

Book Reviews

Anabaptist Essentials: Ten Signs of a Unique Christian Faith. By Palmer Becker. Harrisonburg, Va.: Herald Press. 2017. \$12.99.

Anabaptist Essentials is a book-length expansion of Palmer Becker's popular and influential *What is an Anabaptist Christian?*, a booklet widely disseminated by Mennonite Church USA, Mennonite Church Canada, and their denominational organs. Becker takes as his frame of reference the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* adopted by these bodies in 1995 (13). Within this particular stream of Anabaptist Christianity, Becker self-consciously conceptualizes Anabaptism in the tradition of Harold S. Bender's 1943 statement, "The Anabaptist Vision." Like Bender, Becker has chosen to define Anabaptist distinctiveness around three loci: "Jesus is the center of our faith. Community is the center of our life. Reconciliation is the center of our work" (9). *Anabaptist Essentials* is Becker's bid to add depth and subtlety to his accounts of Jesus, community, and reconciliation. Sandwiched between a brief history of Christianity and a concluding reflection on the work of the Holy Spirit, the meat of *Anabaptist Essentials* is organized into three major sections, each containing three chapters concerning the application of its respective cardinal value to topics of interest in Anabaptist life and thought.

Becker's chapters on Jesus-centered faith touch down in the familiar territories of discipleship, Christ-centered biblical hermeneutics, and the Lordship of Jesus. This section hangs neatly together: Christianity is primarily about following Jesus; an ethical Christ-centered approach to Scripture will yield practical guidance to this end; and the confession "Jesus is Lord" is rightly understood as a commitment to following Jesus in daily life. The coherence of this section comes, however, at the price of some theological richness: Jesus' lordship is reduced to Jesus' role as servant leader of the church, in a way that both parallels and subverts the authoritarian leadership of figures like Caesar and the Pope (54). No mention is made of Jesus' identification with the Lord God of Israel. Rather, Becker defines lordship in more subjective terms: "Jesus becomes Lord when we commit ourselves to following him in daily life" (55). The accent here falls primarily on discipleship, and only secondarily on Jesus' authority as the one in whom the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. "Anabaptist Christians emphasize: beliefs are important but not primary" (38). Yet it is "Anabaptist-minded Christians" (58-59, emphasis mine) who prioritize obedience to Christ over obedience to lower authorities. Readers of *Anabaptist Essentials* would do well to reflect on the role that belief in the New Testament's rendering of Jesus might play in motivating and sustaining discipleship.

The division on community begins with a chapter on forgiveness, which is well worth the price of admission for its account of transformational forgiveness. Here, Becker deftly links vertical forgiveness received from God with new possibilities for horizontal forgiveness experienced in community. The distinction between

positional and transactional forgiveness will be helpful to readers who are interested in squaring the requirements of justice with the charge to forgive. Becker's much-needed chapter on communal discernment calls for a balance between preaching, teaching, and dialogue. This will no doubt be challenging and thought-provoking for communities to whom "dialogue" and "communal discernment" have become euphemisms for debate and voting, to the functional erosion of an authoritative teaching office. The final chapter of this section, entitled "Members Are Held Accountable," takes a surprising twist by advocating for the importance of small groups, rather than offering a discourse on church discipline. While Becker's understanding of small groups arguably owes as much to the Pietist *collegia pietatis* and to Jonathan Wesley's "class meetings" as it does to historical Anabaptism, his proposal is nonetheless worthy of serious consideration.

The section dealing with reconciliation begins by acknowledging that "some followers of Christ say that evangelism is at the center of our work, [while] others say peacebuilding is most important" (111). When Becker goes on to claim that both peace and evangelism are essential to the more foundational Anabaptist value of reconciliation, readers situated within Becker's own tradition will hear the familiar echo of "third way" rhetoric. Those of us who have heard these ideas deployed in a conciliatory mode will be surprised and perhaps refreshed by Becker's brisk assertion that "seekers need help to decide about their acceptance of God's grace and their willingness to follow Jesus in daily life" (123). It is this insistence upon a clear Christian commitment, grounded explicitly in baptismal promises, that undergirds Becker's account of the practice of reconciliation within the church. The final chapter in this division puts forth a capacious understanding of how Anabaptist Christians are called to engage with conflict in the wider world, inclusive of both peacebuilding and spiritual warfare and replete with historical examples of praiseworthy Anabaptist works. The practice of reconciliation beyond the church is not clearly integrated with the preceding chapter on the practice of reconciliation within the church. As perhaps a symptom of this disconnect, evangelism—which was earlier dubbed essential to reconciliation—has disappeared from view.

Given that one-third of Becker's account of Anabaptist distinctiveness falls under the heading "Jesus is the center of our faith," it is ironic that the Holy Spirit occupies the center of Becker's graphic illustration of Anabaptist distinctives (12). This incongruity notwithstanding, Becker's concluding reflection on the work of the Holy Spirit is laudable in its engagement with charismatic expressions of Anabaptism in the Global South, as well as in its heartening forecast for a Spirit-led Anabaptism in the Global North. Becker's initial claim that "the early Anabaptists were the charismatic movement of the Reformation" (12) is repeated widely enough to be mostly uncontroversial, and the pneumatological coda of *Anabaptist Essentials* fits neatly within a recent pattern of interest among mainline North American Mennonites in the work of the Holy Spirit. Becker quotes David Wiebe approvingly to the effect that "in our zeal to be Christocentric, we have minimized the Holy Spirit. Embracing the Holy Spirit. . . will not make Anabaptists less Christocentric, but more so" (165). Yet, like the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* that serves as Becker's basic frame of reference, *Anabaptist*

Essentials gives scant attention to God the Father. One might revise Wiebe's comment accordingly: In our zeal to be Christocentric and Spirit-led, we have minimized the Father. Embracing the Father will not make Anabaptists less Christocentric or Spirit-led, but more so. The relative silence of *Anabaptist Essentials* on subjects patriological is more plausibly a feature of the particular stream of North American Mennonitism of which this text is a product, rather than of the "essential" Anabaptist movement.

It is on one's judgment of this point—the plausibility and value of an essentialized account of Anabaptism—that any evaluation of *Anabaptist Essentials* stands or falls. Becker's *Anabaptist Essentials* models, to its credit, clarity and accessibility. It is poised to influence many readers, like "The Anabaptist Vision" and *What is an Anabaptist Christian?* before it. Yet, like Bender's "The Anabaptist Vision," *Anabaptist Essentials* might also be fairly charged with a kind of reductionism, running roughshod over the variegated streams of the historical Anabaptist movement in order to present a constructed unity. It is this looser use of the word "essential" that looms large on the cover of this volume. By identifying something as essential to Anabaptism, Becker seems to be saying that Anabaptists ought not to neglect that thing, and not that Anabaptism has never been (or could never be) conceived differently. In this, *Anabaptist Essentials* is a revealing artifact of a particular stream of the Anabaptist movement, conveying judgments made by one of its senior spokespersons [my questions in brackets about this word choice remain] about what ought to be emphasized by the church at this particular moment in history. I have little doubt that *Anabaptist Essentials*, and especially the thoughtful questions posed by the author at the end of each chapter, will generate much fruitful conversation about who we Anabaptists are, and what we are becoming.

Rosedale Bible College

MATTHEW CORDELLA-BONTRAGER

Our Amish Devotional Heritage. By David Luthy. Aylmer, Ont.: Pathway Publishers. 2016. 135 pp. \$10.50.

Both novice and experienced researchers of Anabaptist history will appreciate this accessible, straightforward writing and list-making of David Luthy, Amish historian and curator of the Heritage Historical Library in Aylmer, Ontario. *Our Amish Devotional Heritage* adds to the body of knowledge represented by Luthy's earlier published works about the Anabaptist martyr Dirk Willems and about the German printings of the *Martyrs Mirror*.

When I entered my role as archives and special collections librarian for Bluffton University in the summer of 2005, I leaned heavily on sources like Robert Friedmann's *Mennonite Piety Through the Centuries: Its Genius and Its Literature* to familiarize myself with and understand the range of Anabaptist literature found in the collections I was responsible for curating. In addition to Friedmann's work, David Luthy's writing about Anabaptist devotional literature in sources like *Pennsylvania Mennonite Heritage* became foundational for this understanding. I

return frequently to these indispensable works of Friedmann and Luthy when attempting to research and understand Bluffton's rare book collections, their potential for pedagogical relevance, or their candidacy for exhibition.

Our Amish Devotional Heritage brings together essays Luthy has published elsewhere with new material to create a source that is both a pleasant read and a practical reference for Anabaptist devotional literature. The book is divided into five distinct sections, corresponding to types of literature used by Amish in their devotional and worship practices: Bibles and Bible portions; hymnals and songbooks; prayer books; martyr books; and miscellaneous.

The first section includes research on German Bibles used by the Amish, including various editions of the Froschauer Bible as well as the Luther Bible. Much of this research had been published in *Pennsylvania Mennonite Heritage*. Expanding and updating his earlier writing about Bibles, Luthy provides a chronology of Bible production, with discussion on hand-copying, the printing press, and translation efforts. Using Bibles from the Heritage Historical Library collection, Luthy traces Bible production in Europe and in North America. Commentary on Anabaptist New Testaments in this section is expanded from Luthy's earlier writing on the topic in a 1980 article for Pathway Publishers' own *Family Life*.

Luthy adapts more from his portfolio of earlier work in *Pennsylvania Mennonite Heritage* and *Family Life* for the rest of the sections of *Our Amish Devotional Heritage*. The discussion of hymnals and songbooks as section two of the book is expansive and detailed. From the *Ausbund*, with its variations in content throughout its printing history in both Europe and North America, to modern songbooks and sources of hymns from outside Anabaptist circles, Luthy's knowledge and understanding is remarkable. Readers from the Bluffton, Ohio, area will be met with a surprise in seeing images of local settler Michael Neuenschwander's *Schrift und Lieder Register*, a 2011 Heritage Historical Library acquisition, in this section.

Luthy's article "A History of Die Ernsthafte Christenpflicht," published in 1981 in *Family Life*, is adapted to open section three. Luthy describes six small-format copies of the work found in the Heritage Historical Library collection and provides a listing of prayers for European, American, and Canadian editions of the *Ernsthafte Christenpflicht*. Following a discussion of Leenaert Clock's work as author of many of the included prayers, Luthy shares a personal anecdote about differences in prayer ordering between American and Canadian editions, followed by an extensive discussion on the translation of the book into English. Other prayer books, including *Golden Apples in Silver Bowls*, *Lust-Gartlein*, and the Amstutz text, are given attention.

Section four of the book, on martyr books, is intentionally short, and readers are directed to Luthy's earlier book, *A History of the Printings of the Martyrs' Mirror, Dutch, German, English, 1660-2012 : From the Collection of Heritage Historical Library* (Pathway Publishers, 2013). Luthy does include discussion of volumes obtained by the Heritage Historical Library since 2013.

Section five, aptly named "Miscellaneous," includes discussion on various types of devotional literature, including daily devotionals, large-format inspirationals and broadsides, fictional religious books, and the *Sammelband*

form. A *Sammelband* is a collection containing the user's favorite or frequently used sources bound together into a single volume, a common practice of European Anabaptists. Luthy describes multiple examples of each type of literature.

The book is not without some limitations and shortcomings. The lack of an index is unfortunate and reduces the book's ease of use. Inconsistencies in font choice and a handful of typographical errors throughout the work are a minor annoyance. A section on Anabaptist binding styles (used on Bibles and on other types of Anabaptist literature), adapted from a 2012 *Pennsylvania Mennonite Heritage* article on the topic, is placed awkwardly in the middle of the section about Bibles and Bible fragments and would perhaps be more useful as its own standalone section or as an appendix. Other issues of flow and voice are apparent, suggesting that closer editing would have made Luthy's voice more consistent between earlier and later parts of the work.

However, if the goal was for Luthy to revive, update, and unite a large pool of earlier writing, this effort was a success. The table of contents at the front of the book is conveniently subdivided for quick reference to specific sources in each category, which is helpful in the absence of a traditional index. The text is presented alongside beautiful, detailed, full-color images of examples of each type of devotional literature from the Heritage Historical Library. The work is evidence of Luthy's extensive knowledge of the Heritage Historical Library collection and of the wider historical context from which each category of literature contributes to the Anabaptist devotional heritage he describes.

Since the publication of *Our Amish Devotional Heritage*, the boards of the Heritage Historical Library and the Muddy Creek Farm Library agreed to merge as separate collections, with the transfer of approximately 75 percent of the Heritage Historical Library's materials from Aylmer, Ontario, to the facilities of the Muddy Creek Farm Library in Ephrata, Pennsylvania. Luthy himself published an announcement of the merger and transfer in the 2018 issue of *Muddy Creek Review*, the Muddy Creek Farm Library's annual publication, stating that some collections will remain in Aylmer until he is unable to continue presentations to guests there, at which time the remaining materials will be transferred to Muddy Creek Farm Library.

As one who appreciates the work of Friedmann and Luthy as reference works for the history of, connections between, and usage habits of Anabaptist devotional literature, I find the "Sammelband" that is *Our Amish Devotional Heritage* to be a convenient, helpful, and accessible resource in this effort.

Bluffton University

CARRIE PHILLIPS

Cornfields, Cottonwoods, Seagulls, and Sermons: Growing Up in Nebraska. By Joseph Gascho. Hummelstown, Pa.: DreamSeeker Poetry Series. Volume 14. 2017. \$.12.95.

In writing poems, Joseph Gascho avoids the tedious memoir of recounting family stories. Instead, he creates an arc of a different sort as "the boy" of his

poems contemplates the places he's been, the people who have shaped him, and the man he has become. The starkness of his Nebraskan birthplace and early years is delineated by the roads his father knew: "...roads that ran north and south, east and west/ Four miles south, three miles west/got them to church; two miles west,/three and a half north to the Cairo bank" (84). The alliterated title of Gascho's full-length book of poems captures the strange phenomenon of seagulls camping on inland fields on their way to somewhere else (129). And, similarly, as he matures, the boy "knows he will be something else" (112).

Gascho, of Hummelstown, Pennsylvania, is a cardiologist at the Penn State Hershey College of Medicine, where he is presently a professor of humanities and medicine. He grew up on a farm in Nebraska and moved with his parents to Harrisonburg, Virginia, when he was 13. Along with his interest in poetry, he is also a photographer. He was awarded first-place prizes for both his poetry and his photography in *Annals of Internal Medicine*.

Readers rooted in rural Mennonite communities of mid-century America will recognize the author's experiences of deprivation, isolation, and modest living that defined that era. The references to Watkin's salve, *Jungle Doctor* books, *Life Songs*, bishops, and the importance of rural routes for mail delivery will not be lost on those raised in families with relatives named Alvin, Harry, Delmar, and Beulah, each with their own backstory summed up in a few poignant, pithy lines. There was Ida, who "sent /niece Josephine back to Milford/because she was using too much toilet paper" (69). And Uncle Joe who "tells the boy no doctor/was ever going to lay a finger/on his prostrate, no siree, . . ." (68). Tenants of the faith were communicated by small gestures that reinforced the rules—throwing down an extra bale to avoid working on Sunday, packing food for a trip to avoid eating in restaurants on Sunday, and passing out tracts in the city before socializing over cherry pie in a church member's kitchen.

Sermons of Gascho's childhood were delivered by the boy's "Preacher, farmer, father" (47) and while one never learns the reason the family left Nebraska, "...the dropping price of corn" (46) may have been one factor. The disjointed narrative of the family's move from Nebraska to Virginia in a white pick-up truck is inconspicuously woven into the poetic memoir, as the man gives homage to the connections made and kept through letter writing to far-flung relatives and their significance to the boy and his mother. Like many of her peers of the era, Gascho's mother's commendation was doled out infrequently, but memorably: "and one evening when he trudged/in from doing chores she told him/what a dependable boy he was/ and that he would go a long way" (89).

Most likely, the impetus to leave came from the boy's mother, who wanted a better life for her son and recognized his need for an education the one-room schoolhouse couldn't provide. In that school, his teacher never spoke of the "hundreds of thousands/of Sandhill cranes [that] swoop down/on the Platte, in Kearney,/only thirty miles from where he had lived." Yet, according to Gascho, years later, it was discovered, she had "paintings of the cranes/bowing, leaping, dancing,/and that she had a 78-rpm/recording of a pair trumpeting..." (42). Such was the insular scholastic reticence that may have prompted a move to more fertile territories.

Gascho's father is depicted in many poems in this collection. The boy watches him shave, accompanies him on errands in town, disks the field his father plows, and "...learns about money from his dad/who sells the corn just before the price drops and buys calves, feeds them corn,/and picks the best time to auction them off . . ." (37). In flights of imagination as an adult, the poet conjures up a "Doctor Dad" who would have "walked out that first Tuesday/the anatomy professor flashed/the *Playboy* breasts on the screen. . ." and a poker-playing dad, "(his smile the same if the corn came in a bumper crop/or if the August hail had flattened all the wheat)" (82-83).

Contemporary subjects of poems include visits to art galleries, reading the Sunday *New York Times*, and Yoga class. Many of these poems feature a mixture of past and present or ask the man's unanswered questions. The route from the boy to the man is ever-present in this collection of poems, and while the poet sometimes amplifies his surprise at how far he's traveled, he never for a moment loses his grasp on the places that gave him life. This is no more apparent than in the poem "Here's to Herman and Charles" in which he describes his medical mentors Dr. Abboud and Dr. Hook, each with their unique giftedness, alongside Herman, who "hotwired a Caterpillar,/and then cleared away/the barn and chicken shed/leveled by the tornado./First time on such a machine." He lauds the accomplishments of a day in the life of Charles "donor of five gallons of blood/so far . . ." (116-117).

These poems are plainspoken and straightforward, accessible and simple. In "The Plowing Poet," he forswears poetic devices. "No iambs or anapests,/no dacthyls (sic) on John Deere,/only putt-putt spondees. // Cacophony of sounds; no assonance/or consonance . . ." (123). The poetry is wrought mainly through images—the windmills, silos, and volunteer corn in the wheat fields. The language is compact and concrete, at times more like prose, except for the lineation. And while metaphor is scarce in individual poems, a larger metaphor might be found in this collection wherein a cardiologist examines the extremities to learn the truth about the heart.

The use of personification (the boy) suggests a gulf between the past and present. Its use may feel inauthentic and contrived when the reader knows for certain that the poems are autobiographical. Yet, these lines *are* peopled with characters perceived through the youthful gaze of the boy, and these poems also pose questions of a thoughtful man who ponders the events of his childhood.

The book is organized into five titled sections plus a prologue of two poems, "Nebraska" and "District 37," that introduce the book's theme. Joseph Gascho's contribution to the DreamSeeker series tracks the path of many Mennonites of his generation as they made their way from farm life to professional life. The rural images and family stories will strike a chord with countless Anabaptist readers who claim acreage in both worlds.

The Challenge is in the Naming: A Theological Journey. By Lydia Neufeld Harder. Winnipeg: CMU Press. 2018. \$41.

Written over the past thirty years, this collection of previously published and unpublished articles and papers is unique among scholarly Anabaptist Mennonite theological writing for several reasons.

Harder is the first Mennonite woman with a doctorate in systematic theology to examine from a feminist perspective in one collected work such vital topics as Christian vocation, biblical interpretation, theological method and language, ethical orientation, communal discernment, and interfaith dialogue. Her book provides a window into a theological journey that permitted her, over time and in spite of numerous obstacles, to critically and lovingly integrate a life as both Mennonite and feminist.

Second, the organization and style of the book exemplifies Harder's conviction that there is "always a personal element in the theological work we do" (15). While many postmodern theologians recognize this in introductions to their books, Harder's is unusual in the extent to which she provides background commentary for each piece included. Most of the commentaries are two to four pages in length. Harder knows the power of language and writes that in theological reflection we must dare not only to name God, but also to name ourselves "within the web of intertwining relationships that have shaped us," and to name "the world we live in, its complexity and its beauty, its joy and its pain. . . . It is in that naming that we draw boundaries, gain new freedom to grow into our identity and welcome others into relationship and community." Therefore she describes not only the specific invitation that elicited a published article, presentation, biblical study, or sermon, but also particular aspects of the ecclesial, social, and political context at the time or the personal realities of marriage, family, doctoral work, teaching, educational administration, or pastoral ministry that gave rise to the writing.

This contributes to the "journey" character of the book and to our ability to perceive her sometimes painful honesty, her integrity, and theological development as she moves between life experience and theological convictions. This approach illustrates how her understandings of an Anabaptist hermeneutic community, of power and authority in ministry and peace theology, and of humility and passion in the interpretation of Scripture developed as she used the gifts God had given her in male-dominated institutions in Canada and the U.S., as she studied in Catholic and interchurch contexts, and as she participated in extended dialogues with Iranian Muslim theological students and clergy. A striking illustration of how her theological journey prepared and challenged her is the essay in which she graciously explains to a group of conservative Shi'a Muslims the way Christians speak about the authority of the Bible.

Because most of the articles were created in response to specific invitations from Mennonites at different times, the theological presentation in this book is not systematic and there are repetitive elements. Harder writes, "Since learning to articulate one's theology is a cumulative effort, ideas and even stories are sometimes repeated in the various articles that I wrote. . . . In my reflections, there is a circling back and a circling forward with key ideas and symbols repeated but gaining ever deepening significance for me" (19).

In gathering the collection Harder expected the Anabaptist “hermeneutic community” to be the organizing theme of her life’s work. She was surprised to find that the theme of *naming* kept rising to the surface as key—the process of naming God, self, and the world as central to identity formation and as risk, as she noted in a panel discussion at the Women Doing Theology conference at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in 2018.

Each chapter “names” some aspect of her journey—such as coming to name herself as a theological scholar in the Anabaptist tradition, naming her feminist suspicion of Scripture as well as naming the Bible as “home,” and naming the rewards of communal discernment.

A strength of Harder’s approach to theology is her commitment to the Bible as “home.” While setting up her doctoral plan she successfully argued against the conventional disciplinary “silos” that meant students in theology would not normally take courses in Bible. Her belief that Christian theologians must be grounded in Scripture and the interdisciplinary education she then pursued is evident in this book as she names her feminist theological lens. She embraces both interpretive suspicion and interpretative imagination as she responds to particular texts; she explores the Bible as Canon and as Word of God, and includes the often neglected biblical wisdom threads in her theological work.

In her scholarship Harder has deepened Anabaptist Mennonite conversation about hermeneutic communities and communal discernment in several important ways. In her early study she began to articulate ways in which traditional approaches to biblical interpretation and communal discernment often silenced the voices of women—both in theological reflection on these processes and in practicing them in congregational and conference settings. This theme reverberated in her work, extending to include others on the margins, notably First Nations participants and LGBTQ persons. Harder named power and vulnerability as crucial dimensions of these church processes, also pointing out that these realities were frequently overlooked in the development of Mennonite peace theology. Serving as a board member and a peace theology researcher for Mennonite Central Committee, she continued to refine her thinking about how church institutions can make decisions with more careful attention to *power* and *service* and the theology connected to them, a focus of one chapter in this book.

Harder also brought a richer understanding of what it means to be “biblical” in communal discernment because of her study of the biblical canon. In her concluding chapter on discernment that includes, as she puts it, “thoughts of my senior years,” she adapts, for congregational discernment about same-sex marriage, Walter Bruggemann’s approach to theological education. To help shape theological education, Bruggemann appeals to the three major modes of revelatory knowledge of God that are included in the canon: 1) Torah/narrative or foundational teaching that forms identity; 2) prophetic re-visioning; and 3) holy wisdom, including recognition of the limits of our knowledge of God. In Scripture itself, formed within various historical periods, we see these three ways of knowing God interacting dynamically where “engagement with earlier texts as live words of God can be detected in the later texts” (311).

Harder suggests that before churches start appealing to specific texts or theological themes they consider how these three biblical modes of revelatory knowledge are represented among those engaged in communal discernment today. “What continues to be important for the present theological process is that new claims be made on the grounds of both the shape and substance of the older scriptural tradition” (311), as was the case in Acts 15, for example. The God of the Bible speaks through traditional teaching, through prophetic critique, and through holy wisdom, always reminding us that “love, rather than knowledge, is the necessary element in the discernment process” (312). Harder notes how powerful Jesus’ prayer for unity has been, given the many broken relationships both within the church and with those outside the church, especially through the use and misuse of power and authority. The unity she seeks “comes not from uniformity but from relationships of love” (312). In contrast to rigid rules and regulations this approach “is more elusive, for it comes in communion and sharing of gifts, and in forgiveness and worship” (306).

Harder’s book is both scholarly and accessible. She suggests that some people may prefer to delve more deeply into the formal articles while others may spend more time on the narrative commentaries. College and seminary libraries that collect Anabaptist sources should definitely include this book, partly for the sake of those who do not remember the beginnings of second wave feminism in North America and what has transpired theologically in Mennonite Church (Canada) and (US) since then. Harder’s theological journey, recounted truthfully, with deep respect for the One Beyond Naming and with tested love for Christ’s church, has the potential to inspire budding theologians and call forth the courage and patience needed to foster the “elusive” Christian unity that leads to “deepened relationships, and above all an outpouring of love that moves beyond the community itself” (307).

Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary

GAYLE GERBER KOONTZ

German Language: Cradle of Our Heritage. By Amos B. Hoover. Ephrata, Pa.: Muddy Creek Farm Library. 2018. \$65.

Scholarship on the language(s) of the Pennsylvania Dutch extends back to the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1872, Samuel Stehman Haldeman (1812–1880), an eminent natural scientist and philologist at the University of Pennsylvania who was born in Lancaster County and spoke Pennsylvania Dutch natively, published the first monograph on the language, which remains a classic today. In the almost century and a half since, hundreds of articles, theses, and monographs have appeared that address numerous aspects of the history and contemporary situation of Pennsylvania Dutch and its speakers.

With a few notable exceptions (e.g., Shoemaker 1940, Frey 1945), most of the early research on Pennsylvania Dutch centered on its status among its nonsectarian users—also known as the church people or Fancy Dutch—as opposed to the sectarians or Plain people, members of conservative Anabaptist

(and some Pietist) groups. The focus on nonsectarians was understandable, since until the second half of the twentieth century, Amish and tradition-minded Mennonites comprised only a small minority of the total Pennsylvania Dutch-speaking population. Today, nearly all fluent nonsectarian speakers of Pennsylvania Dutch are elderly, yet in Plain communities the language is flourishing. It remains a vital medium of oral communication within Amish and many Old Order Mennonite groups and now enjoys the distinction of being one of the fastest-growing languages in the world, due to the exponential growth in the numbers of its speakers.

Beginning in the late 1970s, researchers, notably Marion Lois Huffines (e.g., 1980) turned their attention to Pennsylvania Dutch as spoken by sectarians, and most of the scholarship that has appeared since then has centered on the linguistic situation of the Plain people, adding to the diverse and growing scholarly literature on the Amish and similar groups more broadly. Not surprisingly, most of the research on Plain groups, including their language, has been produced by outsiders. With few exceptions (e.g., Blank 1986, Stoll n. d.), Plain voices on language and other topics related to their faith and culture are not often heard.

The volume under review here does an excellent job of complementing the existing research on the language situation among Plain Pennsylvania Dutch groups by providing an insider's view. Amos B. Hoover, a member of the Weaverland Conference of Old Order Mennonites, is a native speaker of Pennsylvania Dutch who has devoted most of his life to the documentation and interpretation of the history of Plain Anabaptist groups in North America, especially Mennonites, under the auspices of the Muddy Creek Farm Library, which he founded with his wife, Nora, on their Ephrata farm in 1956. An important focus of Hoover's research has been the changes affecting Plain Mennonite groups in North America. These changes include several notable divisions, with progressives moving toward greater assimilation with the social mainstream while more tradition-minded groups attempt to check that trend.

According to Hoover, most of the major Mennonite splits have involved language, at least indirectly, a view that is well supported in this book. Since their arrival in colonial Pennsylvania in the early eighteenth century, Anabaptists, even the plainest among them, never lived in a social vacuum and were shaped by their interactions with other groups, including Protestant denominations, most of whom were English-speaking. The first Anabaptists in America used a form of standard German for worship and personal devotion and spoke regional German dialects, which eventually developed into the Pennsylvania Dutch language. Into the nineteenth century, formal education for children was conducted in German, though Mennonites and Amish also acquired a basic proficiency in written and spoken English. As some wanted to adopt the practices of their Protestant neighbors, including training their ministers formally, pursuing mission work, and establishing Sunday Schools, the adoption of English was essentially automatic, which Hoover laments: "[O]ur losses have been great by tossing our native tongue" (247).

It is the shift away from German among American Mennonites that Hoover examines in detail in his book, which is divided into eight parts. The three main

sections of the book—part II, “Personal Interviews, and Observations on Language Related Issues,” (35–137); part III, “Language Issues Mentioned in Previously Unpublished Documents,” (141–165); and part IV, “Language Issues Mentioned in Previously Published Sources,” 169–241)—are framed by two essays by Hoover, “Introduction to Language Transition among Mennonites” (15–28) and “The Author’s Summary on PA German” (247–252). The book concludes with brief “Biographical Sketches of Contributors to this Study” (253–275), a list of language-related materials held in the Muddy Creek Farm Library (277–282), and an index (283–311).

At the outset of his introductory essay (15), Hoover presents six major generalizations that are supported by the materials on language he shares in parts II, III, and IV. First, Plain Pennsylvania Dutch speakers have succeeded in maintaining a distinct sociolinguistic identity despite living in an English-speaking society. Second, the way that the Old Orders practice their faith is closely connected with the languages they use, as, for example, when they sing in either German or English. Third, the shift to using English has opened Mennonites to influences from “mainstream American Protestant theology.” Fourth, the ability to speak more than one language is beneficial to speakers, including by affording them access to a greater number of versions of the Bible. Fifth, language has played a role in most major divisions affecting Mennonite groups. Sixth, knowledge of Pennsylvania Dutch and German, including the old German script, is necessary for anyone interested in Old Order history.

The second part of the book is essentially a journal assembled by Hoover that includes hundreds of entries describing community events and conversations related to language use that he either observed or participated in between 1959 and 2017. Many entries include direct quotes in Pennsylvania Dutch or German that Hoover translates and comments on. Since a number of Hoover’s conversation partners were born in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries, their recollections cover more than a century of milestones in Mennonite (and Amish) language history. Collectively, the entries provide a wealth of support for the six generalizations Hoover makes in part I.

The same can be said for the material in parts III and IV, which are compilations of excerpts from unpublished and published sources that address language matters, including the undated essay by Elmo Stoll mentioned above (150–153). Here Hoover has provided a huge help to researchers, since most of the sources are obscure or otherwise difficult to access.

The scholarly value of Hoover’s book is considerable and its substance is complemented by several high-quality black-and-white and color images that grace its glossy and well-bound pages. Overall, this is an invaluable resource for anyone interested in the place of language in North American Anabaptist history.

University of Wisconsin–Madison

MARK L. LOUDEN

1 Corinthians. By Dan Nighswander. Believers Church Bible Commentary. Harrisonburg, Va.: Herald Press. 2017. \$ 29.99.

The Believers Church Bible Commentary series consists of scholarly but accessible commentaries, with specific but not exclusive attention to the implications of the study of the Bible for some of the issues and questions that arise or have arisen within Christian communities, especially within Anabaptist traditions. The author of this particular volume, Dan Nighswander, wrote a doctoral dissertation on Paul's use of shame in 1 Corinthians at the Toronto School of Theology in 1994. He has worked in a range of teaching and ministry positions both internationally and in North America, including service as general secretary for Mennonite Church Canada. Within each chapter of the commentary there is a section entitled "The Text in the Life of the Church," where the above-mentioned implications are discussed. Nighswander is thus able to draw from both his academic training and his diverse experience in ministry and leadership to explore these implications.

In the introduction, Nighswander provides a general description of the church in Corinth, including the geographic locale, Paul's relationship with the church, and the social make-up of the Christian assembly in the city. He shares the general view that this group of fifty to one hundred people consisted of people of mixed social levels; some of them were the "strong," that is, people of a higher status, while most were at the lower levels of society ("the weak"), including slaves. He includes an outline of the letter structure, and subsequently draws from Margaret Mitchell's rhetorical study of 1 Corinthians to assert that a) 1 Corinthians is one letter; and b) this letter has an overall argument focused upon the need for unity (1 Cor. 1:10). Nighswander thus joins other scholars in arguing that the purpose of 1 Corinthians is to bring reconciliation between members of the church in Corinth.

The commentary then proceeds following the overall letter structure (greeting and thanksgiving [1 Cor. 1:1-9], body [1 Cor. 1:10-15:58], letter closing [1 Cor. 16]); and there is a detailed outline at the end of the book). Each chapter offers a preview of the section under discussion, an outline, followed by explanatory notes on one or several verses. Subsequently there are sections on the text within the broader biblical context and within the life of the church; both of these latter sections are consistent features of the Believers Church Bible Commentary series as a whole, which make this series distinctive. The unit on the text in the life of the church sometimes has a final subsection on the use of the text in preaching and worship. Here Nighswander indicates whether the verses receiving attention in the chapter appear in the Revised Common Lectionary, which many Anabaptist churches use regularly.

Although Nighswander relies largely on Mitchell's rhetorical analysis of 1 Corinthians, the commentary does not engage rhetorical questions in a systematic manner.

Likewise, the study occasionally employs insights from social scientific approaches to Pauline literature, such as when it addresses the reversal of honor and shame in 1 Cor. 1: 26-31 (and there are short essays on topics such as "Honor and Shame" and "Patrons and Clients," among other subjects pertinent to 1 Corinthians, at the back of the book). Text critical and translation issues receive

attention, but not in great detail. The commentary also makes comparisons to texts and ideas in other Pauline letters, including to Deutero-Pauline texts such as Ephesians and Colossians. Nighswander takes the view that even if these letters were not written by Paul, they were written by his followers and were meant to represent the apostle's ideas. Nighswander also makes comparisons to the Pastoral Epistles, although he places them in italics, given that many interpreters question whether Paul wrote them.

The commentary does not present novel theses regarding 1 Corinthians itself; rather, the thrust of the book is on the significance of Paul's ideas and the struggles of the ancient church in Corinth for believers today, especially in Anabaptist circles. Given the latter aspect of the book, Nighswander not surprisingly engages particular texts, such as 1 Cor. 6:9-11; 11:2-16, and 14:34-36, with considerable care, arguing that context must be taken seriously when attempting to understand these texts. He points out that such texts do not answer directly the questions that are being asked or debated about same-sex attraction and women's roles and dress in the twenty-first century. When Nighswander addresses 1 Cor. 7—Paul's lengthy discussion of sexuality, virginity, and marriage—he explains Paul's position that celibacy was better than being sexually active, and he indicates that some of the Corinthians were adopting ascetic practices that were not always helpful (170-191). However, it would have been good to see more discussion of Paul's asceticism here, given how much scholarship has attended to this in recent years (and Nighswander draws from Dale B. Martin's *The Corinthian Body* [New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995], which elaborates considerably on Paul's antipathy towards desire, for example). Moreover, it is well known that self-control was a key Roman virtue, and Paul prizes it (1 Cor. 9:24-27). To be fair, Nighswander had to accomplish a lot in this commentary, but more attention to scholarship and the nuances and contextual features of Paul's thought would have enriched portions of the book.

Overall, however, this commentary will appeal to a broad audience, especially leaders and members in Anabaptist contexts who are seeking to deepen their understanding of Paul and of 1 Corinthians, and to reflect on how this ancient letter can be a source of wisdom today. I especially appreciated that at various points throughout the book, Nighswander indicates whether or not a passage from 1 Corinthians appears in the Revised Common Lectionary, and if so, what other readings are associated with it. When a passage does not appear in the Lectionary, Nighswander sometimes makes suggestions for how preachers and congregations should engage it.

Conrad Grebel University College, University of Waterloo

ALICIA J. BATTEN

Women Talking: A Novel. By Miriam Toews. Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Canada. 2018. \$29.95, Can.

As its prefatory "Note on the Novel" states, Miriam Toews's *Women Talking* is inspired by the rapes that occurred between 2005 and 2009 in a Bolivian Mennonite

colony and then resumed in 2013 even though the original perpetrators were imprisoned. The book takes place in June 2009 as women from two families who have been chosen as representatives for all of the colony's women discuss whether or not they should all leave the colony as a response to the violence against them. The decision must be made quickly, so that if they choose to go they can do so while the men are in "the city" trying to get the rapists released on bail (5). The novel consists of the minutes from the women's deliberations broken up into five chronological chapters which span the two days of the meeting.

The meeting minutes are being taken by a man, August Epp, because the colony does not teach its women to read or write. Toews takes poetic license here as, according to the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Bolivian Old Colony Mennonites educate girls through the age of 12. August is an outcast because he is single, because he is bad at farming, and because his parents were shunned when he was a child so he has just recently been allowed to return to the colony. He has also served prison time for stealing a horse that a cop was mistreating at a protest (143). The colony's men hate him, which is why the women trust him not to tell the men about their conversation. Although the women will be unable to read the minutes, they want them taken so they can be "an artifact for others to discover" (51). The women recognize the importance of witnessing to their experience; they recognize that their voices are valuable even though the men teach them otherwise. Similarly, *Women Talking* itself acts as a witness for the real-life women who were attacked. Therefore, whether the women's illiteracy in the novel is factually accurate or not is immaterial because its function is to symbolize the gender-based oppression both they and their real-life counterparts endure.

The novel begins with three illustrations (clouds over a field, a Mennonite woman and man facing off in a knife fight [!], and a horse's behind; see Figure 1) that correspond to the women's three possibilities: "1. Do Nothing. 2. Stay and Fight. 3. Leave" (6).

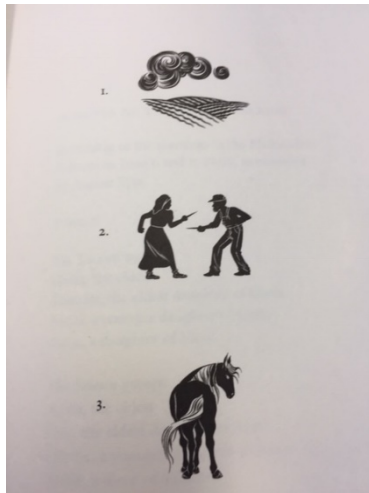


Figure 1.

Due to their lack of education the women know that “The only certainty [they]’ll know is uncertainty” if they leave, because they do not know where it is possible for them to go (53), but the alternative is that they will have to forgive the rapists or be excommunicated if they refuse. I will refrain from discussing the plot further so as not to spoil its conclusion, which, to Toews’s credit, is suspenseful and satisfying even though readers know from the very beginning the small list of possible outcomes. The eight women in the conversation each become vivid as individual characters through their words.

Toews is the premier Mennonite writer working today, and *Women Talking* solidifies this status. Its nomination for the 2018 Governor General’s Literary Award for Fiction, Canada’s highest literary prize (it lost to Sarah Henstra’s *The Red Word*), shows that it is an important literary accomplishment, not only an important Mennonite literary accomplishment. It is an aesthetically beautiful book that treats its difficult subject matter (and it is difficult, especially the first half, to the point where there were times when I wondered whether I would be able to finish it) with grace and kindness. While it is similar to Toews’s other Mennonite-related books (*Swing Low*, *A Complicated Kindness*, *Irma Voth*, and *All My Puny Sorrows*) in that it includes subjects such as suicide, the search for selfhood, and humor-infused anger about Mennonite repressiveness, it explores them in non-repetitive ways. It is an instant classic. Anyone interested in Mennonite thought should read it, scholars and laypeople alike.

But *Women Talking* is even more significant for its argument about the current state of Mennonitism in the Americas than for its aesthetic accomplishments. Despite failing to claim the Governor General’s Literary Award, it is Toews’s most important book, surpassing her 2004 winner, *A Complicated Kindness*, because of how, even though fiction, it is also a theological statement about Mennonites’ continued hypocrisy regarding pacifism, as we claim that war is wrong while we continue to tolerate domestic violence against spouses and children. In the novel, many of the rapists are family members of the women, and aside from the rapes themselves, there are numerous stories of men abusing women physically and psychologically. Mennonite literature has a long history of examining this issue, with writers such as Di Brandt and Patrick Friesen documenting it in their work from the 1980s. It is incredibly damning of the Mennonite community that instances of it are still available for Toews to write about. While the book takes place in Bolivia, and thus it might be tempting for North American readers to dissociate themselves from the troubles there, the same misogynist spirit that led to the rapes is present in actions such as some Mennonite theologians’ continued insistence on using John Howard Yoder in their work despite his extensively documented history of sexual predation. In other words, Toews’s novel implicates all of us Mennonite men in this hemisphere. Rather than being concerned about the issue of writing about a Mennonite group that she is not a part of, Toews’s decision to do so means that all of us who use the term “Mennonite” to identify ourselves in some way have an obligation to be concerned with each other. The novel thus acts as a call for unity as we work to eradicate the violence in our Mennonite community.

The book has the word "LOVE" embossed in the cardboard of its front cover and the word "ANGER" on its back cover, features that are easy to miss because it is necessary to remove the dust jacket to see them (see Figures 2 and 3).

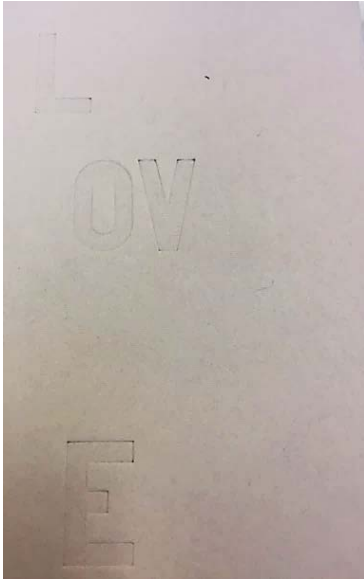


Figure 2.

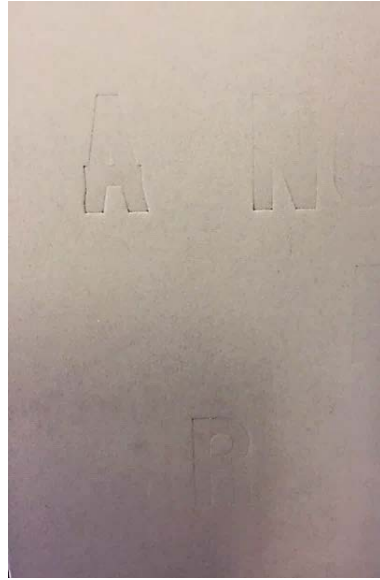


Figure 3.

These words represent *Women Talking's* message to the Mennonite community. It is a critique written with the hope that the community will get better rather than an outright rejection of it, simultaneously angry and loving. Ultimately, like the women, it affirms Mennonite ideals of "pacifism, love and forgiveness" (111), arguing that the possibility of change in the community exists. *Women Talking* is a polemical book--and thus this review may be more polemical than *MQR's* reviews usually are--and it is a necessary one. We would all do well to heed the lessons it teaches.

Utica College

DANIEL SHANK CRUZ

AUTHOR ADDRESSES

Maxwell Kennel. Apt. 303. 99 Church St., St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada,
L2R 3E1. E-mail: max.kennel@gmail.com.

Prof. Austin McCabe Juhnke. 3162 Indianola Ave, Apt D, Columbus, OH
43202. E-mail: austinmccabejuhnke@gmail.com.

Prof. C. Arnold Snyder. E-mail: arnold.snyder@gmail.com

Prof. Duane Stoltzfus, Dept. of Communication, Goshen College, 1700 S.
Main St., Goshen, IN 46526. E-mail: dstoltzfus@goshen.edu.