

Book Reviews

Umwege zwischen Kanzel und Katheder: Autobiographische Fragmente. By Hans-Jürgen Goertz. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. 2018. € 29.00.

Successful people tend to write heroic biographies. Honorable academics usually crown their oeuvre with the reflection of how an outstanding spirit came to be. Hans-Jürgen Goertz's approach in his autobiography is simpler: he writes fragments. He shares memories of his life. Chronologically. Selectively. Wittily.

The title of the book indicates that Goertz wants to tell his life story as a complicated journey between the pulpit and the lectern—as if becoming pastor was a big surprise for him and as if being a professor always left him with a guilty conscience (for not being a pastor anymore). Maybe I should just take this suggestion of his lifetime story as it is. But honestly, I doubt it. Not that I am in the position to reinterpret Goertz's life. I first met Hans-Jürgen Goertz only ten years ago. I am neither a family member nor a close friend—far from that—so maybe I should stay silent.

But I once talked to an old lady in the Hamburg Mennonite Congregation who worked with Goertz in his early years as a pastor in the 1960s. And she said: "From the beginning we felt that Hans-Jürgen wouldn't stay with us for long. His academic ambitions were obvious." And when I became acquainted with Goertz much later, he seemed to be a liberal theologian *par excellence*. He was never mixed up in church politics; however, through his writings he was present in every pastoral library and through the pastor's teachings present in almost every service. He would free his mind to savor the delights of reason and intellect—not for some practical endeavor but for the pleasure of intellect itself.

And when I now read the pages of Goertz's life fragments, I find the traces of someone who grew from soil to thought, someone who was liberated from the agricultural traditions of his forefathers to discover the freedom of theology. Test the boundaries of your mind to awaken your spirit to joy—these are my words to grasp the liberal intentions in Goertz's theological efforts. It seems to me that the book title is misleading, both in terms of Goertz's life story as well as the actual content. The book contains not so much a coherent narrative as a collection of several stories chronologically ordered. Some key facts are missing. For instance, we don't find out when and under which circumstances Goertz became a professor. He received a postdoc position at the University of Hamburg in the 1970s and then suddenly, years later, he is an actual professor. Hence, the subtitle announcing "fragments" is to be taken literally indeed.

If there will ever be an English translation, I think the best rendition of the title would be something like "On Being Nonconformist: Fragments of My Life Between the Church and Lecture Hall." Because that is what the book is about. It shares anecdotes of the only international scholar who has emerged from the

German Mennonites in the second half of the twentieth century and the themes that preoccupied him in life and thought: as a churchman in political debates; as a Free Church voice in an academic institution controlled by mainline churches; as a theologian in social sciences; and as a Reformation historian in systematic theology.

Although the stories are sometimes lengthy (chapter 7) or redundant (chapter 11) they always have something to say. And everything I would expect from anecdotal writings of an international German scholar I find here: There are “fun facts”—actually irrelevant facts, which still manage to illuminate life in a subtle light. So, we read of little Hans-Jürgen’s wiener dog “Purzel,” born with him on the same day, who was overrun by an SS car—“times of inscrutable dictatorship and filial contentedness” (9). Later we learn about small talk at international conferences. In Oxford, Great Britain, in 1989, a central topic at the professor’s dinner table was the contamination of eggs, which then turned into a big scandal (170). Goertz henceforth abstained from “ham and eggs” during his lecture tour.

We are also afforded a glimpse into delicate, albeit detached, details and even a slight hint of the erotic. For instance, Goertz shares with the reader a memory of his first trip to the States in 1957 (31). He remembers a dark-haired student sitting with sad eyes at the rail of the ship. Suddenly she stood up, threw the dark red rose in her hand over board and went on—her eyes full of expectation and lust for life. He tells the encounter like it happened yesterday.

Goertz opens the window to ancient worlds. In his memories the life of former times becomes lucid, including life in East Prussia before World War II as well as the world of academics in Heidelberg and New York. I was especially caught by the description of his first pastoral home in 1965. For their living room, he and his wife, Ilse, chose “the sofa of Bastiano in auburn English fabric, the floor lamp of Colombo, the wall cupboards of Peter Ramms” (74). Then a noble choice; today hipster retro!

Of course, a scholar is expected to recall in his memories not only fun facts, detached erotic and ancient worlds, but also something of the complicated world of scholarship retold in a simple nutshell. In short sentences Goertz explains his approach for writing a Sunday sermon (64), a theory of history (107, 125), his view of the Reformation (144), and his claims of Anabaptist theology (153, 188, 202). To come to terms with the widespread requirements of his vocation, he kept to a phrase of Jacob Burckhardt: “Amateurish in many things, expert in few – do not get ignorant for the many or you might become a brute” (128). Goertz didn’t hesitate to free his mind and pen for edgy thoughts, although he had to fight for them in many ways. Now his approach, at least in Reformation history, has become classic.

Finally, what would a book of academic anecdotes be without—may the Lord forgive us—gossip? Goertz has a lot to say about former colleagues and academic companions, including associates in North America. All of his words are friendly but sometimes tongue in cheek. The two most frequently mentioned persons in the book were both special and dangerous in their own way. The first is Thomas Müntzer, the reformer, who fought with the peasants for a new world and was decapitated in 1525. Goertz wrote his dissertation on Müntzer and was later head

of the Thomas-Müntzer-Society. The other person is John H. Yoder (1927-1997). Goertz met Yoder already in the 1960s but they never became friends. Much later Goertz turned toward systematic theology and wrestled intensely with Yoder's theological approach (*Bruchstücke radikaler Theologie*, 2010, and *Pazifismus im Gespräch*, 2013).

At the end, Goertz cites a Bible verse. In the book I have found few words on his personal spirituality. No prayer requests, no insights into spiritual worries or doubts. Only in the end Goertz links a short reflection about the fragmentary nature of history and knowledge with the phrase of the Apostle "Now I know in part. . . ." (1 Cor. 13:12). Reading these sentences it becomes obvious that there would be so much more to tell—but not now.

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Joel Driedger

Human Sexuality in a Biblical Perspective: A Study Guide. Edited by Carrie A. Mast and Gerald J. Mast. Telford, Pa.: Cascadia Publishing House. 2016. \$12.95.

Individuals, congregations, and conferences within Mennonite Church USA disagree about what it means to be faithful in our sexuality. This leads to particular tension over how our institutions should include and minister to people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and/or otherwise nonconforming to standard sexual/gender identities (LGBTQ). While the official denominational teaching position and *Confession of Faith* hold that God intends marriage to be between one man and one woman, individuals and groups within MC USA are increasingly taking positions "at variance" with this official stance.

Central District Conference has policies in place that allow pastors to officiate weddings for same-sex couples, and a practice of ordaining people who identify as LGBTQ. *Human Sexuality in a Biblical Perspective* is a study guide based on two documents produced by Central District Conference: a statement particularly explaining their reasons for ordaining a gay man, and a more general document exploring their understanding of sexuality. The book presents biblical, theological, and ecclesiological rationale for the conference's support of same-sex marriage and ordination of LGBTQ clergy. In addition to the primary text, there are artistic drawings at the beginning of each chapter and study questions at the end.

The authors acknowledge the centrality of Scripture for Anabaptist faith, and the first four chapters of the book explore various aspects of how the Bible speaks to our understandings of ourselves, our communities, and our sexualities. Rather than focus on counterarguments against traditional readings of passages generally used to condemn same-sex relationships, the authors offer a reading of the biblical text more broadly that presents various expressions of human sexuality in a positive light. This reading of Scripture is grounded in the Genesis creation story, which affirms the goodness of God's creation, and in the teachings of Jesus, who demonstrated God's particular "concern for people on the margins of society" (36).

Key to the biblical discussion is a belief that Jesus modeled and calls us to a “dynamic” reading of Scripture, which means we understand “the interpretation and application of Scripture to change over time and in response to new circumstances” (42).

The final two chapters of the book look more practically at how our reading of the Bible and subsequent beliefs about sexuality affect individuals and communities. The authors point out that our culture particularly privileges *white* heterosexuality, which leads to discrimination not only against LGBTQ people, but also against people of color and women. In addition, an indiscriminate privileging of heterosexuality risks placing *all* heterosexual relationships in the “good” category and all same-sex relationships in the “bad” category without attending to important considerations of love, mutual respect, and fidelity. The authors assert that the church is called to support all people in establishing healthy sexual relationships, and it also has an obligation to address unhealthy, abusive sexual relationships regardless of the genders of those involved.

Human Sexuality in Biblical Perspective makes an important contribution to the discussion of sexuality from a biblical, and particularly an Anabaptist, perspective. While the authors do acknowledge that differing views exist, the book clearly and unapologetically presents a biblical case for full and enthusiastic inclusion of LGBTQ people in Mennonite churches. And beyond that, it encourages churches to address sexuality in general in more robust and faithful ways. This book provides a helpful, even necessary, grounding for communities that sense the Spirit’s call toward a stance that is at variance with the official MC USA teaching documents. And, for those who continue to believe that the Bible does not support same-sex marriage, this guide presents an alternative viewpoint in a way that is respectful and that takes the Bible seriously.

One strong point of the book is that it addresses human sexuality in general and does not fixate on “gay sex.” While Central District Conference clearly did this biblical and theological work in the context of establishing and explaining their beliefs about the inclusion, marriage, and ordination of LGBTQ people, they also take it as an opportunity to address issues that affect heterosexual people as well: celibacy, singleness, divorce, sexual attraction, consent, and abuse. It is important for denominational conversations about sexuality to shift from arguments about whether or not same-sex sexual activities are sinful to a more complex discussion about what it means for all of us to be faithful to God in how we live out our sexuality in the world.

While the authors thoroughly address issues of sexual orientation and attraction from a biblical perspective, less attention is given to gender identity. The LGBTQ abbreviation indicates that transgender people are included in the discussion, and there are a couple of points in the book where transgender identity is acknowledged, but the vast majority of biblical theology articulated in the book relates exclusively to sexual orientation and practice rather than questions of gender identity. The repeated use of the phrase “sisters and brothers” excludes genderqueer individuals and indicates that more substantial work is needed in the area of gender identity.

Nevertheless, pastors and teachers could greatly benefit from reading this book and considering the important perspective presented here. The book, however, may not work well as a study guide for many groups. This is, essentially, a document written by committee, and it shows. The language is often vague and “churchy,” making insightful theological statements but failing to fully flesh out the connection between the theology and daily life. The authors provide very little in the way of personal testimony and real life examples of how this theology matters in the world. Many of the questions feel like what you would see on a college test rather than ideas you would discuss with friends. More academically minded groups could gain great benefit from using this book as a study guide. Other groups will likely need an able facilitator to explain, translate, and contextualize much of the content.

Overall, this book articulates a much-needed biblical case for affirming LGBTQ people in the church. It is an important contribution to the church’s continuing discussion of faithful sexuality.

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Joanna Harader

A First-Class Fighting Man: The Struggles of a WWI Christian Conscientious Objector as Told Through Letters and Diary Entries. Compiled and edited by Barbara Royer. Marion, Indiana: Blessed Read Editions. 2013. \$27.50.

In the opening chapter of *A First-Class Fighting Man*, Verne Kessler is looking fifty years back in time, remembering when he and his wife, Estella, newlyweds, purchased a four-room house in Sawyer, Kansas. They had a barn, a milking cow, chickens, a garden. They took ownership of the property two weeks before Christmas in 1916. “We thought we were well-fixed, and we were,” he wrote. “God be praised for the joy of those days” (1). Four months later, the United States declared war against Germany. Kessler’s retrospection vividly captures the personal stakes in that historic moment: “Causes that cloud the skies of nuptial ties may be classed as major or minor. Some of those major thunderbolts make minor troubles seem like clear skies on a day in June. In our case, the thunderbolt was World War I that darkened the sky, not only for us, but for millions, young and old, married or unmarried.”

A First-Class Fighting Man tells the story of Verne Kessler, a conscientious objector who was ordered to train for war at Fort Riley in Kansas in August of 1918. It’s probably more accurate to say that Kessler shares his own story in that the book consists largely of letters he sent and received and of diary entries that he wrote. Kessler was a prolific writer, with a flair for the language, as was true of his wife, Estella. The letters pour forth, with Verne and Estella sometimes each sending several in a week (and it’s clear that not all letters got through). Barbara Royer, who compiled the documents and edited the book, is a granddaughter of the Kesslers. Royer describes being handed a packet of the letters in 1999 and opening one almost as a polite gesture, “thinking I would not be very much

interested in someone's mail of yesteryear" (xvii). Soon enough, she said, she was swept up in reading "one penciled yellow page after another."

Therein lies the strength of this book, a narration that invites us to share in the wartime experiences of this remarkable couple. Not only do they write faithfully; they are also natural storytellers. The letters reveal a thoughtful couple alert to the world around them and with an eye for detail. The book is not a short read, with the epilogue concluding at page 384. Some readers may make their way steadily through the book and be rewarded for that full immersion. Alternatively, other readers may travel along more lightly and quickly, occasionally skimming a series of letters before settling in again. Both approaches can work.

Royer skillfully stitches these letters together with contextual narration. Sometimes the notes preceding letters are brief guideposts: "Letter from Estella to Verne" or "Letter from Verne to Estella." Elsewhere, she provides a fuller description to ensure good orientation: "The following letter from the Old German Baptist Church to the President of the United States was published in the 1917 *Vindicator*. This shows the stand taken by the Church" (6). The statement that follows explains that "carnal warfare" is incompatible with "the spirit of Christ and his word" and that church members, as followers, would violate their conscience "by taking part in such warfare, even though not actually bearing arms, but nevertheless serving the military arm of the nation" (7).

Royer has added value to the telling of this story by tracking down and publishing key documents and photos. For example, we can see a copy of Vern Kessler's order of induction into military service, directing him to report before the local draft board at Pratt County at 1 p.m. on August 9, 1918. This was the date set for his departure to Fort Riley. During an earlier review of his fitness, an examiner had pronounced him a "first-class fighting man" (6), a line that Royer deftly borrows for the title of the book. An editor might have made a case for quotation marks around that phrase on the cover to signal both the borrowing and the irony intended. In a few cases the reader will wish for more detail. Excerpts of Kessler's handwritten letter of membership in the Old German Baptist Brethren Church are reproduced but there is no date immediately listed. The reader infers that the letter was produced in that summer of 1918. In editing this volume, Royer has made a fine contribution to the collection of first-person accounts of conscientious objection during the war. There are excellent memoirs, like Howard Moore's *Plowing My Own Furrow* (Syracuse University Press, 1993) and Philip Grosser's *Alcatraz: Uncle Sam's Devil's Island* (Kate Sharpley Library, 2007), but few balanced accounts such as this one, alternating letters from camp and prison with letters from home.

Verne Kessler was one of thousands of conscientious objectors to arrive at a military training camp and there find himself essentially alone and under great pressure to conform and become the soldier the nation demanded. He made clear from the outset that he would not be able to put on a military uniform or to train. Officers quickly lost patience. Kessler's diary entry from August 14 conveys the weight of those days. After he approached a lieutenant to tell him that he could not drill, the officer "cursed me and said he felt like throwing his typewriter right

through me" (18). Kessler was ordered to go clean the filthy toilets. Later, a Church of the Brethren recruit approached Kessler and quietly urged him to give in. Kessler seems older than his years as he perceptively describes seeking to remain faithful while navigating these two strains of national patriotic conformity, "the power of threat and authority," on the one hand, and, no less difficult to withstand, "gentle persuasions" on the other.

Before long, Kessler is in the guardhouse at Fort Riley. During one stretch he recounts being desperately sick. A week before Christmas that December of 1918, the war now over, Kessler is taken to nearby Camp Funston for a court-martial, accused of failure to obey orders. He declined the services of an attorney or other counsel. When given the chance, Kessler offered a compelling oral defense. He noted that he did not refuse to help prepare his meals and keep his quarters clean. He said that he had been accused of refusing to help build a latrine, but that in fact no one had asked him to build a latrine, and the same was true of a mess hall, which was essentially finished by the time he arrived at camp. In concluding his defense, Kessler said: "I do not feel guilty because I have not committed a crime. I have kept my conscience clear toward God. . . . I have done no man any harm, and I ask you to do as well by me" (187). He was sentenced to twenty-five years of hard labor, to be served at Fort Leavenworth. He would remain there from December 30, 1918, to June 21, 1919.

Verne and Estella Kessler's dependence on Scripture during this trying time is apparent throughout the account. In a letter in early November, Estella lists a string of Bible verses: I Cor. 10:13; James 1:12-13; James 4:7, 8, 10; I Peter 3:12-13; I Peter 4. "There are so many good ones," she writes. "I don't know where to stop" (130). The reader is asked to appreciate, just as Verne and Estelle would have, the significance of short references. When Verne writes that he "just finished reading 10th Chap. of Heb" (35), the reader is indirectly reminded of the need to stay strong in faith. Verne Kessler's obituary notes that he spent most of his life, after his release from prison, farming and tending his apple orchard. The text for the funeral was from Ephesians 4, a call to "walk worthy" and to keep "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." By all accounts in these letters, that is exactly what Verne Kessler did.

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Philippians. By Gordon Zerbe. Believers Church Bible Commentary. Harrisonburg, Va.; Kitchener, Ont.: Herald Press. 2016. \$29.99.

There is no shortage of biblical commentaries out there. Even a short letter like *Philippians* has garnered considerable scholarly attention. Pride of place in terms of sheer size goes to John Reumann's posthumously published *Anchor Bible Commentary*, which devotes 832 pages to a letter that is only about 1,500 words in

length (or about one page of commentary for every two words Paul wrote!).¹ Unlike Reumann, Gordon Zerbe, professor of New Testament at Canadian Mennonite University, offers readers an accessible, concise commentary on Philippians.²

The commentary is attractively organized. A nineteen-page introduction precedes the main commentary, which runs 232 pages. The volume concludes with a short outline, a series of “essays” that deal briefly (about twenty-eight pages) with some of the scholarly debates around the historical and cultural context of the letter, a bibliography, and an ancient authors’ index. To this reader much of the content of the “essays” would have served better in the introduction, rather than being attached to the end of the book. As it stands, the concise introduction contains numerous cross references to the essays in the back in a way that disrupts the reader.

Zerbe laudably translates a number of Greek words in ways that help modern readers better understand Paul: for example, the Greek *Christos* as “Messiah” in order to bring out the fuller theo-political significance of this title and the Greek *ekklēsia* as “assembly” not “church.” These translations are not only more accurate; they also make the letter temporarily foreign to readers so that they can hear it afresh. Perhaps most important is Zerbe’s effort to avoid importing a Jew/Christian distinction that is anachronistic to Paul’s thinking and day and inevitably leads to anti-Jewish readings of Paul’s letters. Such thoughtful translational decisions cast verse after verse of Philippians in a new light.

Though I commend Zerbe for eschewing anti-Jewish readings of Philippians, I remain unconvinced by his reading of Philippians 3:1–3. Here Zerbe rejects the common reading of these verses, which sees Paul combatting his missionizing competitors’ efforts to teach gentile Jesus followers to keep the Jewish law. In contrast, and in dependence upon New Testament scholarship that has sought to find coded political messages in the New Testament using the work of James C. Scott, Zerbe believes Paul here provides a coded attack on Roman imperialism.³

Nonetheless, Zerbe’s claim that Judaizing is a concept foreign to Paul (38) misleads him. Paul himself uses the term in Galatians 2:14 (*ioudaizein*). But it means something different than what most interpreters (including Zerbe on p. 190) think it means. As Shaye Cohen has shown, the term can *only* apply to non-Jews and very clearly refers to gentile imitation of Jewish customs and laws.⁴ In other words,

1. John Reumann, *Philippians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 33B (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

2. While I am grateful that Zerbe has spared his readers by not writing a bloated book (a temptation to which Paul scholars in particular seem susceptible), I was surprised that Reumann’s commentary goes entirely unmentioned. Surely this (relatively) recent and in-depth commentary contained something of value!

3. James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). His work has been deployed by New Testament scholars in, for instance, Richard Horsley, ed., *Hidden Transcripts and the Arts of Resistance: Applying the Work of James C. Scott to Jesus and Paul* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2004).

4. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 175–197.

the term implies nothing negative about Jews or Jewish customs themselves; rather, it is a derogatory term pertaining to gentile pretensions to Jewish status. Judaizing is a matter of playacting or, we might say today, of cultural appropriation. It is this context which, as in Romans and Galatians, makes most sense of Philippians 3. As Philippians 3:4–6 indicates, Paul works to show his gentile audience, who might be tempted to Judaize, that being Jewish from birth and having punctiliously kept the law better than any of them ever could, even he has placed his loyalty and confidence in the Messiah, not in his own merit—whether that be ascribed through birth or achieved through action.⁵

The volume as a whole is characterized by Zerbe's admirable sensitivity to the Roman imperial context in which both Paul and his first readers in the Roman colony of Philippi lived. Zerbe's own experience working in the Philippines, a country deeply affected by modern imperialism, has sharpened his attentiveness to this context and allows him to speak to contemporary issues regarding the (false) bifurcation of politics and religion, as well as temptations modern Christians face to allow their own citizenship in nation states to dictate their political and social sensibilities, instead of being shaped by a Messiah who becomes a slave in solidarity with and in order to deliver the lowly from their oppression.

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Matthew Thiessen

The Plough that Broke the Steppes: Agriculture and Environment on Russia's Grasslands, 1700-1914. By David Moon. Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press. 2013. Hardcover. \$125.

The vast grasslands of Ukraine and Russia come alive in David Moon's careful analysis of the environmental history of the steppe. Moon's basic premise is that when people move from one environment to another, they displace indigenous people and replace a certain way of interacting with a natural environment with a different way. In the case of the steppes the migrants generally came from areas with substantial forests that were well-watered. For a long time, he suggests, Russians worried about the lack of trees on the steppes and pondered what to do about it. Eventually, however they moved on to devise modern soil science, while settlers on the steppe, "in particular Mennonite communities" (1), found practical ways to conserve moisture, resulting in arable agricultural that was better adapted to the environment. Alongside this intriguing argument, Moon's descriptive style almost makes you feel as if you have been there. Woven into the analysis are vivid descriptions of the aesthetic and tactile features of the steppe. We are immersed in a landscape that was "flat, oppressively so" (43), the feather grass an "ocean... that

5. On how to read this text within the context of a competing mission of Messiah followers who advocate gentile law observance, see Michele Murray, "Romans 2 Within the Broader Context of Gentile Judaizing in Early Christianity," in *The So-Called Jew in Paul's Letter to the Romans*, ed. Rafael Rodríguez and Matthew Thiessen (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 163–182.

stretched to the horizon" (95), and "hot, dry winds from the south-east" (135-136) that harmed the crops. Although a prominent part of the Moon's argument is that newcomers approached the steppe landscape through the lens of the forested and well-watered areas they had come from, Mennonites from the Great Plains and Prairies of North America will read the book with different eyes. An environmental history of the steppes, many of their ancestors from the Chortitza and Molotchna colonies knew, and came to cherish, will necessarily offer an intrinsic comparison with the landscape they know in North America.

The Plough that Broke the Steppes is divided into three main sections, beginning with a discussion of the attempts by travelers and scientific observers to understand the steppe environment. Here the breadth and depth of Moon's research is immediately apparent. The first impressions of the steppe by the Greek "Father of History," Herodotus, in 450 B.C.E., are followed by successive accounts by visitors, scientific expeditions, travelers, and, to a limited extent, settlers, all of whom sought to understand what for them was usually a foreign environment. It would take until the nineteenth century for Russian observers to adopt the steppe as their own national space.

The remaining two sections analyze perceived and actual environmental change in Part II, and then the role of human intervention, with the attempts by farmers, agricultural experts, and bureaucrats to combat what was believed to be wrong with the steppe environment in Part III. Vegetation, climate, and the land are the main variables chosen by Moon to illustrate the changing assessment of who was to blame for the perceived and real changes to the environment. In the writings of Russian scientists and other observers the loss of trees figures prominently in what was wrong with the steppe, a bias that suggested more about the environment they came from than the one they were observing. There were other more direct and more concerning changes, particularly when arable agriculture was at stake. Winds were perceived to be stronger and droughts more prevalent, while an increase in dust storms and the erosion of sandy soils and ravines was readily observable. The author concludes, however, that as the end of the nineteenth century approached scientists increasingly "believed climate change to be cyclical" rather than progressively worsening and caused by human activity.

It is in Part III that Mennonites make their appearance in the analysis. The author turns his attention to what the various actors on the steppe stage tried to do about what they believed to be the negative features of the changing landscape and climate. Here again the question of forests is raised, now as a project of afforestation rather than an effort to replace the trees that had gone missing. Planting trees, irrigation, and new agronomic practices held sway with differing intensity as ways of ameliorating the steppe environment. Moon portrays Mennonites as leaders in attempts to modify the steppe environment, particularly as it related to arable agriculture. He notes that by the middle of the nineteenth century "Mennonites had accumulated a great deal of experience in planting trees" (180). By that time, they had also built forty-six dams to irrigate some of their meadows (210). In Moon's analysis, the greatest contribution of Mennonites was, however, in the area of agronomic practices. Here the author becomes almost

glowing in his language. He considers Mennonites to be the "best example of the combination of settlers from outside Russia adapting farming methods from other parts of Europe to conditions on the steppes" and "by general agreement, ... the most successful farmers in the region" (251). Johann Cornies figures prominently in the success Moon attributes to Mennonites. Cornies is portrayed as an energetic personality and the Agricultural Society he chaired as innovative, establishing a reading society and library to keep up with the latest thinking on scientific agriculture. Moon chronicles the innovations that Mennonites adopted as a result of the efforts of the society and its dynamic leader. The introduction of the four-field system of crop rotation, the planting of shelterbelts, and, most importantly in Moon's assessment, the introduction of deep ploughing and black fallow were championed by Mennonite farmers.

Mennonite accounts of Cornies tend to oscillate between portraying him as a progressive innovator who raised Mennonites to a position of economic success and as an autocratic leader who disregarded religious sensibilities and abused the power that had been vested in him by an autocratic state. Moon's footnotes suggest he is aware of this dichotomous view of Cornies, and while he avoids the subject directly, he peppers his accounts of the success of Mennonite farmers with phrases such as "Cornies ordered." Understanding Cornies as a Mennonite is not Moon's project, but considering how the agricultural innovations attributed to him factored into the relationship between Mennonites and the steppe environment is an interesting question to ponder. Moon is careful not to be ahistorical in his judgments about the role of agronomic practices and their effectiveness in sustaining the steppe. While today's practices in plains agriculture no longer espouse black fallow and deep ploughing, and as his title implies it was the "plough that broke the steppes," in the context of nineteenth-century agriculture "farming methods appropriate to the steppe environment were devised." European settlers were invited to imperial Russia to be model farmers and in Moon's estimation Mennonites "best exemplified" (277) the combination of ideas, people, and practical experience that resulted in agricultural methods that were well adapted to the steppe environment.

We do not gain insight into how farmers themselves viewed the steppe environment, nor their thinking about the agricultural changes someone like Johann Cornies advocated and forced upon them. Sources for such an undertaking proved to be unavailable or nonexistent (26). While that story would shed further light on Moon's argument, the book as it is has much to offer Mennonite readers who seek to gain an understanding of how their forebears interacted with the steppe environment. It also opens the door to environmental histories of other places where Mennonite farming methods have been instrumental in changing the landscape.

Trouble I've Seen: Changing the Way the Church Views Racism. By Drew G. I. Hart. Harrisonburg, Va.: Herald Press. 2016. \$15.99.

Along the blood-soaked streets of contemporary America, the inextricable crucible of race and racism present a most serious challenge to the social witness of Christian peace churches. With the emergence of omnipresent social memes like #BLACKLIVESMATTER, #SAYHERNAME, *Ferguson Is Everywhere*, and We Stand With Charlottesville, Drew Hart's *Trouble I've Seen* is a very serious wakeup call to Christians. The text presents a combination of personal narrative, systemic racial concern, and prophetic call to the reconciling justice of the Christian Gospel. Indeed, *Trouble I've Seen* is a bold and unflinching focus on the—*primarily unconscious but deeply seated*—racism of Christians living in a white-dominated society.

The very brief foreward, written by the prominent Christian social psychologist Christiana Cleveland, correctly notes that Hart's offering promises an excavation of the "unspoken ideas and deadly but silent motivations that hover below our conscious awareness" (9). Hart's opening chapter, "When You Fit the Description," begins with an older brother's false arrest and subsequent four-month detention in a correctional facility. This familial account is emblematic of the country's deleterious racial character, and foreshadows the author's discussion of the routine experiences of black people in encounters with the police and judicial authorities regardless of guilt or innocence. The heart of the arguments to come are a clarion call to radical Christian discernment and action against the church's own collusions with the terrorizing of black bodies.

Starting with this opening chapter, "racialized socialization"—featuring a false sense of white objective clarity, which predisposes them to *not* take black life, pain, and suffering seriously (19)—emerges as a central theme. Conversely, while acknowledging "the rich tradition of Afro-Christian faith that has resisted the domestication of Jesus for generations" (20), the chapter foreshadows Hart's concern about the black churches' own lack of allegiance and activism in support of black freedom from racism. A final critical aspect of the chapter is Hart's call to white Christians to view their racist collusions, not from the vantage point of a *horizontal* embrace of "a naïve and thin understanding of racism" (27), but, rather, from a *vertical* view, which "factors in the depth and width of our racialized and hierarchical society" (27). Already with this opening chapter white Christians will surely be challenged by Hart's call for their living up to the way of Jesus through meaningful discoveries of *not only* black suffering, but also black agency expressed via intellectual thought, literature, wisdom, art, music, history, and religion.

Chapter 2, "The Racialized Society I've Seen," presents an examination of social-geographic dimensions of racial and class conflict. Again beginning with a personal account of life in his hometown of Norristown Pennsylvania, Hart lines out patterns of contrasting racial conformity and difference as "manifested very differently in various communities and regions" (37). The chapter tells of Hart's experiences with false "acceptance" as expressed through the gaze of a white romanization of stereotypical blackness—"coolness, athleticism, and being a 'bad boy'" (37). Of particular interest is Hart's recollection of his matriculation at a predominantly white Christian college, where he experiences pronounced cultural

isolation with a concomitant consciousness of overwhelming anxiety that comes with "my black body in such a white space" (39). With such sufferings and emerging awareness came enlightenment concerning the treatment of black female students along with an alertness of the white propensity to view Hart as acceptably black, therefore fortuitously different from the mass of others marked as "thugs" and "charity cases."

Turning to chapter 3, "Leaving Behind the Whitened Jesus," Hart speaks of his long journey to discovering the Gospel as "much more comprehensive, subversive, dangerous, and even undermining of everything that I knew and took for granted in life" (57). This chapter provides a strong lens into the "divine intervention," "life-altering reality," and social implications of the birth, life, teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus as told in Scripture. The chapter also cites representative contributions of black Christian genius against the scourge of anti-black racism: Vincent Harding, Sojourner Truth, Henry McNeal Turner, Howard Thurman. The Confessing Church discipleship of the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer is also cited. In the service of confronting society's intractable difficulties with race and racism, this chapter is primarily devoted to a welcomed exegesis of the highly subversive biblical narrative of Jesus, and the prophetic implications of the divine narrative for today.

Chapter 4, "Don't Go with Your Gut," turns to a discussion of the various levels and dynamics of Christian socialization within "dominant-culture," where white Christians unfortunately learn to trust "*their own gut*" instead of the marginalized experiences of the oppressed and the "Jesus-shaped ways of knowing our world" (77). The chapter's gift lies in its attempt to address the church's deep and abiding racial divides by offering a perhaps too brief definition of "socialization" followed by concise examples of white Christian complicity with America's racist past. The remainder of the chapter offers, respectively, the profound examples of "Bonhoeffer's Harlem Experiences" and "Martin Luther King's Lifelong Journey" as models for the church's movement from its existence as a communal body of "impaired intuition" to one of "solidarity."

With chapter 5, "Whiteness Matters," Hart recounts his tenure as a pastor of youth ministries at a Brethren in Christ church in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Here his initial optimism about "a time for healing and affirmation of my personhood and psyche" are quickly shattered by the sight of white Christian "service" to "less fortunate" communities of color. The chapter tells of periodic "invasions" of black and brown communities, predominantly by white Christians unaccountable to the people who are targets of their social charity. Hart rightly takes serious issue with "drive-by" approaches to "white Christian social practice," where predominantly white churches "quickly move in, do their good deeds, and then vanish just as quickly as they had first appeared" (99). Hart rightly contends that such "service" by white-ruled churches is part-and-parcel of the dominance of constructed white identity evidenced by wealth, corporate, legal, judicial, and other social advantages.

Of particular import is Hart's commentary on the problematic meaning of blackness from the vantage point of too many "nice white people," including white Christians who participate in "a culture of niceness...combined with the

dangerous ideologies that are death dealing to communities of color" (106-109). The chapter concludes with a challenge to dominant Christians to forsake the triumphalist history of being "Western First, Christians Second." With this challenge, Hart offers an account of white Christian identity in difficult conversation with black, brown, Native American, and Asian peoples. Undergirded by a strong exegesis of Jesus at the margins of society, from which a new community is to be fashioned, Hart succeeds at pressing home the central thrust of the chapter, namely, "[the] prophetic task of naming the powers at work in our world" (115-116).

Chapters 6 and 7, "BLACKLIVESMATTER" and "The Lure of Status and Respect," respectively, present a challenge to black Christians and other people of color to consider their own internalizations of, and collusions with, dominant structures of whiteness as well as their destructively affiliated yearnings for status and respectability. Against such difficulties, and with concern for the cultivation of truer selves, both chapters give strong voice to the actively subversive love of Jesus with some reference to the teachings of Paul in chapter 7. Once again Hart intertwines personal experience (both domestic and international) in these chapters. Particularly arresting is his commentary on black skin as a marker which solicits irrational fear and the pejorative assessment of dominant culture resulting in a black psyche that internalizes anti-black racism, thus thwarting black-on-black love.

Turning to his penultimate chapter 8, "Renouncing Every Hierarchy," Hart expands beyond the black/white binary to offer an intersectional and sometimes contentious account of other marginalized peoples, principally Native Americans, but also ". . . Asian American, Arab American, Latino/a, or other" (147). The chapter also comments upon the destructively hierarchical ways in which society orders itself along sexist, heterosexist, and class divides as these intersect with race. As is true throughout the text, Hart names the names so critical to a reader's deep absorption of *Trouble I've Seen*. Of particular importance on this account is the *saying* of black female names: Renisha McBride, Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells, Ella Baker, Diane Nash, Angela Davis. And once again concluding the chapter is the call of Christian Scripture (with Jesus at its center) offering a renunciation of every hierarchy, including a clarion call for the decentralizing of the "white male figure's blasphemous godlike position" (165).

The final chapter, "Where Do We Go From Here?," offers seven (*embodied*) practical suggestions for *embodied* confrontations with anti-black racism. They include: 1) sharing life together in ways that "renounce racial hierarchy and racialized social patterns"; 2) a deeply empathetic practice of social solidarity, which invites socially advantaged people to "use their bodies as a living sacrifice"; 3) "see[ing] the world from below"; and 4) "subvert[ing] racial hierarchy in the church." Such practices endure while 5) "soak[ing] in Scripture and the Spirit for renewed social imagination"; 6) "seek[ing] first the kingdom of God"; and, finally, 7) engaging in fearless self-examination. While Hart doubts that America will ever live up to its own lofty myths, he is, finally, hopeful that Christians "can visibly lead the way, grouping together through the fog of racialized hierarchy and toward the light of Christ" (180).

Ahead of a set of acknowledgments, Hart concludes *Trouble I've Seen* with a benediction of still another black person "executed by police" followed by a personal account of having himself been pulled over for "driving while black." With such a conclusion Hart finds himself in lamentable solidarity with a historical multitude of other black Christians who have struggled against the complex and subtle racialized denials and refusals of white Christians.

Hart's important text does not present readers with a systematic and disciplined *theological* presentation of race and racism in church and society. More existentially profound, *Trouble I've Seen* offers the subject matter in the manner in which many black Christian scholars experience their lives at the intersections of terror and hope: namely, through an admixture of non-linear and informal personal narratives, scholarly voice, and profound Christian commitment. In these respects *Trouble I've Seen* is quite suited for a lay readership. And, most profoundly, the text's spirit evokes the words of Martin Luther King Jr. in his classic 1967 text *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?*: "Whites, it must frankly be said, are not putting in a similar mass effort to reeducate themselves out of their racial ignorance. It is an aspect of their sense of superiority that the white people of America believe they have so little to learn."

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Pipkin, Brian K., and Jay Beaman, eds. *Early Pentecostals on Nonviolence and Social Justice: A Reader*. Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick Publishers. 2016. \$ 25.

Mennonites and Pentecostals fit into the larger Christian community, the church catholic, as radical expressions of the Reformation (for Mennonites) and the post-Reformation (for Pentecostals). Yet, while both express radical wings of Christian orthodoxy, there are few commonalities in their approaches to ecclesiology. In particular, Mennonites emphasize the community providing a modeled critique to society. In contrast, Pentecostals, particularly early Pentecostals, advocate a Pietist encounter of Christ through the Spirit that is to provide a critique to society. If we were to express this through a Venn diagram, a point of intersection in their prophetic critique would highlight approaches to nonviolence. Through a reader of early Pentecostals Brian Pipkin and Jay Beaman call contemporary Pentecostals to reevaluate their past. Residually, this would call Christians from other communities, particularly from the radical communities like Mennonites, to reconsider their commonalities with Pentecostals that are beyond ecclesial orthodoxy.

The writings are samples from 1905 to 1940, arranged chronologically. This allows the reader to gather a feel of the early Pentecostals' writings, particularly as they are expressed prior to World War I, continuing through the dawn of World War II. The primary voice during the early years was that of pacifism. "From the very beginning," states the editor of *The Weekly Evangel*, "the movement has been characterized by Quaker principles" (93). The early era is significant in that while Pentecostals made up one of the largest pacifist communities prior to World War

II, Pentecostals changed their perspectives during the war. Pentecostals shifted to the acceptance of just war concepts.

A chronological approach allows the reader to identify themes as they develop over time. William Burt McCafferty (29) and Stanley Frodsham (58) are among the many writers who emphasized that a Christian's "citizenship is in heaven." Because of this foreign citizenship, the Christian "should preserve an attitude of strict neutrality to the warring nations in Europe" (57). Samuel Booth-Clibborn extends the notion of heavenly citizenship even further. Since the Christian is a citizen of heaven, the Christian "must therefore obey first the law of heaven which is the law of love as opposed to that of revenge and slaughter" (6). Booth-Clibborn states that a Christian cannot be a patriot, "[b]ecause the aims of present-day 'Patriotism' and true Christianity are diametrically opposed" (14).

A few of the articles address the underlying concern that the church will provide a prophetic voice to society, including how that voice is expressed as a model to society. William Seymour, for example, notes that the character of the church is under the law and supervision of Christ. Thus, while the Church, as "men and citizens," should show respect to civil government, "God's claims are supreme, and annihilate all claims that contradict or oppose them" (27).

The vast majority of readings are based upon Pentecostals' approach to the Great War. Pipkin and Beaman highlight writings by Samuel Booth-Clibborn, Arthur Syndey Booth-Blibborn, Ambrose Jessup Tomlinson, Frank Bartleman, C. H. Mason, and others who challenged the war or called for conscientious objection to war.

A. J. Tomlinson challenged a Christianity that was committed to war: "War is butchery and contrary to the Spirit of Christianity. We, as a nation, make a boast of being a Christian nation, but how little the spirit of Christianity prevails" (86). Tomlinson concludes that the Christian's citizenship is in heaven. Elbert Carlton Backus speaks of patriotism as a harlot, patriotism that the church accepts "without question" (101).

Reflecting the language and concerns of farmers, A. J. Tomlinson laments, "Boys and men are snatched away from their homes . . . and shot down by thousands like cattle and hogs in slaughter pens. Homes are broken up never to be repaired; [those homes] . . . are reduced to poverty and starvation" (31). Frank Bartleman cries out against the economics of war: "[T]he poor people must spill their blood to save the rulers['] fortunes" (36).

Pipkin and Beaman bring to the table a valuable collection of writings that should remind the Pentecostal of her heritage of encountering society with a prophetic voice. For Mennonites, this is a valuable collection of writings that can speak to the diversity of pacifism and nonviolence. It can also speak to how Pentecostals and Mennonites in contemporary society may capture anew commonalities of the radical Christian communities that together they can model as a prophetic voice to society.

BOOK NOTES

More Than Atonement. By Isaiah Ritzmann. Waterloo, Ont.: Zwickau Press. 2017. 144 pp. \$20.

This book engages the work of seven authors writing in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition who make the argument that traditional theologies of the atonement have failed to adequately integrate the church and the kingdom of God with the atonement of Christ. Focused on the works of John Driver, C. Norman Kraus, Thomas Finger, J. Denny Weaver, Mark Baker, Joel B. Green, Darrin W. Snyder Belousek, and Rachel Reesor-Taylor, the author summarizes and critiques atonement theology in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition and puts forward a distinctive ecclesiology rooted in discipleship.

Sketches of God's Faithfulness: Oak Grove Mennonite Church, 1818-2018. By Levi Miller. Smithville, Ohio: Oak Grove Mennonite Church. 2018. 62 pp.

Early in the nineteenth century, eleven Amish families became landowners in Wayne County, Ohio. By the end of the nineteenth century, the group had grown to over 500 members, built a meetinghouse near Smithville, and called themselves the Oak Grove Mennonite Church. This book, commemorating the 200th anniversary of the congregation's origins in 1818, traces the history of the Oak Grove Mennonite Church through a series of thematic essays, each focused on a key church leader. Topics include baptism, family, agriculture, peace, music, education, and service. Collectively, the stories and photos provide a revealing window into the nature of the congregation's unusual impact on the region, the Mennonite denomination, and even the world through the influence of several generations of international mission and service workers.

Canadian Prairie Mennonite Ministers' Use of Scripture: 1874-1977. By Donald Stoesz. Victoria: Friesen Press. 2018. 303 pp. \$24.99.

This book analyzes the use of an unusual lectionary—a list of Scripture readings for each Sunday of the year—by various “Canadian Prairie Mennonite” ministers (a general term that includes preachers from the Sommerfelder, General Conference, Chortitzer, Kleine Gemeinde, Old Colony, and Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference groups). Known as the *Anweisung der Lieder* and located at the front of a German-language hymnbook, the lectionary was used by Mennonite congregations in eighteenth-century Prussia and Russia, before arriving in North America with Mennonite immigrations in the nineteenth century. The lectionary offers a unique perspective on the structure of Mennonite worship and the theological motifs in sermons preached in these communities,

particularly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The book includes numerous maps and tables, along with an analysis of general themes and scriptural references, including a comparative study of three sermons on the book of 1 Peter.

Inhabiting the World: Identity, Politics and Theology in Radical Baptist Perspective. By Ryan Andrew Newson. Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press. 2018. 207 pp. \$35.

Framed against the backdrop of postmodernity and the reality of a post-Christian culture, this book argues that the resources contained in the “baptist vision” of Christian life are uniquely helpful in describing how Christians might creatively inhabit the world as it is. The author describes the contours of a Christian identity centered on “listening” — to the self, to others, and to God — and develops the argument primarily in conversation with the work of theologian James William McClendon Jr., touching on the fields of neuroscience, political theology, church practices, and ecclesial failure. Newson’s analysis advances McClendon’s work by sketching a positive vision for the future rooted in a radical Baptist identity.

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