Book Reviews

Intercessory Prayer and the Communion of Saints: Mennonite and Catholic Perspectives. Edited by Darrin W. Snyder Belousek and Margaret R. Pfeil. Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2022. $23.79 (paperback).

This book begins by recounting the story of Jun Yamada, a twenty-four-year-old Japanese Mennonite student who nearly died of leukemia in 1987. Despite excellent medical treatment, Jun slipped into a coma, and Japanese doctors announced he would die shortly. As Jun lay unconscious in the hospital, his family and fellow Mennonites began praying for him. Thanks to a friendship between the Yamada family and Fr. Alfonso Fausone of the Society of the Divine Word (SVD), so too did a network of local Catholics in Japan who interceded to God and an early member of their order, Fr. Joseph Freinademetz (1852–1908).

Jun gradually returned to full health, though his doctors had no medical explanation. In 2000, the Vatican's Congregation for the Causes of Saints authorized the Nagoya Diocese in Japan to inquire into the cause for Fr. Freinademetz's sainthood because of the possibility that his intercessions had assisted in Jun Yamada's remarkable recovery. Based on findings of the diocesan committee, the Vatican approved Jun Yamada's recovery as a "true and proper miracle," and on October 5, 2003, at St. Peter's Basilica, Rome, Pope John Paul II canonized Fr. Freinademetz, with Jun Yamada in attendance. The pope predicted, "This miracle will be one of the bridges between Roman Catholic and Mennonites in an ecumenical point of view" (32–33).

This volume is the fifth in a series published by Bridgefolk, a grassroots collaboration of largely North American Catholics and Mennonites that explores topics of theology, ritual, and practice in order to honor each other's role in the mission of Christ's church. This book is a collection of presentations from the 2015 Bridgefolk Conference, which reflected on Catholic-Mennonite collaboration in Jun Yamada's healing, and from the 2016 Mennonite Catholic Theological Colloquium, which pondered intercessory prayer and the communion of saints using biblical, theological, archaeological, historical, and liturgical approaches.

Contributors assume that intercession is a valid expression of prayer for living Christians and for the world and agree that intercession should be addressed primarily to God. At issue is whether intercessions to, by, or with departed saints across time have any merit, and if so, how such intercessions might make theological sense. Underneath this question lies differing imaginations of the church. In the Catholic imagination, the church has three "states": wayfaring Christians still living on earth, departed Christians who are being purified, and purified Christian saints in glory who perceive God as God is. For Catholics, Christians in these three states are in communion with each other through Christ. Since Christ's communion with us is not limited by time and space, the members

of Christ's body, the church, can also commune with each other unbounded by time and space. In this view of the church, intercessions to and by deceased Christians like Fr. Freinademetz are possible, though not required.

In the Anabaptist imagination, the church consists of living Christians on earth who commune with God and each other. Anabaptists agree with Luther that at death Christians fall asleep to await the resurrection, without an intermediate state of purification. In this view, intercessions involving deceased Christians make no sense. As several essayists note, modern Mennonites in North America are shifting to a belief that, upon death, Christians immediately enter heaven to be with God. I vividly recall one Easter sermon in the mid-1990s when I outlined the Anabaptist view about falling asleep at death to await the resurrection. I soon received a sharp note from an upset member of the congregation, a lifelong Mennonite in her seventies who insisted I was wrong because "when we die, we immediately go to heaven." As one contributor notes, the step is small from this belief to a belief that we can pray to or with Christians now alive in God's presence. In fact, some Mennonite contributors are disposed, on biblical and theological grounds, to experiment with intercessory prayers that include deceased Christians.

Bridgefolk participants do not merely present scholarly papers; they also worship and pray together. Accordingly, they have developed a Bridgefolk Litany of Witnesses, included in this book, developed from the Catholic Litany of Saints most often used in the Easter vigil. In this Litany of Witnesses, the cantor names notable biblical and historical persons, some Anabaptist, some Catholic, and some from other Christian traditions. The assembly responds with "Pray with us," altered from the traditional Catholic request for the saints to "Pray for us." This litany has helped Mennonites in Bridgefolk sense their participation in the communion of witnesses from the past. It would not be a big stretch for Mennonite pastors to use this litany, or one like it, in services of remembrance for those who have died, now commonly held once a year in a number of congregations. Doing so would enlarge the congregation's sense of the deceased cloud of witnesses evoked in Hebrews 11 and 12 who actively surround Christians still living.

The essayists, balanced between Catholic and Mennonite, write with gentleness and respect. All are humble before the mysterious miracle of Jun Yamada's recovery and are too wise to imply that intercessory prayer "works" in the sense of God giving us all we ask for. Instead, they suggest that the value of intercession is to expand our ecclesial and eschatological imagination, to wish others well, to develop a habit of orienting our hearts to others, and to participate in God's healing love in the world. Catholic contributors clarify that saints in glory have no special capacity to make God hear us and do not deliver special benefits if we venerate them. The final essay concludes that "differences in approaches to prayer to the saints are significant but they are not the greatest of obstacles to full communion between Catholics and Mennonites" (210–11).

The editors have preserved the unique voice of each author, whether Japanese, Canadian, or American, and have sequenced the essays in an exemplary way for

clarity of reading. Regrettably, the table of contents does not have page numbers, making it difficult to find a specific chapter without leafing through the book.

We have many books in English on how to pray in a cornucopia of ways, but fewer that explore the theology of intercessory prayer and what we can reasonably expect will happen when we do it. Alan Kreider, to whom this book is dedicated, along with Eleanor Kreider, and who was an enthusiastic proponent of intercessory prayer, once asked me why there are so few good books on the theology of intercession. Though I had no answer, I suspect he would have been pleased with this book's contribution to that end.

Intercession is not about persuading God. All expressions of prayer primarily function to weave relationships among God, others, world, and self. How apt, therefore, that this volume originated from a network of relationships in Japan that bridged ecclesial boundaries, led to compassionate prayer, and created even deeper relationships. A question lingering at the end of this book is precisely about relationships. If prayer is about braiding relationships, what might happen if Mennonites occasionally expanded their prayers to include faithful witnesses to God across time? How might that enrich our awareness of the grand eschatological project that God has been artfully creating in the world throughout human history?

Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary DANIEL P. SCHROCK

T&T Clark Handbook of Anabaptism. Edited by Brian C. Brewer. London and New York: T&T Clark, 2022. $157.50 (hardcover)/ $126 (e-book).

This volume falls within the genre of subject-area companions/ encyclopedias/handbooks, all of which purport to offer up-to-date reference guidance to interested parties, ranging from advanced students to highly motivated laypeople. These have not been lacking in the Reformation subfield of radical (non-magisterial) and Anabaptist history. A good comparator would be the *Brill Companion to Anabaptism and Spiritualism, 1521–1700* (2011), coedited by John Roth and James Stayer and made up of under half the topics proffered here but with longer excursus.[1] A rather small and coherent group of scholars contributes so often to such collections of topical essays that it is no wonder the editor of the *Mennonite Quarterly Review* had to invite an outsider to review this latest assemblage. The thirty-five authors arrayed here bear such well-known names as Hans-Jürgen Goertz and James M. Stayer as well as those of relative

[1] The encyclopedia category in this field is represented by Donald B. Kraybill, *Encyclopedia of Amish, Brethren, Hutterites, and Mennonites* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010).

newcomers like David Y. Neufeld, with further admirable degrees of expertise and distinction in between.[2]

Brian Brewer calls this present aggregation "pictures at an exhibition" (8). The reader is to consider each chapter rather than meet it as a purported truth. A conclusion permeating this volume is that those strains of thought and practice that we group together under the rubric of Anabaptism were thoroughly heterogeneous—not just in their origins but in the conceptualization of their faiths. The student of early modern popular religion must be content with nuance and variability—a trend that we today find throughout the historical record. In a foundational age given to enforced orthodoxies, popular beliefs were dynamic, a quality they retained as their contexts incessantly changed. Troy Osborne's word *murky* could apply to most aspects of Anabaptist life and not just to the Dutch (133); Geoffrey Dipple uses the phrase "incredibly pliable designation" to describe the concept of Anabaptist in 1527 (153).

Andrea Strübind sets the stage for a subsequent closer discussion of regional and person-oriented centers (14–24): Switzerland; Balthasar Hubmaier, a particularly consequential leader; Tyrol and Moravia with their Hutterites; central and southern Germany with their Thomas Müntzer and the Peasants' War; low Germany both before and after 1535; the riveting events in Münster; and Menno Simons and the Mennonites. Individual leaders drew influences from many sides, including from Catholicism and Luther (e.g., Brewer, 525), and they in turn, for example Melchior Hoffman, cast their thought into varying seedbeds. Despite the now universally accepted polygenesis, Strübind sees the formation of communities around believer's baptism in Switzerland as the foundation point of Reformation Anabaptism (15).

In its varied totality, this anthology leads this reader to present four generalizations about the plurality of types included under the Anabaptist rubric. First, what sets Anabaptist and nonconforming faith varieties historiographically apart from early modern Catholicism, Lutheranism, and Reformed confessions is that we are still gathering a factual account of the individual leaders and the groups who followed them. It seems that a day-to-day and concept-to-concept analysis exists of those Reformers who ultimately left an indelible imprint of their activities on the states where their theologies became established—referred to here as the magisterial Reformers. By contrast, radical thinkers were, sometimes on pain of death, obligated to conceal their convictions and their missionary undertakings. Scholars have had painstakingly to piece together their contacts and continue to delineate and assess them to this day, but since the mid-twentieth century, the pejorative assessments of Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed historians have given way to a dispassionate, even an admiring judgment. But apropos of the early period, Martin Rothkegel points out that a large quantity of Hutterian texts have not yet been studied (111), and Strübind says that much work

[2] I feel obligated to state that David Neufeld was my doctoral student at the University of Arizona.

on the spread of Swiss Anabaptism remains to be done (16). Kat Hill draws attention to the paucity of sources on the central German movement (81).

Second, a theme underlying (articulated or not) several contributions is the low level of resort to writing and the printing press as a mode of dissemination, especially when compared to the magisterial Reformers. Those adepts who underscored their theologies on paper, even in manuscript form, claimed, it would seem, greater weight among their contemporaries and the longevity of their ideas even until today (the probable Michael Sattler, Balthasar Hubmaier, Menno Simons). Not every dissemination occurred by means of "vernacular orality" (Neufeld, 39). As the only leader with a doctorate in theology, Hubmaier published extensively (Kirk MacGregor, 65). Simons's *Fondamentboeck* of 1540 and subsequent editions played a part in the early success of the Mennonites (Osborne, 134). Spiritualist and prophetic expression may have appealed to the many analphabetic in society. But see Dipple on the broad extent of spiritualism among some broadly literate groups (151–67). Karl Koop notes that by 1700, "over 100 printings of [Anabaptist] confessions of faith were in circulation" (311).

Third, Anabaptists coalesced into communal groups, for their beliefs emphasized upright lifestyle in relation to other Christians, whether through ritual acts such as believer's baptism (with conviction preceding initiation) or in social interaction. Both Luther and Calvin stressed the bond between the individual and God, and the *Gemeinde* (community and congregation) was principally an earthly—a geographic and administrative—organization. Anabaptists stood collectively before their deity in loving ties with one another. Occasionally (for instance, among the Uttenreuth Dreamers and the Blood Friends), these ties took sexual forms (Hill, 83; Nicole Grochowina, 191–92). Luther was not simply stereotyping religious nonconformists with the traditional slander of sexual depravity. Living in Moravia in a *Haushaben* of five hundred souls and sharing goods promoted a more separated communal model (Stayer, 327–30), but in fact most Anabaptists lived in close proximity to "nonbelievers" and adapted to these neighbors.

Fourth, the ideal of suffering, derived from medieval monastic ideals and the imitation of Christ's crucifixion, in varied shapes suffused Anabaptism. Julia Qiuye Zhao writes specifically about suffering and martyrdom (339–54) but not comprehensively. The concept of *yieldedness* (*Gelassenheit*) could facilitate submission to prosecution, including torture and execution, but also to the seizure of properties, relegation from hometowns, wandering instability, seeking out and (re)domestication of marginal spaces, migration to other countries and continents, and financial contributions to other Anabaptists forced into exile. Even banning and being banned entailed pain for both parties. Martyrdom had many forms and degrees, and participants in this movement endured at least some. Heirs committed their stories to memory in hymns, sustaining the singers as well as their subjects in song.

At the end of reading this array of specialized essays, the conclusion is unavoidable that none of the summarizations of Anabaptist teaching that we have

inherited are accurate: not believer's baptism, not the commitment to nonviolence, not communal ownership of property. In the diversity of this movement, we encounter a harbinger of modern Protestantism in America, quite apart from whether Anabaptists should rightly be counted as Protestants. In a Europe ostensibly organized around the principle of "the common good," we encounter in these ranks a high variety of religious individualism—perhaps a result only to be expected of such a doctrine as "the priesthood of all believers." States tried to impose discipline toward uniformity even as self-appointed missionary leaders measured everyone else's religiosity by their own inspiration. Small wonder that some heads of church and state attempted to withdraw access to Scripture from ordinary people again. Even so, earthly powers could hardly counter the alleged direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The question may be directed at every essay: What role did women play? Grochowina's chapter (185–203) takes up the "early-late" discussions that have colored recent scholarship by breaking off the "early" stage of Anabaptism. She asks whether the initial phase of nonconformist expression really did elevate women participants to a higher status than their gender generally enjoyed. She concludes, "The vast majority was neither willing nor capable of changing contemporary gender relations and hierarchies. . . . As long as the Anabaptists were persecuted, it was impossible for the movement to settle down and establish structures which mirrored the contemporary gender hierarchies as such" (195). This balanced treatment could well be used in combination with Sigrun Haude's longer analysis that includes the later period, in the Roth and Stayer *Companion* (425–65).

Historians of theology will pay greater attention to part 2, "Doctrine," with its range of specific themes (207–437). A concluding trio (561–609) makes clear how vital a part modern-day descendants of early-modern Anabaptists play, along with groups like the Quakers, in North American and world affairs, particularly in laboring for peace and providing social relief.

University of Arizona SUSAN C. KARANT-NUNN

Winterkill: Poems. By Todd Davis. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2016. $19.95 (paperback).

Native Species: Poems. By Todd Davis. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2019. $19.95 (paperback).

Coffin Honey: Poems. By Todd Davis. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2022. $19.95 (paperback)

Todd Davis, a native of Elkhart County, taught for several years at Goshen College, forming bonds with numerous Mennonites (including many writers) during those years. Now settled for some time at Penn State Altoona, he has produced seven books of poems as well as numerous scholarly works.

These three recent poetry volumes, published by Michigan State University Press in finely produced and nearly uniform editions, form part of a large, complex, but strongly defined project of praise and lament—one in which Davis's central Pennsylvania region, with its mountains, forests, and towns, becomes something of a microcosm for the whole project of life on earth. Through intense attention to both subject matter and poetic craft, Davis illuminates a world that is dangerously threatened and yet remains beautiful and, at times, resilient. While largely devoid of conventional "Mennonite" markers—very few buggies or quaint Low German sayings—these books strike this reviewer as deeply Anabaptist in their active, purposeful love for neighbors, the planet, and all its "native species."

It is no accident that all three book titles are natural references, or that two refer to death. More than many poets, Davis engages deeply and knowledgably with the natural world—through information gathered from external sources and from many hours hunting, fishing, and walking in the mountains near his home. He takes as given that we are ourselves mammals, part of the natural cycle of creation, death, and new life, though distinguished by our apparent determination to wreak havoc on the rest of creation and on each other.

The first of these volumes, *Winterkill*, opens with the brief "Nicrophorus," establishing its focus on natural cycles as it depicts "burying beetles" who enter the carcasses of small animals to feed their larvae. As Davis writes, they "carry / the corpse of the world" to the pit "that consumes / what we love, and feeds / those who come after us" (1). But "Homily" quickly offers a memorable, funny reminder that we often do not share the smooth functioning of natural processes: "I've been thinking about the God / I pray to with no lasting effect and note the effortless work / the stream does as it feeds these bushes" (5).

What is our proper role in such a world? Despite the beauty of the mountains, streams, and valleys of central Pennsylvania ("if you keep your eyes on the horizon, / the mountains look heavenly," Davis remarks in "By the Rivers of Babylon" [11]), its creatures, human and otherwise, are threatened on all sides but especially by the venality and cruelty of men (by which Davis usually means *men*). His little family exists in a kind of oasis among poachers, fracking, and global warming skeptics, where the overdose death of the father of a son's teammate is no great surprise.

Part of the project is to particularize even those who do wrong, to make them more than mere stereotypes. "Crow's Murder" carefully describes three boys who together shoot a hapless bird:

> The kind one who came first to these woods
> after the bulldozers left. . . .
> It was he who sometimes fed her
> bread. And the mean one she'd seen beaten by the father
> and who now used his fists to forget. And the scared one
> who stole his grandfather's .22, wanting to prove
> he was tough. (21–22)

There is always a backstory, Davis suggests, even among those who perform what seems to be senseless violence; yet that fact will not bring back a crow blown apart by bullets. Death is inevitable, not evil in itself, but to kill without need degrades everyone involved.

Part 2 of *Winterkill* is the long poem "Salvelinus fontinalis," a meditation on fishing for brook trout, aging, and God: "We all worship something. / I'll take the beauty and strength / of these fish, holy and godlike" (33). The energy of the fish and the somewhat guilty pleasure of eating them lead into a profession of allegiance to the local: "The news of the universe I'm interested in / is written on the sides of these fish" (35). "Carnivore" takes this entanglement further, as the poet adds up "the things I loved / and killed," from deer to cows to rabbits and ducks, and recognizes "I'm a slave / to the memory of each one / I've plucked and gutted" (40).

The circle of life is real, Davis suggests, but for anyone paying his sort of attention, it is not entirely comfortable. "But who doesn't look awkward in death?" he asks ruefully in a poem describing the deer he's just shot and opened to cool the meat (68). In "How Animals Forgive Us," the link between humans and animals becomes even more explicit and unsettling; the poet refuses to hunt bear, he says, "because when they rise up on hind legs / I see my dead father walking toward me" (69).

Such recognition of the kinship between humans and other animals is sometimes, loosely and wrongly, seen as sentimentality. Davis takes the epigraph of the second book under review, *Native Species*, from William Stafford—"What I believe is, all animals have one soul"—not to engage in fuzzy mysticism but to pursue what he calls "faithful negotiations" in one of the first poems in the book. How can we engage the natural world with integrity, he asks in poems like "Hard Winter," when we do so much damage not only to it but also to each other? The first-person-plural narrator of this poem recounts a whole string of human disasters, including two children abused by their uncle after their parents die in an accident and a man who loses four fingers to a factory machine: "I worry about the girl, though, what was done to her / and the way people talk, a mixture of sympathy and gossip" (11).

Time and again, Davis juxtaposes the cruelty and venality of humans with the cleaner lives of animals, who kill to eat but rarely torment others of their own species. What threatens to become a general bleakness is relieved by moments of dark wit; there are the reckless boys who let the family pickup crash through the lake ice in "Cracks," not thinking of the cost to extract it "or how their moms will cry as their dads berate / such stupidity, which of course is inherited" (14). And there is the mother who can't cook but throws leftovers together and calls it "goulash" after their Hungarian neighbor.

The title poem of *Native Species* memorably envisions a man who becomes so entranced by deer that he eventually, mysteriously becomes one himself, leaving home to lurk in the woods nearby. Somehow his family accepts this change; his sons "swear only to hunt squirrel and rabbit" (28), and his daughter ties yellow

yarn into his antlers. Such transformations run through human storytelling for thousands of years; Davis's treatment intimates a deep recognition that we are not so separated from the rest of the world as we assume.

Coffin Honey, published in 2022, carries forward and amplifies the themes of *Winterkill* and *Native Species*, employing even more lyrical and innovative forms. From the first poem, "If We Have to Go," the tone is apocalyptic: viruses killing off a deer herd, "every part of the world / on fire." The social awareness is unsparing as well:

> Here in the mountains,
> neither grief nor dreams
> will save us: what little water
> we have our parents use to green
> the lawn and frack the ground. (1)

The hapless boys who speak here can only amuse themselves as the world burns, drinking beer and tossing tires at the dead deer on the roadsides. Like so many of us, they *notice* the impending disasters around them but feel helpless to address them.

In this ominously vulnerable world, we meet a number of recurring characters. Some are people, often young and defenseless—a girl who hunts with her father and has (at least for now) stopped cutting herself, a boy whose brutal uncle "touches him / in the cellar" (8), another who researches "the last lynching in Jeff Davis County" (13) with his half-black cousin. But there are animals too. "Hunting with Dogs" begins with an epigraph from Robert Bringhurst that insists "the mind is made out of the animals / it has attended," and the poem traces the human-dog connection all the way back to "thirty-five thousand years ago, [when] the first pup was snatched from a den-litter" (5).

And then there is Ursus, the great bear who wanders through *Coffin Honey* like a demigod or totem, unruly, unhuman, an enigmatic but essential presence. We first meet him observed by a drone that he eventually destroys, though the poem does not mourn that loss; instead, it asks a question crucial to the whole project of these books: "What's the appropriate / music for extinction?" (7). Perhaps a fugue, an oratorio, or a nocturne, the poem suggests. Fittingly, then, the entire book is organized something like a musical suite, shifting styles and modes as it moves among its subjects but never veering far from its particular place, its set of characters, and the particular fusion of anger, mourning, love, and lyrical craft that Davis brings to every page.

The pages of *Coffin Honey* include many formal variations. The stunning "dream elevator," whose four sections are spaced through the book like dividers, sprawls across the page like an asymmetrical web, slowing readers' attention as it shifts focus from the abused boy mentioned earlier to his mother, who lies in a tub:

> water tepid
> skin sluffing
> scales

like deceit
    the secret
knowledge
        of her child's
violation
    a heat
        that fogged the mirror[3]

In the final section of the poem, the raped boy, his uncle, and Ursus the bear come together in a moment of shocking, strangely inexorable violence that culminates one of the narrative lines that threads through *Coffin Honey*. The book can also be read in several other ways: as a series of character sketches that at times nearly become dramatic monologues; as a "deep ecology" of the region, striving to pay distributed if not utterly balanced attention to the widest possible range of characters and concerns; as lament and elegy for a world that seems like it may well indeed be burning up. "Bears are born understanding the eternal" (53), Davis claims in "Bog Parable," another Ursus poem, drawing our attention to those who may indeed grasp both the eternal and the tangible, physical world better than we do.

In some circles, attention to "place" is seen as irrelevant, as a quaint turning away from the more important realm of people in rooms talking to each other. As Davis reminds us, however, such condescension is dangerous. We all exist in the physical world, whether we notice it or not; we are all formed of worldly stuff, and what we do in it and to it will determine whether this weird human experiment will continue in anything like its present form, both utterly flawed and at its best quite magnificent.

Scholar David Abram writes that shamans "are precisely those persons who are especially sensitive and susceptible to the expressive calls, gestures and signs of the wider, more-than-human field of beings, and who are able to reply in kind. The shaman is an intermediary, a mediator between the human community and the more-than-human community in which the human group is embedded."[4] I am quite sure that Davis, with good Mennonite humility, would refuse the label of shaman, but his poetry does some of that kind of work, bringing us together with the particular beings of his locale in knowing, precise detail and with equal measures of sympathy and rigor.

These poems are also often quite beautiful, their sounds and rhythms resonating in layered, complex ways. I will give the last word to these lines from

[3] Some of this material first appeared in Jeff Gundy, "On Todd Davis, *Coffin Honey*, and a Dead Beaver," *CMW Journal* 14 (2022).

[4] David Abram, "Animism, Perception, and Earthly Craft of the Magician," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, ed. Bron Raymond Taylor (New York: Continuum, 2008), https://wildethics.org/essay/animism-perception-and-earthly-craft-of-the-magician/.

"How to Measure Sea Level Rise," a lovely, ominous, visionary poem of an unsettlingly plausible future:

> We huddle together in the dark water lapping
> at ankles, asking what harbor we might sail, where any of us
> might safely drop anchor. (113)

Bluffton University JEFF GUNDY

Secular Nonviolence and the Theo-Drama of Peace: Anabaptist Ethics and the Catholic Christology of Hans Urs von Balthasar. By Layton Boyd Friesen. London: Bloomsbury, 2022. $26.23 (paperback)/$90 (hardcover).

Layton Boyd Friesen's *Secular Nonviolence and the Theo-Drama of Peace* is the most recent installment in the new Studies in Anabaptist Theology and Ethics series, published by T&T Clark. The opening question of the book is "What happens when a five-century tradition of Christian pacifism no longer needs Jesus to support nonviolence?" and its contents provide a response by turning to an unlikely place: the Catholic theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar.

The introduction sets the stage for the book and introduces its paradigm, and the first two chapters provide an interpretive history of Mennonite pacifism's transformations during the twentieth century and up to the present. Following the author's account of how Mennonite pacifism ought to be reconceptualized as a form of union with the living Christ, chapters 3 through 5 use von Balthasar's creedal and theo-dramatic theology as a resource to resolve and reinterpret several dilemmas presented in the first half of the book. At its center, the book presents an argument for "regaining" Christian pacifism through contemplation of and participation in the divine mystery of Jesus Christ, as it is defined in the Chalcedonian Creed and interpreted by von Balthasar. In some ways, this effort is meant to assist Mennonite peace theologians with the task of living in what Charles Taylor calls a "secular age," and in other ways the book will serve to broaden the horizons of Christian pacifism by mediating between and combining Mennonite and Catholic theologies of peace.

However, there is a basic premise at the core of the book that deserves far more questioning than Friesen provides. The frame-narrative of *Secular Nonviolence and the Theo-Drama of Peace* revolves around a distinction between Christian and secular forms of pacifism and nonviolence. Where Christian pacifism is "ecclesial, scriptural, baptismal, and spiritual," secular pacifism is a form of "civility" that is "instrumental, rational, and egalitarian" (27). After exploring both of these "sides," Friesen proposes to "enter the theological vision of Balthasar as a resource for living with this tension" (27). But this distinction is an ideal-type that does not reflect the scholarly literature on the topic of "the secular" or the social world it attempts to conceptualize. First of all, there are many secular pacifists and

nonreligious critics of violence who strongly critique instrumental, rational, and state-sanctioned ways of thinking (from the resistance to the violence of instrumental reason by Frankfurt School critical theorists to Dorothee Sölle's pacifist critique of Christofascism). Second, there are severe limitations to relying on any distinction between good Christian theology and bad secular nonviolence, and there are even potentially violent consequences of reducing the definition of secular nonviolence to its rationalist and state-focused expressions, as Friesen does.

By relying solely on Charles Taylor for an analysis of secularity in chapter 2, Friesen limits his understanding of secular life to a rarefied vision of the world that can only fail to live up to Christian measures, even when there are many ways in which secularity is taken up in scholarly and political ways against the very problems that he attributes to it (for example, critics of violence like Judith Butler who reject neoliberal notions of civility). Beyond this, Friesen's reliance on secularization as a paradigm for understanding the changing face of religion from the Enlightenment to the present does not take into account the almost-total rejection of the classical secularization thesis by sociologists of religion (see, for example, David Martin's collection *On Secularization* or interviews with Peter Berger).

In response to his concern that Mennonite pacifism can do without theology, Friesen bases much of his argument on the de facto inadequacy of secular forms of nonviolence, all without providing a representative account of secular critics of violence. Throughout the book, the disjunction between "world-involved" secular pacifism and "Christ-centred" theological pacifism only deepens as Friesen presents secular critiques of violence in monolithic terms, consistently associating it with a lack and an absence rather than dignifying it on its own terms. He writes that "secularity has called into question the need for the theological underpinnings of the Mennonite pacifist ethic" (7), but rather than listening closely and patiently to the real and deep questions that secular critics of violence have for Christian pacifists, Friesen defends a tradition of defenselessness against only one very limited conceptualization of those who are not religious.

For Friesen, the divine descent of Christ into human form provides a model for being in the world but not of it, and the incarnation of Christ seems to fund criticism of the notion that "we can be good without God" (225). But Friesen does not engage meaningfully with those within the Anabaptist and Mennonite constellation of identities who refuse hard distinctions between religion and secularity—for example, Robert Friedmann's humanist and existentialist expression of Anabaptist values in his posthumous book *Design for Living: Regard, Concern, Service, and Love*. But regardless of the minor traditions of philosophical and secular humanism within the Anabaptist and Mennonite tradition, the question of whether one can be good without God is anything but settled. Friesen's related claim that "to the extent that the Mennonite pacifist ethic is not a theological ethic, it will fail to provide a coherent wisdom for how to live in this world" (11) is patently false, provided that the measure of coherence and wisdom is set by more than just Christian theologians. Indeed, there are secular

Mennonites who defend pacifism quite coherently, as in the recent critical work of Daniel Shank Cruz or the literary contributions of Miriam Toews. Projecting theological measures of coherence onto secular efforts to resist violence works against the possibility of coalitional responses to violence that could achieve not what Friesen calls "unity in difference" but what one might call "difference in unity."

In conclusion, *Secular Nonviolence and the Theo-Drama of Peace* is a highly sophisticated reading of Hans Urs von Balthasar used in defense of Christian pacifism against perceived inadequacies of secular nonviolence that will garner interest from both Mennonite and Catholic theologians, but without deeper questioning of its most basic distinction, it risks remaining within the limits of oppositional thinking about secularity and religion. Instead (as I argue elsewhere), the critique of violence provided by those in the diverse Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition is neither a reason to fully separate from the world nor a selling point for accommodation by the world (as Friesen discusses on p. 71) but rather a reason to question categorical (rather than contextual) divisions between church and world, theology and philosophy, and religion and secularity.

University of Toronto MAXWELL KENNEL

Postsecular History: Political Theology and the Politics of Time. By Maxwell Kennel. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022. $139.99 (hard-cover)/$87.94 (e-book).

Maxwell Kennel, postdoctoral fellow at the University of Toronto, in this ambitious book sets out to explore approaches to the meaning of time and history and, more specifically, to develop a critique of the ongoing periodization of history. The book is part of the ongoing Radical Theologies and Philosophies series published by Palgrave Macmillan. Kennel is interested in showing what is at stake, who profits, who asserts power, and who is oppressed when dividing history in particular ways. We might think, for example, of the act of declaring that a country has arrived at being "post-pandemic," a move that upon close examination is not some objective, self-evident statement of fact; such a statement reveals important things about the power of the entity making such a definitive declaration.

The overall argument of this densely written book can be described as an attempt to show that human ways of periodizing time and history "are powerful legitimation strategies that rely upon entangled theological and political categories" (171). The primary concern regarding periodization is the titular category of *postsecular*, a term that carries with it the suggestion that we have moved beyond the secular, that we have surpassed the secular and know better than we did during the secular age. Kennel isn't arguing that the term is meaningless; after all, it refers to a confluence of Christianity, religion, and secularity. However, "we should not think of the postsecular as a name for a time

that has successfully situated itself after, against, or beyond the secular by overcoming, supplanting, or superseding it" (6).

Following a brush-clearing introductory chapter, Kennel offers six chapters of what he refers to as "interventions that show and critique theopolitical ways of periodizing time in the postsecular environment and within the concept of the postsecular itself" (20). The first of these interventions traces the work of contemporary political theologians who address issues concerning the theology and politics of time. Kennel's concern here is to show that periodization is never neutral but instead can serve as a legitimation strategy, proclaiming the end of an era, or claiming that some promise is now fulfilled, calling for a return to some era that is purportedly in the past in some way, or promising release from problems identified as secular, which can be solved only by theology.

In Kennel's second intervention, he turns to the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic to show how the group called the Collegiants mediated between spiritualism and rationalism as the Reformation gave way to the Enlightenment. Following this account, Kennel leaps to the current thinker Daniel Barber and finds in this comparison a resonance regarding the challenge of representations of religion and rationality as stable entities. In doing so, Kennel hopes to show that current postsecular concerns simply are not as novel as they claim to be. The following chapter turns to a study of fanaticism as a way of thinking about the politics of time. Fanatics are often accused of forsaking the rational that is contemporary in favor of continuing to embrace a past that is considered irrational, thus revealing a problem of the uses of time and history.

Kennel then turns to a comparative study of Augustine's *Confessions* and Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, offering an account that shows considerable resonance between these two very different texts, and yet showing the difference between narratives of meaningfulness (Augustine) and narratives of meaninglessness (Nietzsche). Augustine looks at his personal history as a providential pilgrimage, while Nietzsche's Zarathustra wanders about rather aimlessly. Neither of these respective ways of interpreting what has (or hasn't) happened can serve as an adequate or universal way of shaping or understanding narratives of reality. In the following chapter, Kennel investigates the entanglements of technology, power, and time, showing "how technological mediations of time are inseparable from the human valuations of means and ends that guide their instrumental causes and effects" (170).

Kennel's sixth intervention explores the ambivalence and potential of waiting by drawing extensively on Dorothy Sölle's theology. Kennel sees in her work a kind of open-ended waiting, which allows the future to remain open while eschewing inappropriate possessiveness. Kennel concludes the book by turning to Eric Auerbach's notion of figural history, a way of reading history that identifies figures that prefigure their fulfillment, as is made evident, for example, in the relationship between Adam and Christ. In figural history, the figure and the fulfillment both remain real and important—one does not cancel the other, and

therefore both can continue to carry meaning, allowing for waiting and proceeding as legitimate ways of being in this world.

Overall, this book is an interesting, engaging, and wide-ranging argument that displays considerable depth. The argument is often dense, but Kennel provides signposts along the way that orient, reorient, and recapitulate the argument; indeed, Kennel's enthusiasm for providing these signposts at some points makes for some repetitiveness. Perhaps the emphasis on providing these signposts is necessary because several sections of the book initially found life as seminar papers in Kennel's graduate studies, or as discrete essays, and the weaving together of these pieces into a monograph calls for justification for including this or that chapter or subsection. That is, there are times when a section of a chapter can feel a bit forced—I'm thinking, for example, of the section of Melville's *Moby Dick* in chapter 4, which while interesting requires considerable explanation as to how this fits the larger argument of the chapter and the book. Kennel also includes several sections that seem underdeveloped, especially the very brief treatments of Yuk Hui's "cosmotechnics" and Mark Rifkin's notion of settler time. Further, given the power that Kennel gives to Auerbach's figural time, it feels as though Auerbach is given too little attention too late in the book.

However, while I offer these several critiques, I conclude with the assessment that Kennel's work is important to Christian political theology. He offers insightful engagements with and connections to influential thinkers and brings to view what goes on in seemingly innocent activities and habit of mind, such as periodization. He also brings to light the use and abuse of history, with its attendant moves of oppression and unthinking patterns of domination. This book serves as a solid contribution to political theology at this early stage of Kennel's career; I look forward to hearing more from his distinctive voice soon.

Canadian Mennonite University PAUL DOERKSEN

This Very Ground, This Crooked Affair: A Mennonite Homestead on Lenape Land. By John L. Ruth. Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2021. $37.95 (paperback).

John L. Ruth has been telling Mennonite stories for over fifty years, developing a distinct style that bridges narrative accounts with demonstrative anecdotes. *This Very Ground, This Crooked Affair* is a swan song with careful research and characteristic generosity blended into Ruth's grounded storytelling. It is one part corrective, adding Lenape voices, as much as possible, back into the Mennonite stories that Ruth has made his stock-in-trade. It is second part journey, as this elder statesman of Mennonite history attempts to reckon with his own sense of place and the knowledge of those who came before.

This Very Ground is an exploration of the diminishment of the Lenape in parallel with the enrichment of the Mennonites, a transition viewed through the lens of

Ruth's homestead in Salford, Pennsylvania, along the Branch Creek. Ruth scaffolds his inquiry by the lives of three key individuals: the Swiss-born Mennonite pioneer Hans Stauffer; the first proprietor of Pennsylvania and stalwart of the Religious Society of Friends, William Penn; and the Lenape representative and wampum-keeper Sassoonan, also called Alumapees. Ruth deftly weaves together the lives of these three along with their associates and descendants to review the proprietary period of Pennsylvania from its antecedents in 1643 to its twilight in 1768. He covers colonial expansion and its consequences, balancing William Penn's vision with its practical implementation. Ruth pores over Pennsylvania's Indian treaties and accounts of the negotiations that formed them. He does not shirk from telling of violence, either settler or indigenous. While he treats most with generosity, Ruth reserves disdain for surveyors such as David Powell, who plied his trade "with chains clinking on the heels of withdrawing Lenapes" (160). Special ire is also reserved for the Walking Purchase of 1737, "that crookedest affair" (241).

Ruth uses *This Very Ground* to examine two interrelated themes. He is careful to stress that desire for land out of a concern for posterity motivates all the actors in colonial Pennsylvania. Ruth reflects, "All of our story's main characters—Lenape, English, German, Quaker, or Mennonite—dreamed of passing on to their families a place to dwell in America" (135). This is as true for William Penn and his secretary James Logan as it is for Hans Stauffer or Sassoonan. Ruth's personal benefit from his ancestors' desire undergirds the concern with which he weaves his narrative. This drive for land is tempered by the reality of colonial violence and dishonesty. Ruth reckons with the nature of Pennsylvania as a colonial project, built by struggle and tension, and its very existence as an entity rooted in war. Referring to Admiral Penn's famous naval battle with the Dutch, Ruth admits, "Any farm carved from the Lenape has fiery Lowestoff in its pedigree" (27). *This Very Ground* begs the question of how one might respond to this from our present vantage point, though Ruth stubbornly refuses to provide any answers.

Alongside the desire for land, Ruth goes to great lengths to contrast Mennonite and Lenape fortunes. When Mennonites fell victim to a land scheme organized by surveyor Powell, Mennonites received preferential treatment because they were understood by Logan to be "an honest, industrious people" (158). Such favorable treatment highlights the contrast with the Lenape, who were forcibly removed from their native homes "in a series of 'crooked affairs'" by the same colonial official (182). The comparison and the discomfort it creates in the author serve as the driving engine of *This Very Ground*, propelling Ruth to investigate and provide an accounting.

Ruth repeatedly claims that his project is not a history, choosing to name it in the introduction a "pondering" (13) and concluding by declaiming, "This has been a musing" (153). But even with Ruth's authorial intention and the fact that he has no formal training in history, this is not a claim that can be borne out. Any reader picking up *This Very Ground* is primed to accept it as a historical work and to reflect on its conclusions in this light. *This Very Ground* is not a historical monograph; Ruth decided against providing clear documentation of his sources. The lack of

documentation, however, does not reflect a lack of research: I have seen Ruth's preparatory notes, which include sources, even as these are not provided in the published manuscript beyond the select bibliography at the end. *This Very Ground*, despite authorial intent, ought to be treated as a historical work, with the authority and scrutiny that follow.

The need to levy historical criticism is seen most clearly in Ruth's analysis of Logan as he reflects, "Only a careful reading of the sources by modern historians would reveal Logan's obviously self-enriching motives" (96). This modernist position is not necessary. It undercuts the agency and capabilities of Logan's contemporaries who were aware of how Logan used his position for his own benefit. Furthermore, Ruth's treatment of Quaker identity, society, history, and faith and practice lacks the deftness with which he navigates Mennonite material.

Regardless of these criticisms, *This Very Ground* remains an important work, adding to the small but growing repertoire of reflection on Mennonite relations to indigenous people and interfacing with Ruth's significant catalog of Mennonite history. For the seasoned researcher looking for a thoroughly documented text considering the relationship between Mennonites and the Lenape in colonial Pennsylvania, this is not the best source, though it will be of interest, nevertheless. For the enthusiast historian or reader of general interest, Ruth provides a tremendous starting point to engage colonizers' relation to land from his deep sense of rootedness in place. All readers can be glad for a chance to engage with John Ruth as he reflects on his career as a Mennonite storyteller, on the power of place, and on the virtues of story.

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