

Book Reviews

Eastern Mennonite University: A Century of Countercultural Education. By Donald B. Kraybill. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press. 2017. \$40.

Donald B. Kraybill charts the course of a Mennonite institution that, once trumpeted as a bulwark against “the cyclone of modernity” and offering only high school and Bible classes at its founding, made its “progressive vision” as a multicultural university and seminary the focus of its centenary celebration in 2017. Focusing on “transformation” as the book’s thematic lodestar, distinguished sociologist and alumnus Kraybill offers a tightly focused, scholarly meticulous account of one separatist institution’s changing response to the world. This history achieves a difficult feat: faithfully documenting one college’s idiosyncratic story, while simultaneously using that story to illuminate its larger context—in this case, Mennonite experience in America. Coming as it does as the fifth in a series of Mennonite college histories published in the last twenty-five years, Kraybill’s book invites us to look with fresh eyes at the other stories.

Kraybill organizes Eastern Mennonite’s history into three central sections marking the institution’s successive identity as school, college, and university. A preliminary chapter, “Mennonites in a Turbulent Nation, 1880-1920,” describes the American milieu in which certain determined conservative leaders of the “Old” Mennonite Church, mainly in Virginia and in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, laid the groundwork to establish Eastern Mennonite School—in some substantial part, as a reaction to Goshen College, the academically polished and, some onlookers insisted, doctrinally lax institution already in operation for twenty-five years by Mennonites in northern Indiana.¹ Kraybill closes the volume with a *tour de force* coda, “The Transformation of Countercultural Education, 1917-2017,” an essay that could stand on its own but which gathers enriched meaning as an interpretive fulfillment of the preceding chapters.

In selecting as his through line the school’s evolving relationship to outside culture, Kraybill lifts up for special attention certain topics perennial in the life of the institution: attitudes toward peacemaking; academic freedom; educational policy; race relations; gender roles; and the performing arts. Revisiting these motifs lends narrative and interpretive coherence to the whole. Kraybill argues that through it all, an abiding, but increasingly ambiguous, puzzle facing school

1. The valuable attention Kraybill gives to EMU’s complicated attitudes toward Goshen merits fuller discussion than what is possible in this brief review; one could examine more closely, for example, Goshen’s passage from “enemy to exemplar” (326): how, in addition to reliably supplying a caricature of liberal threat, Goshen surely also influenced EMU programs—for example, Goshen’s 1968 launch of its inventive Study-Service program requiring a term of international study.

leaders was how to run a liberal arts college while at the same time remain faithful to the scriptural, traditionally Mennonite mandate to be nonconformed to the world. One inadvertent answer to that puzzle emerged in the 1960s, when EMU relinquished the 1920s Mennonite watchword “nonconformity” in favor of the label “countercultural,” ironically allying the spiritually devout campus with the decidedly irreverent American youth movement of the time.

Kraybill patiently details the school’s early decades, including the false starts, personal squabbles, and financial fallout that accrued as the founders essayed various Virginia sites, ultimately locating a permanent home in a grove of trees in Assembly Park north of Harrisonburg, Virginia. Lending color to this origin story are powerful and often contesting personalities, among them the redoubtable, gifted, and domineering bishop George R. Brunk; first president J. B. Smith, an adroit Bible scholar and relentless gadfly for orthodoxy; and the “steadfast and earnest” revivalist preacher A. D. Wenger, who became EMU’s second president when Smith was dismissed for, among other provocations, keeping a piano in his home. J. L. Stauffer succeeded Wenger as president in 1935.

Kraybill explains that the founders saw their school efforts as a battle between good and evil, a metaphor that gave rise to the repeatedly invoked terms “fortress,” “safeguard,” and “loyalty” and to strenuous decades-long efforts, via a “Religious Welfare Committee” and other means, to shield students from popular culture. The educational philosophy in these first decades, Kraybill states, was “indoctrination-separation.” Setting EMU apart from other Mennonite colleges, some of its most influential leaders advanced ideas borrowed from American fundamentalism, including premillennial and dispensationalist interpretations of Scripture. Kraybill provides a full, nuanced discussion of how these apocalyptic ideas played a part in the institution, concluding that, because of its primary allegiance to traditional Mennonite doctrine, “while EMS stood categorically against liberalism, it was not a fundamentalist institution” — an assertion still open, perhaps, to further discussion.

Eastern Mennonite’s middle period, 1948-1986, revealed gradual movement toward acculturation, as faculty members and students appealed for greater academic and social freedom to cautious authorities: administrators; the Virginia Conference; and the college’s own Board of Trustees (EMU declined to join peer colleges under Mennonite Board of Education governance until 1984). Presidents John R. Mumaw, Myron Augsburg, and Richard Detweiler served during this middle period. Despite its author’s Goshen pedigree, H. S. Bender’s “Anabaptist Vision” helped the EMU community during these years shift attention from the tired conservative-liberal axis of the twentieth century to stirring, proto-Mennonite ideals of the (safely remote) Radical Reformation. In this era, Kraybill explains that the college’s educational approach, reflecting President Augsburg’s bridging participation in American Evangelicalism, shifted from indoctrination to “persuasion-engagement.” Following a five-year debate within Virginia Conference as to whether a record player should be classified as musical instrument (forbidden) or laboratory equipment (permitted), EMU representatives in 1952 successfully articulated their position that a Victrola is not a worldly musical instrument but in the words of their petition “an educational

device, useful in various classes to learn bird calls, teach new languages, hear dialects, and learn the songs of African Americans and American Indians" (160-161)—managing poignantly to square the circle between nonconformity and the treasure house of liberal learning. Another indicator of EMU's changing outlook in this period was its loosening requirements on church-regulated plain clothing. As Kraybill describes this arc, "Controversy about attire grew in the 1940s, peaked in the late 1960s, and then gradually subsided. By 1990, dress regulations had vanished except for those governing attire in the sunbathing areas of campus" (127).

Kraybill portrays the most recent thirty years at EMU as a pluralist flowering in which the institution's original renouncement of "unsafe" external influences, including suspect Mennonite influences, modulated to confident engagement with the multiple cultures and religions of a needy world. In these years the university was led by Joseph Lapp, Loren Swartzendruber, and Susan Schultz Huxman, who was EMU's first woman president, appointed in 2017. The campus embraced a new educational paradigm of "walking together in the world" and asserted in its vision statement the prophetic exhortation from Micah to "do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God." The Conflict Transformation Program, established in 1994 and later named the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding, took its place on the cutting edge of conflict resolution training—with Kraybill citing as emblematic of EMU's enlarged mission the award of the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize to Liberian activist Leymah Gbowee, a 2007 alumna.

In coming to the end of this substantial contribution to Mennonite and American studies, one could pause to ask whether the book's great strength—the author's focused commitment to a governing theme—also cramps its range: whether strict adherence to a master idea may have pushed outside the frame less compatible but nonetheless revealing pictures of EMU's shared life—for example, "community" is cited as a constant EMU core value (indeed, the book closes lyrically, quoting a faculty member's expression of love for her colleagues), but since the motif falls outside the central narrative of change, it receives less analysis.

But to complain about a book that hangs together this successfully is, of course, unreasonable. Creating a substantial college history that speaks to an audience broader than devoted insiders requires an author to impose some hierarchy of selectivity. In examining EMU from the point of view of change, Kraybill has painted a unified, frank, and fascinating portrait not only of this school conversing and quarreling with itself but of its dialogues beyond Assembly Park, starting with elder sibling Goshen College and extending to the Mennonite Church, to non-Mennonite students, to its Harrisonburg neighbors, and, ultimately, to the very world it originally vowed to repel.

Northwestern University

SUSAN FISHER MILLER

Congregational Music, Conflict and Community. By Jonathan Dueck. New York: Routledge. 2017. \$149.95 (eBook \$54.95).

What is at stake in conflict over congregational music? Relationships nurtured in specific musical contexts, rather than theological principles or musical style, is Jonathan Dueck's answer. Dueck reaches this intuitively compelling yet unexpected conclusion based on ethnographic research in three Mennonite congregations in Canada that take "traditional," "contemporary," and "blended" approaches to church music.

Using the theoretical lens of an aesthetics of encounter, defined as "an experiential, embodied, practiced feelingful way of encountering the world – rooted in individuals' contingent and particular life experiences with other people" (4), Dueck makes the case that it is necessary to begin explorations of congregational music by attending to how musical practices are situated in specific relationships and memories for individuals and communities. Borrowing from Deleuze and Guattari, he envisions these relationships as "a horizontal network of constant growth, change, movement, decay, rebirth, and flight" (143). A wasp taking pollen from an orchid is an image for these networked relationships: the wasp and orchid are entirely different from each other, yet they intersect for a moment in a distinct event in which their differences overlap and their identities dissolve. An aesthetics of encounter is concerned with these emergent moments of intersection, how congregational music making is not static but rather a dynamic "momentary conjunction of many stories" (144). These stories, like the orchid's pollen, are carried forward, giving shape to future trajectories.

Three ethnographic case studies of thriving Mennonite congregations in Edmonton, Alberta, anchor the volume. First Mennonite Church, of General Conference Russian Mennonite origins, celebrates and cultivates traditional music, including hymn singing from a denominational hymnal led from the piano, and a robust intergenerational choral program. In contrast, River West Christian Church, a Mennonite Brethren congregation, aspires to engage mainstream Canadian culture by singing primarily contemporary worship music, led by a band, whose members write songs themselves and draw on popular international sources. Holyrood Mennonite Church, originally a Swiss Mennonite congregation that later welcomed a group of Russian Mennonites and a sizable group of French-speaking African members, emphasizes cultural and musical diversity in its practice of "blended" worship that incorporates traditional Western hymnody, gospel songs, contemporary worship music, and African hymnody. A distinct feature of these cases is the ways they intersect in the field as well as on the page; at the time of Dueck's fieldwork, the congregations worshiped together annually, and participants were able to reflect on the musical practices of the other congregations as well as their own communities. Although Dueck provides vivid portraits of individuals and congregations, and carefully situates himself as an "insider" in relation to Mennonite church music, the volume would benefit from an appendix that includes an interview guide and the demographic details of the participants in the study to provide the reader with a clearer sense of how Dueck's methods influence his results.

While the congregational case studies focus on music making and the construction of group identities, Dueck homes in on his core argument in Chapter 6 with a focus on how individual identity is related to group identity in music making. Through the stories of three music leaders—a sound engineer, a pianist, and a contemporary worship leader—Dueck explores how individual musical lives are part of the process of making emergent group musical practices, yet how at the same time individuals cross the musical boundaries that distinguish groups. Complicating the boundaries between constructed genres of congregational music is essential, especially when Dueck's examples include "contemporary" music "conducted in a perfect four-pattern by the song leader" (22) and "traditional" hymnody that is part of a "charismatic and feelingful culture of worship leading" (161). Blurring these boundaries is even more significant today when the old categories of the "worship wars" have broken down in ecclesial practice, with "retuned" hymns topping contemporary worship music charts, and contemporary worship music appearing in denominational hymnals.

Although it is an appendage to the central argument of the book, the final chapter of the volume situates his fieldwork, conducted between 1998 and 2001, in historical context. Looking back, Dueck examines Mennonite periodicals to determine where the divisions that marked worship at the turn of the millennium began and how they changed over time in different branches of the Mennonite tradition. Looking forward, more than a decade after his initial fieldwork, Dueck returns to the congregations he studied to observe how musical practices have developed. He also interviews Mennonite worship scholars about the current state of Mennonite congregational music in Canada. Twenty years after the "worship wars" that frame Dueck's study, the Canadian Mennonite musical landscape has shifted, especially in a broad desire to expand the experiential and emotional range of corporate worship.

The interdisciplinarity of Dueck's work has the capacity to capture a diverse audience. Musicians and musicologists may value the theoretical discussions of how music means and functions for individuals and communities, which, while presented in the context of church music, may extend to other spheres. Scholars of religion may appreciate the fine-grained analysis of the internal diversity of a small segment of the Christian tradition and its engagement with a wider world, musically and culturally, especially in relation to evangelicalism and immigrant communities. Liturgical scholars, and particularly ritual scholars, may benefit from Dueck's conceptualization of the relationship between the individual and community in church music making, and consider whether Dueck's understanding of congregational music may apply to other aspects of congregational worship. A deeper exploration of the relationship between musical expression and liturgical structure could further nuance his argument. Mennonites, and those who study Mennonites, may value Dueck's willingness to tackle difficult questions of ethnicity, theological identity, and denominationalism in relation to lived experiences of church music.

Practitioners of church music may be inspired by Dueck's approach in how they choose music for worship in order to recognize and foster relationships, and how they introduce new, and especially different, music: "Making space for

exchanging stories of musical memories and their meanings (imagining church music through the lens of an aesthetics of encounter)—as I try to do, in a preliminary way, in this book – is one strategy for allowing Christians with different musical lives to remain in dialogue, musically and otherwise” (14). As Mennonite congregations in North America prepare to receive a new worship and song collection for use in congregational worship in the decades ahead, they can be grateful for Dueck’s careful examination of how congregational music, while being a theological force and artistic expression, more fundamentally carries meaning in the relationships it recalls and cultivates.

University of Notre Dame

SARAH KATHLEEN JOHNSON

The Pietist Option: Hope for the Renewal of Christianity. By Christopher Gehrz and Mark Pattie III. Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic. 2017. \$23.

In 1874 Daniel Brenneman was expelled from the Indiana Conference of the Mennonite Church and shortly thereafter formed the Mennonite Brethren in Christ (MBC). As Harold Bender observed in his *Mennonite Encyclopedia* article on the MBC, it “represented in its beginning a breaking forth of new life in the Mennonite community, with emphasis upon evangelism and aggressive work, conversion and Christian experience with a warm, rather emotional piety” (see www.gameo.org). In the language of Christopher Gehrz and Mark Pattie, we might say that the MBC took “the Pietist option.” However, Bender describes how “the traditional Mennonite distinctive principles and practices . . . gradually received less emphasis” within the MBC until finally it dropped the name “Mennonite” in 1947. The moral of the story seems to be that Mennonites who take the Pietist option eventually cease to be Mennonites—that there is something within Pietism that is fundamentally at odds with Anabaptism. As a self-identified Anabaptist pastor within Brenneman’s denomination—now called the Missionary Church—I read Gehrz and Pattie’s *Pietist Option* with great interest, hoping it would shed light on the question raised by my denomination’s history: Are Pietism and Anabaptism incompatible?

Gehrz is a historian who has written extensively on Pietism at the historically Pietist Bethel University, St. Paul, and Pattie is senior pastor at the historically Pietist Salem Covenant Church, New Brighton, Minnesota. Their purpose with this book is not to make converts to Pietism but to offer the “tremendous resources available in the rich history of the Pietist movement and ethos that will leaven your faith, which has no doubt been shaped and sustained by other experiences and traditions” (9). They distinguish between “Pietism as a particular historical movement that came with Spener and Mack and went with Zinzendorf and Wesley” and “Pietism as a timeless *spirit*, or *ethos*,” which “leavens different flavors of Christianity [and] has proven to be remarkably adaptable” (4, emphasis original). The authors identify this Pietist ethos not so much “with shared practices . . . or shared emphases” as with shared “instincts” (5), which include “a God known more through prepositions than propositions, a commitment to stay

together, a Christianity that is less and more than we think, and an enduring hope for better times" (8).

The book is divided into two parts. In part one, the authors briefly detail the ailments of contemporary Christianity and their reasons to still be hopeful for Christianity's renewal. In part two, they provide six proposals for renewal, which are patterned after Philipp Spener's 1675 *Pia Desideria* (pious wishes) that was the catalyst for German Pietism. These proposals include greater attentiveness to Scripture as "a God-inspired gift for transformation (43); an emphasis on the mission of the church as "the common priesthood seeking the common good" (58); an understanding of Christianity as "not primarily a system of beliefs or doctrines, but a way of life" (69); an insistence "that unity—while impossible to achieve perfectly—is essential to Christian community, mission, and witness" (83); a vision of personal formation as "the ongoing conversion and growth of the whole person throughout one's whole life (95); and "a renewal in our preaching," which "must also extend to the other forms of proclamation to which God calls all of us" (105). The book concludes with a benediction by Pattie, followed by an appendix with more resources about Pietism (the movement) and a study guide for personal devotions or small group discussion.

At times the book would benefit from greater theological subtlety—such as when they lament the KJV term "charity" in 1 Corinthians 13 as a watered-down "substitute" for the word "love" (21), which evinces a misunderstanding of the greatest of the theological virtues, *caritas*. But the book is written less for theologians than it is for pastors and lay-people who are seeking ways to renew their faith in the midst of troubling and confusing times. To such an audience, the authors make a compelling case for choosing the Pietist option by adopting their six proposals for renewal. They ably dispel the myth that Pietism is inherently individualistic, anti-intellectual, socially disengaged, or otherworldly. While acknowledging that some Pietists have given in to these tendencies in the past, they present their Pietist proposals "for the renewal of individuals and—through them—the church and the world" (9).

Returning to the question with which we began, I did not find the book's presentation of Pietism to be inherently incompatible with Anabaptism, though some tensions remain. I suspect, for example, that Anabaptists would view ecclesial renewal as preceding individual renewal rather than the other way around, though this may be a difference in emphasis rather than substance. I would therefore hesitate to lay the blame on Pietism for denominations like the Missionary Church losing their Mennonite roots. Rather, I suspect the Mennonite roots slowly eroded as subsequent generations simply forgot the tradition that gave life to their faith.

My concern with the Pietist option, then, is not that it is Pietist but that it's an option. While the book generously sprinkles quotes from the Pietist tradition, they are used more as illustrations or free-floating epigraphs than as a coherent presentation of the Pietist tradition. Indeed, the authors seem to consciously minimize the significance of the roots of the tradition in order to emphasize its fruits. When the faith is distilled to a number of competing (or even compatible) options—Pietist, Benedict, naked Anabaptist, and so on—then it will become

increasingly unsustainable in the midst of our free-market capitalist society and its endless options. But perhaps a proposal for renewing Christianity need not include a proposal for sustaining it, in which case we can learn strategies for renewing our faith from *The Pietist Option* while learning from the successes and failures of our respective traditions on how to sustain it.

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DAVID C. CRAMER

Silentium: And Other Reflections on Memory, Story, Place, and the Sacred.
By Connie T. Braun. Eugene, Ore.: Resource Publications. 2017. \$16.80.

“Every life, from the beginning, is an inchoate story to someday be told” (2). So states Connie T. Braun in the first chapter of *Silentium*. The book that follows is a movement out of the silence of Braun’s ancestral past into a truth-seeking and truth-sharing journey, primarily focusing on the history of the author’s mother’s family as Mennonites in Poland. Braun combines a recounting of historical events with personal reflections and citations of other authors who also have something to say about memory, loss, and the power of storytelling. *Silentium* is a slim volume (161 pages) of essays and poetry. As the introduction indicates, the reader can dip into the collection at any point, as each essay or poem stands on its own. As a whole, the book provides a fragmented picture of one person’s exploration of her own past in a way that brings to light an overlooked part of the Mennonite story.

In the opening essay, Braun reflects on memory and grief, the death of a friend’s child, and the anticipation of the birth of her first grandchild. She writes, “The ‘knitting up’ of memory into storymaking is the human endeavor to assemble coherence from particle, to bestow meaning to our lives and another’s—a sacred, god-like act” (7). Throughout the book, Braun attempts to “knit up” fragments of family memory, personal insights, and historical documentation, with the result being less a coherent narrative and more a sampling of poignant moments and observations.

A section titled “Obscurity” describes the author’s experience visiting her ancestral Polish homeland with family and another trip to Europe that included a visit to Auschwitz. Braun wonders about the silence of her grandparents, parents, and other family members about their past. Through prose and poetry, she explores hints about this past that she picked up throughout her childhood. The introductory essays help the reader appreciate the images in the poetry more fully.

The book’s second section, perhaps paradoxically titled “Silence,” reveals the most intriguing and moving details in the volume. We hear about the welcoming and then suspicion of ethnic Germans, like the author’s family, into the area of Europe that is now Poland. We learn that her grandfather’s lingering leg wound was not from a bullet in the war, as the author had assumed as a child, but from guards in a Polish prison where he was a captive. We hear that the Mennonites in her mother’s village viewed the German occupation during World War II as not “good” but “better” (74). The final chapter of this section, called “Gathered

Fragments: 1944-1948," is organized around phrases from the book of Ecclesiastes. In it, Braun slowly reveals the difficult story of her mother's family as it becomes clear Germany is losing the war, and the family joins an attempted evacuation of their village. The group is turned back by Russian soldiers and stripped of all their possessions; they make a painstaking three-week return journey on foot to their ransacked home. Braun's mother and her siblings, previously part of the middle class, are split apart to work for Polish families; they eventually travel to Germany with the assistance of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). Braun's sparse descriptions interlaced with quotes from interviews with family members make this the emotional climax of the book.

The final two sections, "Quiet" and "Repose," are a mix of reflections on more contemporary experiences and metaphors. There are chapters about Braun's father's return trip to Poland in 1973 and her own subsequent "pilgrimage" to the area. In other chapters, Braun uses everyday practices and items like crocheting, containers, and traditional Mennonite foods to shape her observations on the process of remembering, holding one's identity, and keeping it. Essays in these sections acknowledge the incorporation of and connections with influences from Polish, Ukrainian, Jewish, and contemporary Canadian culture on what some people would describe as "Mennonite" traditions or experiences.

The fragmented nature of *Silentium* is both its biggest strength and its biggest weakness. It is clear that many of the essays (and poems) were originally designed to stand alone. As such, they each attempt to convey enough background information to set the stage but not so much as to dominate the concise framework of the pieces. Reading the volume straight through, I sometimes felt the collection was a bit repetitive, as Braun rehashed her particular connection to the history she was telling. I also felt that readers might benefit from more comprehensive information at some point in the collection; for example, there could have been more explanation of the wider Mennonite story, perhaps mentioning Mennonites of Swiss-German ancestry and the global Anabaptist/Mennonite family. *Silentium* also could have used more careful editing. The sentence structure is sometimes confusing, and spelling mistakes are present throughout the text.

In my recent Mennonite historical research, I have come across many ancestral personal and organizational histories that are quite insular. Braun's is not one of these. Her writing is personal, yet avoids a parochial Mennonite narrative. Her wide reading and citing of contemporary authors and non-Mennonite historical sources is a strength of her work. Quoting from writers like Eva Hoffman and Czeslaw Milosz adds breadth to her reflections and makes it clear that Mennonites are far from the only people to have suffered the difficulties of persecution and migration. Braun is also honest about possible Mennonite sympathy for and even collaboration with the Nazis, showing her familiarity with important recent scholarship on this topic.

Silentium has a lot going on: specific names and dates, overlapping and sometimes competing memories, metaphors and present-day connections, attempts to frame reflections around biblical texts and church seasons. Sometimes this made the volume seem in search of a central theme or storyline. On the other hand, this kind of writing is a good representation of how memory—and life—

actually functions. We constantly move from prose to poetry, from contemporary experience to ancestral memory, from silence to revelation, often with little coherence in our daily lives. In this way, *Silentium* uses an honest and provocative method to present an important part of the ever-emerging Mennonite story.

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Anita Hooley Yoder

Beyond Reformation: An Essay on William Langland's Piers Plowman and the End of Constantinian Christianity. By David Aers. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press. 2015. Pp. xix + 256. \$35.

This is an extraordinary and peculiar book. Indeed, attesting to these qualities is the simple existence of this very review, since a monograph of this sort—a sustained and dense close reading of a single work of late medieval English poetry—would seem *prima facie* outside the purview of this journal and of scarce interest to its readers. In fact, however, a readership like that of *MQR* is among the audiences that the book's author, David Aers, is most targeting, as one of his principal aims is to convince scholars of the Reformation that a literary work that they may never have heard of, the late fourteenth-century poem *Piers Plowman*, deserves a prominent place in any narrative of religious change from medieval to the early modern. More ambitiously, Aers wants to demonstrate the relevance of this poem to ecclesiological concerns both past *and* present—to show readers with professional and personal investments in this area that the poem's author, probably a man named William Langland, was a major thinker in this regard, whose complex, wide-ranging, and remorselessly critical scrutiny of the church of his day yields insights from which we may continue to benefit in the twenty-first century. Aers is uniquely equipped to attempt such a project, as he is not only a celebrated scholar of late medieval English literature who has devoted much of his illustrious career to the study of this poem, but he is also the possessor of a joint appointment in Duke University's English Department and Divinity School; as Aers mentions in the preface (xv), in this capacity he co-taught a course on grand narratives with Stanley Hauerwas that served as one of the book's inspirations. The result is an "essay" (as Aers terms it in the book's subtitle) that pursues a multifaceted but still quite focused interpretive argument about a 600-year-old work of literature as a means to broach larger contentions about, among other topics, the viability of Christian institutions.

Part of the peculiarity of Aers's book derives from its object of study, for *Piers Plowman* is a quite odd poem, and was so even in its own day. It is a long (over 7,000 lines in its final version), narrative, allegorical work written in alliterative verse (a non-rhyming form with roots in Old English conventions) that describes the wanderings of an enigmatically indigent first-person narrator named Will (which is at once a given name that connects narrator to author and, allegorically, a personification of the human will) as he roams the countryside and repeatedly falls asleep and has dream visions. Divided into twenty-two chapters that Langland terms *passus*, or steps, the work's organization, despite what that term may suggest, is in no way teleological; rather, its unpredictable, episodic

progression defies any straightforward characterization. Strikingly, for the study under review Aers decided to emulate aspects of the poem's form. Rather than organizing the book into a set of chapters divided neatly into discrete topics that progressively elaborate evidence and refine argument, Aers has divided the book into seventeen sections of varying length, which, like the poem's progression, are reiterative without being exactly repetitive. He makes no attempt to cover the entire work, but repeatedly examines select moments and narrative sequences, turning them over and over in light of various literary, historical, and theological contexts, and, in a web-like way, incrementally extending the scope and density of his larger arguments.

These arguments are in the first place literary critical because they rest on the answer that Aers understands the poem ultimately to supply to one of the basic questions that inaugurates it: can the church be both a human institution and holy? As Aers shows, *Piers Plowman* ruminates on this question from beginning to end, interrogating the ecclesiological theory and practice of its day in their profound entanglements with social, economic, and political concerns, searching for viable avenues of reformation that could bring the institutions that constituted Langland's church into line with the Pentecostal and apostolic ideals that the poem, at several points, vividly recalls. For Aers, Langland's poem finally arrives at its inconclusive ending without a positive answer to this question, and thus the poem stakes out an ecclesiological position, as Aers's title indicates, "beyond reformation"—that is, outside of any orthodoxy that would recognize any kind of continuity, or even any potential continuity, between the original Christian community and Langland's late fourteenth-century Christian church.

On this literary interpretive platform, then, Aers places two larger interventions. First, because the ways in which Langland thinks about this question, the lines of critique that he pursues, and the conclusions at which he arrives have much in common with, on the one hand, William of Ockham (d. 1347), and, on the other hand, John Milton (d. 1674), the history of religious thought between medieval and early modern to which those two figures conventionally belong (and the grand narratives that this history underpins) needs to be rewritten to account for lines of continuity—continuity both in respect to the anti-Constantinianism that these figures represent and in respect to the new Constantinianism that arose during the English Reformation with King Henry VIII but was already evident, Aers claims, in Langland's day with Richard II. Accordingly, in this rewriting of history, *Piers Plowman* must be granted a much more prominent place than it currently occupies, as it is a major document of religious thinking in addition to a curious, idiosyncratic masterpiece of religious literature. Second, because the nature of the illness in the Christian community that Langland diagnosed is, in a fundamental sense, the same as the de-Christianization that Pope John Paul II diagnosed in the late twentieth century, *Piers Plowman* has bearing not just on historiographical debates but also on contemporary ecclesiology. Langland, Aers shows, was not a mere moralist but rather a shrewd analyst of the subtle mechanisms and deleterious effects of the confluences of different spheres of value—especially, the conflation of economic exchange and spiritual restitution—and Aers persuasively contends that analogous mechanisms and effects stand behind the mode of secularism that John

Paul II identified as de-Christianization. Crucially for Aers, however, Langland's response to de-Christianization was vastly different: while John Paul II, unsurprisingly, recommended the bolstering of the magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church, Langland remains skeptical to the very end of any formal institutionalization of Christian devotion whatsoever, seeing such institutionalization as perhaps inevitably tending toward de-Christianization.

This categorical anti-Constantinianism, for those who trace their religious identity back to the Radical Reformation, is likely to have some appeal, and indeed, despite Mennonites receiving only passing, differentiating mention in Aers's preface ("my own usage of the phrase 'Constantinian Christianity' remains Langlandian rather than Mennonite" [xiv]), Aers would no doubt be pleased if his book were to encourage some Anabaptists to recognize Langland as a precursor of sorts. And yet, inasmuch as those readers remain committed to some kind of durable institution for preserving, promoting, and perpetuating a distinctive kind of Christian practice, they are likely to want more from *Piers Plowman* than skepticism of human institutions *per se*; they are likely to want, that is, not just a critique but also a solution. And it is in this respect that the peculiarity of Aers's book is especially felt.

On the one hand, because the book is in the first place an interpretation of a work of literature, and because Aers deeply respects the ambiguities and indeterminacy of this particular poem's dialectical, open-ended form, he does not much give in to the temptation of going beyond the poem and offering a positive and definite ecclesiology. On the other hand, however, even the few comments that he does offer in this regard are likely to raise the eyebrows of those readers who are specialists on the poem, as such remarks threaten to make the poem feel more like fodder for Aers's ecclesiological views than an object of interpretation. There is, in other words, some friction between the book's ecclesiological and literary critical aims.

These sorts of reservations, however, at least in part reflect an impulse toward disciplinary boundary policing that, I must admit, smacks of close-mindedness. In effect, they amount to the complaint that a platypus is neither a mammal nor a bird. What Aers achieves with this book is an idiosyncratic mode of interdisciplinary scholarship for which he is uniquely qualified. The study is both compact and wide-ranging, both erudite and accessible. It addresses twenty-first-century concerns that matter deeply to Aers and the Divinity School portion of his audience, and it does so by demonstrating the capacious brilliance of a poem that the medievalist portion of his audience has long felt deserved broader recognition. If it provokes objections from those on either side of this divide, then it has succeeded in bringing our attention to how that divide has predetermined our modes and forms of scholarly inquiry.

Turning Points in the History of American Evangelicalism. Edited by Heath W. Carter and Laura Rominger Porter. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. 2017. \$28.00.

For scholars of American Evangelicalism, Mark Noll's recent retirement itself marks a significant turning point. Though he continues to mentor younger historians and will no doubt keep writing, the close of Noll's distinguished teaching career, spent mostly at Wheaton and Notre Dame, signals an important transition not only in his career but in the broader field of history. Noll's decades-long leadership in the study of American evangelicalism is evidenced by the attention his retirement has received in the past two years, including interviews with him, blogosphere tributes, and, most recently, a special conference at Notre Dame in his honor.

Heath Carter and Laura Rominger Porter's new book makes a fine contribution to these celebrations. Yet, to call this volume simply a festschrift would sell short its importance since festschriften do not always bring together such a substantive collection of essays as this book does or make as significant a contribution to the field. *Turning Points in the History of American Evangelicalism* is meant to highlight what is perhaps the area of greatest influence within Noll's writing: the story of evangelicalism and its significance to the American narrative. The title, of course, is a play on one of Noll's most widely read books, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*, a volume that is often assigned as a textbook on Christian college and university campuses. Contributors include representatives within the Calvin College tradition, younger scholars, as well as established leaders in the field—Edith Blumhofer, Catherine Brekus, Jon Butler, Richard Carwardine, Dennis Dickerson, Darren Dochuk, Luke Harlow, Nathan Hatch, Mark Hutchinson, George Marsden, Martin Marty, Harry Stout, Marguerite Van Die, and Grant Wacker.

The underlying tension I find in this volume revolves around the question of narrative. There does seem to be one. Indeed, the notion of "turning points" would indicate some basic linear path upon which a story travels as it twists and turns. The basic organization of the essays follow a path that one would expect: Anglo-American awakeners in New England have a series of revivals we know as the Great Awakening, they reflect the enlightened intellectual currents of early America, wrestle with the political quagmire of disestablishment, attempt to transform the nation in antebellum America, reflect the sectional divisions of the nation during the civil war, keep the revival fires going in the nineteenth century, double down in the face of modernist theology, find a spokesperson in the iconic Billy Graham, and continue their gaze toward foreign shores. Now it is important to point out the fact that this volume augments this narrative in interesting ways. It gives significant attention to important female figures and recognizes the importance of sometimes neglected areas such as the influences of Canadian evangelicals, the varied experiences of blacks, Pentecostals in the city, and evangelical focus on the global south. This is especially welcome and it is here the book may make its freshest contributions to the genre of studies Noll has helped to create.

But despite this underlying narrative, as I read the introduction, the editors seem to want to downplay any discernable storyline, or at least the existence of a “singular arc,” preferring instead to see the essays mostly as a means of provoking further discussion about the identity of American evangelicalism (xviii). Additionally, they note that an array of other turning points might also have been suitable for inclusion. Thus the introduction preempts the tension that readers may well feel as they work their way through the essays, and I presume this was exactly what the editors intended. Even so, the tension remains.

Intended narrative or not, and despite the inclusion of a wider range of topics, as mentioned above, I would have liked the volume to go further in helping us rethink the traditional historiographical paradigm—in which white, Anglo, and Reformed strands of the movement are often defined as the main branches of the evangelical family tree. Readers of this journal may well agree that a larger discussion of Evangelical nationalism, the synergy between American Anabaptists and the evangelical left, or the legacy of German Pietism, could have been fruitful areas of inquiry. Here, we are reminded of the compelling critiques posed by Donald Dayton’s or Molly Worthen’s analysis of Evangelicalism’s diverse varieties. And, as the editors of this volume indicate, broadening and rethinking old paradigms is not inconsistent with Noll’s own work at all.

I say this, however, with the full understanding that no volume can be all things to all readers, and if the goal of the book was simply to “stimulate further conversations in classrooms, in church basements, and around many a kitchen table” (xvii), the volume will serve this purpose well.

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Books Noted

Agus Suyanto and Paulus Hartono. *The Radical Muslim and the Mennonite: A Muslim-Christian Encounter for Peace in Indonesia*. Edited by Agnes Chen. Surakarta, Central Java: Mennonite Diakonia Service. 2015. 126 pp. \$12.99.

This book, drawn from a thesis by Agus Suyanto, describes a unique relationship that emerged between the Hizbullah Front and Mennonite Diakonia Service in Solo, Indonesia, in the years following the tsunami that struck the Indonesian city of Aceh in December of 2004. Beginning with an overview of Muslim-Christian relations in Indonesia, the book summarizes the efforts of the Indonesiann Mennonite community to form the Mennonite Diakonia Service and other institutions committed to practical and transformative witness. The third chapter describes the history and mission of the Hizbullah Front—particularly a splinter group known as “Battalion 99”—an Islamic paramilitary group based in Surakarta. The heart of the book narrates the transformative encounters between Paulus Hartono, an Indonesian Mennonite pastor, and Yanni Rusmanto, the Hizbullah commander as they unfolded in dialogues of life, action, and theology. A collaborative relief effort in response to the devastating tsunami forms the heart of the story. Concluding chapters reflect on the unlikely friendship that emerged between the Mennonite community and Hizbullah, raising questions that may be relevant for interreligious dialogue and reconciliation in other settings.

Musa Adziba Mambula. *The Christian in Contemporary Nigerian Society*. Bloomington, Ind.: WestBox Press. 2016. 84 pp. \$11.95.

Christians in contemporary Nigeria face an overwhelming array of challenges, including HIV/AIDs, political instability, widespread corruption, and the persistent threat of religious violence, particularly in the face of attacks by the radical Muslim group known as Boko Haram. Since 2009 more than a million Christians in northeastern Nigeria have been displaced as a result. Musa Adziba Mambula is a pastor, school administrator, and denominational leader in the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria (EYN). In this collection of essays, Mambula reflects on the church’s role in responding to a wide range of social issues, including health care, political participation, corruption, family stability, and religious violence. As a peace church, he argues, the EYN offers a unique and much needed witness in a country full of potential.

Philip A. Roth. *A PAX Adventure, 1954-1956: Looking Back*. Victoria, B.C.: FriesenPress. 2017. 156 pp. \$14.99.

This book tells the story of one man's journey as a heavy equipment operator who spent two years as a Mennonite Central Committee volunteer in Paraguay helping to build the Trans-Chaco highway. Construction of the highway—which connected Mennonite colonies in the Chaco with urban markets in the capital city of Asunción—proved to be an enormous cultural, environmental, and engineering challenge. Roth's highly personal account is richly illustrated with color photographs and offers a unique cross-cultural perspective on this significant milestone in the history of Paraguay and the Mennonite colonists who settled there.

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