

## Book Reviews

*Later Writings of the Swiss Anabaptists, 1529-1592.* Edited by C. Arnold Snyder. Translated by H. S. Bender, C. J. Dyck, Abraham Friesen, Leonard Gross, Sydney Penner, Walter Klaassen, C. Arnold Snyder, and J. C. Wenger. Classics of the Radical Reformation, vol. 13; Anabaptist Texts in Translation, vol. 4. Kitchener, Ont.: Pandora Press. 2017. \$53.

Since the mid-1990s, C. Arnold Snyder has been calling attention to the wealth of archival sources that shed light on the convictions and everyday lives of Anabaptists who lived in Swiss territories following the period of the movement's origins. Over these years, a small group of scholars, composed mostly of Swiss historians, has drawn on such holdings to describe the experience of nonconformists who, in comparison with the earliest Swiss Anabaptists, had existed in relative historiographical obscurity. Snyder's primary prior contributions to this effort were his textual criticism and contextualization of an extensive tradition of manuscript production, modification, and circulation among the Swiss Brethren, the results of which have been published in a series of articles in this journal. The current volume, which presents exemplars from this manuscript tradition and other associated writings in English, extends this work. Its major achievement is the edition, translation, and interpretation of the 466-page Codex 628, copied and edited anonymously in 1590, which exemplifies Swiss Anabaptist theological argumentation and method in the late sixteenth century.

*Later Writings* contains twenty discrete texts written between 1529-1592, divided into fifteen chapters. Selections are diverse in form and function. Shorter writings include Wilhelm Reublin's confession of faith (chapter II), mid-sixteenth-century interrogation protocols (chapters III and IV), Swiss Brethren letters to Dutch and Polish interlocutors (chapters V, VI, and XV), the Strasbourg Discipline or church order (chapter VII), and prefaces from three Swiss Brethren hymnals (chapter IX). These documents provide distinct vantage points from which to evaluate the internal priorities of Swiss Anabaptist communities and their main concerns in interactions with other nonconformist groups.

The volume's core writings, meanwhile, elucidate the nature of Swiss Anabaptists' ongoing dialogue—or, rather, conflict—with Reformed neighbors and authorities. Chapters X-XIV draw attention to nonconformists' long-term projects to, one, develop more convincing responses to questions raised at the 1571 disputation with Reformed clergy at Frankenthal in the Palatinate; and, two, to carve out space for themselves in a Swiss Reformed confessional environment hostile to their presence. Translations of the two works comprising the Codex 628, together constituting a "virtual encyclopedia of Anabaptist beliefs and positions," demonstrate the seriousness of these efforts (153). "A Short, Simple Confession" (chapter XII)—extending, paradoxically, to 366 manuscript pages—forwards carefully-argued responses to each of the thirteen points of doctrine discussed at

Frankenthal, focusing particular attention on the relationship of the Old and New Testaments, the legitimacy of a Christian magistracy, and baptism. The following work, "Concerning Separation" (chapter XIII), is a creative expansion and reworking of a 1546 manuscript reprinted in Heinrich Bullinger's 1560 *Anabaptist Origins*. It makes a forceful case for the toleration of Swiss Anabaptists. Analogous appeals, which portray nonconformists as faithful Christian subjects rather than disobedient sectarians, are forwarded in separate writings to the city councils of Bern and Zurich (chapters X and XIV). Thomas Meyer's "Concerning the Christian Ban" (chapter VIII) suggests that Swiss Anabaptists also directed efforts at persuasion toward a lay Reformed audience.

In his discussion of authorship in the introduction to Codex 628 (chapter XI), Snyder concludes that the source was the result of "a community effort" (156). So too is this volume. While most writings in this collection currently reside in European archives and appear in a critical edition and translation here for the first time, Snyder has updated and reprinted several existing translations completed by a previous generation of Mennonite scholars. The editor's collaboration with Abraham Friesen, Leonard Gross, and Walter Klaassen has produced a faithful and yet highly readable translation of the massive Codex 628, making an intimidating, difficult resource accessible to both specialists and an interested public.

The critical apparatus that accompanies the text of each writing differs in depth, consisting variously of original page or folio numbers, marginal annotations, biblical references, and explanatory notes on place names, translation decisions, or manuscript characteristics. Different fonts in the edition of the writings of Codex 628, assigned respectively to shared and unshared elements in similar versions of the works, allow readers to track how Anabaptist "copyist/editors" adapted the theological argumentation to suit changing purposes over a period of decades. A great deal of painstaking textual comparison has gone into the creation of a lengthy appendix listing the authors and works cited in the codex, which reveals Anabaptists' capacity to appropriate and redeploy a surprisingly eclectic set of theological contentions from the Church Fathers, popes, councils of the church, early reformers, and Reformed churchmen. The volume also includes thorough subject, name, and biblical citation indices. The comprehensive scope of the latter provides a rebuttal to contemporary Reformed claims concerning Anabaptists' scriptural selectivity and challenges common perceptions about the substandard theological sophistication of the Swiss Brethren. The most helpful of all contextual elements in this book are Snyder's detailed and perceptive source introductions, positioned at the beginning of each chapter. They locate each text in time and place, survey the existing historiography, and provide interpretations of the significance of the documents to broader questions of Swiss Anabaptist belief and practice.

Thus, in addition to serving as the reader's trustworthy guide throughout this volume, Snyder also forwards a set of substantive arguments about who later Swiss Anabaptists were, what they believed, and how their convictions shaped their social identity. The assembled writings testify to the maturation of a "supra-regional tradition" capable of collective decision-making, confident in its

theological foundations, and courageous in its attempts to secure accommodation in the jurisdictions in which its members lived, many of which lay beyond Swiss territorial borders (9). Theological shifts, such as the tempering of earlier calls for separation, demonstrate the impact of nonconformists' long-term coexistence with a Reformed majority, Snyder contends.

On the basis of the evidence presented in this corpus, this interpretation is persuasive. It merits testing. Two lines of interrogation could bear fruit. First, while Snyder argues convincingly that many of these writings reflect group discussion and discernment, we need to learn more about who used manuscripts and how they were used. The degree of these sources' integration into shared Anabaptist religious life should tell us something about how closely they reflected the sentiments of a membership beyond literate male leaders. Second, it would be useful to put these writings into more direct conversation with sources that record everyday interactions between Swiss Anabaptists and Reformed counterparts. Examination of interrogation protocols, governmental correspondence, and parish records, for example, reveals social dimensions of religious confrontation that do not always relate directly to the theological content of the assembled texts. Future efforts to reconstruct the experience of later Swiss Anabaptists need to integrate findings based on these latter sources of evidence with analysis of the significant products of Swiss Anabaptist religious culture presented in this volume. With *Later Writings*, Snyder and his colleagues have facilitated and encouraged such attempts.

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*The Place of Imagination: Wendell Berry and the Poetics of Community, Affection, and Identity.* By Joseph R. Wiebe. Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press. 2017. \$49.95.

In *The Place of the Imagination*, Joseph R. Wiebe considers the role of fiction as a source for moral formation. He does this by carefully interpreting the canon of Wendell Berry's fictional writing, focusing on the role that imagination plays in the development of an ethic that is place-based and community-oriented. Taking the form of literary criticism, Wiebe's book analyzes each of Berry's major works of fiction, with an eye toward the ways that Berry unites form and content in his writing. Wiebe structures his chapters episodically, focusing on one of Berry's stories at a time. As he does so, he considers the lives and motivations of Berry's central characters in order to set a context for his own interpretation. For those readers who may not be familiar with Berry's writing, the effort Wiebe spends on understanding the particularities of Berry's stories serves as helpful background. Some of the book's most insightful moments, however, are the times when Wiebe takes a step back and helps the reader to see the dynamic, contextual, and open-ended ethic at the heart of Berry's work, an ethic that is rooted in imagination and affection.

Wiebe's book is divided into two major sections, each consisting of three chapters. The first part focuses on Berry's method, in particular his use of imagination and affection, and the development of his writing style. Part two turns to the lives of three central characters in Berry's stories whom Wiebe draws on as illustrations of Berry's method in practice.

Wiebe begins the first part of his book by addressing what he sees as two common misunderstandings of Berry. As he observes, some readers assume that Berry is promoting a model for how communities should be organized anywhere and everywhere. For them, Berry's writing becomes a universal ideal to emulate. Alternatively, other readers will commonly dismiss Berry's place-based agrarianism as unrealistic and hopelessly anachronistic for addressing the global and economic crises the world faces today.

Wiebe points out that both of these interpretations miss the inherently poetic, imaginative, and unprogrammable nature of Berry's writing. Instead, he notes that Berry's fictional works are written in the form of parables, "as expressions meaningful for understanding the human experience of reality despite their self-consciously fictive stance" (6). Wiebe suggests that Berry's parabolic form allows greater freedom than other forms of writing for the indirect ways that truth is revealed through imagination and poetics.

Wiebe explains that, for Berry, imagination has a quality of perception that discloses the many ways we are in relation with others in the places where we live. Without imagination, people too often relate to others by reduction, a way of categorizing and valuing others based on generalizations and stereotypes. According to Wiebe's interpretation, Berry uses imagination in his writing in order to challenge the reader to break down the artificial categories that divide people and to begin to see the many points of relatedness between oneself and others. Wiebe notes that since imagination can also apply to people's relations with places, plants, and animals, it is foundational to Berry's environmental ethics as well.

Building on his analysis of imagination, Wiebe turns to Berry's understanding of affection. Wiebe notes that, according to Berry, imagination becomes morally formative through its ability to disrupt pity and create the conditions for affection. This is important because, while those who pity are able to recognize and even feel distressed about the suffering of others, they do not see themselves as having any responsibility for it. However, people who are moved by affection not only see the suffering of others, but also recognize that the wellbeing of others concerns them as well. In this sense, the affective imagination is an interior response that is the condition for the possibility of social responsibility.

In the second half of the book, Wiebe turns his attention to three of Berry's books: *The Memory of Old Jack*, *Jaybar Crow*, and *Hannah Coulter*. Dedicating a separate chapter to each book, Wiebe focuses on the titular characters in these stories, illustrating how Berry writes each work of fiction as a parable that is not intended to prescribe a way of life, but to evoke the reader's imagination. Like other virtues, using your imagination to develop affection for other humans, animals, plants, and places is a practice that, once learned, can be adapted to different contexts and circumstances. And this, it seems, is one of Wiebe's larger points in his study of Berry.

All in all, Wiebe's book achieves its main purpose: to help readers better understand and appreciate the distinctive moral vision in Berry's fiction. Yet, while Wiebe does raise common critiques that other readers have made about Berry's work, I was left wondering how a more constructive project might take greater critical distance from Berry's viewpoint.

For example, Wiebe is well aware that communities and places are always shaped by their histories, which are already entangled in systems of oppression, and he demonstrates that Berry is cognizant of the structural dimension of injustice. Yet Berry is convinced that structural change will do little good without the concurrent transformation of community character. Drawing out the implications of Berry's community-based social ethic, Wiebe suggests that structural changes risk causing more harm than good if they are imposed from outside rather than implemented in line with the goals and interests of the communities that they impact. While it is true that systemic change may have negative and unintended consequences on the life and history of local communities, the preference for the local community in this book underestimates the degree to which systems-level changes can also positively disrupt the entrenched injustices of local communities.

The concept of imagination is also perhaps too limited in its scope. The focus is on imagination's positive potential, with no significant consideration of how it may also be destructive or insufficient as a basis for moral formation. Following Berry, Wiebe understands imagination to be a "way of seeing the earth and its human and natural history reverently" (159). Like Berry, Wiebe also suggests that imagination is not fantasy—it is in fact the means by which we can glimpse reality. Throughout the book Wiebe demonstrates the humanizing value of this way of using the imagination, but there is less acknowledgement of the power that imagination has to dehumanize as well. People's imaginations are regularly distorted by biases and prejudices that function culturally to produce and maintain systemic forms of violence. If an affective imagination is not combined with a critical consciousness I wonder how the ethic that Wiebe discerns in Berry's fiction will function when reality conflicts with imagination or how often an affective connection might serve as a substitute for equity or justice.

Overall, Wiebe's book succeeds in offering students and admirers of Berry's writing a nuanced and comprehensive analysis. This largely sympathetic reading of Berry will undoubtedly be an important contribution in and of itself. This study of the community-forming power of imagination will also be of interest to those working in the areas of ecological theology, environmental ethics, and theopoetics.

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*The Architectonics of Hope: Violence, Apocalyptic, and the Transformation of Political Theology.* By Kyle Gingerich Hiebert. Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books. 2017. \$28.

*Messianic Political Theology and Diaspora Ethics: Essays in Exile.* By P. Travis Kroeker. Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books. 2017. \$33.

In 2017, the “Theopolitical Visions” series of Wipf and Stock’s Cascade imprint brought us these two volumes, representative of the increasing numbers of forays into “political theology” (explicitly named as such) by scholars from Anabaptist traditions. These volumes also share a focus on constructive employment of the apocalyptic in political theology, and both engage at length with the work of John Howard Yoder on the one hand, and with the emerging canon of contemporary, Western political theologians on the other hand. Here, however, the similarities end.

Gingerich Hiebert’s volume arose from his doctoral thesis. It is the work of a young and emerging scholar, and sustains a central argument across the monograph. Kroeker’s volume arose from decades of publishing, bringing together fifteen diverse essays all previously published elsewhere. It is the work of an established scholar, tracing some key moments and themes in his work to this point.

Kroeker’s *Messianic Political Theology and Diaspora Ethics* includes essays on what it means for political theology and ethics to be messianic, apocalyptic, and exilic, and what it means to be Anabaptist in a modern, pluralist, liberal democracy. There are essays on Yoder and on Augustine; on diaspora and on the academy; on sixteenth-century Anabaptism and on twenty-first-century technology. Anyone who does political theology or Christian ethics, as well as anyone who does theology from within or sympathetically alongside Anabaptist traditions, will be enriched by the wide-ranging explorations in which these essays engage. The collection exhibits a generosity of engagement with traditions and approaches outside Anabaptism as well as a firm grounding in a thoroughly Anabaptist commitment to the messianic and the ethical.

In the introduction, Kroeker helpfully unpacks terms from the title (“messianic,” “diaspora,” and “exile”), which are the threads drawing together the essays. The relationship and differences between “political theology” and “ethics” are somewhat more explicit in this introduction than in the volume as a whole, which begins with four essays in part 1 intentionally engaging with and in political theology, then moves to parts 2 and 3, which are distinctly ethical. It would have, perhaps, also been a kindness to the reader for these three parts of the book and their contents to be introduced here in addition to the introduction to these important conceptual themes, particularly as the sections and the essays themselves are not preceded with introductions or abstracts. But this does not distract from the considerable value and importance of the collection of essays itself.

Turning to *The Architectonics of Hope*, we have a different task: evaluating the argument of a monograph as opposed to the value of a collection of essays. The central argument of Gingerich Hiebert’s book is genealogical, tracing a trajectory of apocalyptic and aesthetics through the course of contemporary political

theologies, through the works of Carl Schmitt, Johannes Baptist Metz, John Milbank, David Bentley Hart, and John Howard Yoder. The genealogy is meant to illuminate the “apocalyptically inflected aesthetics of violence” that characterizes Schmitt’s work (chapter 2), and trace how subsequent theologians sought to oppose or overcome Schmitt, but did not succeed due to their lack of actual engagement with his work. Instead, they each remain unwittingly Schmittian. Metz does not succeed because he and Schmitt both prioritize function over content, employ a radically negative theological anthropology, and believe in the ongoing necessity of violence (chapter 2). Milbank and Hart also do not succeed (chapter 3). Milbank employs “a Schmittian the o-logic” in which an enemy is falsely created against which one’s own proposal can then be constructed. Hart comes closer to succeeding, but reveals his failure in his critique of pacifism. In the end, Yoder comes closest to succeeding (chapter 4).

The development of this genealogy takes the reader through some impressively sophisticated close readings, which also engage with a variety of interlocutors. The breadth of engagement with and knowledge of the terrain of a certain tradition of political theologies is considerable, and the readings are often astute. Particularly strong are the sections on the function of violence in political theologies; critiques of Milbank and Hart in this regard are incisive and important for readers of their work.

However, the central argument, overall and at each step in its progression, begins with a rather audacious claim, acknowledging that it is audacious and asking the reader to bear with the author as it will be revealed as both plausible and important; the author then offers a dense and complex defense of the audacious claim, which in the end is radically qualified and blunted. The audacity of the steps that must be taken to describe Metz, Milbank, and Hart in genealogical relation to Schmitt, which culminates with Yoder, cannot be understated—and Gingerich Hiebert does not understate it. The inclusion of Yoder, however radically qualified—which Gingerich Hiebert stresses is “non-epic” (he insists Yoder is not the hero, and cannot alone get us where we need to be)—seems a bit forced. Reading Yoder in terms of metaphysics, and especially aesthetics, presses him into trajectories set by traditions and discourses that he steadfastly rejected or avoided (even if this reading of Yoder is astute and fruitful).

And as we come to the end of the dense, detailed readings of these authors, the audacity of how and why they are being read in this way becomes so qualified and softened that the reader must wonder why the genealogical claim is needed at all. It is unclear why Schmitt is needed in order to explain Metz’s negative anthropology or Milbank’s rhetorical style, or the necessity of violence in Metz, Milbank, and Hart. This is perhaps admitted in the conclusion: “another way to understand the overall genealogy would be to suggest that it stages a confrontation between several different visionary options in an effort to theologically assess their relative strengths and weaknesses, particularly with respect to Schmitt’s vision” (158).

So, then, why Schmitt? The first chapter suggests that the genealogy will show how “the discipline of theology has prematurely bid adieu to Schmitt to its own detriment” and that “Schmitt’s work deserves more sustained and charitable

theological engagement" (3). By the end, however, the sharp edge of this argument is removed, when the writer concludes that it has "by no means" been suggested "that any reconfiguration of political theology that does not explicitly engage Schmitt's work does so at its own peril" or that "explicit engagement with Schmitt is some kind of unqualified theological good" (180). Perhaps then, although Gingerich Hiebert has established himself as an incisive theological reader and interlocutor, the actual impact of the central argument is to raise as many questions as it answers.

Finally, I cannot help but note an unfortunate commonality between these two volumes, which is an indictment of our common discipline of political theology as much as it is a criticism of these two authors' work. Kroeker engages with Paul, Friedrich Nietzsche, Walter Benjamin, Martin Buber, Eric Voegelin, Plato, Isaiah, Augustine, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Wendell Berry, Chaim Potok, Martin Luther, Thomas Müntzer, Michael Sattler, John Howard Yoder, Oliver O'Donovan, Karl Barth, and Michael Ignatieff. Gingerich Hiebert engages with Carl Schmitt, Johann Baptist Metz, Max Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Block, John Milbank, David Bentley Hart, Hans Urs von Balthasar, John Howard Yoder, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Nathan Kerr. There are ways in which we must commend the sorts of breadth and diversity exhibited in these interlocutors. However, there are obvious aspects of diversity that are entirely absent even in such a long list of thinkers, including gender and ethnicity. Reading these two books in close succession, I felt distinctly like a female outsider listening in on a conversation between men, for men (with the important exception of Kroeker's co-authored essay with Carole Leclair). These authors, and most of our male colleagues in political theology, must work harder to seek out, listen to, and engage with the voices and work of women and others excluded from these conversations, both historical and contemporary.

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*Circles of Sisterhood: A History of Mission, Service, and Fellowship in Mennonite Women's Organizations.* By Anita Hooley Yoder. Harrisonburg, Va.: Herald Press. 2017. \$24.99.

Anita Hooley Yoder's *Circles of Sisterhood* covers one hundred years of Mennonite women's groups. It focuses on the Mennonite Woman's Missionary Society (MWMS) and the General Conference Women's Missionary Association (WMA), today merged as Mennonite Women USA. Yoder provides a thoughtful, detailed study. Her engaging writing style, along with an eye for good stories, will make this an enjoyable read for a broad audience.

Yoder starts with the local sewing circles that formed the MWMS and WMA, both in 1917. The groups formed during the Progressive era, when Protestant women were active in social reform and church activities, particularly missions and service. These women did not necessarily set out to remake gender roles, but their increased participation in society did set off many changes. Yoder explains



this opening context well and notes the ways Mennonite women fit into the broader picture of American Christianity. The context is essential for understanding some of the suspicion the groups faced early on, particularly MWMS, which was infamously taken over by the General Mission Board in 1927. Embroiled in the fundamentalist versus modernist debates of the 1920s, many Mennonite leaders thought women's organizations smacked of progressivism, despite women's protestations that they were not suffragists or advocates for women's rights.

Yoder argues that women's groups have always had two purposes: service and sisterhood. In the early days, women emphasized service. They sewed and raised money for missions, provided meals at church events, sewed and collected materials for the men in Civilian Public Service during World War II, and were key players in Mennonite Central Committee relief efforts. Although the service element of these groups was most evident in the first decades, Yoder shows how the groups also met the inner needs of the participants by providing a place for women to gather, talk, and grow together.

In the 1950s and 1960s women began to acknowledge the sisterhood function more explicitly: empowerment, relationship building, spiritual growth, and self-care. Yoder highlights the 1970s as a pivotal decade as women's groups encountered feminism and shifted even more. For women entering church leadership the women's organizations helped them develop leadership skills, as well as build relationships and find support. Women's groups still raised funds, sewed, and engaged in service projects at the end of the twentieth century, but they also held retreats and nurtured personal spiritual journeys. Again, Yoder excels at tying trends in Mennonite life to a broader historical context. Mennonite women's groups boomed in the 1940s-1960s, a time when women's organizations in general grew in the U.S. An emphasis on spirituality and self-care came alongside renewed interest in spirituality across America in the 1970s.

After the 1970s participation declined and questions about relevance and purpose grew. Yoder argues that projects like Sister-Link, which paired women in North American with Mennonite women around the world, and Sister Care, which trains women for healing ministry and has also fostered relationships around the world, brought new vitality to the organizations. Women's groups began to see "sisterhood as service" (174) with relationships nurturing individuals, meeting physical needs, and empowering women who face many difficult challenges throughout the world. In the last section of the book, Yoder reflects on the place of women's organizations in the twenty-first century, highlighting the struggles these organizations face and the gifts they bring to church life. Most intriguing are Yoder's thoughts on how women's groups, with their emphasis on storytelling, relationship building, and artistic expression, may be particularly suited to the challenges churches face in the post-modern era.

As an institutional history, the book provides a general overview rather than close analysis of any one period or theme; however, it should help point the way for new directions in research. Yoder introduces the chapter on Latina and African American women's experiences noting the need for more research in this area. She discusses the diversity of Mennonite reactions to feminism in the 1970s, but there

is more scholars could do here. Likewise, Yoder briefly touches on lesbian women, noting division within Mennonite Women on the issue of including LGBTQ persons in church life. Given the close, yet complicated, relationship between the women's movement and the gay rights movement, there may be more to explore here.

The most engaging parts of the book are the five interludes between chapters where Yoder pauses from the chronological narrative to reflect on questions and themes that cut across time periods. She explores the way sewing has functioned as a symbol; the role of women's organizations in the creation of Mennonite Church USA; the dynamic tension of service and sisterhood; and women's empowerment. She also addresses the question: "are Mennonite women's groups feminist?" On this last point, Yoder offers a thoughtful examination, but readers might appreciate more depth in considering how scholars and feminists have defined feminism.

The book will be of interest to scholars looking to expand on some of the topics introduced here. It is also well suited to discussion groups. While it is on the long side (some chapters could probably have been consolidated), excerpts, particularly the thematic interludes between chapters, are ideal for group discussion. Yoder has a keen eye for how the story of women's organizations intersect with broader American history and with pressing questions and dilemmas in Mennonite life. The book is sure to prompt reader reflection—a fitting tribute to the women's groups that fostered exploration and empowerment in church life.

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