

## BOOK REVIEWS

*"Just as in the Time of the Apostles": The Uses of History in the Radical Reformation.* By Geoffrey Dipple. Kitchener, Ont.: Pandora Press. 2005. Pp. 324. \$33.50.

Many of those who broke away from the Roman church in the sixteenth century appealed to history to justify their reforming agendas. Their historical visions turned to the practices of the true church in order to differentiate their movements from the deteriorated and fallen institutions they saw around them. In this carefully argued book, Geoffrey Dipple examines the radical reformers' visions and uses of the past. By emphasizing the ways that ecclesiastical histories changed over time and from place to place, he challenges and overturns scholarly assumptions that all Anabaptists were historically-minded restitutionalists. This is an important book for Radical Reformation studies and for all scholars interested in the use of the past during the Reformation. Its particular strengths lie in the author's nuanced argumentation, his careful reading of the sources, and his inclusion of a variety of radical reforming movements and events from the seventeenth century. His subject is a long radical reformation rather than a quest for an Anabaptism "proper."

Although revisionist scholars have identified differences and changes in Anabaptists' understanding of the sword and government, the notion that they shared a historical vision has remained relatively unchallenged. Much of the scholarly assumption derived from Franklin H. Littell's thesis that the radical reformers' commitment to the restitution of the primitive church is what differentiated them from the humanists and magisterial reformers. Littell implied that this primitivism resulted in the separatist ecclesiology of Anabaptism proper, usually associated with the Swiss Brethren. Dipple's book, therefore, is a critical reassessment of Littell's thesis.

The humanists, magisterial reformers and the radicals all shared the primitivist outlook that the past had more authority than the present. One of the most powerful critiques available to all reformers was an appeal to the primitive church as a Golden Age against which the contemporary abuses fell short. Scholars of the Radical Reformation have traditionally assumed that a careful reading of church history inspired the reforming movements. Dipple, however, demonstrates that the reality of the ecclesiastical histories is more nuanced and complicated than that of a simple cause-and-effect relationship. He argues that the past was not the initial motivation behind reform, but a mirror within which the corruption of the present could be viewed and critiqued. The complicated reality of these historical visions is especially clear in the case of the "Evangelical Anabaptists." For example, Conrad Grebel's appeal to primitive church practices arose from his Biblicism, not from studying the long sweep of church history. In general, the early Swiss Anabaptists called for the restitution of apostolic practices, but their restitutionism was not derived from a well-developed scheme of the past. The most sophisticated historical visions appear in the Hutterite *Great*

*Chronicle* and, to a lesser extent, *The Martyrs' Mirror*. These last two writings illustrate Dipple's persuasive conclusion that the deciding factor whether a group developed a historical vision was whether they needed to defend their movement against opponents, either Spiritualizers within the movement or outside antagonists. The Swiss Brethren faced no such challenge whereas the Hutterites and the Dutch did. According to Dipple, the historical visions rarely, if ever, provided the initial impetus for reform. Instead, the radicals turned to the past to find ways to support their agendas or to critique those of their opponents.

Dipple begins his study with the historical visions of the humanist and magisterial reformers. Like the radicals, they also believed that the Church had declined since Christ but they differed as to whether and when a fall took place. Dipple argues that although Erasmus criticized the introduction of philosophy into Scholastic theology, his rejection of the church was not as thoroughgoing as Littell argued. Like Erasmus, Luther saw the church continuously falling away from the apostolic model without identifying any single event that led to its fall. As their movements grew, those calling for reform increasingly turned to the past to find the point at which the church fell. Although they all praised the apostolic age, no one called for its restitution.

To a greater degree than Luther or Erasmus, Andreas Karlstadt and Thomas Müntzer saw the early church as a model for reform. Both men started out as humanists who located the fall of the Church in Scholasticism. As the Reformation was well underway, both Spiritualists adopted a primitivist ecclesiology and looked back further in the past for the Church's fall. Karlstadt saw the age of the apostles as the last point when the Holy Spirit was truly present in the Church. Müntzer looked at both Old and New Testaments for models for understanding the contemporary Church. Even though the two men considered the apostolic Church to be the best model for a spirit-filled Church, it was not the only one.

After discussing the historiography of Anabaptist restitutionism, Dipple turns to the visions of the so-called Evangelical Anabaptists. He regards them as essentially primitivists in their orientation to the past, but nuances and problematizes the concept. Not all of their historical visions were sophisticated and many of them did not place the fall at a so-called Constantinian shift. For some, primitivism did not automatically imply separatism from the world or the rejection of a magisterial reformation, even though this was the position that gradually evolved over time. Dipple's careful examination of the sources shows conclusively that as the movements evolved, their historical visions changed and developed, often in an ad hoc manner.

Next, Dipple argues that although they were both Spiritualists, Sebastian Franck and Caspar Schwenckfeld developed some of the most sophisticated historical schemes among the radicals. Although their positions differed from one another, they both turned to history to understand the present, while rejecting the necessity of restoring specific teachings or practices from the past. They wanted to restore the apostolic church insofar as it exhibited the gifts of the spirit. Similarly, the Anabaptist Spiritualizers Johannes Bänderlin and Christian Entfelder each created sophisticated historical visions in order to undermine primitivist ecclesiologies. Ironically, Mennonites and Hutterites turned to

spiritualist histories, such as Franck's *Chronica*, as historical ammunition in their confessionalist debates with spiritualist adversaries.

The overall result of Dipple's careful and comprehensive analysis is a thoroughgoing revision of Littell's thesis. Given the longstanding debate regarding Anabaptist positions on the sword, it should not come as a surprise that there was a range of historical visions among various Anabaptists and that they too changed over time. Because the book assumes that the reader is familiar with some of the historical background, such as the patristic and scholastic authors Dipple mentions in passing, it may not be accessible to some undergraduate students. However, it will undoubtedly become the foundational text for future studies on the topic and of great value to scholars. As such, it will serve as a gentle reminder that reforming agendas derived from historical visions are often more about critiquing contemporary affairs than understanding what has led to the present.

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TROY OSBORNE

*118 Days: Christian Peacemaker Teams Held Hostage in Iraq.* Tricia Gates Brown, ed. Telford, Pa.: Cascadia Publishing House. 2008. Pp. 227. \$17.99.

On November 26, 2005, four men—James Loney, Tom Fox, Harmeet Sooden and Norman Kember—were taken from their vehicle outside a mosque in Baghdad and held captive for 118 days. Although the men were certainly not the first to be kidnapped in the hostile environs of occupied Iraq, their abduction presented new challenges to Christian Peacemaker Teams, the organization for which the men worked. As Doug Pritchard, the co-director of Christian Peacemaker Teams, noted, the kidnapping “tested CPT in a way that we had not been tested before” (vii). Following their motto to “get in the way,” the unarmed Christian Peacemaker Team had traveled to Iraq to support the nascent Muslim Peacemaker Teams, call attention to the plight of Iraqi detainees, alleviate the suffering of Palestinians in Iraq and witness to the progress (or lack thereof) of the rebuilding campaign sponsored by the multinational forces in Iraq. The kidnapping of the Iraq team and the subsequent murder of one of the hostages, Tom Fox, complicated those efforts, but also created space for dialogue about C.P.T.'s role in conflict situations and the structure of the organization itself.

This dialogue is captured in part in a new collection of reflections on the kidnapping crisis published by Christian Peacemaker Teams, *118 Days: Christian Peacemaker Teams Held Hostage in Iraq*. More than an account of the personal agonies the kidnapping caused, the reflections describe “the ripples set in motion” (vii) by the abduction. Those ripples resulted in part from the international composition of Christian Peacemaker Teams: the Iraq team included men from Canada (Loney), the United States (Fox), New Zealand (Sooden) and Great Britain (Kember). More than that, though, the ripples reached beyond national identities to impact religious communities around the world. Christian Peacemaker Teams had long worked in Hebron and had

developed fairly close ties with Muslims throughout the Middle East. As many of the essays note, the kidnapping of the Iraq C.P.T. delegation highlighted and extended the ongoing dialogue between Christian and Muslim peacemakers. That dialogue challenges both contemporary stereotypes about Muslims and the polemical framing of the situation in Iraq by the Bush administration. Many Muslims took great risks to voice their support for C.P.T. even as they condemned the American-led occupation of Iraq.

Muslim-Christian cooperation is just one thread running through *118 Days*. Many of the essays also focus on the difficulties C.P.T. members encountered in trying to deal with the crisis on a daily basis. Team members around the world struggled with fear and a sense of foreboding as they waited for news of their kidnapped colleagues. Indeed, one of the most frustrating realities of working through the crisis from the outside—something nearly every reflection mentions—was the dearth of information. *118 Days* provides insight into the horrors of living with the knowledge that a loved one has been abducted and the utter helplessness in the face of it. Readers might be surprised to learn that one of the most difficult challenges in a prolonged hostage crisis is how the crisis eventually works its way into daily routine. As Matthew Behrens explains, while C.P.T. members certainly longed for the release of their colleagues, the “normalization” that eventually takes hold, perhaps as a means of surviving the stress, “is also a disturbing sign of our ability to accept the existence of truly intolerable situations because it feels there is only so much we can do” (168).

Perhaps unexpectedly, though, the anguish felt by C.P.T. members around the world often gave them insight into the burdens carried by those for whom they worked. Sandra Rincon admitted that her struggle to cope with the abduction of the Iraq delegation gave her a new understanding of what Colombian parents living in the wake of “disappeared” sons and daughters must deal with on a daily basis. Similarly, in going to the Baghdad morgue to look for the bodies of the C.P.T. delegation, Michele Naar-Obed more fully understood the daily anguish felt by the Iraqi women who stood sobbing outside the morgue, wondering whether their loved ones lay inside.

Another thread that emerges from the collection is the way the kidnapping challenged Christian Peacemaker Teams as an organization. Understaffed and underfunded, C.P.T. struggled with how best to manage and respond to the crisis. A number of reflections focus on the chaos that surrounded the organization’s attempts to speak to reporters, develop videos pleas and dispel myths about the crisis. Tim Nafziger and Simon Barrow, in particular, reflect on how difficult it was to explain C.P.T.’s peacemaking motivations to the press, which attempted to work the C.P.T. Iraq delegation into a “dominant narrative” that cast team members as naïve, anti-establishment peaceniks mucking up the work of loyal, brave, rational military personnel. Unable to comprehend C.P.T.’s efforts to promote peace and Muslim supporters’ willingness to plead for the lives of those being held hostage, an almost ravenous mainstream media turned on the Iraq delegation, accusing them of having hidden agendas and of being ungrateful for their subsequent rescue by British soldiers. But as Nafziger writes, no matter how frustrated C.P.T. became with the conduct of the media, it was important to engage the media, so as to function as a “subversive footnote” and

provide the public with a “well-documented counter-fact” (147). In the process of working through the hostage crisis, C.P.T. learned more about its witness: “In an era of corporate power and mass consumption, cracks in the system, viewpoints from the grassroots, truth from the margins, and wisdom from the outsider are the concrete ways in which a new kind of gentle energy can be nurtured and sustained” (150).

Controlling information also took on greater importance because of the sexual identity of one of the hostages. As a gay man, Jim Loney faced the real possibility of torture and execution, particularly since Muslim clerics had issued fatwas calling for the killing of homosexual men. C.P.T.’s decision to keep Loney’s sexual identity and his long-term relationship with his partner, Dan Hunt, out of the spotlight is one of the most poignant and controversial aspects of *118 Days*. In fact, the entire collection was repeatedly rejected for publication by mainstream presses precisely because of the inclusion of reflections that frankly discussed the love Hunt and Loney shared and the ways that anti-gay bias shaped the crisis itself. The decision not to disclose Loney’s sexual identity was torturous for his partner, but also left some team members conflicted as to how C.P.T. should manage its witness.

*118 Days* has many strengths and offers wonderful insights, but it is not perfect. While the essays help readers intimately understand the daily struggles of C.P.T. and the turmoil both the hostages and their loved ones felt throughout the crisis, the collection might have been strengthened by closer editing and a more coherent vision. Often the reflections veer off into political statements about Israeli abuses in the occupied territories or the shame of discrimination against gays. While these topics are vitally important, they redirect *118 Days* away from the abductions at hand. Moreover, the collection left this reviewer desperately seeking more discussion of just what made the C.P.T.’s presence in Iraq and response to the kidnapping “Christian.” There is next to no discussion of the theology that underlay C.P.T.’s work, save for a wonderful reflection by Norman Kember. What does it mean to be a “Christian” peacemaker? What made C.P.T.’s engagement with the media “Christian”? How did the Christian identity of C.P.T. workers around the world inform the ways they coped with and worked through the crisis? Many of the essays could have easily been written by non-Christian humanitarian-minded activists (indeed one of them was—Harmeet Sooden is Sikh). This is not to suggest that non-Christians are not valuable peacemakers, but I could not help but wonder if the media’s inability to understand the Christian motivations of C.P.T. was largely due to a failure to articulate the Christian nature of the organization.

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PENELOPE ADAMS MOON

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*Spoken among the Trees: Poems.* By Jeff Gundy. Akron, Ohio: University of Akron Press. 2007. Pp. 107. \$14. 95.

Jeff Gundy’s poems have always been ecstatic, even mystical, albeit grounded in the sometimes harsh, sometimes forgiving landscape of the American

Midwest. But in his fifth full-length collection, winner of the 2007 Society of Midland Authors poetry award, Gundy's vision of a heaven and earth wed, of the way God lives in all things—calling to us out of the mouths of birds or out of the leaves as wind pushes through them—mounts toward a feverish pitch. Or, perhaps more aptly, the poems offer us a glimpse of what can only be called a Mennonite nirvana.

Gundy first studied the art of poem-making with Nick Lindsay (the son of famed Modernist poet Vachel Lindsay) at Goshen College in the 1970s. Lindsay's prophetic rants and celebrations are the stuff of legend in Mennonite circles, as is his influence on a number of poets working in this tradition. Perhaps no other writer is so clearly a disciple of Lindsay's visionary search after the face of God as Gundy. While Gundy has appreciatively acknowledged Lindsay's influence many times in the past, in *Spoken among the Trees* his mentor's influence is writ large. The book begins with a quotation from Lindsay's poem "A Wedding Song"—"Do your eyes seek high places, soaring, some thin sky? / You and I, we aren't birds, but water in a cup"—and concludes by dedicating the book to Lindsay. As Gundy says, he was "my first and best teacher."

And what has the pupil learned? That contemplation and meditation are a path the soul ought to travel. That the things of this world must be praised because they carry the sacred imprint of God. That some of what we say, in reaching after what remains ineffable, may be deemed heretical. That laughter at our own ineptitude is yet another way to pray. That it is the poet's task to send missives back to those he loves, offering them a glimpse of what he has sought.

Some of the poems in this volume spill over with indecision and doubt, a characteristic that reminds us of the humility of so many prophets within the Christian tradition. Yet Gundy does not allow the fact that he may be grasping at proverbial straws to curb his enthusiasm for the search. In "Advice for Walkers," the speaker confesses that "No one knows where the miracle / will begin, or where the disaster will start." With a tempered degree of confidence, the poet claims that "the earth is a mirror. The sky is a lens. The trees are an echo / of their own roots." For this contemporary mystic, in some manner the prayers of mothers who must pray "thank you" and "goodbye," and the "lost fathers" who brood on "shades of black in quiet caves," coalesce with "the women who glow like stars" and "the son who lost his balance" because he was "dizzy with love and hunger." As in so many Gundy poems, love and hunger send us running pell-mell toward a conclusion that proffers a kind of consolation:

When your eyes have drunk a million shots of splendor  
and turned back for more, when your heart has packed  
and hidden every wonder, every slender ankle, every head  
of curling invitations to the wrong feast, when desire  
elbows memory into the bushes and runs headlong downhill  
smack into the creek, when the creek closes icy  
and astonishing over you, all your clothes soaked and useless,  
the last veils of your secrecy torn open like the car door

after the crash, when you clamber up dripping mud  
 and snowmelt and the most obstinate futility since  
 second grade, when you fumble at the bank, scrape knuckles  
 on the frozen roots, on the slabs of broken ice, oh my friend,  
 lift your dripping useful boot and press it to the ground,  
 press and push and even now the world will hold you up.

Notice how we are in constant motion through these lines, how a car crash in adult life connects us to the same futility we felt in second grade, how the veils of secrecy we work so hard to shore up must be torn open if revelation is to have any chance of working its wonders upon us, and how the dear sweet earth holds us up as we set forth once again.

The knowledge of the world that holds Gundy up has deepened in this collection, and, as he professes in "The Poet on the Beaver Marsh," he is "trying to write the song of bird wings and the grind / of shoes on gravel . . . / to sing of the multiflora rose hedging the towpath, the canal / / clogged with duckweed and pond lilies." In hopes of fulfilling such desire, Gundy calls on a range of artists and utilizes a stunning array of poetic techniques. Such disparate personages as Jonathan Edwards, Emily Dickinson and Joe Walsh make cameo appearances in order to help the poet negotiate the troubled waters of the twenty-first century. And as the reader sails through these rough seas, she will find her ship of poems built with psalms and lists and letters and notes and reports and rules. The effect of such a disparate collection of forms is a nod to the poet's unquenchable thirst for some manner, some path, some means for imparting what he has found or been blessed with thus far. As he explains in "Spring Tractates," "High up, the new cottonwood leaves / shine like mirrors, // like the starling's purple helmet. / In this much sun, everything blazes, // even the water shines." How to explain or represent such shining, the dazzling nature of creation? And even more problematical: the soul. "Spring Tractates" concludes with a philosophical and dream-like flourish:

And then my soul, or some soul,  
 curled itself around me  
 like the down bag I didn't own.  
 It didn't speak a word, but I listened —  
 and centuries or years or hours later,  
 a shape felt its way out of darkness, and another,  
 and between them I saw four smooth stones,  
 four steps I could take.

Like Jacob's vision, Gundy sees a makeshift ladder or staircase of sorts, steps he might climb to continue the blessed journey none of us ultimately can deny; and the vision of this book, for which Gundy's earlier work laid the foundation, is comprised of connection after connection, a ladder he hopes the reader will choose to climb with him.

In *Spoken among the Trees*, the heavens and the earth come together — each man and woman, plant and tree, all the animals of the fields and of the sea — one

fabric knit by the hands of an omnipotence the poet struggles to name. Yes, Christ and God the Father and Mother of all hover over this book and are at times referred to by traditional monikers, but Gundy hesitates at the hubris of such naming, how in this act we may fool ourselves into believing we comprehend what is beyond us. His poems are gestures toward the infinite. He is a spiritual and poetic descendant of Walt Whitman attempting to throw his arms around the world, to plunge himself in its seas, and while he may toss himself into the ocean of never-ending, splashing joyfully in its waters, it is only the smallest cup he can take away to make his poems. The water in the cup—as Lindsay has explained in “A Wedding Song”—offers life, a life Gundy seeks to reveal to others through a poetry of muscle and tenderness, of wonder and mirth, of hope that dares not proclaim the circumference of the sea but loves to gaze upon its far shores.

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TODD DAVIS

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*Under Vine and Fig Tree: Biblical Theologies of Land and the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict.* Alain Epp Weaver, ed. Telford, Pa.: Cascadia Publishing House. 2007. Pp. 202. \$19. 95, U. S.; \$25. 95, Can.

*Identity and Religion in Palestine: The Struggle between Islamism and Secularism in the Occupied Territories.* By Loren D. Lybarger. Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press. 2007. Pp. 265. \$39. 50.

In the preface to *Identity and Religion in Palestine: The Struggle between Islamism and Secularism in the Occupied Territories*, Loren Lybarger quotes the late Edward Said, who pointed out the irony that Palestinians, subjects of a vast body of literature and central players in a major global conflict, have remained largely unknown, especially in the West. The two books under review address this sad irony in very different ways, both of them substantive. Speaking to different audiences and approaching the conflict from different angles, the two books are united by their authors' deep empathy for the suffering of Palestinians, empathy shaped by the Mennonite Central Committee's long-term commitment to working for justice and reconciliation in the Middle East. Lybarger's book, based on his doctoral dissertation in the sociology of religion and Islam at the University of Chicago Divinity School, appeals to scholarly readers willing to immerse themselves in theoretically informed ethnographic research based on six years of field experience over a period of two decades. In 1986, fresh out of college, Lybarger accepted an M.C.C. assignment teaching English at Bayt Jala near Bethlehem on the West Bank. As a teacher he witnessed firsthand the intifada that erupted in Gaza in December 1987 and that spread throughout the Occupied Territories over the following months. Following his M.C.C. assignment, Lybarger pursued a master's degree in Cairo, spent two years in Gaza directing an English-language program, and studied Muslim-Christian relations at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago before starting doctoral studies at the University of Chicago in 1995. Building on an unusually rich set of firsthand experiences and personal connections in both Gaza and the West Bank,

Lybarger spent a year of fieldwork near Bethlehem and in Gaza in 1999-2000 just prior to the outbreak of the second intifada, recording some eighty conversations detailing the life histories of Palestinians whose political maturation had been shaped by the events of the previous decades. The richness of his book derives from the ethnographic depth of individual stories that vividly portray the experiences of Palestinians living under military occupation during turbulent times.

*Under Vine and Fig Tree: Biblical Theologies of Land and the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict* is a basic study and discussion guide for North American Christians who most likely are studying the Palestinian-Israeli conflict for the first time. Based on the fruit of six decades of M.C.C.'s experience working alongside Palestinians and Israelis, the authors offer brief historical, theological and sociological perspectives that seek to correct some common misunderstandings and misperceptions among North American Christians. As a collaborative effort by five current and former M.C.C. workers with extensive international experience, particularly in the Middle East, the twelve chapters were divided up fairly evenly among the authors, Esther Epp-Tiessen, Dan Epp-Tiessen, Timothy Seidel and Christi Hoover Seidel, with Alain Epp Weaver serving as editor. In a spirit of humility and repentance, the authors acknowledge that they represent heritages tainted by a history of anti-Judaism and dispossession of indigenous peoples.

*Under Vine and Fig Tree* is written in an accessible style ideal for study-discussion groups. Chapters conclude with discussion questions and suggestions for action. Appended are well-chosen supplements: a timeline, glossary, list of resources, indexes and maps. Although some chapters lack depth, they all present information and perspectives that are historically grounded, theologically informed and empathetically balanced. Dedicated to M.C.C.'s Palestinian and Israeli partners, this book builds on an authenticity fostered by decades of M.C.C. involvement in the daily lives of Palestinians and Israelis. The chapters offer glimpses of daily life for Palestinians, especially the dwindling number of Christian Palestinians; challenge common Christian Zionist assumptions that simplistically apply Old Testament passages to contemporary Middle East politics; provide nuanced biblical interpretations on a variety of questions surrounding Israel/Palestine; offer balanced historical overviews; critique popular apocalyptic fantasies; and share stories of hope drawn from individuals and organizations working toward understanding and reconciliation.

Groups using this book as a study guide may want to complement it with Sandy Tolan's *The Lemon Tree: An Arab, A Jew and the Heart of the Middle East* (Bloomsbury, 2006), which engages readers with the intertwined tragic and inspiring stories of an Israeli Jew and a Palestinian Arab. The appeal of *Under Vine and Fig Tree* as a study resource lies more in its stories than in a systematic or thorough approach. Reading this book, one cannot help notice the profound influence of the Palestinian theologian Naim Ateek's *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation* (Orbis Books, 1989) in providing a theological foundation for nonviolent action on behalf of all the residents of the Holy Land.

There are few more troubling concepts for North Americans to grasp than Islamism. Loren Lybarger's *Identity and Religion in Palestine* does a masterly job of

communicating the rich texture of life that lies behind this widely misunderstood label. The author sums up his approach as “a sustained attempt to listen carefully to Palestinians and interpret their choices within a framework informed by historical context, ethnographic observation, and sociological theory” (xv).

Chapter 1, “Islamism and Secular Nationalism,” develops a nuanced metaphor for approaching Palestinian politics as multiple threads being rewound into new complex patterns. Ethnography offers a rich window. Palestinian identity was profoundly shaped by the context of occupation in which three generational shifts occurred, each shaped by momentous historical events: 1948, 1967 and the 1980s. Chapter 2, “The Secular-Nationalist Milieu,” provides a historical overview of the development of Palestinian nationalism, including the often overlooked role of women.

Chapter 3, “The Islamist Milieu,” begins with a historical overview of Palestinian Islamism, acknowledging the key influence of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Also shaping Palestinian Islamism were the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the subsequent rise of Hizbullah. This chapter contributes to an understanding of Middle Eastern politics at the end of the decade, especially Israeli concerns about a perceived “threat” from Iran. The militancy of Iran and Hizbullah inspired a new Palestinian militancy led by Islamists.

Chapters 4 and 5 immerse the reader in the biographical profiles of selected Palestinians living in two refugee camps, one near Bethlehem on the West Bank and the other in the heart of Gaza. A wonderful story about the “desecration” of two “sacred texts”—Che Guevara’s picture and a copy of the Qur’an—illuminates both the symbols and the substantive issues that divide secularist and Islamist wings of Palestinian activism. The reader also encounters an incisive explanation of the complex factors influencing the wearing of the hijab by Palestinian women. So as to provide a more nuanced model for Palestinian political activism, the author fleshes out four profiles: secularism, Islamic secularism, liberal Islamism and Islamism. Three principal structural factors further shaped positions within this fourfold framework of political ideology and activism: family, socioeconomic changes and generational shifts linked to formative events. The author concludes with an analysis of the situation following the stunning Hamas success over Fatah in the January 2006 elections.

In a sense this book is unique. The rich biographical sketches and lengthy quotations from Palestinians themselves constitute a treasure that both enriches and challenges conventional labels such as Islamist, secular, modern and traditional. Understanding “Islamization” requires a multifaceted approach that takes into account generational shifts, changing economic conditions and traumatic disruptions that put a “stamp” on an entire generation. This book reveals how social, cultural, economic and demographic factors fostered a unique kind of conservatism that has nurtured the strength of Islamism in general and Hamas in particular. Underneath the convergence of complex currents remains the reality of a burdensome occupation by an alien power.

Who could have predicted when Lybarger was recording interviews in a Gaza refugee camp in 2000 that this small strip of overpopulated land would gain much of the world’s attention at the end of the decade? *Identity and Religion in*

*Palestine* deserves to be read by decision-makers and shapers of public opinion. Palestinian identity remains fluid and open to diverse influences even in the face of unrelenting violence. The author remains hopeful that an increased level of knowledge and empathy among outsiders concerning Palestinian society and culture in all its complexity can ultimately lead to meaningful negotiations and a viable Palestinian state. The publication of this book is a small but important step in moving toward the peaceful future that he envisions.

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DON HOLSINGER

*So this is the world & here I am in it.* By Di Brandt. Edmonton, Alb.: NeWest Press. 2007. Pp. 244. \$19.95, U. S.; \$24.95, Can.

*So this is the world & here I am in it* is the tenth volume in the *Writer as Critic* series, edited by Smaro Kamboureli of NeWest Press, a literary publisher in Edmonton. The book gathers twelve articles and personal essays written over ten years by the poet Di Brandt, holder of the Canada Research Chair in Creative Writing at Brandon University in Manitoba.

Five of the collection's essays focus on contemporary writing and writers, and thus demonstrate Brandt's place in a national literary conversation that emanates from Winnipeg and extends beyond Canadian borders. Informed by feminist and multicultural discourses of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, the essays show how one Mennonite critic reads within and against the mainstream: with firm, subversive commitments and sharp wit. In addition to the literary analyses, a longer piece engages the work of Aganetha Dyck, an installation artist who collaborates with honeybees. Brandt captured one of Dyck's pieces in a photograph for the book's cover. Throughout, fourteen black and white illustrations—including a contemporary collage featuring a nude child and a sixteenth-century print of an Anabaptist orgy—underscore the text's concern with material and bodily experience.

Of interest to most readers of this journal will be the six personal essays of Mennonite memory and identity that frame and structure the collection. These begin and repeatedly return to Brandt's home village, Rheinland, Manitoba, where the women are strong and the men rule by order of the conservative Rudnerweider Gemeinde. Brandt's ancestors, Anabaptists from the Flemish lowlands who migrated to Prussia, and then to Ukraine, settled in southern Manitoba in the 1870s to establish a community that Brandt describes as characterized by "stubbornly traditionalist, locally defined, peasant ways" (113). Brandt celebrates peasant ways with passion and eloquence throughout the book. She loves the oral culture and three languages spoken by farm folk in Rheinland; their reliance on dreams, prayers and other supernatural methods, such as dowsing to find water and the lot to find preachers. She loves gatherings of the clan, the women singing hymns during everyday work, the children's pleasure in mud and their mothers' tolerant affection for it, too; and the endless devotion to food, family and farmland.

Trouble enters this world by several modern means. One is the lure of learning and reason that draw the truth-telling daughter from her home. The other menace is bound to multinational capitalism. Brandt's father built a 1,000-acre farm from the twenty acres his wife brought into the marriage, and after a life of labor saturated in pesticides and herbicides, he died from cancer at 61; her brother quit farming at 47, sickened by an environmental illness Brandt believes was caused by toxic agricultural chemicals.

Concern for the earth—too little, too late—she compares with her own love for her home place, its land, languages and people. In the collection's first essay, she is the urban artist-intellectual exiled from the earth, singing a song of the wild prairie by the waters of Winnipeg's Red and Assiniboine rivers. By the end of the book, she likens herself not to a Hebrew in Babylon, but to James Joyce, the modernist artist who must denounce faith and family in order to write. She exclaims in the last lines of the collection: ". . . I've been faithful, are you listening, daddy, grandma, somewhere up among the stars, I've been true, trying as hard as I can to understand what that idealistic, crazy, stubborn, ecstatic, beautiful heritage was all about, and what it means to me, and to everything now" (211). A lot of wonderful writing happens in between, and there's much to learn about the biography and cultural context of this major Mennonite author of ten books.

As she travels between Rheinland, Winnipeg, and the region around Windsor/Detroit, we see the gains and poignant losses that come with education and public success: cultures clash, assimilation and resistance both come at a price, and, finally, a sickening shunning from immediate family turns the author into a scapegoat, albeit a free agent. She travels to Berlin and there, by way of Plautdietsch, German literature and a familiar *Gurkensalat*, finds connection with her exiled ancestors, even in dislocation. She also travels in time, back to the roots of the Anabaptist movement, tracing connections not usually made in a typical Mennonite history class: Were witches and Anabaptists sometimes the same people? How about Jews? How can early Anabaptism's defiance of modernity help us to resist globalization and reconceptualize our place on the planet? Or this:

Surely the reason for our cultural separatism and numerous migrations and endurance of so much political persecution over numerous generations was to protect and preserve our deep connection to the land and the veneration of our traditional cultural ways, which included the following: an irreverent comic distrust of cultural hierarchies and so-called authority and expertise, whether bureaucratic, technological or intellectual; pacifism and the willingness to practice civil disobedience or migration to avoid military conflict; delight in physicality, sexuality, practicality and dirt; emotional and artistic expressiveness in music and poetic language; and a deep belief in the spiritual economy of "love," understood erotically and familially, and as a practice of toleration and loyalty to the village community. (80)

"Our?" a careful reader might ask. How can she speak from such an earthy, even quirky, place for "us" and "our" collective past? (Brandt uses plural pronouns liberally throughout the book.) Her memories resonate with some of

my own impressions of Amish farm life, but they may seem foreign to Mennonites culturally inclined in more middle-class, Protestant directions. Her excessive particularity will nonetheless refresh readers accustomed to the bland and careful generalizations of community histories that often strain to keep totalizing ideologies intact. The book does contain an extensive bibliography and some long notes, and I hope it will expand historical inquiry from an irreverent margin.

The greatest strength of the collection, for me, however, lies in the lyric, sometimes ecstatic, writing. Anyone interested in Anabaptist history, Mennonite identity, or ethnicity will find Brandt's work moving at times, at others, wildly strange—more a performance of feeling than anything evoking a reader's response—but always fascinating. Her writing renders consciousness and proves that feeling and knowledge need not part ways, indeed should not. Particularly in the Mennonite essays, she wields the lyric poet's tools to make new meaning: associative logic, metaphor, a strong personal voice and mythic narrative.

Following a familiar trope of the landscape as feminine, Brandt imagines the prairie before it was conquered, subdued or broken, an age when animals and Indians roamed free before the arrival of Mennonite settlers. Before that, her imagination extends to Europe and a time prior to persecutions and the Inquisition, before punishing and subjugating patterns entered the community. And before that—or somewhere around then—her desire finds a place I identify with Nietzsche's "Dionysian" principle: somewhere in the German Middle Ages, before the alienation of rationalist individuality and literacy, when peasants sang and danced and dreamed, and humans lived in communion with one another and the earth. Brandt brilliantly celebrates and laments the losses of modernity and links that longing to the utopian Anabaptist project.

Her essays show that some Mennonite writers inhabit or come from Anabaptist contexts that oppose the production of literature precisely because they are grounded in forms of the peasant culture Brandt praises. These communities exhibit preoccupations with "practicality" and "concern for edification" and a real suspicion of the "individualism" it takes to make art—to name only a few of the "scruples" identified by John L. Ruth three decades ago in *Mennonite Identity and Literary Art*. At that time, Ruth could have counted the number of serious Mennonite works of literature published in English—from Canada or the U.S.—on one hand. Now, they would probably fill an energy-conscious sedan to the roof, but the fact of collective success does not diminish the difficulty of individual struggle as Brandt's essays reveal.

In the January 2008 issue of *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, the editor, John D. Roth, complained that Mennonite writers seem only to praise one another's work, in contrast to the historians' "vigorous debate" about what it means to do "scholarship for the church" or the theologians' ability to critique their own discipline from an Anabaptist perspective. Roth observed that we rarely publish overtly critical reviews of one another and constantly seem to be launching celebratory conferences at Mennonite colleges. This critical failure and refusal to maintain boundaries, he predicted, may finally lead to dissipation and the demise of the Mennonite literary renaissance.

I don't think we need to worry about an absence of boundaries. As long as there are traditional Mennonite communities, which multiply at a faster rate than the other kind, there will be artists singing songs of celebration and lament. (Exile is not the only source of literature, but it remains a rich one, always and everywhere.) Brandt cares very much about her Anabaptist past, and the force of her prose comes through details impossible to paraphrase. Likewise, the novelist Rudy Wiebe writes from Anabaptist history, just as Jeff Gundy troubles theological matters in his poems. The emotional and imaginative work these writers do is as necessary to Mennonite culture as scholarly history or theology, only of another sort. (Does this need to be said?) Maybe the historians and theologians should take a page from artful authors like Brandt and learn the value of praise and lamentation—not to mention celebration!

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JULIA SPICHER KASDORF

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*The Amish and the Media.* Diane Zimmerman Umble and David L. Weaver-Zercher, eds. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 2008. Pp. 275. \$35.

Noticing this book on my desk, several colleagues made a joking remark about the title: Is there enough to publish an entire volume on the Amish and the media? Renowned for their cultural separatism and especially their rejection of modern technologies, the Amish are nevertheless regularly the subject of movies, novels, magazine and newspaper stories, Web sites and even reality TV. It's an intriguing irony. Here is a religious minority that is at once "media wary" and yet by virtue of its cultural difference of continual fascination to both the producers and consumers of American media. Exploration of this central dynamic weaves together the varied essays in this collection that sparkles with insights and makes a valuable contribution to the literature on religion and the media.

The relationship between the Amish and contemporary media is contextualized as a case study for investigation of the mediation process itself, described as a "complicated mix of agency and power" involving here members of an ethnic-religious subculture as both object and subject in the generating and circulating of shared meanings. As the editors explain in the introduction, "the Amish" are not a monolithic or unchanging group, but rather a collection of progressive and "unprogressive" factions in the face of the advances of modernism. It is the countercultural Old Order Amish—the largest and most traditional group with their horse-drawn carriages, plows, plain clothes and suspicion of the mainstream media—who most occupy the popular imagination and the attention of these writers, who are all seasoned scholars. Sound theoretical concepts, each carefully documented, frame their treatments. Without exception, the essays exhibit scholarly grit and are remarkably even in tone and accessibility, all exhibiting a kind of personal style of prose fitting the sensitivity the authors display toward their subject.

Together these scholars examine the culture of mediation from every angle—mainstream media producers, curious consumers, the commercialization of the

communication process and Amish people themselves as mediators—toward providing “a window on wider cultural conversations” (15) about North American religion, culture and media. As examples, the contributors address such questions as (from the introduction): Are those who critique Amish religious practice as oppressive seeking to promote their own enlightened perspectives in the process? Are those who celebrate the simplicity of Amish pastoral life yearning for a solution to their own sense of fragmentation? What might the construction of Amish religious practice as Other say about the values we espouse for religious identity? And what might the Old Order Amish teach us about the creation of religious identity on the basis of their own mediation practices? (14, 16) The pursuit of these and other questions opens up rewarding avenues of inquiry into the complex nature of the interaction of religion and mass-mediated communication.

The essays in the first part of the book deal with various media representations of the Amish: popular Hollywood movies, lesser known documentary films, poetry, nonfiction, reality television and tourist sites. Common themes emerge across these essays, among them treatment of the Amish as the exotic Other; “English” (an Amish term for cultural outsiders) experience with media or tourist sites that represent Amish life in terms of a “pastoral” ideal contrasting with American social fragmentation; and the vexing relationship of media producers and publicly reticent Amish sources. Whether a debunking of cultural myths, a careful examination of popular stereotypes or poetic imagery, or an industrial analysis of documentary film and television production, the overall aim is to cultivate a more nuanced understanding, not just of the Old Order Amish, but also of the process of fashioning mediated representations of this and other religious groups. In that regard an essay might lean one way or another in its disclosure of Amish culture or treatment of the mediation process, but the effect collectively is to provide insight into both. Some unexpected conclusions emerge: for example, one writer’s somewhat ambivalent, yet generally positive, assessment of the reality television program “Amish in the City.”

The second part is concerned with the Old Order Amish as producers and consumers of their own media and select mainstream products. Aware that scholars also play a mediating role, this comparative approach juxtaposes mainstream and Amish media ventures as a way to avoid further objectifying the Amish. Writers examine the conflicted negotiations Amish enter into as media informants, including a close analysis of the media coverage and events surrounding the arrest of two Amish-raised boys in a drug bust. One analysis of two Amish newspapers (*The Budget* and *Die Botschaft*) reveals how they function as “collective diaries,” and another shows the ways Amish publishing enterprises serve their community’s separatist aims. These essays find thematic focus in tensions within the Amish community between humility—the supreme virtue—and publicity, and the clash between Amish and English cultural values. This central conflict, one writer notes, is captured metaphorically by an elder who said: “In Amish life, it’s always best to keep your head under the covers” (165).

The cultural separatism of the Amish presents a particular difficulty for this study. Mainstream journalists and producers do have an obligation regardless of deadlines and profit margins to dignify Otherness, but Amish community restraints put the interpretive burden almost entirely on outsiders. The Amish have “potential for witness within tourism” (127) and publicly forgiving the Nickel Mines shooter infused the media coverage with a “spiritual significance, even moral challenge” (247). But again Amish reluctance to interact with mainstream media and culture renders these examples of agency as more incidental, exceptions to their separatist posture, rather than the result of direct intent. Consequently, insofar as their broader aim is “promise for probing the relationship of religion and the media,” these scholars are able to glean more from their study of the Amish as mediated images than as agents in the mediation process.

I write as someone steeped in the Reformed tradition with its strong conviction that believers are called to be engaged in politics, culture and the media. As it is, “social fragmentation” and “technological decontextualization” are real issues, but for most North American Christians a near absolute minimalist involvement is not a realistic model for navigating contemporary life. Nevertheless, Christians of all stripes can benefit from an embrace of the kind of communal values that set the Amish apart from the hyperindividualism that characterizes mainstream American culture today. And one would hope these biblical values centered on deep humility that find expression in Amish separatism can also be manifested in other cultural approaches as well.

What I appreciate most is the extent to which this book is able to explain Amish life, the religious beliefs that give meaning to Amish social and cultural practices, while also showing how their technological hesitancy complicates the multifaceted process of media mediation. *The Amish and the Media* should be of great interest to scholars and generally educated readers drawn to North American religion and the media.

Calvin College

WILLIAM D. ROMANOWSKI

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*A Molinist-Anabaptist Systematic Theology.* By Kirk R. MacGregor. Lanham, Md.: University Press of America. 2007. Pp. 350. \$46.

If not already acquainted with Kirk MacGregor through his book on Balthasar Hubmaier,<sup>1</sup> one would do well to get to know MacGregor’s work through this latest book. *A Molinist-Anabaptist Systematic Theology* is worth reading not only because of its level of scholarship, but also because of MacGregor’s ambitious attempt at combining what he believes to be the best in philosophical theology, Molinism, with the best in practical theology, Anabaptism. Though the former originated with a sixteenth-century Catholic theologian, Luis de Molina (1535-1600), its contemporary proponents include not only Catholic but also evangelical philosophers, such as William Lane Craig. MacGregor’s work is thus

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1. *A Central European Synthesis of Radical and Magisterial Reform: The Sacramental Theology of Balthasar Hubmaier* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2006).

best read as an evangelical appropriation of Catholic and Anabaptist thought—a combination that might be important for each of these traditions.

MacGregor's understanding of systematic theology is that it should attempt to answer questions that are not clearly answered in any one biblical text and thus require a logical synthesis of biblical exegesis and philosophical reasoning, a pairing with which MacGregor seems comfortable. Thus, this work does not proceed through the standard categories of systematic theology but rather focuses each chapter on a separate problem. After a prolegomena that offers the background to Molinism and Anabaptism—including a brilliant deconstruction of the Augustinian notion of original sin—MacGregor proceeds in two major directions: Molinist philosophical theology and evangelical Anabaptist practical theology. In chapter 2 MacGregor addresses the perennial question of how to synthesize a robust view of human free will with an equally robust view of divine sovereignty. MacGregor defends a Molinist view in which God's knowledge prior to creation proceeds in three logical stages: first, knowledge of every possible future state of affairs; second, knowledge of what would actually (though contingently) be the case in any world he could create; and finally, knowledge of what will indeed be the case based on the world he actually chooses to create. The second stage of knowledge, known as middle knowledge, is crucial for the Molinist system, which MacGregor distinguishes from both Calvinistic determinism and Arminian general sovereignty. MacGregor then spends the next two chapters applying his Molinist schema to two issues in theology: how to reconcile the personal God of Scripture with the God of philosophy—for which MacGregor believes Molinism has greater explanatory power than current "openness" views—and how to reconcile God's existence with the existence of genuinely gratuitous evils. Here again, MacGregor argues that a Molinist view offers the best explanation, in which "it is simply a logically unavoidable necessity of contingent living that even an omnipotent being cannot prevent evil" (122).

MacGregor next turns to theology proper, specifically to philosophical explications of the doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation, and then applies his view of the Incarnation to an Anselmian satisfaction theory of the atonement. Notably, MacGregor proposes a nonviolent atonement theory, arguing that "if the crucifixion was necessary for God to instantiate humanity's salvation, then a monstrous human evil was necessary for God to accomplish the ultimate good" (163).

In the concluding chapters, MacGregor tackles four issues especially relevant to evangelical Anabaptist concerns: scriptural inerrancy; the sacraments and church discipline; women in ministry; and the implications of Jesus' ministry for violence and political involvement. MacGregor argues for inerrancy but cautions that it must be understood in light of a proper biblio-critical hermeneutic. Not surprisingly, he argues for believer's baptism and against baptismal regeneration. Somewhat more surprisingly, he argues for Calvin's eucharistic theology, which he finds "comprises the trajectory in church history having the most to commend it" (219). With both of the sacraments, he argues that their administration should be closely tied to church discipline. In the penultimate chapter, MacGregor masterfully argues on exegetical grounds that women

should not be barred from any church office. Finally, MacGregor argues in his last chapter that, though the state is “not identical to the Kingdom of the World, [it] is dependant for its existence on the Kingdom of the World” (273). Christians should thus be cautious in their support of, or involvement in, the state, though such involvement is not necessarily prohibited. Here MacGregor follows Hubmaier closely as well as Greg Boyd and N.T. Wright.

As with any work of this scope, this book is not without room for critique. Though MacGregor rightly rejects consequentialist/utilitarian moral logic, it is difficult to see how his Molinist account avoids such logic, especially when MacGregor applies it to soteriology. MacGregor follows Craig’s argument that “God has actualized a world with an optimal balance between belief and unbelief, creating no more of the lost than is necessary to achieve the maximum number of the saved” (79, cf. 115-117). Such a calculation of the ratio of lost to saved as a basis for which world to create seems utilitarian indeed. God’s justice is still maintained by granting libertarian free will to each of his human creatures. But according to MacGregor, “God could have placed each elect individual in a salvifically comparable set of circumstances where that person would have been freely damned” and vice versa, a choice which “hinge[s] solely on the good pleasure of God” (83). So while Molinism may indeed be able to synthesize libertarian free will with a “high” view of sovereignty, one might question whether such a view of sovereignty is itself theologically viable. Here a reevaluation of Molina’s interpretation of relevant biblical texts from a bibliocritical standpoint would be helpful.

Second, while MacGregor’s chapter on women in ministry is one of the strongest in the book, one would have liked to see a defense of his assertion that “the complementarian position essentially reflects the biblical teaching on marital gender roles” (234). Instead, the reader is directed to a number of other works on the topic and given a few proof texts, which seem to have little if anything to do with the actual questions disputed between complementarians and egalitarians.

Finally, there are points where MacGregor noticeably parts from Anabaptist views without offering adequate discussion of the Anabaptist alternatives. His model of the eucharist is a prime example, where his description sounds like a *reductio ad absurdum* against his own view when he states that “the soul of the believer *literally* eats and drinks the infinite divine spirit of Jesus, thus respectively satisfying the soul’s *literal* hunger and quenching the soul’s *literal* thirst” (221, italics mine). How the biblical imagery of the soul’s hunger and thirst for God is to be taken literally is perplexing. MacGregor owes the reader a fuller discussion of how to understand such spiritual consumption, or better yet, a discussion of Anabaptist views of the Lord’s Supper.

A more important example comes in his concluding chapter, where MacGregor distances himself from the majority Anabaptist stream by arguing that questions regarding Christian participation in the military, support of just war and potentially violent self-defense are “highly ambiguous and open to legitimate disagreement among Christians” (298). Certainly, there is much disagreement over these matters among Christians, but most Anabaptists would be leery of characterizing these questions as “highly ambiguous.” Here again a

fuller interaction with the pacifist Anabaptist tradition would be helpful, although the logic of his chapter clearly supports a nonviolent position.

Such departures raise the larger issue of whether Anabaptism is the type of theological tradition that can be readily assimilated with other theological systems. Is Anabaptism open to ecumenical syntheses? Or does it have its own underlying logical integrity that defies such attempts? I leave this for the reader to decide, but certainly a great place to begin reflection on this question is Kirk MacGregor's *A Molinist-Anabaptist Systematic Theology*. Quibbling aside, this book is highly recommended for readers of all theological stripes.

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DAVID C. CRAMER

*Where We Start. Poetry.* By Debra Gingerich. Telford, Pa.: Dreamseeker Books. 2007. Pp. 90. \$12.95.

*Domain. Poems.* By Barbara Nickel. Toronto: Anansi. 2007. Pp. 93. \$14.95, paper.

In an editor's note introducing the special *Mennonite Quarterly Review* issue (January 2008) of essays from the "Mennonite/s Writing: Beyond Borders" conference held at Bluffton University, John D. Roth noted uneasily that poets, fiction writers and literary critics do not seem to argue with each other the way the historians and theologians do—that all the essays seem to be "highly positive, perhaps even self-congratulatory." He added: "If there are no borders, one might ask, do any criteria remain for distinguishing between good and bad literature?"

This is an excellent question, but it seems to me to misconstrue the phrase "Beyond Borders" in a subtle but crucial way. To go beyond borders means to cross them, not to obliterate them, after all. In doing so we may meet, befriend and even marry citizens of other nations, without forgetting our homelands or their ways. And while questions of quality always remain important, there is no more self-evident, or more important, literary truth than this: there are many varieties of literary excellence. In fact, it has long seemed crucial to me to encourage as many different types of excellence as possible. We need no more choose between them than we need choose between the parables, the prophets and the psalms.

These new books of poems—by two Mennonite women living several thousand miles apart, one from upstate New York and the other from western Canada—have both more and less in common than one might expect. Their styles and concerns are quite different: Gingerich's poems, mainly in free verse, often turn on negotiations with "plain" Swiss Mennonite identity, while Nickel offers sonnets, sestinas and other traditional forms, with the Russian Mennonite experience of trauma and exile as her reference point. But both show concern for the unified architecture of a book—something neither simple nor easy in a gathering of fifty or sixty mostly short and mostly lyric or narrative poems.

Dreamseeker Books, the poetry imprint of Michael King's Cascadia Press, has begun to accumulate a significant list—Debra Gingerich's *Where We Start* is the fourth book in three years of the series, following others by Dallas Wiebe, Cheryl Denise and Shari Wagner. (Full disclosure: I am now poetry consultant for Dreamseeker, though I had no role in the publication of *Where We Start*.)

Gingerich's first book contains mainly straightforward, carefully paced and economical narrative poems. Its three sections weave together several ongoing narrative strands that run across the entire book. One concerns her husband, born in Yugoslavia; a second is a series of "Lewis County Chronicles," about Mennonites in upstate New York; a third is more personal and autobiographical, though intersecting with both of the others, for obvious reasons.

The style is clean, compact and direct; Julia Spicher Kasdorf's work is clearly an influence, and Gingerich shares some of the concerns of Kasdorf's *Sleeping Preacher*, though the home territory that Gingerich remembers with complicated nostalgia and resistance is the cold dairy country around Lowville, not Kasdorf's sheltered, isolated Big Valley. Here she is on that prototypical Mennonite theme, singing in church:

And we should have known  
that folks who once all wore  
that same cut dress, the same plain coat  
couldn't also sing in unison.  
Somehow it had to be told that  
we are not all made alike (26).

Gingerich, like many post-conservative Mennos, looks back on the strict tradition with more discomfort than nostalgia, and so, even, does her mother:

Mom says that after she cut her hair,  
turning the back of her cropped curls  
on those bishops' teachings about length  
and beauty, she could reach the high notes  
of hymns better (27).

Her husband is as exotic to Mennonite readers as Amish are to regular Americans. "How is it that he loves me / through all of these languages, / through the check points / and road blocks . . . ?" (50). "My dreams are content / in one language / while his wide-eyed mind juggles / four tongues."

Gingerich is a recent graduate of the Vermont College M.F.A. program, and at times this book shows her relative inexperience. The poems are sometimes predictable, and the language does not always generate much excitement. But her best poems are full of complicated feelings, personal and public: guilt, anxiety, love, joy and fear are all amply present. "On Writing a Truthful Poem," one of a number of well-crafted prose poems, invokes the difficulties of negotiating between past and present, tradition and culture, and secularity and faith, with passion and clarity:

It is hiding your sins deep in your pockets. It is not for you to challenge or interpret. It is why your family could stop loving you with the flip of a page, the reading of one word, the switching of one fact. It is why they might get questioned by the grocery-store clerk (who went to church camp

with your cousin) or why the milk truck driver might start looking at them funny. This room is full. No one waits for you outside (58).

Barbara Nickel's *Domain* is also braided from several strands, although they are as much formal as thematic. A crown of sonnets (in which the last line of each forms the first line of the next) is scattered through the book. Like numerous other poems, the sonnets deal with themes of houses and buildings, each treating a different room. Nickel's language is typically resonant and a bit oblique, as in this ending of the first sonnet, "Master Bedroom": "A finger on the mirror now, I track a pale / design that keeps me out—a girl obscured. / The only way to touch her is to hurt" (1).

As perhaps befits her training as a musician, Nickel has a fine ear for the sounds of a line and a stanza. Both this craftsmanship and the central theme of the book are clear in the opening of its second poem, "House":

Feel the old brick. Chipped. Not really red.  
Veranda, vines, the balcony. Gentle  
Cyclops with its attic eye that leads  
us home from school, watches the antlers  
plough through the sky each Christmas; our life threaded  
through its stare with sparrows, who build lintels  
in the vines. Inside, we build our fires,  
hundreds, searing our seer, born of fire (2).

This house—like the others in *Domain*—is a place of ambiguous comfort, home to all the complications of memory. Much of the poem has to do not with the house but with the kiln nearby where the bricks were fired, an even harsher environment, a "heat trap" where sweating workmen stoked fires "like fuelling hell" to make the brick for "my home, this pretty edifice" (3).

As we might expect, house leads into family memory and story, told in quick, sure strokes. The doctor-father "touches pain so she can buy the meat / delivered to the house in boxes labeled / Dr. Mrs. before her name" (6). His exhausting days and hers are paralleled, and the poem ends—not quite unexpectedly—with a slightly awkward joining and, as it began, with pain that leads somewhere: "he reaches for / his wife. In the dark where two can make room / they touch. It hurts. She's crying. I begin."

One of the few poems with sustained and explicit Mennonite themes is "My Brother's Wedding Ring" which introduces another recurring motif: golden rings. This poem moves from rings clinking on a steering wheel to borscht in old Russia, with the obligatory "murdered Mennonite families," stories of hardship and emigration, and eventual Canadian prosperity. By now these stories, like the Swiss stories of tight-knit farming communities and so forth, are both familiar and inescapable. William Faulkner was right: the past is not really past, but remains stubbornly present. Still, the poem suggests, we keep moving; in the final lines the brother drives north on his honeymoon, "and he can't even see / the rear view" (9).

Another high point of *Domain* is its crafty set of five poems on Catherine the Great, the legendary monarch who invited the Mennonites to the Ukraine. These poems are each in four stanzas, and each stanza ends with a line drawn from the

four-line epigraphs by or about Catherine. The first four concern Catherine's life and times, and are fine enough; my favorite, though, is "Catherine Reborn," which celebrates the life of a venerable Mennonite icon. If you can't guess her identity from this brief excerpt, buy the book and find out for sure:

. . . swath of dark water  
 becoming the gap between her teeth, a field  
 the Africans have called beautiful. See  
 it as she raises her arms to give the crowd—  
 thousands—music. They will be filled.  
 She is among those who give food (43).

There are many other worthy things in this book—poems filled with deep feeling and finely tuned language, subtle meditations on pain and memory. Like Gingerich, Nickel continues to press with integrity and invention further into the possibilities that memory, relationships, faith and craft have to offer her art.

*Bluffton University*

JEFF GUNDY

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*Electing Not to Vote: Christian Reflections on Reasons for Not Voting.* Ted Lewis, ed. Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books. 2008. Pp. 126. \$17.

Ted Lewis should be applauded for putting together a book that asks an important question: should Christians vote? This collection of essays approaches the question from different vantage points, and most draw the same conclusion.

John D. Roth's essay is the most interesting of those making the comprehensive case against voting. He fashions five reasons why "Christians might conscientiously abstain from voting" (3). First, abstaining from voting is one way of living out pacifist convictions that Christians ought not take part in the violence of military conflict. Second, the moral differences between presidential candidates are negligible. Third, the general idea that Christians should attempt to elect candidates who support their (Christian) positions is imbued with "Constantinian logic" (5), meaning that there are faulty theological presuppositions built into the need to have people "like us" holding high office. Fourth, voting's private and solitary character challenges the communal nature of the Christian faith. Fifth, and finally, abstaining from voting makes a statement in the public realm about ultimate allegiances.

Andy Alexis-Baker argues that voting serves as a national ritual, expressing our commitment to the ideology of "state-as-savior," rather than as a platform for policy change. Rather than participate in voting as a "confession of faith" in the state to solve all of our problems, Alexis-Baker would point to John Howard Yoder's vision of ecclesial practices that constitute an alternative political world.

Nekeisha Alexis-Baker challenges the idea that voting is an expression of one's political voice. Because ballots are so structured or "prepackaged," voting processes are not reliable and minorities are often subject to discrimination. Because the author desires true "freedom of voice," she does not vote, and she seeks alternative methods of political expression modeled after the civil rights movement, rooted in the church and possessed of "political imagination."

G. Scott Becker mines the theology of Karl Barth for help with the question of the meaning of not voting. Becker contends that Barth's christological conception of the state as in the service of Christ's redemptive purposes "draws the church into the sphere of governmental politics" (40) and beckons the church to offer alternative options for "reconciliation and economic justice" (43). The essay concludes with the idea that if government is failing to fulfill God's ordained purpose, then not voting would be an appropriate expression of the Christian's contention that the state has "abandoned its high calling" (49).

Michael Degan wants to recover the traditional Anabaptist two-kingdoms vision, with its concomitant commitment to nonresistance, as the best defense of not voting. He concludes by suggesting that because of Jesus' core teaching of nonresistance, our choice in voting is not between parties or candidates, but between "God and mammon" (61). And because voting is "staking a claim to a piece of the mammon" (61), Christians should refrain from participation in politics.

Todd David Whitmore takes up the Catholic mantle in the debate over voting. Catholic social teaching suggests that voting is a way of showing "solidarity on behalf of the common good" (64). However, the duty to vote is not absolute. The author then commences to make a case for not voting in the 2004 presidential election, by arguing that President Bush failed to meet the demands of just war criteria in the Iraq conflict and that John Kerry wavered on important moral issues, including abortion, making him an unreliable moral leader. The author's formula for deciding whether to vote in a given election is interesting: "is the distance between Catholic teaching and the candidate nearest to it greater than the distance between the candidates?" (77).

Paul Alexander, a Pentecostal, and Tato Sumantri, an Indonesian-American Christian, draw essentially the same conclusion through similar arguments. Both contend that the death and resurrection of Jesus are of such momentous theological importance that it drowns out any other moral framework for making decisions and begs us to shun from consideration any process or institution not wholly committed to the implications of Jesus' death and resurrection. For these authors, a moral separatism leads to a political separatism, though Alexander seems less absolute than Sumantri in that regard.

Ted Lewis concludes the collection with this thesis: voting "establishes bonds between people and government in similar ways that religion establishes bonds between people and deities" (103). At the end of the essay, a reader is left wondering exactly what those "similar ways" are, as Lewis merely restates the thesis: "voting implies a devotedness that cannot mix the politics of this world with the politics of Jesus" (113).

There is much to be admired in this collection, and I think it will prove useful to remind Christians that deciding whether to vote and deciding how to vote is a morally-charged activity that requires much deliberation. By way of critique, I could quibble with a number of the points made in the essays. For instance, Andy Alexis-Baker too easily elides democracy with the social contract tradition and both of those with liberalism. And he incorrectly thinks that the liberal, democratic, social contract tradition in America was designed to deliberate about the highest good. James Madison and Thomas Jefferson would disagree.

Nekeisha Alexis-Baker presumes that American electoral politics is designed to give people “a voice,” unaware that “identity politics” draws the ire of most in normative discussions of politics. Voting is fundamentally about electing candidates for office and setting policy, not necessarily giving people “a voice.” That voting fails to do something it wasn’t designed to do is not a serious critique.

There are a few larger problems with several essays, so I will talk about the collection as a whole at this point. First, I remain unconvinced, despite the arguments of many of the essays in this book, that voting must establish a relationship between voter and democratic government that precludes a faithful relationship between God and a disciple of Christ fully committed to the life of nonviolence and fully cognizant that government is not the savior. I wholeheartedly agree with most of the authors that Christians do not have a moral duty to vote. But this does not equate to a moral prohibition on voting. Sometimes a Christian voting simply means that she believes one candidate will be able to handle the nexus of duties and relationships that confront a president better than another candidate. There need not be idolatry here, or elevation to divine sonship. It can simply be like an employer making a judgment call among different candidates for a job hire. You assess the nature of the job, you limit the pool of candidates based on certain criteria, and you make a decision. There is clearly power involved here. Often there are moral compromises. And many times, the person hired is clearly better suited for the job than the other candidates.

Second, and related to the last point, while I agree with Roth’s second principle, in that no candidate for president is going to make a good Mennonite, that seems to be an unreasonable criterion for president. We aren’t electing the president to be a model of Christian discipleship, or to be pastor of the local church. He or she is going to be president, and that job requires a skill-set all its own. I totally agree that it is conceptually impossible for a person to be a faithful disciple and be president. But you must construct a sophisticated argument to then conclude that faithful Christians should not vote for a presidential candidate. None of the essays presented here successfully make that construction.

Finally, most thinking about the relationship between Christian discipleship and political activity lacks serious thinking, including biblical reflection, on the nature of government and its role in this world; that is, they lack a political theology. Becker’s and Whitmore’s essays begin to do this in helpful ways. Most of the other essayists need to consider what it means that God has ordained government, that it has some sort of role to play in God’s world at this point, and that it has been authorized to use the sword. This makes thinking about being Christian and being a citizen more complicated, though it need not change the simple facts that Christ is Lord of all, and he has called us to a life of nonviolent reconciliation with our enemies, full of grace and truth.

*Stumbling Toward a Genuine Conversation on Homosexuality*. Michael A. King, ed. Telford, Pa.: Cascadia Publishing House. 2007. 311 Pp. \$22. 95.

*Reasoning Together: A Conversation on Homosexuality*. By Ted Grimsrud and Mark Thiessen Nation. Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press. 2008. 317 Pp. \$17. 99.

*Stumbling Toward a Genuine Conversation on Homosexuality* and *Reasoning Together: A Conversation on Homosexuality* are the two most recent, provocative additions to an eclectic spate of full-length Mennonite texts dealing with same-sex sexuality. Others have included C. Norman Kraus's *To Continue the Dialogue: Biblical Interpretation and Homosexuality* (Pandora Press U. S. , 2001); Michael King's *Fractured Dance: Gadamer and a Mennonite Conflict Over Homosexuality* (Pandora Press U. S. , 2001); Willard Swartley's *Homosexuality: Biblical Interpretation and Moral Discernment* (Herald Press, 2003); and a series of personal stories—*From Wounded Hearts* (Chi Rho Press, 1998), *Together in Love* (Strategic Press, 2002) and *The Cost of Truth* (Strategic Press, 2003)—edited by Roberta Showalter Kreider.

More so than these predecessor volumes, the Grimsrud and Nation text, as well as King's latest contribution, seek to offer diverse and varied perspectives that contribute toward the Mennonite and larger Christian dialogue about same-sex sexuality. For those whose families and friendship networks include same-sex-oriented people, for those who seek faithful biblical interpretation on this and other issues, and for those who care about the future of the institutional church, both books are well worth reading.

*Stumbling Toward a Genuine Conversation on Homosexuality* is a healthy expansion of the Winter 2006 issue of *DreamSeeker Magazine*, which King edits. That volume of the magazine was prompted by the suspension of ministerial credentials for a Seattle pastor, Weldon Nisly, after he performed a same-sex ceremony. The first seventy-five pages of *Stumbling* is almost a verbatim reprinting of that magazine issue, a reality that makes for slightly awkward reading in the book context since many references remain to "this special issue of *DreamSeeker Magazine*."

King acknowledges from the beginning that his call "is to support genuine conversation across differences" (25), although he asserts that it "was a particular challenge to secure writing from persons who want to support the Mennonite Church USA teachings on homosexuality" (20). In the background of both texts are two statements on sexuality from churchwide conferences in Saskatoon in 1986 (General Conference Mennonite Church) and at Purdue University in 1987 (Mennonite Church). Those statements were re-acknowledged at the Columbus 2009 gathering of Mennonite Church USA. The Columbus resolution also acknowledged "the presence of dissenting voices within our denomination" and affirmed "the church's commitment to ongoing dialogue and discerning and 'agreeing and disagreeing in love.'"

Among the writers representing that diverse dialogue in part I of *Stumbling* are Loren Johns, C. Norman Kraus, Paul M. Lederach, Weldon Nisly, John D. Roth, Mary H. Schertz, Carolyn Schrock-Shenk and Ruth S. Weaver. Most

insightful are the direct interchanges that occur as several authors respond to each other near the end of part 1.

The last 190 pages of King's text seek to deepen the conversation begun in *DreamSeeker*, and much of the rich interchange occurs here. Although *Dreamseeker* did not include any writings from those who self-identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual, part II includes several such voices. One should read these pieces recognizing the ways in which lives, perspectives, and sexual identities morph and change, particularly since one writer who spoke of seeking healing from his same-sex orientation has embraced a gay identity since the book's publication, and at least one other same-sex-oriented writer, then in good standing with the church, is now at odds with conference leaders.

Many essays in part II are profound and insightful, engaging and provoking responses from readers. A medical student, Luke L. Miller, writes poetically about embracing his same-sex orientation in his childhood, teen and young adult years (218-227). A church leader, Harold N. Miller, writes as "a conservative who would change on homosexuality—but so far has not" (149ff.), still finding inadequate those arguments that affirm same-sex covenants as holy. A former pastor and active Germantown Mennonite Church member, John Linscheid, writes passionately about what he perceives as the "spiritual abuse" of current Mennonite teaching on same-sex sexuality and about troubling machinations of church leaders in addressing same-sex sexuality in less-than-loving ways (164-177).

Pacific Northwest Conference Minister Sheldon Burkhalter addresses individual and corporate conscience, concluding with eleven principles regarding pastoral leadership, including the expectation that pastors will "exercise restraint in articulating personal views" that differ from the church's 1995 Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective and that "pastors are obliged, by their ordination covenant with conference and the Mennonite church, to teach and minister in ways consistent with" the confession (280-281). Pastor Phil Kniss talks about being "hitched to the lame horse of institutional church membership," and instead proposes that "membership in the church should be determined by a group no larger than the number of persons who can know and relate to someone deeply, intimately, and regularly enough to do good discernment" (258).

Grimsrud and Nation also make contributions to the *Stumbling* text, most of which is repeated in their longer conversation in *Reasoning Together*. While *Stumbling* has an eclectic feel, with multiple, scattered voices, *Reasoning Together* is more focused since only two voices are heard. While that elicits some redundancy, the interactive style also allows for greater depth regarding, for instance, biblical perspectives on same-sex sexuality and on the calling of the church on this issue. The book concludes with fifteen pages of the authors' individual annotated bibliographies, which are very helpful for those who want to read further.

*Reasoning Together* grew out of public conversations that Grimsrud—a theology and peace studies professor at Eastern Mennonite University—and Nation—a theology professor at Eastern Mennonite Seminary—conducted over the last several years. The authors say they hope that by persevering in their

conversation, they have provided a model for Christians “trying to find their way through this oh-so-difficult terrain” (17).

Near the end of the text, the two authors identify six points of agreement between them: 1) the centrality of the Bible; 2) the importance of care and respect for vulnerable people; 3) affirmation of marriage as the only morally valid context for sexual intercourse; 4) social constructivism and the belief that the dynamics that shape our sexual identities and practices are complex and beyond our ability to fully understand; 5) the problems of a double standard in churches with regard to the sexual sins of heterosexuals and gays; and 6) that gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people should be welcomed into our lives and into our churches (247-251).

Grimsrud writes from what he calls an “inclusivist” position (which Nation calls “revisionist”) while Nation identifies himself as a “traditionalist” (which Grimsrud calls a “restrictivist” position). The two say in the introduction that they have remained friends even after their “at times bruising exchange” (17).

Bruising, indeed. Amid all the polite posturing and expressions of gratitude at the beginning and end of each back-and-forth chapter and the concluding questions and counterpoints, I was at times reminded of a classic line from Peter Carey’s epic novel *Oscar and Lucinda* (Vintage Books, 1988), in which the protagonist, Lucinda Leplastrier, argues with her associate, Mr. d’Abbs, saying passionately, “Your point, with respect, Mr. d’Abbs, does not matter.” Her interlocutor retorts: “There is no respect in that at all, Miss Leplastrier, and simply saying ‘with respect’ does not put it there.”

Nonetheless, the reading is richer because of the honesty of this zesty exchange, one that ultimately *is* respectful even though it includes many barbs along the way. Both Nation and Grimsrud claim that they have a high view of Scripture. Grimsrud says his is an inclusive perspective “with a more conservative biblical hermeneutic” (131), though Nation later expresses considerable doubt about that positioning (181).

Given the centrality of the Bible for the writers, much of the dialogue is intentionally and unapologetically biblical. They repeatedly address the multiple perspectives on whether the Greek terms *arsenokoites* and *malakos*, which are used in a few Pauline letters, connote some form of same-sex sexual behavior (pederasty? male prostitution?), and at times have been jointly translated as some form of “homosexuality.” Both address at length the tensions and callings of biblical hospitality and biblical holiness.

Although often sympathetic in talking about his gay and lesbian friends, Nation also (with some acknowledged cringing on his part) describes gay and lesbian people as having a “flaw in their identity, a ‘disability’ that manifests itself in various ways, including, not unusually, psychological disorders” (102). Grimsrud consistently argues against a position that would see some “inherent wrongness” with same-sexness rather than with certain forms of same-sex activities.

There are same-sex practices and behaviors that should be opposed by the churches, Grimsrud says, but those aspects “would also be morally problematic when engaged in by heterosexuals.” Morally problematic sexual expressions, he says, may include “sexual intimacy outside of marriage, promiscuity, coercive or

abusive sexual behavior, sexual behavior that is economically exploitative, or lustful sexual behavior linked with idolatrous religious activities" (110)—all on the basis of the practices themselves and not whether two people are in same-sex or other-sex relationships. The few biblical passages that address same-sex behaviors do not, in other words, speak to all "homosexualities," says Grimsrud.

Nation, for his part, charges Grimsrud with being ideological and placing his "heavy interpretive grid over the [biblical] details, allowing what Grimsrud describes as "present-day relevance" to conveniently coincide with his "ideology of inclusion" (126).

Ultimately, Grimsrud asks the church to 1) allow for a safe and open discernment process; and 2) leave membership issues to congregational discernment. He says that "all of us who believe in fidelity, monogamy, and sexual intimacy only in the context of covenanted relationships" should welcome "committed same-sex partnerships and [call] all in the churches to faithfulness and high ethical standards within covenanted relationships" (166).

Nation believes that while hospitality is an important biblical theme, it is not "an overarching or programmatic theme within Scripture," but instead "one moral claim among many" (170). Also required are proclaiming "God's glory with our whole beings," "moral purity" and "holiness, a distinct identity."

In combination, *Stumbling and Reasoning Together* contain much wisdom for the church as it moves forward in discerning how gay, lesbian and bisexual members and attenders will be understood or critiqued, included or restricted, embraced or rejected. The two texts make clear that faithful, God-seeking, biblically educated and compassionate pastors, scholars and church members differ on their interpretation and application of the biblical text on this issue, and on their sense of God's calling on the contemporary church. Given that, what ought the church to do at this juncture?

For those who think loving dialogue should be halted, or that the church has spoken with a definitive word that need not be revisited, these books should be read before the dialogical door is closed.

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