witness" (209). This I find not only troubling but suspect. Dialogue between persons of different faiths has emerged in recent decades as an important new development in the relations between persons of different faiths. Dialogue is not witness, nor is it aimed at conversion. But this is not Shenk's view. He says that dialogue contributes to "mutual understanding and growing friendship" (213) and that "we listen with sympathetic appreciation to other religions" (214). But finally he argues that dialogue is a "prelude to witness, [has] witness dimensions, and [can] be a witness in itself" (219). If so, then it becomes, as many non-Christians suspicious of Christian invitations to dialogue allege, "a wolf in sheep's clothing," a covert strategy of evangelism. Saying that "we need genuine respect and appreciation for other religions" does not make it so, when the reason for such knowledge is to enhance Christian witness to Jesus Christ. As Shenk remarks, "when we befriend Muslims . . . people may be more willing to discuss personal faith issues . . . in this context witness can be both person-centered and truth-centered." (255) This, alas, is not authentic dialogue.

Yet Shenk also says that in dialogue we need "genuine respect and appreciation" for other religions. How can this be, if dialogue is understood as a form of witness? This is the contradiction that lies at the heart of this volume.

For Shenk the only question in a Christian's relating to people of other faiths is that of witness. Anything else is, seemingly, a betrayal of the Christ that stands at the heart of faith. But is this the relevant question? Why does the fact that some people are Muslim, some Buddhist, some Hindu, some Sikh, etc. call into question central claims of the Christian faith? Why is the Christian called in relation to persons of other faiths to the single note of witness to Jesus as the Christ? Does the multiplicity of faiths challenge the Way to God present in Jesus Christ? Shenk seems to think so, I don't. The reality of other faiths is better approached under the doctrine of God's revelation to humanity then under the heading of God's redemption in Jesus Christ.

DARROL F. BRYANT, Renison College, Waterloo, ON

Journeys: Mennonite Stories of Faith and Survival in Stalin's Russia. John B. Toews, ed. and trans. Kindred Productions, Winnipeg, MB and Hillsboro, KS, 1998. *The Silence Echoes: Memoirs of Trauma and Tears*. Sarah Dyck, ed. and trans. Pandora Press, Kitchener, ON and Herald Press, Scottdale, PA, 1997.

If you want to know, hear, and feel what it was like to live in the Soviet union as a Mennonite or "German," read these two excellent books. You might cry. You might rage. You might say, why haven't people been told? Not that the memoirists in these collections are self-pitying. No, they just tell it as it was.

Historian J. B. Toews' *Journeys* consists of four fairly long stories edited, abridged, and translated from personal interviews with two deeply religious women and from memoirs written by two men (with more complicated faith), all of them within the USSR. Toews does not say how or when he got three of these pieces, but all are original sources. Sarah Dyck, a literary specialist, has compiled a more eclectic book of thirty-three contributions. As she read more and more memoirs by *Aussiedler* Mennonite and German-speaking Soviet citizens, emigres to Germany whose life stories were being published, especially in *Der Bote*, she knew her work: these moving stories should be translated, made known.

Much has been written about Soviet oppression, but these two books make the topic personal. It is like sitting at the table when your Tante Kathe or Uncle Gerhard begin to talk. Many hours later, numbed and overwhelmed, you find yourself freshly bereaved. You hear that a relative was rounded up at midnight, imprisoned, starved. Another, under guard, was marched through snowdrifts past frozen corpses to chop down trees in Siberian forced labor camps. They had lost not only house, village, and community, but hundreds of years of Mennonite-cherished faith and institutions. And you say, "That's how it was? Oh God, what were we doing at that time? Playing hopscotch?"

These books make accessible to the general reader the insider view, stories of evil but also stories of eloquent endurance, love, faith and, yes, heroism. Says one survivor: ". . . amid the criminality of all this terrible evil, there were always noble persons who clearly saw the injustices of such mass oppression" (*Journeys*, 136). Earlier Mennonite memoirs, often self-published in German, were not widely distributed, and correspondents from the USSR,

wary of reprisals, steered clear of anything that might be construed as "counter-revolutionary" or critical. Only the fall of Communism and the *Aussiedler* migration to Germany have allowed survivors to speak more freely and specific details to surface. Thanks to compilers, translators, and editors like Dyck and Toews, these stories are now available to a larger audience.

The two collections, well edited and translated, differ in format and content. Toews's concise introduction provides a quick up-to-date history of Mennonites in Russia from beginning to end, some 200 years. In her introduction, Dyck is more subjective and passionate. Citing literature and history (Goethe, Solzhenitsyn), she pleads with readers to listen to the "host of witnesses" from the "man-made hell" who know what happened, and to learn from their experiences.

The Silence Echoes, in a loosely organized chronology, describes life in the Soviet inferno through a great variety of forms and voices, in poems, letters, and "as told to" or autobiographical stories. There are haunting childhood memories: of Christmas, a buggy ride with Father, of enough to eat, juxtaposed with a starving child's dream of rice pudding, a mother watching her little ones die. Narrators often seem in shock: "No one could cry. We had lost too much" (32). A half-dozen stories are anonymous, as though to cover the shame of unspeakable events: a mother submitting to sexual demands of the collective farm chairman Vanya in order to save kernels of grain to feed her children, or innocent men purposely being fed salted fish without water so they would die to become shark bait for a floating prison ship. Some only in snapshots, some in stories covering many years, the writers present their evidence. Caught by the Red Army in 1945, Heinrich Peters says peace was "the rapes of our mothers, of our sisters . . . that's how we experienced the days of Liberation" (159).

The most "literary" memoir in Dyck's collection is Dietrich Rempel's "And Life Goes On." At times lyrical, the story of the unfortunate villagers of Eugenheim has unforgettable images: the white shroud of a dead child bobbing in the wake of a tanker carrying deportees into banishment, an old man throwing flower after flower out of a train window to mark the graves "somewhere in the sand" (223).

In *Journeys* Anna Kroeker, in a somewhat jumbled recollection of events, sees miracles of God amidst her greatest hardships. Justina Martens,

introduced as offering "one of relatively few surviving female accounts of Mennonite exile experience in Asiatic Russia during the 1940's" (49) was designated a *Kulak*. Single, she moves back and forth between Mennonite settlements, assists her sister-in-law in raising two children, and is forcibly exiled. Resettled among Russians in frigid northern Kazakhstan, without proper shelter, food, or clothing, yet put to work, she relates how she managed in a situation where all you can think of is staying alive. Martens focuses on how she kept spiritual life going, indeed becoming a *de facto* preacher to young German (Mennonite) boys and girls, quietly and illegally.

Abram Berg, a journalist trained in animal husbandry, describes his time in jail, on prison train transports, and in Karlag, a Karaganda agricultural concentration camp, the "Island in the Steppe." Struggling with his fate, Berg is driven to leave a record so that "at least some of the people he had known would not be nameless victims of a massive terror" (97). Memoirists do not tell everything. Most steer away from personally incriminating or intimate subjects, but Berg dares to reveal how savvy a survivor needed to be and to mention male-female sexual contacts in forced labor camps. He does not discuss God, but asks why Soviet policies were so insane.

The fourth "faith" witness in *Journeys* is a Mennonite minister, Aron Warkentin. His is an ongoing conflict with God. Following his unsuccessful attempt to emigrate to Canada in 1929, he is imprisoned and experiences the shock that Mennonites first felt when targeted for their religious and ethnic background. "We often asked ourselves why God was dealing with us so severely" (160). Subsequently, he concludes that "there are simply things in the human story which cannot be understood or explained" (179). During the Great Terror in 1937, a man with five children, he is arrested, sentenced to ten years, stuffed into a locked cattle car, then floated north–"Our heavily loaded barges glided along this tributary of the Dvina River like colossal coffins" (183)–eventually reaching an almost certain death camp in distant Kotlas.

In all the accounts the editors seek to reproduce the style of the original story teller, so you shouldn't read to criticize technique. The compelling content of these memoirs precludes literary dissection. The awkwardness of certain passages adds to their authenticity; these are ordinary people telling about events that well up: how it was, for instance, when suddenly you and your hard-working parents were pariahs. How they took away even the family cow.

Why mice tasted good. How it stank when you were locked inside a fetid "red wagon."

Memoirs generally either merely report events or are introspective. Dyck says her writers are gentle, grateful, and they write to remember, to respect their tortured dead, and to appeal to the world to end tyrannical oppression. But these two collections do more. They raise the ultimate problem of good and evil, when evil appears stronger. They show how individuals respond under situations of terror, how faith helps people to survive, how brutality can become everyday, how ethnic hatreds are perpetuated. In this way they raise political questions of how Soviet citizens of German-speaking background became scapegoats. Are they really introspective? Not directly.

These memoirists leave the answers to others. Driven to break the silence, they simply tell the truth as they saw it and trust, as Jesus said, that "the truth shall make you free." A survivor, Franz Thiessen, muses, "Why am I writing this? Writing organizes one's thoughts . . . allows us to remember and calms the soul." Or it may be, as Toni Morrison has said, that the function of freedom is to free someone else. Perhaps these stories could awaken consciousness of oppression, as Dyck so fervently expresses it.

But there is another objective. Often, remembering bodies thrown out on the windswept frozen steppes, the story tellers in both books challenge the reader: Does anyone remember? Does anyone care? These books say, Yes.

ANNE KONRAD, Toronto, Ontario