Mennonite Central Committee in Canada: A History. By Esther Epp-Tiessen. Winnipeg: CMU Press. 2013. Pp. 328. $29.50.

This history of Mennonite Central Committee Canada (M.C.C. Canada), sponsored by the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, was released to coincide with M.C.C. Canada's fiftieth anniversary. It is not an organizational autobiography, but rather, as Epp-Tiessen explains in the preface, an insider history. She has had a lifelong connection to M.C.C. Canada and Mennonite Central Committee (M.C.C.) as a donor, volunteer, and staff member. She benefited from an insider's access to the organization's "internal workings" (9), not only with a free run of its archives, but through a network of contacts to interview plus knowledge of conflicts and problems that were not fully spelled out in the written record. She acknowledges that she is more familiar with some parts of the M.C.C. Canada story—particularly that of Ontario and Manitoba, plus that of the Mennonite Church Canada constituency. She has been careful, though, to research areas in which she had less direct knowledge. She names movements for Christian feminism and nonviolent social justice, and especially indigenous justice, as influences on her thinking, together with post-colonial theory. This is evident in her occasional strictures on Mennonites' failure to see their role in the injustices of colonization. Her background and commitments appear more frequently in Epp-Tiessen's interpretation of M.C.C. Canada as an expression of Mennonite identity and in her exploration of the role of women in M.C.C. Canada, both of which I will take up below.

While Epp-Tiessen's preface may worry a casual reader, it shouldn't. The book's tone and organization are well suited to a general audience. The many small photos create an interesting visual history that supplements the textual one, and the headings make it easy to navigate within chapters. The author's self-positioning and the book's extensive research base, which will interest scholars, are reflected in Epp-Tiessen's careful narrative, especially visible in the book's opening pages and the final sixty pages of appendices, endnotes, bibliography, and index. As someone who, like the author, has a multi-generational connection to M.C.C. Canada and Mennonite Central Committee, I easily found in this history people I knew and programs or events in which they and I had taken part. A warm glow of satisfaction alternated with moments of vindication as her account confirmed and valorized bits of family tradition and personal memory. At the same time, I learned things I didn't know, ranging from the existence of M.C.C. programs for livelihood support in 1920s Siberia to the origin of the "To Remember is to Work for Peace" button I put on every November 11. Epp-Tiessen's chronicling of programs and individual contributions will doubtless allow others with a similar background to find their M.C.C. Canada connections, and her account will also provide fodder for family dinner debates at Canadian

Thanksgiving. Those who believed M.C.C. Canada did not use a long enough spoon when it supped at the Canadian International Development Agency (C.I.D.A.) table will find evidence to support their view, as will those who believed M.C.C. Canada lost its way by following fads in the relief and development sectors, rather than staying true to an evangelical faith. But so will those who argued that M.C.C. Canada (and M.C.C.) should focus on the roots of poverty and violence, addressing injustices both overseas and at home. Non-ethnic Mennonites and non-Mennonites who read this book will no doubt be left with questions about internal affairs, like the difference between a Swiss- and a Russian-Mennonite organizational culture, that Epp-Tiessen does not feel a need to explain.

Epp-Tiessen organizes her history with a life-cycle metaphor. Her section on M.C.C. Canada's gestation and birth deftly retells, from a Canadian perspective, the story of inter-Mennonite cooperation (and conflict) during the two world wars and the intervening Depression. Her section on the creation of M.C.C. Canada in 1963 is curiously brief; those interested in details are referred to her unpublished master's thesis and a 2001 book on J. J. Thiessen, which are not widely available. She focuses on M.C.C. Canada's youth and early adult years, with an extensive chapter on each of the decades between 1963 and 1993. To her credit, she names conflicts and problems as well as accomplishments. More problematically, she implies that M.C.C. Canada's organizational changes occurred in neat intervals of ten years. The decades of midlife crisis after 1993 receive less print, but more analysis, as Epp-Tiessen suggests reasons for the soul-searching, contraction, and redirection of that period. Her chapter on M.C.C. Canada's most recent decade revisits issues and trends that she argues have been present throughout the organization's history. She names the 2008-2010 New Wine/New Wineskins re-visioning process and C.I.D.A.'s 2011 rejection of a large M.C.C. Canada funding application as turning points whose significance are not yet clear.

I opened this book expecting not only the story of a "beloved and iconic" Mennonite institution (267), but also a history of a faith-based relief and development non-governmental organization. Epp-Tiessen's book joins a growing shelf of development histories that cover organizations ranging from U.N. agencies down to nongovernmental organizations, as well as a growing body of historical research on specific projects and programs. But Epp-Tiessen cites hardly any of this material, even items that discuss M.C.C. Her chapter on the 1973-1983 decade sums up in a few sentences the many changes that rocked development organizations as well as governments and communities around the world. The reaction—two decades in which neoliberal thought dominated the development landscape—is not mentioned at all. Changes in M.C.C. Canada during these tumultuous years are explained as the result of dynamic individuals in leadership positions or changes in its constituency. Some external influences were transmitted via chiding from C.I.D.A., but Epp-Tiessen does not explore other avenues. There is no mention, for example, of the role that the Canadian Council for International Cooperation's Code of Ethics discussions likely played on the communications code that M.C.C. Canada—a Canadian Council for International Cooperation member—adopted in 1994 (214). The effects of M.C.C.

Canada's participation in Canada's distinctive ecumenical coalition scene or the growing number of non-Mennonite volunteers and donors are other possibilities that deserve further study. For Epp-Tiessen, M.C.C. Canada and M.C.C. remain primarily a "ministry of Anabaptist churches" (256) and an expression of Mennonite "peoplehood," with "the best wisdom" of other development practitioners (256) influencing their structure and practice only belatedly and tangentially.

The great strength of Epp-Tiessen's history, and an important reason for both development historians and Mennonites to read it, is the consistent and organic inclusion of women in the organizational story. By way of contrast, the relief sale chapter of the M.C.C. history *Hungry, Thirsty, a Stranger* (Herald Press, 1988) does not even name the female author of the *More-with-Less* books, let alone the many women who organized and labored to make the sales possible. Epp-Tiessen's relief sale section highlights the organizational role of Margaret Brubacher and the essential contributions of women's groups. She also discusses the way that relief sale committees gave women a space for decision-making long before that was possible in other branches of M.C.C. Canada (93-95). Epp-Tiessen's chapters all open with vignettes of M.C.C. Canada activity, many of them involving women. Both the text and photos that follow document their roles as generators of resources, volunteers, and support staff, as well as their struggles to become full participants in M.C.C. Canada's decision-making bodies and to have their views incorporated into its structure and programming. A 1997 gender audit, she notes, found many areas where change was still needed (219-220). Lucille Marr's history of M.C.C. Ontario (Pandora Press, 2003) was an important precursor in the inclusion of women's stories. Epp-Tiessen's history has further raised the bar for Mennonite organizational historians and development historians.

Menno Simons College, Canadian Mennonite University RUTH REMPEL

Present Tense: A Mennonite Spirituality. By Gordon Houser. Telford, Pa.: Cascadia Publishing House. 2011. Pp. 173. $16.95.

In *Present Tense*, Gordon Houser—a lover of God, a steward of words, and a member of the Mennonite community—weaves a multilayered spirituality that calls us to be mindful and present to each moment with the gift and company of God-with-us and among-us in Jesus. This formative and autobiographical work of faith and practice provides readers a window into Mennonite spirituality in the world, as Houser offers a call to "yield our lives to God (and to one another) all the time, in each moment" (29). Houser takes something that is often a stepchild in ecclesial and academic circles—the experience of God—and places it at the center of Anabaptist practice.

The alliteratively-named chapters form a kind of quilt, a patchwork of "practice" involving "living out our beliefs" (31) and "living in the Spirit" (28) through "Patience," "Peace," "Politics," "Play," "Prayer," "Perfection," and

"Presence." Each chapter offers a defining or redefining of a practice that leads readers from the way of the world toward the way of Jesus in the world. The common thread, working to hold the pieces together, is *gelassenheit*, a multifaceted German word pointing to a yieldedness to God and to one another.

In our North American culture that separates work and play and in a Mennonite tradition that can herald a work ethic as synonymous with devotion to God, Houser's chapter on play is refreshing. He calls us away from a driven "penchant for productivity or pragmatism" (93) and "dominance of our ego" (107) toward a freedom of interplay, of dancing with God in which we "lose ourselves, to join others, . . . each of us performing our steps in time to the music" (101). This is the *gelassenheit* of play, losing our self-consciousness through the mystery of self-surrender as we are fully present in the moment (97).

The chapter on politics is one of the strongest. Here, drawing upon the influence of John Howard Yoder's *Politics of Jesus,* a text that attracted him into the Mennonite community as a young adult, Houser explores his experience of living in intentional community in Newton, Kansas. That to which Yoder calls us, Houser practices. The spiritual practice of politics departs from the politics of this world toward a politics of Jesus in the "workings of a community of people making decisions together to carry out their goals, the kind of life they've set for themselves" (78). This is the *gelassenheit* of politics, lived in community where "We cannot follow Jesus alone" (91). With this vulnerable and earnest exposition of community life, which we read today over against the revelations of Yoder's practice, *Present Tense* places spiritual experience as foundational to theological discernment and understanding. How we are part of a community matters.

Houser does not write as a scholar in the field of spirituality—something he freely admits. He writes as one among others who are also seeking a deeper spirituality, inviting us into his own experience. Drawn to faith through hearing Billy Graham on television, Houser was introduced to Mennonite practice when, as an adult, he returned to his hometown of Emporia, Kansas, after it had been struck by a tornado. There he found himself working side by side with members of the Mennonite Disaster Service, who impressed him with their sacrifice and dogged determination.

Houser's common approach becomes the book's strength. In the midst of a sea change in the world and in the church, the field of spirituality is abounding. Look in a bookstore, do a web-search, or listen to a young adult describe that she is "spiritual, but not religious," and one finds a significant hunger in contemporary culture for something or someone beyond oneself. Houser beckons his reader to accompany him as he explores the complex quilt of his own deepening spiritually-formative journey in a fashion that can be of value to not only Mennonites on a similar journey, but also to seekers who are attracted or curious about Mennonite faith, as well as those who take a more skeptical approach. At the same time, the text offers Mennonite scholars an opportunity to engage the struggle of spiritual journey, where God's spirit is active among God's people.

Like the field of spirituality itself, which can be messy and muddled, Houser's approach does not track a straight path. It winds through its patchwork of

spiritually-formative practices and life-is-messy experiences, in an attempt to form a sacred quilt to which we, too, can be drawn and challenged. As a reader, it is easy to get lost in the frayed edges of the pieces of spiritual practices that Houser works to bring together into a coherent whole. In Houser's desire to integrate spiritual practice with life in the world and life in the world with spiritual practice, he leads his reader in multiple directions at the same time. It is complex to articulate the ineffable, especially as we are engaged in it. To be sure, experiences do not follow a linear approach and spiritual practices are interrelated. Yet, an orientation into how spiritual practices build upon one another, how spiritual practices interrelate with beliefs in different ways during the Christian journey, and what this reveals to us about our growing relationship to God, self, and others, would make this text a stronger guide amid the ineffability.

The text could also have benefited from Houser's lingering with the spiritual guides who have influenced him for a more sustained conversation, as well as a deeper and wider encounter with sources in the Mennonite tradition. We do get glimpses of both. For example, Houser references John Rempel's work on Anabaptist understandings of the Lord's Supper, yet absent are other voices being discovered from within the early Anabaptist tradition, such as Rempel's work with Pilgram Marpeck. This work could help recover a rich sacramental theology that intersects profoundly with the very work that Houser is doing.

Present Tense offers a gift to the church. With his vulnerability, love, and passion, Houser reveals how God is moving through a particular life and the life of the surrounding Mennonite community to which he yields again and again, and the struggle to piece together the complex array of spiritualties amid deeper longings. This experience of the in-breaking of God, which Anabaptists hold so dear, has often been relegated as second-order theology. *Present Tense* serves as a charge to the church to rid itself of the boundaries between mind and body that have hindered such journeys, and invites the academy to enter the conversation about the place of such experience within critical theological reflection. It is an invitation that the church and the academy ignore at their own peril.

Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University HEIDI A. MILLER

The Trace of the Face in the Politics of Jesus: Experimental Comparisons Between the Work of John Howard Yoder and Emmanuel Levinas. By John Patrick Koyles. Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick Publications. 2013. Pp. 150. $18.

John Patrick Koyles's book on John Howard Yoder and Emmanuel Levinas was released in 2013, the same year in which my own book of Yoder-influenced essays appeared.[1] Thinking about how to go on with (or without) John Howard Yoder's thought has become even more painful since then, as both his history of

1. Peter C. Blum, *For a Church to Come: Experiments in Postmodern Theory and Anabaptist Thought* (Herald Press, 2013).

abusive behavior and the rationale that fanned its flames have been documented and discussed with increasing detail.[2] In such a context, one might understandably want to eschew further attention to Yoder's work. Even Yoder himself often emphasized that he was drawing together insights from others, downplaying his own originality, so why not just go elsewhere? Is a project like that undertaken by Koyles, which brings Yoder into conversation with one of the most influential ethical thinkers of the twentieth century, perhaps drained of its importance?

On the contrary, I would suggest that Koyles's reflections take on a deeper resonance, given the chasm we find between Yoder's intellectual prowess and stature on the one hand, and his moral failure on the other. Suppose that we phrase the question like this: How can we continue to take Yoder's thought seriously, precisely by looking for blind-spots in his work that may have aided and abetted his more obvious blindness to the harm that his behavior did to others, especially to the women who were his victims? Although this is not the animating question for Koyles, his book provides experimental soundings that are relevant for consideration.

At the most general level, I commend Koyles on what is one of the most accessible short introductions to Yoder's thought that I have encountered. Beyond this, his treatment of selected criticisms of Yoder by other Anabaptist thinkers is illuminating and insightful. His nuanced treatments of such friendly critics of Yoder as Stanley Hauerwas and Chris Heubner are well worth considering in themselves. But they also chart a particular course toward articulating what Koyles takes to be the point of contact between Yoder and Levinas, the concept of *kenosis* (self-emptying), and toward the clarification of responsibility for the Other that is central for both. I take Koyles to be arguing basically that the concept of *kenosis*, as illuminated by reading *between* Yoder and Levinas, can open deeper and more fruitful reflections on the implications of self-emptying and "revolutionary subordination" than are prompted by Yoder's texts alone. Part of what is apparently indicated by "experimental" in Koyles's title is that the point of contact is more the subject of preliminary charting than exhaustive development. Nonetheless, the journey to that point is interesting and provocative.

Quite apart from how one might judge the success of Koyles's reading of *kenosis* between the two thinkers, I believe that his strategy brings his discussion into proximity with fundamental questions regarding human action, questions that are generally not thematized either in Yoder's texts or in other Anabaptist-Mennonite ethical reflection. Koyles rightly emphasizes in his discussion that there are multiple ways in which Levinas is read. But the problems that arise in reading Levinas are more deep and troublesome even than Koyles indicates. In particular, there are fundamental ways in which the character of human action is left implicit and potentially confused in all of the texts with which he deals, thus

2 At the center of an explosion of discussion that same year (2013) was the online appearance of Ruth E. Krall, *The Mennonite Church and John Howard Yoder (The Elephants in God's Living Room*, Volume 3): http://ruthkrall.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/The-Elephants-in-God%E2%80%99s-Living-Room-Vol-3-%C2%A9.pdf.

infecting his text as well. Still, the level at which Koyles is working in his comparative study seems much closer to rendering this problem explicit than other discussions I have encountered.

One of the biggest problems giving rise to diverging readings of Levinas is the tendency to map his discourse onto superficially similar views that are actually more voluntarist or decisionist (i.e., "existentialist"). As I have taught Levinas over the years, I have found that both my students and I constantly slide into reading Levinas as a sort of existentialist. Even when one realizes that his phenomenological reflections all take place at a level anterior to, or "before," individual choice or commitment, the tendency is very difficult to resist.[3] Levinas is emphatically not Soren Kierkegaard or Martin Buber (or, by admittedly complicated extension, Karl Barth). He is much closer to the complex view of agency and freedom issuing from G. W. F. Hegel (by way of Martin Heidegger). My sense is that the responsibility for the Other in Levinas is situated very differently from that in Yoder, in terms of how such responsibility is *given* or *taken*. (And is that ''or'' an exclusive one?)

This is a question not only about freedom and will, but also about the very notion of normative force. Contemporary tensions among Mennonites make it clear that we are dealing with a plurality of conceptualizations of authority (most of them probably implicit and more or less ill-defined). Koyles seems to me to display an appropriate mixture of enthusiasm and suspicion regarding Yoder's well-known resistance to theoretico-methodological closure, to what he called "methodologism." Whatever good there may be in the latter, it surely did not prompt Yoder toward extensive discussion of the ontology or epistemology of the normative. But Levinas's contribution here is also quite complex. Many seem to read him as providing an account of the Other that somehow renders the legitimacy of its demand intelligible, thus providing it with an "argument" in some sense, or with philosophical warrant. It seems more accurate to me to say that Levinas provides a phenomenology of the situation in which we find that normativity has become an issue, and then explores the "agonistics" of that situation, between Athens and Jerusalem but also in the shadow of the Holocaust.[4] But however one reads Yoder and Levinas in this regard, Koyles's book performatively suggests that we should not be hasty in abandoning this dig.

So, my recommendation is that readers of Yoder, bringing their struggles with the indelible stains on his legacy, might read Koyles's book at two levels. Do read it at the level of Koyles's own competent treatment of the literature, watching for insights both within and overflowing from his argumentative itinerary. A number of specific discussions in the book have gone unmentioned here though they are worth the time, a major example being his consideration of feminist readings of Levinas. But read the book also at the level of what might be *shown* (or "unconcealed") rather than said (i.e., written), at the level where Levinas's

3. This problem is touched upon in my own discussion of Levinas, but only peripherally.—Blum, *For a Church to Come*, chap. 4.

4. Compare my approach in chap. 9 of *For a Church to Come.* A book I wish I had read earlier is Diane Perpich, *The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas* (Stanford, 2008).

thought might hit some facets of Yoder like a tuning fork ("hammer" in Nietzsche) taken to our idols.

Hillsdale College PETER C. BLUM

The Jesus Factor in Peacemaking. By C. Norman Kraus. Telford, Pa.: Cascadia Publishing House. 2011. 125 pp. $12.95.

C. Norman Kraus is a professor emeritus of Bible and religion at Goshen College. A Mennonite theologian, Kraus has been writing for the church since his first book was published in 1958. *The Jesus Factor* continues themes from his earlier writing, notably in *Using Scripture in a Global Age* (Cascadia, 2006), in which he argued for understanding the Bible not as a literal instruction book, but as a guide for contextualizing contemporary topics. Additionally, he addressed the theme of interfaith engagement across cultures in *An Intrusive Gospel: Christian Mission in the Postmodern World* (Intervarsity Press, 1998). In *The Jesus Factor*, Kraus expands these ideas by challenging Christian mainstream conceptions of peace and of peacemaking, which range from peace as personal spiritual well-being to peace as an imperialistic socio-political status achieved through force. Kraus's alternative is the *Jesus Factor*, or Jesus' "style" of peacemaking.

Jesus' style, according to Kraus, was anchored in a worldview and theology of the Hebrew context. The Hebrew God was creator and sustainer of the universe who "created humanity with dignity and for themselves and the earth," in which humans are accountable for the "mutual well-being of each other in community" (30). However, Jesus changed this paradigm in two ways. First, Kraus contends, Jesus saw God as impartial and universally available regardless of human cultural religious identities (Jesus is not exclusively for Christians). Second, while Jesus still understood the Hebrew *shalom* to be "neighbors living in peace and social well-being under God's covenant" (31), his definition of "neighbor" expanded to include *enemy.* These subtle but radical changes, Kraus argues, brought about a new style of peacemaking that was nonviolent and focused on love, compassion, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

Throughout the book, Kraus highlights the distinctions between Jesus' historical reality and our own to help clarify what roles Jesus was calling for then, and how these may be applied now. He presents topics that relate to Jesus' approach, including religious pluralism, concepts of "kingdom," cultural and religious traditions, Israel's view of God, the Mosaic law, and definitions of vindication. Throughout this section, Kraus contends that although Jesus did not give specific guidance on how to work toward peace, he did provide "a basic pattern or framework of spiritual assumptions, and moral perspectives within which to work at approaches and strategies to modern peacemaking" (30).

For Kraus, the application of this framework assumes the example of Jesus who rejected the use of violence and who pursued justice. Just as Jesus acted as a "sojourner" in his political and social context, Kraus argues that contemporary

peacemakers are charged to favor human well-being over institutional allegiance, regardless of their religious, cultural, institutional, or national identities. Kraus adds that Jesus' style implies that his metaphor of "the kingdom of God" stands for transformational social possibility in general, not for a political world order or an institutional religious one. Kraus wraps up his book by highlighting seven additional ways that Jesus' approach to peacemaking is essential for peacemaking today (112).

The Jesus Factor makes a contribution not only to the fields of theology and religious studies through careful biblical inquiry, but also to the broader social sciences by initiating a difficult discussion on the sometimes tense distinction between human agency and God's agency. Kraus's presentation of a nonviolent Jesus narrative will also be challenging to those who espouse any of the Christian mainstream understandings of peace, or those for whom Jesus represents exclusive access to God, or those who are uneasy with interfaith engagement. At the same time, Kraus's expectation for the social science disciplines to be more inclusive of Christ-centered approaches to peacemaking may be challenging to non-Christian peace practitioners.

Since I am a social scientist and peacebuilding practitioner and scholar, any concerns I may have about Kraus's arguments are less important than the universal vision of peacebuilding and justice Kraus outlines. This vision, based on concepts of *shalom*, justice, and inclusion, is foundational to the peacebuilding approaches that I study, practice, and teach. Kraus writes with a straightforward style that is accessible even to those who, like me, are not theologians. Though he writes simply and clearly for a broad audience, there are occasions where he assumes a deeper knowledge than may be warranted (e.g., theological and historical definitions such as Mosaic law; knowledge of social movements like Gandhi's; or familiarity with other religious perspectives, including Buddhism and Judaism).

Kraus has succeeded in laying out a new vision of Jesus as a nonviolent peace and justice activist wholly reliant on God's transformational power. It remains to be seen if the challenge to the mainstream religious and political establishment and to the field of peacebuilding is an invitation to conversation that is accepted or ignored. While this vision fits with my own faith and values framework as an Anabaptist pacifist, I hope those who disagree will read the book and enter into the discussion.

Peacemakers and peacebuilders are often judged by whether or not they "walk their talk." In this book, Kraus describes a style of justice and peacemaking that challenges all who seek to understand the biblical implications for our work to "talk our walk." We'll see if others will pick up the challenge.

Eastern Mennonite University GLORIA RHODES

Christ, Power and Mammon: Karl Barth and John Howard Yoder in Dialogue. By Scott Thomas Prather. London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark. 2013. Pp. 299. $130.

In *The Politics of Jesus*, John Howard Yoder famously upbraided dominant accounts of Christian ethics that set aside Jesus' political ethic as normative. Various scholars of Yoder's work have sought to identify the sources of his concrete Christology, with growing attention given to the relationship between Yoder and his teacher, Karl Barth. Although Scott Prather highlights the deep continuities between Yoder and Barth, in *Christ, Power and Mammon* he uses Yoder to nuance and correct Barth's own tendencies to evade the demands of Jesus' politics. As such, this book might be seen as primarily a contribution to Barth studies, and Prather indeed construes his work as a challenge to the apoliticism of much of the Anglo-American evangelical wing of that field (4–5, 223). But Prather's book is much more than a call to arms for Barthians. It is a thoroughly theological "exousiology"—a theology of the *exousia* (powers or authorities)—that calls all Christians to a communal being-in-discernment centered on solidarity with the oppressed.

Prather's primary goal, then, is to put Barth's and Yoder's theologies of the principalities and powers into conversation in order to demonstrate the importance of a theological description of contemporary social and political realities (6). By doing this, he hopes to show the analytical purchase of "powers" language *as theology*, and not simply as an analogical launching pad to social scientific analysis (76). The engagement with Barth and Yoder occupies the first four chapters, allowing Prather to develop a rich exousiology rooted in his Yoderian renovation of Barthian dogmatics. He then turns in a final chapter to an exousiological investigation of Mammon, giving special attention to "disaster capitalism" as displayed in Hurricane-Katrina-ravaged New Orleans.

Prather begins *Christ, Power and Mammon* by setting forth Barth's theology of the powers as created and fallen. In Barth's political writings and in the volumes of the *Church Dogmatics* on the doctrine of creation, he describes the state and other institutions as angelic powers whose function is to serve humanity by promoting justice. By abandoning their divine charter and fostering injustice, the angelic powers become demonic. Barth's attempt to renew Augustine's so-called "privation theory of evil" as a theological account of the power of "nothingness" (*das Nichtige*) comes into play here, as it allows Barth to name the fallenness of the powers as secondary to their ontological determination as divinely ordained servants. This perspective informs Barth's final writing on the powers, the section on the "lordless powers" in *The Christian Life*. Given Barth's conviction that Christ is lord over all, the powers' lordlessness is, of course, illusory.

In his analysis of Barth's eschatology, Prather identifies the shortcomings of Barth's approach. While agreeing with Barth that basic Christian theological commitments require one to affirm the ontological contingency of sin and evil, Prather contends that Barth's privative ontology fails to grapple with the devastating power of the fallen powers. Barth's concern to underscore the ephemeral ontological status of evil leads him to view Christian resistance as resistance to this ontological status as a whole and to underplay the need for

concrete resistance to (and, at times, collaboration with) specific powers in the here and now. Moreover, because Barth views the fallen powers' power as deriving from personal human attitudes and practices, he is unable to capture the ways in which they exceed and exert pressure on humans. Barth, according to Prather, remains with a largely epistemic account of sin and salvation: humans under the fallen powers' rule are "confused" about life's ground and goal; and knowledge of its true ground and goal—knowledge of the Word-made-flesh—dispels this confusion. Prather wants a less individualistic, more sociopolitical, powers theology, and for that he turns to Yoder.

Yoder's exousiology coincides with Barth's insofar as it describes the powers as created to be the "good" constitutive structures of reality. Yoder further maintains that the powers' fallenness consists in their oppressive deviation from their created purpose, and views the human response to them as part of Christ's redemptive work. For Prather, Yoder is far clearer than Barth in each stage of his powers theology that the powers are suprahuman sociopolitical realities. These realities shape human existence for good or ill; and human sociopolitical action may shape them for good or ill. Because being human being is bound up with the powers, redemption is, for Yoder, intrinsically sociopolitical. Christian and other Jesus-shaped political action is redemptive; it realizes the one rule that is creation's source and destiny: the reign of God.

On Prather's reading, the singularity, comprehensiveness, and finality of Christ's lordship as achieved in his death and resurrection means that Christians should expect to find such witnesses to God's reign abroad, even as they seek to embody this witness in communal form as the church. "Church" then names the body that discerns the moral shape of specific powers as it learns from and joins other bodies incarnating Jesus' politics—intentionally or not—of tending to broken, hungry, and isolated bodies. A final difference Prather names between Barth and Yoder is related to this unity of political witness: Barth's inclusion of "the state" as such in the order of redemption posits an alternative political embodiment of redemption that is not finally informed by Jesus' politics. Prather argues instead that some states, or at least some aspects of some states, might be redeeming insofar as they protect the oppressed, but such judgment is reserved for practical Christian discernment.

Having so revised Barth's powers theology with Yoder's, Prather turns in a final chapter to naming the contemporary powers of Mammon. Here William Stringfellow's and Jacques Ellul's writings on Mammon are put alongside Barth's "socialist" writings in order to convey the interrelationship between politics and economics as dominating, oppressive forces, and to demand practical resistance to these forces. A concluding meditation on Hurricane Katrina directs our attention to the ways the havoc unleashed in New Orleans was not the result of a "natural disaster," but rather was the outworking of long developing patterns of racism and classism bound up in imperialist-capitalist logics. These logics were laid bare in Katrina's aftermath, as the poor and persons of color were abandoned, displaced, and imprisoned to make way for "cleanup" efforts and economic renewal. Allegiance to Christ's lordship, Prather suggests, will involve

solidarity with these marginalized persons and resistance to the forces of disaster capitalism.

Considering how disaster capitalism disproportionately harms women, Prather might have incorporated an account of gender power into his theological naming of Mammon and resistance to it. Katrina, for example, hit a city in which poverty rates were significantly higher for women than for men. It was largely women—by a margin of almost four to one—who were left behind to deal with the storm, after which they were subject to a major spike in sexual and domestic violence (as is common after disasters). Finally, it is women who have been disproportionately affected by the post-Katrina destruction of public services, including public housing, since women are more likely to use those services.[5] Any description of disaster capitalism must examine the ways in which gender intersects with the racial and class dynamics that Prather rightly names.

The need for such a gendered account of disaster capitalism, and indeed of the powers as such, is all the more pressing given Prather's sources. For all its merits, *Christ, Power and Mammon* is a dialogue between men whose power wounded and marginalized women in word and deed. Solidarity with these women, and with all women and men whose being has been misshaped by patriarchy, racism, and economic exploitation, requires listening to women's testimonies of abuse, attending to their specifications of power, and participating in their resistance efforts. Such is the work of redemption.

Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary JAMIE PITTS

The Violence of Scripture: Overcoming the Old Testament's Troubling Legacy. By Eric A. Seibert. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. 2012. Pp.220. $23.

I remember the day I discovered that God was as violent and scary as the wicked witch in Hansel and Gretel who threatened to eat them alive. Maybe worse. Sister Helmuth, our Sunday School teacher, read the flood story (Gen. 6) with gusto: "And God said to Noah, 'I will destroy everything that I created from the face of the earth; every person, beast, and creeping thing, and every bird. . . everything that breathes!'" With a *tsk* and an ever so slight nod she concluded, "What terrible things happen when people sin." From that moment to this, for me and countless others, "the troubling legacy" of *The Violence of Scripture* has not easily been overcome, rainbow-endings notwithstanding. Eric A. Seibert, an associate professor of Old Testament at Messiah College, hopes to remedy that.

Already in his earlier book, *Disturbing Divine Behavior*: *Troubling Old Testament Images of God* (Fortress, 2009), Seibert tackled problematic portrayals of God revealed in our childhood Bible stories found in the most surface readings of Scripture. In many respects, *Violence of Scripture* serves as a sequel.

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5. See Laura Butterbaugh, "Why Did Hurricane Katrina Hit Women So Hard?" *Off Our Backs* 35, no. 9/10 (Sept.-Oct. 2005), 17–19, and Institute for Women's Policy Research, "Women, Disasters, and Hurricane Katrina" (Aug. 2010), http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/women-disasters-and-hurricane-katrina on Sept. 7, 2014.

Violence of Scripture is divided into three parts with an introduction that anticipates well the argument to follow in the rest of the book. In the introduction, Seibert also makes transparent his potential biases—or, better said, the assumptions from which he reads, understands, and promotes his main premise that "the Bible should never be used to inspire, promote, or justify acts of violence" (2). One might also include his personal Christian pacifist biography. Much later in the book Seibert also clarifies that while he does not engage in any extensive theoretical or methodological discussion" per se (74), those familiar with biblical scholarship will recognize his use of an eclectic batch of postmodern critical approaches, including "readers-response criticism, feminist criticism, postcolonial criticism, ideological criticism, and deconstruction" (74). What is self-evident for me, however, is that the baseline method used by Seibert is that of readers-response criticism, all other approaches subsumed under the category of "reading strategies" (74). Indeed, the central thesis of the book hinges on the evident "danger of *reading* the Bible" in certain ways. So, for Seibert, his overarching goal is to "encourage people to *read* the Old Testament more ethically," (6) that is, to *read* it "nonviolently" (5).

Part one reiterates the troubling legacy of violence in the Old Testament and the danger that "violence-friendly" sacred texts pose for justifying genocide, war, abuse, and other cruelties. Seibert provides plenty of examples in history where such violence is justified by direct appeals to what are now widely described as biblical "texts of terror." For those counting, the Old Testament contains thousands of verses of explicit violence and hundreds more in which God commands others to kill. In some cases, they are directed by God "to show no mercy" ruthlessly killing "everything that breathes" (Deut. 7:1-2). Still other texts show God killing for seemingly nonsensical reasons. The capacity for escalating human violence seems only a mirrored reflection of God's own capacity for violence. In a perverse (or is it ironic?) expression of humans being fashioned in the image of God, the flood story recounts the human capacity for violence as mirrored in God's own ruthlessness: "And God said to Noah, 'The end of all flesh has come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them from the face of the earth" (Gen. 6:11,13). Seibert worries about such pervasive violence, especially when violence is viewed in Scripture as "virtuous," that is, positively "appropriate, justified, and, perhaps even praiseworthy" (28). "Do violent texts lead to violent acts?" asks Seibert. After citing mounting evidence he concludes, "it is hard to deny that a real and significant link exists between textual and actual violence" (52). Having outlined the violent-laced "troubling legacy" of the Old Testament, Seibert is ready to lead Bible readers from being mere "compliant readers" of Scripture (a dangerous posture) to being engaged or "conversant readers" (56).

Part two is, in effect, a how-to manual for learning how to become "ethically responsible readers" (61) by "reading the Bible nonviolently" (73). Seibert offers three general reading habits, three guidelines for ethical critique of violent texts, and five steps in reading nonviolently. He proposes developing reading habits that actively engage texts with probing questions and ethical critique, rather than reading passively and uncritically. One should not simply read texts, especially violent ones, at face value. For example, if we read the accounts of the "conquest

of the promised land" in Joshua 6-11 uncritically, does it not endorse genocide of indigenous populations and confiscation of their homeland? Seibert suggests it is ethically irresponsible to read such a text passively and without critical engagement (95). So by what criteria might one engage such a text?

One should read violent texts using as critical guide "the rule of love for God and others" (67); with "a commitment to justice" (68); and "valuing all of life consistently" (69). Indeed, one must always name the violence in a text, never ignoring it. The reader needs to analyze who is committing the violence (God or someone else?); who is being hurt by it? what are the motives of the perpetrator of violence?; and so forth. Seibert then offers another list of ways to critique the violence of a text. Perhaps, he suggests, the violent story is told as parody or with irony so as to actually criticize the violent content, as if to ask the reader, "See where such violence leads?" For example, I think the selection of judges whose stories are actually told in the Book of Judges is an anti-hero parody of the judge-warrior mythologies of the time and an alternative account to the Book of Joshua's virulent conquest motif. Judge Ehud is disabled and dies on the toilet. Deborah is an atypical judge of the time, a *woman* warrior. Judge Gideon wins his battle by scaling the size of his army way back to a small group of dog-lappers. Abimelech is killed by a woman dropping a stone on his head. Judge Jephthah makes an impulsive oath, and judge Samson is a muscle-bound dullard who commits hari-kari. Not your typical war manual by *any* stretch. It's as if the writer is answering his own introductory statements in Judges 3 that the story he is about to tell is to teach successive generations the realities of war; that is, winning war has little to do with human prowess and leads ultimately to disaster. Taken together with the whole account of the Former Prophets (Joshua through II Kings), the canon-shapers of Scripture seem to be arguing that the story of warfare, violence, and kingdom-building ends badly with the destruction of the temple, and the utter loss of two kingdoms, including the Davidic dynasty and the annihilation and exile of God's people.

And so Seibert concludes that in addition to critical analysis of the perspective of individual texts, one must also be aware of those texts of Scripture that outright condemn other violent biblical texts —text against text, as it were (80). Does not the peaceful vision of the famous plowshare passage in Isaiah 2:2-4 explicitly contradict the violent plowshare passage of Joel 3:9-10. So, which is it? The discerning reader—the engaged reader, the ethically responsible reader—Seibert would say, must choose Isaiah's version to guide our practice, lest Joel's account lead to violent self-destruction.

To read the Bible nonviolently also requires the reader to side with the victims of violence (81); to consider how such stories may influence a child's view of the world (for example, the ark story) (82); to read from the margins of society (85); and to read with an appeal to accepted standards of morality (86). All of these reading strategies are efforts in sorting, critiquing, and ultimately transcending the "troubling legacy" of the violence of Scripture.

Seibert turns in part three to applying his nonviolent readings to three of the most vexing problems associated with the Old Testament's "texts of terror": genocide, war, and violence against women. Using his nonviolent reading

strategies outlined in part two, Seibert provides the reader with a substantive critique of the conquest narratives in Joshua against genocide, argues against using the Old Testament to justify war, and bluntly challenges biblical texts that are misogynistic, sexist, and outright abusive toward women. At a minimum, these texts are useful as conversation starters about what not to do, and important historical memory markers lest we forget the past and repeat it.

Clearly, Seibert's approach raises questions for many as to how one understands the Bible as God's word, an authoritative guide for faith and practice. Seibert recognizes this concern in the opening pages of this book and addresses them in an excellent "brief word about biblical authority" (159) in an appendix.

I commend this book to anyone interested in learning how to understand, interpret, and overcome the Old Testament's troubling legacy of violence. When read as a standalone volume, the book could have used stronger editing, especially in the middle how-to section, where the lists-within-lists-within-steps-within-more-steps tended to overwhelm even a seasoned reader trying to keep track of the process. As a sequel to Seibert's earlier work *Disturbing Divine Behavior* (2009), which was a tour-de-force, this volume can, at times, seem slightly redundant given the overlap of subject matter. As a teacher and student of the Older Testament, I so appreciate that the author asserts that any study of violence in Scripture must include New Testament violence, as well, a fact often piously overlooked by most Bible readers. In that spirit, he has left open the door for a possible third and welcomed volume in a trilogy on *The Violence of* the Whole *Scripture,* both New and Old Testaments.

Goshen College JAMES E. BRENNEMAN

Renewing Identity and Mission: Mennonite Brethren Reflections After 150 Years. Abe J. Dueck, Bruce L. Guenther, and Doug Heidebrecht, eds. Winnipeg, Man.: Kindred Productions. 2011. Pp. 314. $23.99.

At least three books of essays appeared to mark the 150th anniversary (2010) of the beginning of the Mennonite Brethren (M.B.). Reviewing this one, especially in light of the 2002 dissolution of the North American M.B. Conference into Canadian and U.S. national bodies, encourages one to probe how the globalization of Mennonites reframes issues.

The Mennonite Brethren have become a more global Mennonite denomination in the past fifty years, but a missionizing style was evident from the beginning. The denomination emerged in 1860 out of dissatisfaction with the spiritual drift in the Russian Mennonite colonies, and out of the impact of Pietist renewal that had by then become a widespread movement inside the Russian Empire. This "religion of the heart" was essentially irenic and ecumenical in its intent and evoked some resistance in established circles, but its pervasive style of influence through traveling preachers, books, tracts, and hymnody made it widely influential, including among Mennonites. For Mennonites in Swiss, German, French, Dutch, and Prussian territories, Pietism stimulated financial

and prayer support for the new British Baptist Mission Society and it was a factor in the emergence of the Dutch Mennonite Mission Society in 1851. Within a decade missionaries from the Russian Mennonite colonies had begun serving with that mission.

The emergence of the Mennonite Brethren in 1860 was the culmination of struggles with Mennonite colony leaders in specific Russian Mennonite regions, who resisted its emotional excess, exacerbated by colony managers worried about a potential breakup of the colony structures that could signal the end of the Mennonites' special status. Indeed, it was tsarist state intervention in 1862 that made possible the sharing of colony life by two Mennonites groups—older *Kirchliche* Mennonite and newer Mennonite Brethren—while also forming denominationally separate religious bodies. There had been earlier renewal and separatist movements among Russian Mennonites, but they had not been as threatening as the Mennonite Brethren schism. M.B.s were perceived as a special threat, thanks to their closer ties to Baptist movements of indigenous origin that the tsarist state persecuted until at least 1906.

Still other comparative background observations help us understand the renewed M.B. movement and its "renewed identity and mission" search in 2010. At the group's centennial, in 1960, M.B.'s could draw on German language histories of earlier vintage. One group of historians decided to translate into English the famous history of the Russian Mennonites by P.M. Friesen, which had appeared in German in Russia in 1912. Its eventual appearance in 1978 as *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia* was an expression of the scholarly revival of M.B. historical consciousness, following the publication of an official scholarly history of the Mennonite Brethren by John A. Toews, timed for the 450th anniversary of the Anabaptist movement in 1975. Since then there have been frequent gatherings of M.B. historians, missiologists, and related scholars, who, among other things, aggressively fostered a "recovery of the Anabaptist vision" to counter the dominance of evangelicalism (and its patriotism) among highly Americanized M.B. churches. Meanwhile, M.B. churches matured around the world, developed global structures, and generally participated actively in Mennonite World Conference, to the degree that in 2009, César Garcia, a Colombian Mennonite Brethren, had been appointed general secretary of the world body.

The volume on *Renewing Identity and Mission* for Mennonite Brethren is particularly interesting for what it addresses and how the chapters cover the issues, and scholars will consult the volume's sources and footnotes for some time hereafter. It is obvious that the contributors not only work professionally, but as deeply engaged church members with a mandate to probe and push. Its limitations are that the contributors were mostly Americans or Canadians, except for the keynote speech by Alfred Neufeld of Paraguay.

The book is divided into three parts: historical, theological, and missional reflections. The historical section contains an overview by Valerie G. Rempel of key M.B. histories to show the shifting historiography, noting how much the latest works appropriate the impact of cultural shifts. Rempel encapsulated it as "the delicate dance between assimilation and boundary maintenance" (42). Two

chapters present critical surveys of North American identities as Evangelical and Anabaptist, and of the history of revisiting M.B. origins (though without noting recent European and Slavic scholars). Two other chapters with most interesting information are on M.B. hymnody and on "Passing on Peace?"—the question mark in the title promising self-criticism.

The section on theology, also with five chapters, focuses first on three central concerns: the significance of the confession of faith (Doug Heidebrecht), *Sola Scriptura* and the Mennonite Brethren (Tim Geddert), and the role of "conversionism" for Canadian M.B.'s (Andrew Dyck). Then follow a case study on congregational discussions on women in leadership ministry and César Garcia's reflections as leader in Colombia about radical ecclesiology for local churches.

The final section on "missional reflections," with six essays, does two things. An MB Mission administrator, Ray Harms-Wiebe, presents both reflections (historical) and projections about MB Mission. This chapter gives the background intentions and initial experiences in attempting to work in mutuality.[6] The other chapters, all but one on Canada, offer fascinating data on the "truth and method" tensions in mission theory, on the results of church growth (sobering, yet insightful) in rapidly secularizing cultures, and creative case studies on emerging adults (millennials) "owning" faith, and on encounters with university students.

Alfred Neufeld's keynote address, "Recovering Apostolic and Prophetic Origins and Identity" (1-30), provides not only a stimulating overview but also a fraternal critique from this Paraguayan theologian who is committed to being Paraguayan and thinking in Spanish while also being conversant with German and English language discourse, and pushing for ecumenical comparisons. His penchant for theological categories, dichotomies, and dualisms serve him well for summarizing M.B. historiography in catchy phrases.

Neufeld's own life was shaped by the "all-Mennonite ecumenical commonwealth of immigrant churches in Paraguay and Uruguay," his mother M.B., his father Mennonite Church, so as family they went to both local congregations, trading off every other Sunday. Hence, his inter-Mennonite and broadly evangelical involvements as an adult made him conscious that the M.B.s were not "the only true church." He began by declaring that the M.B. movement sought "to recover the essential nature of the church," "to recover the essential dimension of salvation," and "to recover the transcultural mission of the Holy Spirit" (2). Ecclesiology, soteriology, and pneumatology here serve as points of common M.B. concerns.

In the end, Neufeld asks whether "there [is] still a need for a special Mennonite Brethren way . . . within the global Mennonite family" (20) and on "the wider Christian stage" (25), adding that as a prophetic church the Mennonite Brethren must be prophetic "in the big Ninevehs and Babylons of this world" (26). One can detect at the 150-year marker, not only in Alfred Neufeld,

6. See Harms-Wiebe's article in *Mission Focus* 2012, which followed up further intensive consultations globally, and was a necessary continuation of this effort at authentic mutual reciprocity.

but in all the contributions, an implicit assumption that one could and even should envision a faith and life that does not need a "special M.B. way." That all the writers are nevertheless Mennonite Brethren is easy to detect. The lived faith and life of Mennonite Brethren around the globe, warts and all, must be part of a global Mennonite—indeed, of a global Christian—story and witness.

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