

BOOK REVIEWS

Pentecostal and Holiness Statements on War and Peace. By Jay Beaman and Brian K. Pipkin, eds. Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick Publications. 2013. Pp. 291. \$34.

The role and duties of a Christian regarding participation in war and peace have been a matter of debate since the beginnings of the Christian tradition. Many Christians have at least supported, if not participated, in war. Most are caught up in social structures where their labors and taxes support military systems. This volume is a reminder that in the United States, peace traditions have been a vital, thoughtful part of the Christian tradition, particularly within the Mennonite, Holiness, and Pentecostal movements. This is a timely reminder as these traditions, in trying to support upward social mobility and integration into mainstream society, are often forgetting or repressing the peace traditions that were at the core of their earlier belief systems. The lengthy foreword (ix-xx) by Titus Peachy, the peace education coordinator of the Mennonite Central Committee U.S., sets the tone for the book. He notes that “opposition [to war] was a part of the identity of these faith groups and was often a test of membership” (x). He provides examples, including his own great uncle, of the abuse suffered by conscientious objectors to war when they went against the dominant militaristic cultures.

The introduction (1-39) by editor Jay Beaman provides a survey of the witnesses to pacifism and growing accommodation to the cultural norms by the movements under consideration. The analysis is quite nuanced. The focus is on the Assemblies of God—the largest of U.S. denominations rooted in Pentecostalism—several of whose members have become leaders of the new “Christian right” and who are strong advocates of war as a tool of state to be supported, they insist, by all Christians. This *volte face*, albeit less obvious in other groups, has been a result of the evolving American Empire since the Spanish-American War, and especially since World War II. Especially helpful is the section “degrees of pacifism,” which explores ambiguities of both the term and the statements of the various churches. Beaman notes that many of the statements arose from government pressure at the beginning of World War I, and the denominations used that pressure to persuade independent congregations to affiliate with a church body recognized by the government as a peace church.

The method of searching for official and authoritative statements about war and peace began with the published works and archives of Carl Piepkorn. Supplemented by searches of databases of digitized Pentecostal and Holiness periodicals as well as selected disciplines (rule books) of Holiness and Pentecostal churches, the research came to include statements from thirty-three Radical Holiness and forty-three Pentecostal denominations in the United States,

and citations from eight countries (Australia, Britain, Canada, Palestine, Peru, Russia, South Africa, Switzerland) mostly based on English and U.S. expatriate sources.

The presentation of data is by denomination (alphabetical order) and within each denominational category in chronological order. This makes reference by denomination easy, but it is quite difficult to use the data to quickly chart the trends within the various branches of the Holiness and Pentecostal churches and organizations or to find parallels in the texts. Access to the statements is facilitated by indexes of personal names and organizations. However, these do not include many names of both organizations and individuals discussed in the introduction, foreword, and footnotes.

The statements from the Mennonite churches are useful for context, although the stance of the various Mennonite bodies is quite well known and has generated a significant literature. While the argument is not made, it could be read as suggesting that the pacifist tradition in the Holiness and Pentecostal churches owes its origins to the Mennonite position. Actually, the Quakers were at least as influential. As the introduction suggests, the reality is quite complex. The extent of influence of the Mennonites on Holiness and Pentecostal church positions is difficult to ascertain at this point in the research. Holiness denominations interacted more with Mennonites than did Pentecostals. The pacifist position of Holiness and Pentecostal churches was being articulated on the basis of a "Jesus spirituality." Because the "Baptism of the Holy Spirit" was less common among other Christians, it became the public identifying factor of the Holiness and Pentecostal tradition. However, it could be argued that most of the Holiness movement and much of the Pentecostal movement were initially Jesus-centered piety traditions. This focus on Jesus and the teaching of Jesus led many people toward a pacifist position as a part of what it meant to fulfill the mandate of Jesus to be perfect in love.

The greatest lacuna in the volume is analysis of the pacifists among the Holiness contingents of the Methodist Episcopal Churches (North and South), out of which came much of the leadership of the Radical Holiness Movement. Two examples: Martin Wells Knapp, founder of God's Bible School and a Methodist Episcopal clergyman until the last year of his life, was a pacifist. Knapp was the teacher of Pentecostal founders William Seymour, R. E. McAlister, A. J. Tomlinson, and Glen A. Cook, among others. And E. Stanley Jones was a lifelong Methodist.

This initial compilation will hopefully see future editions and updates as it becomes more inclusive denominationally, linguistically, and culturally. As more texts become available in digital form, searching for meaningful statements in sermons and popular writings will become easier, although the results may be fraught with historiographical complications. The linguistic breadth of the volume could be expanded in later editions, perhaps through the development of an international team of collaborators. For example, the carefully nuanced statements of faith of Eastern European Pentecostals under communism and the clearer statements that have evolved since the early 1990s should be included in a later edition. It is also important to find ways to distinguish between military

service in a country such as Bulgaria and those (e.g., U.S. and Russia) where the military is a linchpin of aggressive foreign policy. Only in that way will the research move toward a more holistic understanding of these global traditions.

As it is, this volume is a tour-de-force. It brings into one place a host of documents that until now had been available only to specialists with excellent library resources. As a reference tool, it is a major scholarly contribution. Passionate and personal, this volume is also a good read. To suggest that there is more to do is not meant to detract from the value of the work completed. Both authors and publisher are to be congratulated.

New York Theological Seminary and Seoul Theological University DAVID BUNDY

The Age of Evangelicalism: America's Born-Again Years. By Steven P. Miller. New York: Oxford University Press. 2014. Pp. 221. \$24.95.

The study of postwar American evangelicalism has attracted remarkable scholarly attention in the past decade. In the past three years alone, several major studies have appeared to wide acclaim, including Darren Dochuk's *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt* (2011), D. G. Hart's *From Billy Graham to Sarah Palin* (2011), Axel R. Schäfer's *Countercultural Conservatives* (2011), David R. Swartz's *Moral Minority* (2012), and Molly Worthen's *Apostles of Reason* (2013). Each author has urged historians to rethink dominant narratives about American religious history, especially the career of the Religious Right. Given the salience of these works, scholars might ask if we need yet another study of late twentieth-century evangelicalism. Steven Miller's *The Age of Evangelicalism: America's Born-Again Years* demonstrates that we do.

Miller's intervention in the field is his argument is that evangelicalism in the years under consideration (1970-2008) was "perhaps . . . not really a subculture," but actually resided "at the very center of recent American history" (7). In other words, evangelical vocabulary, paradigms, politics, and pop culture influenced American society as a whole in ways that we have yet to fully understand. The result was nothing less than "the age of evangelicalism."

Miller begins in the 1970s, when evangelicalism began to impinge on popular culture as a whole. The Jesus People movement, the popularity of Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970), and the prominent conversions of such unlikely figures as Charles Colson, Johnny Cash, and Eldridge Cleaver all achieved recognition outside of evangelical circles. Politically, a nascent "evangelical left" got behind George McGovern in 1972 and helped elect Jimmy Carter in 1976, although they never came close to persuading the majority of their coreligionists to follow their liberal course. Instead, most conservative Protestants supported Ronald Reagan in 1980 and 1984.

According to Miller, the New Religious Right became one of the key "pillars" of the Reagan coalition (66), an influence that extended to the Republican Party as a whole for the next two decades. Even those who were not evangelicals felt compelled to respond to the powerful presence of the Christian Right: the 1980s witnessed the founding of Norman Lear's People for the American Way, for example, while Americans United for the Separation of Church and State and the

American Civil Liberties Union also ratcheted up opposition to the conservative agenda.

In addition, evangelical intellectuals wielded an influence out of proportion to their numbers in the 1980s and 1990s. Francis Schaeffer was the example *par excellence* of a self-taught guru whose ruminations on Western history and philosophy attracted the attention of musicians Eric Clapton and Mick Jagger in addition to his more common audience of fellow evangelicals. The publication of Richard John Neuhaus's *The Naked Public Square* (1984) and Stephen L. Carter's *The Culture of Disbelief* (1993)—by authors who were at least friendly to evangelicalism—gave ammunition to those wishing to instill a greater place for religion in public life. The publications of “thoughtful evangelicals” in academia provided the movement with needed gravitas (94).

In Miller's view, the first decade of the twenty-first century witnessed both the apex of “the age of evangelicalism” and its demise. The election of George W. Bush, whose friendship with Billy Graham was well-known, meant that for the first time since the Reagan days Christian conservatives had one of their own in the highest position of power. “I always laugh when people say George W. is saying this or that to appease the religious right,” said one of the president's cousins. “He *is* the religious right” (127). Bush's enthusiasm for quasi-mandatory White House Bible studies and his appointment of the Pentecostal John Ashcroft to the position of attorney general further illustrated the extent to which many evangelicals felt at home in his administration. In addition, the popularity of *The Passion of the Christ* film (2004), endorsed by many evangelical leaders, and of the explicitly dispensationalist *Left Behind* novels showed how American culture as a whole was getting evangelical religion.

Ultimately, though, conservative overreach and the resurgence of the evangelical left spelled the end of the age of evangelicalism by the 2008 election. Evangelical efforts to teach the theory of intelligent design alongside traditional biological evolution in Dover, Pennsylvania; the refusal of Judge Roy Moore to remove an unlawful Ten Commandments monument from his Alabama courtroom; and the interference of conservative Christians in the famous Terri Schiavo matter of 2005 all seemed to indicate that evangelicals were dangerously insistent on getting their own way at any cost. The deaths of Jerry Falwell and D. James Kennedy combined with the liberal backlash to pave the way for the emergence of more moderate leaders like Rick Warren or the reemergence of even liberal ones like Jim Wallis of *Sojourners*. When figures like the latter engineered a “proxy campaign” on behalf of Barack Obama in 2008, the evangelical left proved that reports of its death had been greatly exaggerated (158).

Readers of *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* will be especially interested in the minor but interesting roles played by Anabaptists in this story. A key figure in the evangelical left was Ronald Sider, the Canadian-born Anabaptist theologian who authored *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (1977) and founded Evangelicals for Social Action. Likewise, one of the book's most memorable moments occurs when President Bush met with fifty Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, Amish during the 2004 campaign. Although the majority of Amish

do not vote in presidential elections, some did cast a ballot for Bush and one enthusiastic soul even presented the president with a quilt reading "I Love America" (129).

Overall, *The Age of Evangelicalism* has many strengths. Miller's extensive research in the published record, his attention to the evangelical left, and his awareness of the theological differences between, say, Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, are all admirable features of this important study. Moreover, the book is well-written, appropriate for both a scholarly and a popular audience. A few criticisms might be made. Most significant is that Miller never offers a definition of "evangelical" or "evangelicalism." To be sure, part of his argument is that such boundaries were fluid during this period, but the term is still in need of some definition. In addition, some readers will be surprised that there are no oral histories in the book, given that many of its subjects are still alive. Like the shortage (though not complete absence) of archival documentation, this may have been a deliberate choice on the part of the author.

The book ends by noting "the waning salience of evangelical politics as a whole" (162) in the contemporary world. Historians are usually averse to predictions, but Miller's evidence does suggest that evangelicalism does not command the cultural cache it did even ten years ago. In any case, for readers interested in the past as well as the future, *The Age of Evangelicalism* offers an insightful look at this important period in American history.

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BENJAMIN J. WETZEL

Pursuing the Spiritual Roots of Protest: Merton, Berrigan, Yoder, and Muste at the Gethsemane Abbey Peacemakers Retreat. By Gordon Oyer. Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books. 2014. Pp 275. \$33.

In November of 1964, just two years after the Cuban missile crisis and four months after passage of the Civil Rights Act, a handful of prophetic voices from broader North American Christianity gathered to consider the spiritual roots of protest. Notable among the group were Thomas Merton (Trappist monk and the gathering's host), Abraham "A. J." Muste (Protestant clergyman and political activist), John Howard Yoder (Mennonite theologian and, at the time, administrator at Mennonite Board of Missions), and Daniel Berrigan (Jesuit, poet, and New Testament scholar).

Gordon Oyer's book about this remarkable gathering is a full and detailed record—as full and detailed as any record could possibly hope to be—of the circumstances of their meeting, what was said by everyone involved as best as it can be reconstructed, and the gathering's aftermath evaluated from a contemporary point of view. As a reconstruction from notes, handouts, letters, recollections, and interviews, the book is richly peppered with quotations, some extensive but most short phrases, and one gets the feeling that no detail has been left out. Mennonites will note with interest the significant role played by Paul Peachy as executive secretary of Church Peace Mission, an interdenominational advocacy group.

The overall structure of the book falls into three categories: prelude to the meeting (chapters on the antiwar movement, the idea of a gathering, and Merton's pre-meeting notes); the gathering itself (three chapters, one on each day); and legacy (a chapter on the immediate aftermath and one looking back from the vantage point of fifty years).

The book regularly—and sometimes frustratingly—draws on shifting historical, fictional, and theological conventions to tell its story. To put it gently, readers should not be in a hurry. To give an example, this sentence appears at the beginning: "Fallen leaves, slippery wet beneath their feet, slowed their pace as they made their way up the dark and muddy footpath, sheltered from sunlight by the arched canopy of thinning branches that stretched over their heads" (1). But, there is also this sentence at the end, which takes us much closer to the theological heartbeat of the book: "In time, [God's movement] will seep through some crevice in the dominions' constraints and at some unpredictable moment emerge as a life-giving spring in our desert of apprehension."

The gradually emerging proposal of the book is that acts of protest can be sustained when "grounded in a hope offered by the 'mystery of God's will to save man and his promise of a reign of peace'" (207). To state the thesis succinctly: prophetic protest can only be sustained by hope grounded in trusting the goodness of God. Here Oyer has his fingers directly on the pulse of an issue facing Mennonites today, particularly our institutions of higher learning: Do we really need the "extra weight" of monastic spirituality or theological confessions or church attendance to protest the current state of the world and to go about our work of building a better one? Can't we do just fine without burdensome habits of devotion (prayer), antiquated notions of doctrine (Trinity), and awkward practices (footwashing)?

Insofar as the book wishes to advance a theological claim, and not simply give a this-happened-and-then-that-happened history (or even a somewhat elaborate historical-fictional account), the claim of the book is quite simply that we *cannot* do without devotions, doctrines, and practices because we need the structure of such a spirituality to sustain our hope for a different world. The quiet-in-the-background reasoning that supports this claim is equally simple: there are surely even more things to protest today—rampant racial prejudice, unfathomable economic disparity, irreversible environmental disasters, and shockingly brutal wars—than there was back then, and there is (let's be honest) *very* little to suggest that we can feel confident in the effectiveness of our third way strategies to engage and redeem the powers and principalities that structure our world. Placing our hope in the effectiveness of strategies, then, is a naïve, risky bet.

The central hope of prophetic protest—that God's movement will emerge as a life-giving spring in our desert at some unpredictable moment—is no less risky. It runs the risk of tragically (laughable or pitiable to those who are watching) waiting for Godot. This is nothing new. Prophetic protest has *always* run the risk of being laughable or pitiable. The apostle Paul knew that when he said that "if Christ was not raised . . . we of all people are most to be pitied" (1 Cor. 15:17, 19). That self-awareness, of course, does not remove the problem of protesting. In fact, it makes it worse for those of us committed to saying "No" to

the current state of the world: we *know* that we may, in fact, be waiting for Godot.

Perhaps this is why Thomas Merton, the host of the conference, opened the gathering with the question: by what right do we continue to protest—or, perhaps better, where do we *stand* to continue to protest—the state of the world? The presenters each have their suggestion for sustaining roots and sustaining stance: monastic retreat (Merton), academic critique (Berrigan), ecclesial witness (Yoder), and political revolution (Muste). To the book's credit, it recognizes that there are serious and significant question marks after each of these proposals. None of these roots are pure, as only a casual awareness of the recent investigation into the life of Yoder confirms. But the book does not pursue those critical questions as far as it might have.

Instead, using the voices of contemporary protesters standing in the prophetic tradition, it proposes a standpoint in harmony with all of these—to join (call it participation, identification, or solidarity) with those who suffer, which is to say to stand with the poor. As Jake Olzen, an activist and farmer shaped by Catholic Worker houses, commented:

[I]f I have faith that I can just be with this person in their suffering and be an ally and accompany them, I think that creates space for something bigger to be born. I'm at my best when I'm just able to sit with somebody and not have to solve it or be effective, but trust that this relationship is what matters. Out of that spirit, usually if you are asking the right questions, tactics and strategies and a campaign can emerge that may change the circumstances (221).

That *standing with* is also, mystically and spiritually, an *experiencing with*, a *feeling with* and a *seeing with*, which is open to and perhaps even demands theological language: God is present here. That ground is the very crevice in the dominions' constraint out of which God's life-giving spring emerges—but to say this at this moment in time can only be a confession of faith.

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CHRISTIAN EARLY

Together in the Work of the Lord: A History of the Conservative Mennonite Conference. By Nathan E. Yoder. Harrisonburg, Va.: Herald Press. 2014. Pp. 551. \$34.99.

In 1910, five formerly Amish, but not-quite-Mennonite, ministers convened in Pigeon, Michigan, seeking ways to be “together in the work of the Lord” while adhering to traditionally Amish Mennonite understandings of biblical and ecclesial authority. In subsequent gatherings, an ever-growing body of leaders defined the boundaries of a religious identity that intentionally defied both the firm separatism of the Old Order Amish and the increasing cultural assimilation of the Amish Mennonites. Amid this tension, the fellowship that would eventually become the Conservative Mennonite Conference (C.M.C.) was born. Today, C.M.C. has 104 congregations with around 11,500 members, and maintains an institutional center in Rosedale, Ohio, home to its Bible college,

mission organization, and administrative offices and archive. The group claims an identity blending evangelical piety and politics with Anabaptist emphases like nonresistance and simplicity.

This transition from Amish moderation to “evangelical Anabaptism” provides the narrative thrust for historian Nathan E. Yoder’s *Together in the Work of the Lord*, the first critical history of C.M.C. Based on exhaustive research in official records, unpublished accounts by C.M.C. members, and oral history interviews, this study offers an insightful and encyclopedic (if not always lively) examination of one small religious community negotiating the complexities of being separate from but also engaged in mission to the outside world.

Yoder, a professor of church history at Eastern Mennonite Seminary, tells the C.M.C. story without succumbing to the triumphalism implicit in much institutional history. He writes with a scholar’s acumen as well as an insider’s empathy. As an academic, he observes the ironies in rhetoric and behavior that shaped this particular community: that conference founders created a new, distinct group in the name of “peace and unity”; that a group rejecting political involvement as “worldly” nonetheless evinced political attitudes opposed to the civil rights and anti-Vietnam War movements of the mid-twentieth century. Yet as an insider, Yoder gives fair and careful treatment to sensitive issues in conference history, including a controversial ministry to people with multiple personality disorder supported by Rosedale Bible College in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Though Yoder’s writing can be dry at times, he peppers his narrative with enough anecdotes and mini-biographies to enliven the C.M.C. story.

The author gives sustained attention to C.M.C.’s self-conscious attempts throughout its history to differentiate itself from other Mennonites and Amish. At its founding, the conference adopted the name Conservative Amish Mennonite Conference, but dropped “Amish” in 1954 when it became irrelevant and even embarrassing (242-245). For many years the conference associated with the (Old) Mennonite Church, and many of its young people attended Eastern Mennonite College. But it repeatedly resisted union with other Mennonites. In the late twentieth century, increasingly suspicious of a perceived Mennonite impulse to “deemphasize the authority of Scripture, describe salvation primarily as ethical living, downplay the atonement, and compromise the deity of Jesus Christ with an overemphasis on the humanity of Jesus” (396), C.M.C. distanced itself from the denomination and developed its own understanding of being both Anabaptist and evangelical.

Yoder showcases C.M.C.’s “evangelical turn” as both a rupture with church tradition and a redefinition in the group’s sense of conservatism. Although C.M.C.’s formation was precipitated (in part) by the nineteenth-century “Mennonite awakening,” which itself echoed the evangelical Great Awakenings that earlier swept through American society, the conference did not embrace evangelical theology until the 1940s, when it began to practice revivalism, redefined salvation as personal conversion, and embraced a “contemporary missionary mandate” (198), all of which drew them closer to the mainstream of American evangelicalism. By the 1970s and 1980s, that migration accelerated: C.M.C. members attended “family-focused” seminars by Bill Gothard and

accepted the complementarian understanding of gender relations promoted by John Piper's Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. A statement of theology produced in 1991 reflected Anabaptist and evangelical themes, and in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, denominational intellectuals worked hard to synthesize Anabaptism and evangelicalism into a coherent group identity.

Yoder convincingly shows that as C.M.C. embraced evangelicalism, enforcing uniform nonconformity became less important than aggressive evangelism and church growth. Even though Gothard and other evangelicals praised the piety of plain-dressed Mennonite conservatives, many C.M.C. leaders and members began to see uniform nonconformity as a "cultural block" (329) impeding mission. Evangelical theology, not plain clothes and social separatism, became C.M.C.'s marker of conservatism.

Yoder is one of several scholars who have challenged the so-called "declension thesis" within Mennonite historiography: a persistent claim that evangelicalism corrupts or dilutes Anabaptist-Mennonite emphases like peace, simplicity, and the gathered church. In *Together in the Work of the Lord*, Yoder both validates and further disputes this thesis. For instance, he argues that, in the C.M.C. context, missionary activity did stir debates about the relative necessity of church traditions, especially plain dress—a claim first made by Mennonite historian Theron Schlabach in one of the earliest monographs to articulate a declension thesis. Moreover, Yoder finds similarities between C.M.C. and the Fellowship of Evangelical Churches and the Fellowship of Evangelical Bible Churches, two formerly Mennonite groups whose history is frequently cited in defense of declension. However, Yoder also finds that C.M.C. "charts a course . . . independent from the choices of" these other groups (353), particularly in C.M.C.'s ongoing high regard for Anabaptism. Thus, by highlighting C.M.C.'s story, Yoder offers a case study that—at least in part—poses an alternative to the declension model. He shows that, in the C.M.C. context, the interethnic exchange between evangelicalism and Anabaptism was not as fraught as sometimes suggested. His study adds to a growing body of scholarship highlighting rapprochement and even complementarity between these two traditions.

Given this complementary reading of evangelicalism and Anabaptism, I was surprised by Yoder's seeming inattention to C.M.C.'s thought and practice of nonresistance. Yoder does document some C.M.C. members' involvement in World War II-era Civilian Public Service as well as the conference's support for 1-W (conscientious objector) assignments during subsequent global conflicts. He even shows that a few conference members supported civil rights activism in the U.S. South. But he says almost nothing about the doctrine's status among contemporary Mennonite conservatives. This is a significant oversight, given the persistent claims of the declension thesis. Does C.M.C. continue to embrace and embody some form of nonresistance, or has the God-and-country rhetoric of some evangelicals muted this emphasis within the conference? *Together in the Work of the Lord* leaves such questions unanswered.

Despite its flaws, *Together in the Work of the Lord* is a valuable study. While the book's primary readership will likely be members of C.M.C., those interested in

Mennonite institutional history will find value as well. As Yoder points out in his introduction, “various scholars have noticed that, in the United States, there are more Mennonites outside Mennonite Church USA . . . than inside it” (38). Studies such as this provide an alternative—and perhaps more helpful—lens for understanding the interplay between Anabaptism and American culture than those focused on the flagship of Mennonite denominationalism.

Messiah College

DEVIN C. MANZULLO-THOMAS

Path of Thorns: Soviet Mennonite Life under Communist and Nazi Rule. By Jacob A. Neufeld. Harvey L. Dyck, ed.; Harvey L. Dyck and Sarah Dyck, trans. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 2014. Pp. 444. \$85, cloth; \$37.95, paper.

Path of Thorns is a collection of three works originally written in German by Jacob A. Neufeld (1895-1960). Born in the Molochna colony in southern Ukraine, Neufeld served as a medical orderly in the Mennonite alternative service program during World War I. After enduring the Bolshevik Revolution, the civil war, and the 1921-1922 famine, Neufeld assumed the position of chairman of the Gnadenfeld (Molochna) branch of the *Menno Verband* (Union of Citizens of Dutch Ancestry) in 1922. The *Verband* was a Mennonite-organized cooperative that obtained Soviet-government permission to provide food and economic relief to Mennonite families and facilitate the reconstruction of Mennonite settlements in Soviet Ukraine. Neufeld worked for the *Verband* until 1927, when Soviet authorities liquidated the organization and arrested some its leaders, including Neufeld. He was given a five-year prison sentence, but was released after serving only five months. During the early years of Soviet collectivization and dekulakization (1928-1933), Neufeld tried to make a living by farming, but dire economic circumstances forced him to work in a *kolkhoz* (collective farm) for approximately a year. In 1930 he found employment as a bookkeeper in the Gnadenfeld consumer cooperative in Molochna, which enabled Neufeld and his young family to endure the severe economic deprivations and hardships that accompanied collectivization and the 1932-1933 famine.

It is at this point in Neufeld’s life that the first of the three works in *Path of Thorns* begins. “Part One: Five Years in the Gulag, 1933-1939” commences with Neufeld’s dismissal from his job at the Gnadenfeld consumer cooperative in mid-1933 and his subsequent arrest on charges of being a parasite and untrustworthy person with a counter-revolutionary background. Along with other *Verband* leaders, Neufeld was held for months at the Dnepropetrovsk prison, where he suffered extended periods of hunger and endured more than twenty interrogation sessions. Exhausted, starving, and under extreme duress, Neufeld signed a confession in early 1934 acknowledging the charges against him; he was summarily sentenced to a five-year term of imprisonment in labor camps. Much of part one describes the horrendous conditions that Neufeld experienced in Soviet prisons, on prisoner trains to and from Siberia, in Soviet labor camps (including Bamlag in Siberia and Ukhtpechlag in the Komi Republic), and in a *sovkhoz* (state farm) on the Ukhta River. Neufeld repeatedly refers to the

important roles that his religious faith, his companions, and his desire to be reunited with his wife and children played in helping him endure the brutal living and working conditions. The gulag experience left Neufeld a broken man: when he returned to his family in Molochna in 1939 he suffered not only from crippling rheumatoid arthritis, but also psychological trauma. Neufeld found it difficult to secure employment because of his criminal record and often experienced isolation from his neighbors and friends.

Because Neufeld wrote about his prison and gulag tribulations years after he experienced the events, his accounts are sometimes lacking in detail and are, at points, factually incorrect. For example, Neufeld states that the N.K.V.D. (political police) arrested, interrogated, sentenced, and imprisoned him in 1933 and early 1934. This was not possible, as the N.K.V.D. of the Ukrainian Republic was not operating in 1933 and early 1934; the N.K.V.D. of the U.S.S.R. was not formally established until July 1934. Secret police operations were conducted by the Ukrainian G.P.U. (subordinate to the O.G.P.U.) in 1933-1934, but Neufeld does not refer to this organization in his account. While this type of factual error does not diminish what Neufeld experienced in Soviet prisons and gulags, it does raise questions about the factual accuracy of Neufeld's descriptions, and the extent to which Neufeld may have used his imagination or the experiences of others to fill in details when his memory failed.

Part two of *Path of Thorns*, entitled "*Tiefenwege: Soviet Mennonite Life and Suffering, 1929-1949*," is an abridged translation of Neufeld's book *Tiefenwege*, which was first published in Canada in the late 1950s. The largest of the three parts in *Path of Thorns*, this section begins with a brief description of Mennonite life in Soviet Ukraine in the 1920s and early 1930s, but much of the focus is on the travails of Neufeld and his family in the late 1930s and 1940s, including the following: the difficulties of life in a Molochna kolkhoz in 1939-1940; the impact of the German *Wehrmacht's* invasion of eastern Ukraine in 1941; the depredations of the N.K.V.D. and Soviet authorities prior to the German occupation of Mennonite colonies in southern Ukraine; the improvement in living conditions and the resumption of church life that accompanied the German *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle* (Ethnic German Liaison Office or *VoMi*) administration of Mennonite villages in Ukraine; the "great trek" (the flight of Soviet Mennonite families to Poland and Germany in 1943-1945) that was initiated by the retreat of the *Wehrmacht*; the experiences of Soviet Mennonite refugees in post-war Germany; the efforts of Soviet Mennonites to avoid the repatriation schemes of the N.K.V.D. and Soviet authorities operating in Germany; and the process of immigrating to Canada. The first two sections of the book were written years after Neufeld had settled in Canada. The one exception is Neufeld's account of the great trek, which is largely based on his diary; it includes detailed and vivid descriptions that convey an immediacy and authenticity that is not always apparent in other sections of the book.

What is clear from Neufeld's account is that he and most other Soviet Mennonites viewed German *Wehrmacht* soldiers and *VoMi* employees as heroes. For instance, Neufeld refers to the German occupiers as "our rescuing angels" and "saviours" (218) from Soviet tyranny. Given what Neufeld had experienced

at the hands of the Soviets, his effusive gratitude to Germany and its *Wehrmacht* is understandable, but may have also blinded him to many of the atrocities that the Nazis carried out in southern Ukraine during the war. To his credit, Neufeld acknowledges that the Nazis sometimes brutalized ethnic Ukrainians, but he says very little about the Germans' inhumane treatment and mass murder of Jews. By the time Neufeld wrote part two, the Nazis' genocidal treachery in the U.S.S.R. and Eastern Europe was widely known, and so perhaps this omission was due to his anti-Semitic views, which are clearly evident in his historical accounts.

Neufeld also says little about Soviet Mennonites who assisted the German occupation forces during World War II. From other sources, we know that a significant number of Soviet Mennonites worked as translators, clerks, and soldiers for the German *Wehrmacht* and other German occupation agencies. Mennonites also worked as guards at concentration camps, assisted the SS *Einsatzgruppen* (mobile killing units) in their murderous campaigns in southern Ukraine, and served in the ranks of the SS, including the *Waffen SS*. Unfortunately, Neufeld's account is largely silent on these disturbing historical realities.

Part three of *Path of Thorns* is entitled "A Memoir-Letter from Jakob A. Neufeld to His Wife, Lene (Thiessen) Neufeld, on the Occasion of Their 25th Wedding Anniversary" and repeats much of what was already stated in the preceding sections. Part three could easily have been omitted from the book.

When conveying Neufeld's works from German to English, the translators employed a "free translation" approach. They deleted repetitive sections in Neufeld's works and abridged paragraphs that were too wordy. The result is that the text in *Path of Thorns* is both lucid and engaging. But in polishing the rough spots in Neufeld's original texts, the translators sometimes incorporate diction and a tone of writing that more closely resembles that of a university professor than the former manager of the Gnadenfeld branch of the *Verband* (e.g., 53, 356).

The "Introduction and Analysis" in *Path of Thorns* is written by a University of Toronto historian and professor emeritus, Harvey L. Dyck. Dyck does an admirable job of summarizing Neufeld's early years, his experiences during World War I, the 1917 revolutions and civil war, and his challenges and triumphs in the *Verband*. But Dyck's opening analysis is not without shortcomings, one of which is his characterization of the Mennonite relationship with the Soviet regime in the 1920s. For instance, Dyck contends that "the overwhelming bulk of Mennonites" in southern Ukraine continually resisted the regime's efforts to sovietize them in the 1920s (21-22, 33-34). While such characterizations might inspire ethnic pride in readers who share a Mennonite heritage, the question that arises is whether the characterizations are historically accurate. Records in the Zaporizhzhia State archives in southern Ukraine confirm that already by 1920-1921 hundreds of poor Mennonite families in the Khortytsia colony had joined the *Komitety nezamozhnykh selian* (Committee of Poor Peasants or Komnezam) in Mennonite settlements; hundreds of Mennonite men were also serving in the Red Army by this time. Contrary to Dyck's thesis, the archival records

demonstrate that the sovietization of large segments of Mennonite society was already well under way before the end of the civil war.

Another problem with Dyck's analysis is his characterization of Mennonites as largely passive "bystanders and victims" from the time of the October Revolution until 1921, and from 1929 until the death of Stalin in 1953 (22). Once again, the records at the Zaporizhzhia archives tell a different story. By 1920, for example, an increasing number of Khortytsia Mennonites sought positions within a large number of Bolshevik institutions at the village and *volost* level. These included leadership positions on executive committees, soviets, administration departments, land departments, food provisions commissions, tax commissions, the People's court, mandatory labor departments, commissariats for education, revolutionary commissions, and military commissariats. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, a significant number of Khortytsia and Molochna Mennonites were also employed in executive positions at village and district soviet institutions, including executive committees, soviets, committees of poor peasants, workers and peasants' inspection committees, revision commissions, district land division committees, and kolkhozy. Mennonites also worked at machine tractor stations, the People's court, *chistka* ("cleansing" or "purge") committees, and the political police. Mennonite names also appear on the membership rolls of the League of the Godless, the Komsomol, and the Communist Party. Mennonites in these positions actively participated in decisions that affected the implementation of Soviet policies in their communities. They determined which fellow Mennonites would be disenfranchised and dekulakized, have their property seized, and be imprisoned or exiled. Mennonites also assisted in the creation and operation of kulak settlements in the Khortytsia and Molochna areas. Dyck is aware that Soviet Mennonites worked for the state; in his endnotes, for example, he cites a work (incorrectly I might add) that details the extensive role that Khortytsia Mennonites played in the dekulakization of their communities. But acknowledging the inconvenient truth of widespread Mennonite participation in the local Soviet bureaucracy poses a problem: it does not fit into Dyck's narrative of Soviet Mennonites as "victims and bystanders." In failing to acknowledge this historical reality, however, Dyck does a disservice to readers who do not have access to former Soviet archives or the latest historical research.

Notwithstanding some of the problems with Dyck's interpretive approach, *Path of Thorns* is a good read. The book provides an important firsthand account of life in the gulag and a unique, if somewhat biased, perspective on the Nazi invasion of Ukraine; it is also a testament to the tenacity the human spirit and the importance of religious faith in dealing with the most trying circumstances. But when reading *Path of Thorns*, bear in mind that the role of Mennonites in administering their communities during Soviet and Nazi rule is far more complex, variegated, and messy than what either Neufeld or Dyck present in the book.

Good News: The Advent of Salvation in the Gospel of Luke. By Darrin W. Snyder Belousek. Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press. 2014. Pp. 139. \$16.95.

In *Good News*, Darrin W. Snyder Belousek seeks to “explicate the manifold message of ‘good news’” (x) in the Gospel of Luke in seven short accessible chapters. Snyder Belousek presents his book as particularly beneficial in the Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany seasons, although good for any time of year. His stated desire to connect “the Anabaptist tradition of peace theology and the Benedictine tradition of spiritual practice” (xi) corresponds well with the mission of Bridgefolk, of which Snyder Belousek is executive director, to bring together “sacramentally-minded Mennonites and peace-minded Roman Catholics.¹ Snyder Belousek targets a general audience to prompt personal reflection in conversation with the implications of Luke’s good news in contemporary society. Informed by biblical and theological scholarship, the book will also aid pastors, clergy, and students in their study of the Gospel. The book concentrates on the nativity narrative and songs, healing stories, parables, and post-resurrection appearances with lots of intertextual exploration. Snyder Belousek’s approach is canonical, confessional, and guided by three questions: What message of salvation is proclaimed in the text? How does the biblical canon both inform and bear witness to the fulfillment of the Gospel? And how is that message relevant today? (xii) This book largely succeeds in these aims. Snyder Belousek provides an approachable, knowledgeable, and reliable guide that connects salvation to the personal and the social.

After a preface, the seven chapters are organized to correspond to the liturgical cycle: chapters two through five to Advent, chapter six to Christmas, and chapter seven to Epiphany. These are followed by endnotes, a brief thematic bibliography, and a Scripture index. Chapter one, “Good News: Herald of Salvation,” prepares the readers for the study of Luke and the Gospel message by considering prophetic oracles in Isaiah and the poetry of Psalm 85 about salvation. Snyder Belousek finds that *shalom* from the Hebrew Bible provides both the inward and outward dimensions of peace that pull together the prophetic message of good news, salvation, and the reign of God (20). Familiarity with Luke’s scriptural tradition, then, shows how the Gospel in Luke is preached in concert with the prophetic message. Snyder Belousek shows, in particular, the thematic threads between Isaiah 52:7 and Luke 1–4. His observations at the end of chapter one (20–23) are fleshed out in the remaining chapters: “Fear Not: Salvation and Deliverance,” “Have Faith: Salvation and Healing,” “Bear Fruit: Salvation and Repentance,” “Do Right: Salvation and Justice,” “Sing Praise: Salvation and Freedom,” and “Go in Peace: Salvation and Mission.”

Snyder Belousek’s interest in joining evangelism and social action in this book is effective, and rings prophetically in our times. For a mainstream American audience, the book will provide challenges to culture that may be uncomfortable. For example, in his chapter “Sing Praise,” Snyder Belousek shows how the Gospel message is a critique of imperial power. The Gospel that declares “release

1. See <http://www.bridgefolk.net/>.

to the captives" (Lk. 4:18) is at odds with the ways of . . . imperial power [that] would seek to "secure the peace" through a dominating system of imprisonment. . . . To fight its global "war on terror," the United States sought to dominate its enemies by setting up a network of secret prisons into which thousands detained in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, the U.S., and other places disappeared beyond the reach of legal accountability and public scrutiny. Many in these secret prisons were not only innocent of any offense but were subjected to humiliating and brutalizing conditions and torture treatment. Moreover, in order to "secure the domestic tranquility" the U.S. has pursued a policy of mass incarceration, exponentially expanding its own prison system in recent decades—to the point of currently imprisoning some two million men and women. Those imprisoned are disproportionately racial minorities, poor, undereducated, drug-addicted, or mentally ill; and the incarcerated are often subjected to brutalizing and dehumanizing conditions (89–90).

This is one example of Snyder Belousek's joining of theological and ethical concerns. In his analysis of American imperial violence, he levels an appropriate challenge to Christians who believe that Jesus' promise of salvation is good news, particularly to those who suffer the most, and a hard word to those who have the most power.

It is too bad, however, that the short bibliography reflects an all-male and almost all-white roster of North American scholars. There are notable exceptions, like Pedrito U. Maynard-Reid's *Complete Evangelism* (1997) and Oscar Romero's *The Violence of Love* (1998 ed.), but in a study of the Gospel of Luke—a book often noted for its special attention to marginalized groups—I would like to see more diversity in the resources used, especially scholarship by women. This is important since Luke's Gospel gives more space to women characters than other Gospels, but treats them in ambiguous ways. Although Mary H. Schertz's Believers Church Bible Commentary on Luke is not yet available (to be released soon, I'm told), other excellent studies exist, like Amy-Jill Levine's *A Feminist Companion to Luke* (2001), *Choosing the Better Part? Women in the Gospel of Luke* (1996) by Barbara Reid, and Sharon H. Ringe's Westminster Bible Commentary on Luke (1996).

This is not to say that Snyder Belousek neglects readings of Luke "from the margins." For example, in his text and notes he draws on books like Robert MacAfee Brown's *Unexpected News* (1984) and Donald B. Kraybill's *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (1990), and from the wisdom of Martin Luther King Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement. However, it would be more in keeping both with the trajectory of Snyder Belousek's book and the Gospel of Luke to provide a list of additional resources for readers who wish to consider feminist, liberationist, postcolonial, or other explorations of Luke written by scholars from non-majority cultures.

This said, the book is consonant with its stated aims. Although a short book, I found it to be good for my Advent reflection and an excellent joining of theology and ethics. Snyder Belousek's concern to show Luke's good news of salvation in evangelism and social action effectively comes through. In sum, I believe this is

an approachable and appropriately challenging book for general and clerical audiences, as well as a reliable supplement for scholarly pursuits.

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The Nonviolent God. By J. Denny Weaver. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans. 2013. Pp. 304. \$25.

In addition to being the sequel to *The Nonviolent Atonement* (2001), J. Denny Weaver's most recent book has a forty-year-old point of origin. He explains in the preface that his book about a nonviolent God is part of an intellectual quest that emerged during his first year of college teaching in 1974. The two-part query at the heart of this journey is this: how do we articulate what Jesus' rejection of the sword and violence means for christology, and how do we make this perspective more visible in our theology? On his quest, Weaver is greatly indebted to John Howard Yoder. Indeed, Yoder's work and instruction help Weaver develop his methodological impulses—both to insist on the Jesus story as the beginning point of Christian theology and to be wary of systematizing the theology flowing from this narrative (7-8).

Weaver's strategy for developing his central thesis—that it is “the God of narrative Christus Victor . . . who saves through the power of the resurrection and the restoration of life” rather than the God of classic theology whose *modus operandi* sanctions violence—is to pose three questions and then answer them using doctrinal categories found in systematic theology while avoiding offering a classically systematic response (2ff). The queries Weaver's theologizing draws out and addresses are 1) What makes the Jesus story salvific? 2) What does the saving quality of this story mean for us as twenty-first-century Christians? and 3) Since God was fully present in Jesus, what do we know about God through this revelation?

Given these questions, Christology, soteriology, atonement, and ecclesiology (including ritual practices like baptism and communion) become the primary systematic “signposts” that Weaver uses to direct his discussion. So while Weaver does not seek to offer his answers as dogmatic proposals, he does aim to give a set of programmatic rather than experiential answers (7). While dogmatic and programmatic are synonymous in their intentions of making certain beliefs or ways of believing normative, the difference between them in this instance is that the former involves prescribing beliefs and the latter involves describing beliefs. His proposals form what he calls “a theology for living,” “a lived theology,” and “discipleship theology” (3). This programmatic approach allows Weaver to bridge theology and ethics in ways that will resonate with many readers.

Weaver uses the Gospels and Paul's commentary on them to shape the christological narrative that undergirds *The Nonviolent God*, the most important themes being summed up as the reconciling work of God in/through Jesus (2 Cor. 5:19) and the presence of God's grace in our lives as we help usher in God's

reign (1 Cor. 15:10). These two ideas serve as the guiding principles for each of the two parts of *The Nonviolent God*.

“Part I: The God of Jesus” includes a recapitulation of *The Nonviolent Atonement* to harness the major arguments Weaver uses to develop narrative Christus Victor.² The major contribution *The Nonviolent God* makes to the atonement discussion is to argue that what we learn about God through Jesus is that nonviolent images best capture this revelation rather than violent images. The nonviolent, biblical images Weaver cites from both the Old and New Testaments are not metaphors or similes but more “instances of nonviolent responses, and divinely sanctioned nonviolent resistance” (119) and “parables and sayings of Jesus that “imply or present nonviolent images of God” (122), which may disappoint readers who are looking for concrete references to help shape visual peace theology.

What follows in “Part II: The Reign of God Made Visible,” is focused attention on the ethical dimensions of a lived theology. As in Part I, Weaver’s discussion of the interplay between Christology and ecclesiology is energized by a range of voices. Whereas *The Nonviolent Atonement* drew primarily in black, womanist, and feminist conversation partners, *The Nonviolent God* widens the range of contributors so that we hear from well-known contributors (like Stanley Hauerwas and Nancy Murphey) but also new interlocutors (like Brian McLaren and Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer). Weaver applies nonviolence to a range of concepts and practices that directly connect with the church and what it teaches about atonement, violence, and nonviolence: forgiveness; suffering; racial reconciliation; gender justice; and economics.

Weaver is to be commended for the volume of material that he covers and for his contribution to discussions about the centrality of pacifism for Christian identity.

At the same time, there are a number of concerns I have about the content and method of *The Nonviolent God*. My evaluation is an “internal critique” because, as a Mennonite peace theologian myself, I share Weaver’s commitment to basing our confession of Christian faith on the good news of God’s great shalom. My criticisms demonstrate my interest in supporting Weaver’s basic argument—that God is best understood using nonviolent images—while pointing out ways I think he might make the case more persuasively.

First, issues of content. There are three themes where Weaver’s iteration for the case of a nonviolent God needs further development: a) the Trinity, b) providence, and c) theological anthropology. These themes surface, either explicitly or implicitly, in *The Nonviolent God*, but fail to receive appropriate attention. Before offering a brief word about each of these areas, I should make clear that I do not share Yoder’s concern about systematic theology that Weaver cites in his book (7); rather, I think the traditional categories for thinking theologically can prove useful to guide our theologizing.

2. See J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001).

I find the absence of a robust discussion of the Trinity in *The Nonviolent God* a glaring omission. Further, his language of God vis-à-vis Jesus is an example of a typical pitfall among Christians who do not want to distinguish the First Person as Father (or Mother)—from a trinitarian perspective, “God” names the unity of the Three Persons, not the First Person alone. Rather than relegating his section on the Trinity to the concluding pages of the book, Weaver would better serve his readers by stating up front that he, like Yoder, conceptualizes the Trinity as something that happens in time: “God present in Israel and in Jesus and immediately to us today” (278). This would signal that his discussion of God is not designed to be trinitarian in a traditional sense.

In a similar vein, Weaver outlines other’s views of providence in relation to divine violence and then points out the inadequacies of such religio-political rhetoric and religious platitudes (98ff), but he does not offer an alternative for how we might conceptualize God’s providence nonviolently. Other strategies might have been to set aside any notions of providence at all or simply note and bracket that discussion. In either case, we note the absence of a fuller discussion.

It also seems appropriate that a book on a theology of lived discipleship could, and even should, contribute to conversations about theological anthropology—the nature of human beings, particularly in relationship to God. The dynamics of power relations in Christian community is an area that we frequently lament is underdeveloped in Anabaptist/Mennonite scholarship. However, Weaver makes the choice to keep his discipleship theology christologically and ecclesialogically focused. This appears to be another significant gap because theological anthropology is linked with both of these themes: Jesus Christ offers human beings salvation and human beings represent the church, the body of Christ.

A second concern is methodology. Unlike *The Nonviolent Atonement*, *The Nonviolent God* is heavily reliant on Yoder, and I find this puzzling. Weaver has proven he has the ability to construct and sustain his own theological argument and analysis, so why use Yoder to bolster his thesis in this volume? Elsewhere, I praised Weaver for his methodological boldness in *The Nonviolent Atonement* by actively putting himself in dialogue with theologies on the margins, and wish he would have penned this latest manuscript with the same confidence.³ I am concerned that Weaver’s decision to use Yoder to shape the present discussion gives credence to the critique that is often, and legitimately, leveled against Mennonite theologians and ethicists: we talk about peace and nonviolence but fail to root out the male supremacy that lives in our communities and ivory towers. And, as the bumper sticker says, “world peace begins at home.”

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MALINDA ELIZABETH BERRY

3. <http://archive.bethelks.edu/ml/issue/vol-59-no-1/article/anabaptist-theology-in-face-of-postmodernity-a-pro/>.

Branch: A Memoir with Pictures. By John L. Ruth. Harleysville, Pa.: Mennonite Historians of Eastern Pennsylvania. 2013. Pp. 421. \$25.

John L. Ruth hides himself inside the pages of this multidisciplinary Mennonite memoir, yet no work of his hands has revealed his character more than this one.

Every memoir places the author's self in a particular relation to the rest of the world. The reader can find clues to this author's approach by deconstructing the cover of the book. The front cover of this book features the beautiful Branch River, placid on the light blue surface, yet suggestive of depth through darker blue shadows. The emerald green trees growing along the river banks pull the eye toward the distance. Under low branches, light shimmers, reflecting the image of the trees in the water. An inset on the cover shows the author, his face hidden behind a black, single-lens reflex camera—as though he is taking a picture of the reader. On the back cover stands a man with his back to the viewer, standing by the same river.

Nowhere does the author seem to gaze at the reader, and, even when he does, as in his fourth-grade photo, the author draws our attention to his own portrait posture long ago: "I was also introspective and sometimes shy, as I think can be interpreted from my slightly downward-tilted face. . . . My classmates' faces are more frank and directed to the camera's gaze" (44).

These early clues invite the reader to search for the author, who will point to markers of self outside the self, inviting you on a journey in which you, too, may become the subject. "Land, water, peoplehood, and memory would turn out to be my themes," he says of his photography (148).

Readers who have read Ruth's other works, especially his magnum opus, *The Earth is the Lord's: A Narrative History of the Lancaster Mennonite Conference* (Herald Press, 2001), will already know how attached he is to place. In this more literary book, nothing inspires his lyrical voice more than land: "I know of no more welcome seat than that of a John Deere tractor pulling a side-delivery rake, the swish of the furling windrows audible over the familiar two-cylinder putt-putt, while barn swallows swoop and glide" (96).

When the farm on which he was raised is sold for development, Ruth walks the land one last time, remembering his father at the plow as he, the son, disked the field: "Our engines would intermittently converge, creating a brief metallic vibrato before drifting apart, then reconverging" (96).

Though the farm itself is gone, Ruth's Salford Mennonite Church community helped him return to the house of his childhood close to the Branch River and restored its ancient beauty as well as making it a comfortable dwelling for John and his wife Roma in their old age. The circle of life is complete, something John celebrates frequently by pointing out that he is writing in the same place as that shown in many of his pictures. Space, in other words, offers a constancy, perhaps a solace for the loss of land and for the ache of time gone by.

When in his research for this book John Ruth stumbled upon a photo he took in 1953 that depicts an Amish farmer walking behind his plow, he calls it "prophetic." With benefit of hindsight, he can see his first fascination with

themes that would emerge decades later in his films. He worries at first that he is simply lusting for "picturesqueness," like the millions of tourists soon to flood Lancaster County. Then he pivots:

But no. Within that curiosity was an admiration of the Amish ability to maintain a faith story not bent to the flexing shape of the national cultural environment. That thought has grown beyond nostalgia into an existential questioning: Where, in the half-millennial Anabaptist story, do I speak my own lines? (148)

This is the question of every Mennonite memoirist. Ruth chooses a location well within the fold of his ancestors. Yet he delights in encounters with the secular world at Harvard University, where he earned a Ph.D., and with Mennonites of different stripes in Indiana and Pennsylvania, Switzerland, and Germany. It seems the more he can locate difference and yet resonate, hearing the same music, the happier he is, going broader, rather than deeper, into his faith. In Africa, for example, at the Mennonite World Conference in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, he blends his voice with others and nearly levitates: "As the huge assembly sang choir-like in antique harmony, the closing refrain of each stanza — 'my Jesus, 'tis now' — lingered with a resonance of respect and love so diaphanous that it still lights up my spirit" (396).

Music provides the best peoplehood link of all when he joins an Old Order German hymn sing, which inspires the most nearly perfect sentence in the book: "The deep, rolling sound itself is unforgettable, blending the related traditions of persons who still have in their sensoria the venerable tempi, rhythms, timbre, and pronunciations we moderns have long ago abandoned."

Many of the photos and essays focus on others—family members, church leaders, congregants, colleagues, and friends. These are his people. But he rarely gets ponderous about peoplehood. He seems aware of the problem of name-dropping of "important people" even when, in silence, he hears the voice of the less-learned saints and elevates their wisdom. Yet, with Ruthian humor, he also includes a close-up photo of Hilary Clinton, just in case she becomes president someday.

The Branch River, flowing through the many villages of eastern Pennsylvania north of Philadelphia, provides the image selected by the author to represent his life. Symbolically, the river functions like the North Star in the Underground Railroad, a place of unalterable orientation connected to God even as the landscape around it changes from woods and fields into "real estate."

Water—of streams, of baptism—quenches
spiritual thirst and represents wisdom.

Memory may be his favorite subject, but it is not treated as explicitly as other themes. The reader has to find it. Memoir is always about "me now" telling a story about "me then." On almost every page both "me's" in John Ruth's life are present, and, even though the "me" tries to subordinate itself to "we," it sometimes fails. The author confesses the sin of making a few unilateral decisions, fears that his attempts to speak on behalf of Native Americans and the Amish may somehow objectify them, and worries about inattention or intrusive attention to his family. Ruth tries to be as scrupulous as a historian about facts

while being as attuned to the invisible world as a poet. Though a preacher since the age of 19, he is preachy only in the way Wendell Berry is, with a dash of irony and openness to learning a larger truth.

I read this book through my relationship with the author and appreciation for his countercultural testimony, so I can't be totally objective in evaluating it. A few sentences landed with a clunk for me. Occasionally, the condensed prose is too obscure, the syntax too Germanic, the references too oblique. Because the book spans a whole life, it probably belongs more to the autobiography tradition than to the memoir.

No matter.

If I had to choose one American Mennonite memoir to represent all of us, it would be *Branch*, the fountain flowing from the life of John Landis Ruth.

Harrisonburg, Va.

SHIRLEY HERSHEY SHOWALTER

In the Kingdom of the Ditch. By Todd Davis. East Lansing, Mich.: Michigan State University Press. 2013. Pp. 97. \$19.95.

Todd Davis writes about the natural world with the authority of someone trained in environmental science and American literature. But he also writes from the perspective of a middle-aged husband and father, someone who regularly hikes with his sons through the Allegheny forest near his Pennsylvania home. We are fortunate that through his fourth book of poetry he takes us with him on his wilderness excursions. As I read *In the Kingdom of the Ditch*, I thought of William Stafford's words in "The Way It Is": "There's a thread you follow. It goes among things / that change. But it doesn't change. / . . . While you hold it you can't get lost." The beautifully crafted poems in this new collection often follow a thematic thread that while pulling the reader forward through twists and turns also leads home to where the end meets the beginning—much like the route of a footpath.

The first poem, "Taxonomy," is that kind of poem. It takes off with the idea that as children "we've been taken captive by the world, named by it, taught to eat from its table" and then follows a succession of images that are themselves each a journey that moves from violence to regeneration or transition. Humans set fires that "burn / the earth because berry canes / won't come back without dirt / as dark as the color of its fruit." We hunt coyote "hoping to save the sweet / lambs we tend," but by evening what's left is wool caught on a thistle's "comb." Further on, the leaves of a fallen tulip poplar are turning the yellow of the mustard and ragwort that will replace the tree. By the end of the poem, we're brought back, full circle, to the table, but now we humans are served up as the speaker presents a blessing: "When we die / may we be a pleasing word / placed in the mouth / of the world. The personification, "mouth of the world," reminds us that we will be consumed. It conjures cave, ditch, grave—the idea of annihilation. But then again, it also implies song, prayer, poetry, nourishment, and even our bodies as communion wafer.

The Kingdom of the Ditch fully embraces the yin and yang of opposites. Within its title poem of three couplets, it describes the ditch as a place where contraries balance each other:

Where Queen Anne's lace holds
its saucer and raspberry its black
thimble, the shrew and the rat snake
seek after the same God,
who mercifully fills the belly
of one, then offers it to the other.

The thread here takes us from the saucer of a white blossom through the balanced opposites of lightness and darkness, openness and closure, fullness and emptiness, life and death, and, with the word "offer," back to the now-filled saucer. The idea that God's mercy is linked to the food chain may startle some readers. Christianity often posits the natural world as "fallen" and God's kingdom as a future realm where the lion and lamb will no longer exist as predator and prey. But Davis doesn't view the natural world as fallen. In these poems, as in his previous three books, nature, even though it will devour us, is an agent of grace and a teacher of spiritual truths.

The ditch's kingdom is a kind of Upside Down Kingdom, a lowly but sacred place of parable, where "the last shall be first," where creatures like honeybees and crows have lessons to teach. In fact, many titles reflect Davis's Christian faith ("Dona Nobis Pacem," "Imago Dei," "The Knowledge of the Lord," etc.). Within the actual body of the poems, however, there is a consistent strain of Buddhist and Native American thought, especially the idea that the spiritual and physical worlds are deeply entwined. In that belief the speaker in these poems is akin to Henry David Thoreau—author, poet, naturalist, Transcendentalist, and hiker. Nestled between the first and last sections of this book, there is even a series of deft poems that speak through the persona of Thoreau. The aforementioned poem, "The Kingdom of the Ditch," appears in this section, as well as other poems that bring together apparent opposites, such as entering and leaving.

The need to come to terms with death—that final departure—is a strong thread throughout this book and understandably so since these poems were written in the aftermath of Davis's father's diagnosis of pancreatic cancer. Specific references to the father appear in about a dozen poems, but I suspect his death is a source of unnamed grief in many more, a reason in one poem why the speaker spends days without writing. The last poem in the book, "I'll Catch You Up," is from the viewpoint of a son in an upper field where "Deerberry hangs its pitch / black fruit like lanterns." He addresses his dead father and tells him that "It's always the opposite / that illuminates":

. . . Your being
dead, me alive; my presence
in this field, your absence; the sun
in September, the coming dark
of December. . . .

Even the enjambed line of “in this field, your absence; the sun” testifies that the darkness of loss contains light. The attention to opposites reminds me of the Cherokee underworld, where its day is our night and seasons turn backwards. I was also reminded of the Greek myth of Orpheus, a creator of songs who travels to the underworld to retrieve his dead wife. But the speaker in this poem knows he does not have to go on a special mission to another world to catch up with his father. His own life journey will take him “down the old logging road / that leads toward the spring / that runs along the bottom / of the ridge.” The son may be following a road of death and depletion, but it leads toward reunion at the regenerative spring.

I am hard-pressed to find fault with the poems in this book. The irony that fruit grows sweeter “as the vine withers” is frequently used, but fresh imagery keeps it from growing stale. More sparingly used is the wonderful image of the honeybee, a creature believed in many ancient mythologies to connect the natural world to the underworld. In this book they spin their honey “under the ribs of the dead,” cross over the pale flowers of beebrush, and disappear into the throat of flowers. I love the mythic undertone of the imagery in this book—chords that deepen the notes.

In terms of tone, “Three Songs for Flannery O’Connor” seems out of place in the collection, but it is nevertheless an amazing poem. It mixes comic humor, tragedy, revelation, with a voice as tough as O’Connor’s. I’ll be curious to see if in the future Davis works more with this voice.

If you are looking for a poetry collection to read, *The Kingdom of the Ditch* would be a solid choice. In a society where “following a thread” implies computer correspondence and “connecting” suggests Facebook and Twitter, this wise book reminds us that our mortal bodies—our own two legs and five senses—can take us on journeys that root us more deeply to the earth and each other.

Indiana Writers Center, Indianapolis

SHARI MILLER WAGNER

Songs from an Empty Cage: Poetry, Mystery, Anabaptism, and Peace. By Jeff Gundy. Telford, Pa.: Cascadia Publishing House. 2013. Pp. 294. \$23.95.

Somewhere Near Defiance: Poems. By Jeff Gundy. Tallahassee, Fla.: Anhinga Press. 2014. Pp. 108. \$20.

Amid all our God-talk, poetry has a place—an important one. In his recent book *Songs from an Empty Cage: Poetry, Mystery, Anabaptism, and Peace* (Cascadia, 2013), this is Jeff Gundy’s argument, and it is one he makes persuasively. In *Somewhere Near Defiance: Poems* (Anhinga, 2014), Gundy beautifully shows what poetic God-talk can be.

Most of us reading here may feel surprised that Gundy believes there is need to make a case for including “theopoetry” amid our God-talk. The Bible, we know, includes the Psalms, although that inclusion makes them Scripture (which *could* cause us to overlook them as poetry). We also know that poetry is generally

good stuff—in theory—and holds an honored place among literary types. However, some may think, poetry as poetry can be left to literary types. Too many good books of many sorts! So we must make choices. Which books shall people oriented to the divine read and let impress us? Poetry often slips well down the list, when it's even listed.

In *Songs from an Empty Cage*, Gundy extends the emerging discussion of theopoetry's place in the mix through nine previous articles and papers, revised for this volume and complemented with seven new chapters. Throughout, Gundy projects his poetically slanted sensibility, which, to me, seems one example of what the theologian Ted Grimsrud has labeled "Neo-Mennonite." Gundy stands among those nurtured by and continuing in Anabaptism but not "caged" by it. Although Gundy values the tradition, especially its countercultural and pacifist postures, he values them also in other countercultural and pacific poets and traditions and would contribute to their ongoing evolution.

In this vein, among many other themes, Gundy discusses how attuned he is, as a poet, to the world: its objects and entities and his encounters with them. He notes how he develops his poetry from concrete images of this world, images of the divine creativity that produces them. And he reminds us that, despite the many flaws and sins of people and groups, "the world" (the *natural* world at the least) is very good, just as it was created. Thus, Gundy problematizes the familiar Anabaptist notion of standing against it—of supposedly being "in but not of the [fallen] world." To Gundy, this traditional attitude seems to stand against the creativity that continues to give birth to goodness. And as a poet, he wants to do his part in filling the world with more good things.

In this way, he reflects the sensibility that Grimsrud describes: trusting of creation's abundance and constructing theology experientially and dialogically, collaborating with (not passively yielding to) religious authority, including the authority of tradition.⁴ By extension, our Anabaptist traditions of simplicity and austerity trouble Gundy, in that they have made us prone to dismiss such things as poetry as, supposedly, frivolous. Gundy aims to valorize poetry as an expression of creation's abundant and glorious goodness—goodness that has brought to life beings who can create "beautiful things made of words" (244).

While this may seem self-serving, Gundy reminds us that authentic discernment requires everyone's interaction—the cultivation and appreciation of many voices/perspectives. If we are to have such discernment, we have to make space for each other and not stifle difference, even as we nurture discipleship. For how many forms may discipleship take? (59) Gundy enchants us with the image of poets as writers (and our partners in dialogue) especially dedicated to de-familiarizing the familiar, people with capacities to refresh our visions of things (215). Some poets, like him, aim often to construct linguistically musical images of divinity-in-creation, which might draw us to theopoetry as

4. Ted Grimsrud, "Mennonite Theology and Historical Consciousness: A Pastoral Perspective," in *Mennonite Theology in Face of Modernity: Essays in Honor of Gordon D. Kaufman*, ed. by Alain Epp Weaver (North Newton, Kan.: Bethel College, 1996), 151-155.

enlightening literature, serious God-talk. Certainly, this helps us see why Gundy devotes a section of the book to the vocation of teaching theopoetry, not just writing it.

While the poetic aim to de-familiarize strikes some as “wild” (204), Gundy embraces it. He is at home with his “otherness” in relation to tradition and orthodoxy, declaring relative comfort with—as he sees it—the “heretical”/unorthodox character of his own poetry and sensibility, and with wild God-talk in general. Gundy refuses to be completely domesticated, and he implicitly cautions us about the familiar impulse to domesticate God—to presume knowledge of God, to presume our religious structures can capture/cage the ineffable (207). Creativity is revealed both in the wild and in the civilized. Theopoetic (de-familiarizing) God-talk seems at least as important, in this way, as any other form.

That it is beautiful and moving adds to its value. *Somewhere Near Defiance* is both of these. As my first introduction to Gundy’s poetry, this collection whets my appetite. In the lead poem, from which this collection takes its name, “Defiance” is the kind of concrete image that Gundy masterfully develops throughout the collection. Tangibly, as he tells us in the poem’s first line, the Defiance that Gundy lives near in Bluffton, Ohio, is the town Defiance, Ohio (which is not the only interesting location to map in these poems). But “nearly defiant” is also Gundy’s attitude. He defies (or nearly so) what Defiance stands for, for this town grew up adjacent to the historical Fort Defiance (although Gundy doesn’t tell us this), and Fort Defiance was the base from which General “Mad” Anthony Wayne (to whom Gundy does refer) launched the decisive battle in the Northwest Indian Wars, just after the American Revolution. But fairly defiantly, “Somewhere Near Defiance” culminates in Gundy’s declarations of peace:

... it’s time for declarations,
 Time for floods. Time to put down the *Toledo Blade*
 and take a very long walk. Time to say peace on terror,
 peace on drugs, peace on Defiance.
 Peace on Mad Anthony and his soldiers – gone so quiet now –
 and the warriors they fought, and the fruit trees they tore. (5)

In the image of Defiance, Ohio, then, Gundy develops depths of reference, and from there he finally suggests depths of meaning and value and compassion. It’s time to put down swords and blades and begin the long journey to peace—time for peace to come to the issues causing conflict and to the people, places, and things swept up in such conflicts. Interestingly, although Gundy’s poetic voice takes initiative (“I’ve stalled around too long” [5]), his “I” quickly disappears, leaving us simply with a time ripe for declarations of peace and, we might presume, the required peacemaking—declarations anyone of our time (and any time) could make, peacemaking in which everyone can participate.

Serious God-talk here.

As we travel while reading his poems, numerous pieces portray Gundy’s poetic encounters with rock formations, paths, vistas, weather conditions,

creatures (some human), and such. Although concrete imagery usually dominates these poems, they are not mere descriptions. Gundy's encounters are always rendered through his poetic sensibility. Whether we're walking a path near the Bluffton campus, sitting at a desk in a writer's retreat house on Kelley's Island in Lake Erie, rocking on a porch in Cleveland overlooking the Cuyahoga River, driving through southeast Wisconsin, looking east from one of Washington's San Juan Islands, or traveling anywhere else or "resting" at home with Gundy, we become conscious of the sights, sounds, and so on that he has crafted for us as poetic images, not just presented to us as objects.

The stuff of the world seems worth our attention—the everyday and the awesome. The images often come with commentary, but it's usually brief and never confining. It's inviting: "Come along! See," it seems to beckon. Although Gundy may tell us something of how he sees things—what they've meant to him—what we see, in the end, is up to us. He seems sometimes to be teaching us how to read. When we encounter a poem (or any reading material), the writer's imagination should not be the only one at work. Gundy aims to rehabilitate the world—well, not so much the world as our opinions of it, if we don't already hold it in high regard. So he needs our involvement. He will de-familiarize, but we need to "re-cognize," re-imagine—see the world afresh. Still echoing with the first "words" of creation, the world Gundy pronounces "good."

At the heart of the book, Gundy places a series of "contemplations." Each poem in this section is entitled "Contemplation with [something/s]." To me, these poems seem especially poignant. Gundy is approaching retirement age (though the meaning of this is even more vague for writers than university professors). Trailing Gundy by only a few years, I accepted his invitation and found myself looking ahead with him. Among other things he contemplates, he seems concerned about all the poems not yet written. In the first lines of "Contemplation with Distant Scenes and Loon," Gundy makes an image of himself: "All day I've been a parchment written on / too many times. . ." (49). Perhaps he's somewhat worn. Sitting on the shore of Horseshoe Lake, he looks across to the far shore:

The old trees
and older stones will offer themselves to anyone
willing to pull an oar over and over against
the slate-gray water. (49)

Again, the concrete imagery resonates beyond the tangible surface. Row across the lake and stand among the trees and stones, and seemingly of their own inanimate volition, they become ours—we can see this even from here. But each thing in this passage resonates as a writer's tool. We make parchment from wood. We've carved in stone. The lake is slate-like, and our oars (*anyone* willing can make the trip) mark/inscribe the slate over and over again.

In the poem's ending, a loon "swims / right up as if in appraisal or approval, / sharp head reflected like a ghost soul in the lake" (49). Something haunts Gundy, perhaps what's left unwritten on another shore.

But perhaps that other shore is ours. Perhaps Gundy means to haunt us with the prospect. Amid all the God-talk to be done, we too have our calling to refresh

the landscape. Both *Songs from an Empty Cage* and *Somewhere Near Defiance* call to us with much to consider as, listening reverently, we shape our sensibilities and craft our contributions.

Washburn University

BRADLEY G. SIEBERT

Gathering the Silence. By Eileen R. Kinch. Georgetown, Ky.: Finishing Line Press. 2013. Pp. 27. \$12.

Though the title of Eileen R. Kinch's poetry debut ends with the word "Silence," we meet her voice as one "Crashing the Choir Rehearsal at the Baptist Church," "singing in peals of thunder / loud enough to wake God" (3). In this opening poem, the Baptist women who adopt the speaker and her "soprano feathers" (3) symbolize a greater, everyday community the speaker longs for, a repeated subject that dances through the rest of this collection. But while this theme may be familiar in poetry highlighted in such places as *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, Kinch brings new life and energy to the very idea of *silence* as someone once firmly rooted in the conservative Quaker tradition.

While there are certainly poems that show us glimpses of how the speaker has been silenced as a woman or community member in the past, most of the time Kinch's work demonstrates the rich, mysterious connection between practiced stillness—gathering the silence—and a Spirit-led life, one where many "leadings" can't be heard if smothered by things like anger or busyness. Having once considered myself a Mennonite-Quaker (my wedding ceremony was a Quaker one), I would argue that the Society of Friends has much to offer Anabaptists. Among these offerings might be how to *center down* and welcome silence as holy and energized worship, not necessarily as an absence or a punishment. Kinch's approach to widening the definition and importance of silence in her first poetry collection is both intriguing and refreshing. As her readers, we learn to anticipate examples of a "hush so deep/ we sometimes feel it take on flesh, / standing among us" (4).

While she writes about universal themes such as community and the often charged and sacred familial bonds between women, Kinch's poems also highlight the importance and reality of collecting an individual experience. What does it mean to this poet to be "plain," to be a "Quaker" or "granddaughter"? And what might it mean to be one speaker at the edges of any carefully defined group or relationship?

Some of the most memorable poems in this chapbook deal with preparing homemade "slow" foods like yogurt or sauerkraut. "Waiting," a poem comparing the transformation of milk into yogurt with the daily living out of the kingdom of God, starts with the unforgettable line, "All night long, the milk sits in the fridge, discerning / its thoughts inside the clear glass. The best ones / rise to the top during the dark hours. . ." (15). Another titled "Fermentation" ends with the speaker thinking of Jesus' resurrection when canning, that "cool silence, the sour smell / of ripening. But he also knew how life breaks / the seal and comes bursting out one morning. . ." (16). Certain poems like this one stand out

in this collection as taut, lyric portraits, while others read almost essay-like, such as the surprising piece “Lifeblood,” a poem unflinching in its exploration of the ties between menstruation, family, and loss. What might happen if some of these essay-like poems grew into actual essays (since Kinch is also a gifted nonfiction writer)? Or more poems were added to shape a full collection? This reader hopes both will happen.

For now, *Gathering the Silence* already serves as a chapbook worth taking with us into days filled with the growing white noise of a daily commute, texting strangers, unending commercials, the news at the top of the hour, or simply a ravenous to-do list. For Anabaptist writers and readers, it reminds us that we are not the only “quiet” culture trying to figure out our identity in a much larger world. And whether we are fellow seekers longing for a simpler, more loving community, or readers who can relate with constantly being at the edges of a family, culture, or faith, the mystery and necessity of the types of silence explored in Kinch’s poems leave us both more centered and filled with more churning questions—in a way, mirroring the meetings for worship she describes in her poems. Indeed, Kinch also ponders in “What Remains” (the chapbook’s last poem), “[i]s it the word or the silence / That I cannot tell you” (24).

Ohio University

BECCA J. R. LACHMAN

The Wittenbergs: A Novel. By Sarah Klassen. Winnipeg: Turnstone Press. 2013. Pp. 404. \$21.

In many ways, Sarah Klassen’s novel, *The Wittenbergs*, turns on the question of family history and just how heavy a burden one family’s past can weigh upon its current generations. For the Wittenbergs, the family at the center of Klassen’s text, this sometimes unacknowledged weight carries with it certain consequences. Only a reformation of sorts can set the family free to understand their history in new, more hopeful, ways.

Klassen has made her name as an award-winning poet; this is her first effort as a novelist. Her poetic impulse makes *The Wittenbergs* a lovely reading experience, with striking images especially of the protagonist, Mia Wittenberg, contending with a sometimes harsh winter Manitoba landscape, and, later, with an equally challenging but no less beautiful Crimean summer. Although overall *The Wittenbergs* is a strong text, there are small clues that this is Klassen’s initial foray into longer fiction—too many narrative strands being, perhaps, the most notable barrier to making this a flawless novel.

The book’s plot is compelled forward by Mia, who is in her final year of high school and experiencing significant anxiety—as with most teens her age—about her identity, her future, and her place in the school’s social order. But she must also contend with a family on the brink of collapse, a depressed mother, and two nephews who have been diagnosed with Fragile X, a genetic disorder that can cause significant developmental delays.

At the encouragement of her beloved English teacher, Mia begins an independent study, interviewing her grandmother, then writing the stories of

GranMarie's difficult Ukrainian childhood and her immigration to Canada. An endnote tells readers these stories were inspired by Klassen's mother, and there is a quality about them—about GranMarie's telling, and Mia's retelling—that suggest the experiences might be told and retold by Mennonites of a certain generation, faced with a grim upbringing in Russia, with the terror of political upheaval, and with a challenging journey overseas to a land completely foreign.

As Mia constructs stories from the pieces of her family's history, her world continues to fray. Her father, a principal at Mia's high school, becomes more distant, drawn like his daughter to the young English teacher, though for different reasons entirely; her mother descends further into depression; her sister, struggling to care for two children with disabilities, turns to a charismatic church for comfort, the Mennonite faith having failed to provide her the promise of healing she needs.

These crises are complicated and intensified by other events: a car accident; a suicide; GranMarie's illness and death. Such sorrow for Mia and her family is set against the backdrop of larger grief, the 1991 war in Iraq. Invited to a prayer meeting for the war at her Mennonite church, Mia prays for peace—for the Middle East certainly, but also for her mother and father, and her drug-addled friend, and her nephew. After the vigil, walking with a friend and her father into the frozen night, she sees a "glorious night sky," a portend suggesting all is not irreparably broken in Mia's world.

What begins the family's reformation—they are Wittenbergs, after all, and the theme of reformation thrums throughout the story—is a heritage trip taken by Mia and her parents to the Ukraine, ostensibly to scatter GranMarie's ashes on her motherland, but also to learn more of the Wittenberg family history about which Mia has been writing. Against the backdrop of the Soviet Union's collapse, the Wittenbergs are drawn closer together, both by the power of this journey, but also by an accident that challenges them to rely on each other—and on their daughter Alice, waiting anxiously for them in Manitoba.

Klassen faces difficult subjects head-on in *The Wittenbergs*: depression; suicide; substance abuse; marital infidelity; genetic disorders. At times, these seem a natural part of the unfolding story. At other times, the plot appears to strain under the weight of probability—so much difficulty and pain for one family and, specifically, for one young protagonist.

Still, through a number of narrative strands, Klassen capably explores our relationship to familial and ethnic history. The boys' Fragile X syndrome; Mia's interest in her family's history and Joseph's seeming initial disinterest in the same; GranMarie's tenuous hold on the stories of her past; even the Wittenberg family drift away from, and back to, their Mennonite heritage—these elements of the novel all raise intriguing questions about how our past defines who we now are, and who we wish to be. *The Wittenbergs* also challenges us to wonder whether we can ever really rewrite the past. Or, in the least, whether we can redeem parts of our stories that have broken us.

While the novel's denouement may feel a little too tidy for contemporary readers, it also suggests that redemption certainly is possible: for GranMarie, finally settled, her ashes scattered across a Ukrainian wheat field; for the

Wittenbergs, who find in each other the wholeness they've been seeking; and for Mia, affirmation that her own life, her own story, matters, even if the end has yet to be written.

George Fox University

MELANIE SPRINGER MOCK

Everyday Mercies: A Novel. By Evie Yoder Miller. Milton, Wis.: Big Girl Press. 2014. Pp. 344. \$15.

Evie Yoder Miller's second novel depicts three generations of the Lehmans, a Mennonite farm family in Wisconsin, as they interact with each other over a Thanksgiving weekend. The women in the family are the primary characters: Martha, in her 80s; Charlotte, her daughter; and Carrie, Charlotte's 20-something daughter. Each of the book's twenty chapters is told in third person from one of their perspectives, with Carrie's view the most frequent, followed by Martha's. Four of Martha's chapters also include excerpts from her mother's diaries from the 1920s and 1930s.

Everyday Mercies begins with Martha asking: "Where, the peace that passes understanding?" (1), a question that any of the characters could ask, as they all seem to be at a crossroads, whether spiritually or professionally. The novel's two significant narrative subjects are Carrie's attempt to find direction for her life after an unsuccessful spell as a teacher in Appalachia and a recent breakup and Martha's grieving process after her husband's death. Secondary conflicts include Carrie's father James's worries about the economic viability of his farm and her teenage brother Chad's late-night alcohol-fueled shenanigans. In each of these threads the characters attempt to discern where "home" is for them. Much of the book's plot plays out via conversations between the characters and glimpses into their thoughts.

Through these conversations, *Everyday Mercies* wrestles with two major questions. First, what does it mean to be a Mennonite; and second, how does one respond to and live within these uncertain economic times in the U.S.? While the prominence of the former question seems to make Mennonites the novel's primary intended audience (and, indeed, references such as those to "upside-down thinking" [21] and Dutch Blitz [103] may only make sense to Mennonite readers), its investigation of the latter question helps it move beyond sectarian boundaries.

The book hints at definitions of Mennonites throughout in answer to the first question. Carrie's aunt Gloria asserts "Once a Mennonite, always a Mennonite" (134), implying an ethnic element of the faith. This inescapability is borne out in Carrie's approach to her young person's malaise: while she questions the definitions of "success" that she has been taught, this questioning is made possible by the Mennonite view of the world she was raised with. *Everyday Mercies* also considers how "the English" view Mennonites, as there is discussion of plain dress throughout the novel and how it feeds outsiders' misconceptions. Martha fits the tourist stereotype of what a Mennonite is because she dresses plain for church, but she is much more flexible theologically than her plainness

implies. Carrie's definition is the one the novel ultimately affirms, and it places the essence of Mennonitism in actions. She says that Mennonites are "just us. Ordinary people—farmers and such—doing the best we can every day" (93). The characters embody their individual versions of ethics-based Mennonitism through their deeds: James is a steward of the land in his farming; Charlotte shows love for others via her cooking; and, although he is portrayed unsympathetically, the reason Carrie's ex-boyfriend Ryan abandons her may be seen as laudable, as he leaves in order to go to Palestine with Christian Peacemaker Teams.

The second question is partially investigated through James's musings about whether his dairy farm can continue to compete in an industry dominated by mammoth agribusinesses, but is preeminently examined through Carrie's struggles to find herself. Charlotte does not understand why her college-educated daughter works at a thrift shop instead of finding another teaching job. For Carrie (and, the novel implies, many others in her generation), the old model of having a middle-class job and raising a family is no longer satisfactory, but she has not found a replacement yet. She knows "[s]he needs to be *for something*" instead of simply criticizing old ways (100, Miller's italics), and seeks advice for how to begin searching for it. It is significant that none of the other characters suggest a theological remedy for the lack that Carrie feels. Through this silence *Everyday Mercies* asserts that wanting to feel fulfilled in one's earthly life is a legitimate desire.

Ultimately the explorations of these questions speak to an issue that synthesizes the two and has of course been a central one in the Anabaptist tradition since its beginning: how can Mennonites successfully be in the world (and in *Everyday Mercies*, specifically the twenty-first-century world, with Facebook and hybrid cars and slow food movements; one of the novel's strengths is the deftness with which it describes these innovations) but not of it? The book's treatment of these weighty themes makes it more compelling than Miller's 2003 novel *Eyes at the Window*. The characters in *Everyday Mercies* are memorable because readers can identify with them and their struggles.

Everyday Mercies has few weaknesses. The diary excerpts are fascinating, especially in their sensitive portrayal of clinical depression, but their infrequency does not allow them to be an effective part of the story. They are the one loose thread left after the book's tidy ending. Perhaps a sequel where Carrie investigates them more in-depth than her grandmother is able to would be in order. Another questionable aspect of the novel is the great disparity between the characters' generational concerns, which at times threatens to stretch the story's plausibility too thinly. Martha has recently decided to stop wearing her head covering outside of church while Carrie is a feminist interested in cutting edge techniques for sustainable organic agriculture. Martha's lingering feelings of guilt as she questions her partial abandonment of plain dress seem quaint in light of Carrie's big picture thoughts about issues of social justice, and one could argue that the novel is too ambitious in its readiness to address issues. However, the poignant conversations between grandmother and granddaughter show that

they are ultimately concerned with the same question: how does one live a proper life in this messy, complicated world?

The strengths of *Everyday Mercies* easily outweigh the deficiencies. Miller's smooth, realist writing style will appeal to a wide variety of readers (including non-Mennonites, though they will have a very different reading experience), whether one is reading for leisure or for academic purposes. *Everyday Mercies* is an important addition to U.S. Mennonite fiction.

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