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Recovering from the Anabaptist Vision: New Essays in Anabaptist Identity and Theological Method

London; New York: T & T Clark, 2020

EDITED BY LAURA SCHMIDT ROBERTS, PAUL MARTENS,
AND MYRON A. PENNER

Recovering from the Anabaptist Vision is a collection of essays about the identity and methodology of Anabaptist theology. How should Anabaptist theology be defined? What is the relationship of Anabaptist theology to Christian theology in general? Especially, how should Anabaptist theology be reconstructed now that Harold Bender's *Anabaptist Vision* and John Howard Yoder's interpretation of that vision no longer function as the consensus for North American Anabaptist theologians? The essays in this book originate from a 2017 conference called "Anabaptist Theology: Methods and Practices" at Trinity Western University, part of the Anabaptist Theology Project of the Humanitas Centre.

One of the strengths of this book is that it brings together in a single volume what seem to be the major emerging strategies in North American Anabaptist theology: ecumenical, postmodern, and liberation. (These are my own admittedly artificial categories as I attempt to summarize the book. Perhaps more appropriately, the editors do not try to fit each contributor into an overarching framework.) Each of these strategies, in their own way, poses a challenge to twentieth-century North American Anabaptist theology represented by Harold Bender and John Howard Yoder.

The book opens with a helpful introduction by Paul Martens explaining the need for a rethinking of Anabaptist identity in light of Yoder's sexual abuse and outlines some of the issues that the contributors address in their respective chapters. The essays from Karl Koop and Jeremy Bergen argue that Anabaptist theology must move forward into an ecumenical dialogue, with emphasis on common commitments to the Christian tradition and Trinitarian theology. Both Koop and Bergen see an opportunity to move beyond the separatism of Bender's *Anabaptist Vision* to claim an Anabaptist identity that is situated within rather than against the broader Christian tradition. Laura Schmidt Roberts and Paul Doerksen focus more on the

potential to move beyond the essentialism of Bender's Vision, with the help of postmodern lenses such as Ricoeur's hermeneutics (Roberts) or the idea of methodological restlessness (Doerksen). Both authors advocate for a theology that explicitly resists static or essentialist Anabaptist identity. Carol Penner, Stephanie Chandler Burns, and Melanie Kampen each advocate for the use of a critical or liberatory framework to shift attention from the Bender-Yoder preoccupation with international military violence to address structural injustice, even within faith communities. Penner discusses the success of the "Women Doing Theology" conferences as a model for feminist methodology in Anabaptist theology. Chandler Burns suggests points of connection between Anabaptist and queer theologies. Kampen uses a de-colonial, trauma-informed approach to diagnose shortcomings of Mennonite-Anabaptist pacifism.

The editors are careful to point out that this conversation about Anabaptist identity is specific to the North American context. Bruce Yoder's essay touches on the relationship between North American and African Mennonite theology, but even Yoder's essay is really about how the dialogical approach used in mission work might help us engage the North American Anabaptist identity crisis. This is probably appropriate; the conversations around global Anabaptist identity need to respond to a different set of concerns and require separate treatment. Still, it's important to recognize, as the editors do, that the conversation among Anabaptists in other parts of the world would be quite different than the one represented in this volume.

As I said, this book does a good job laying out a mix of responses to the question of Anabaptist identity among North American theologians. The effect is to show Anabaptist identity as a subject of healthy contestation and evolution. There seems to be a consensus among all authors that Anabaptist theology, whatever it is, is on a "journey toward a new future" (Martens, p. 16), and that journey, wherever it goes, definitely goes somewhere beyond the Bender-Yoder synthesis.

Reading these essays together brings up an underlying question that none of the authors seem to address directly. It strikes me that if Anabaptist theology has given up its too-easy claim to distinctiveness, it has also become more vulnerable to an existential threat. Consider, for example, a passage from Kampen's chapter where she reflects on a library display about

the history of Mennonite conscientious objectors: “Ten years ago this display would have resonated with me, elicited reverence for my forefathers, awe at the depth of their commitment to nonviolence and their absolute refusal to bear arms. But now the display rings hollow for me” (93-94). I recognize that sense of betrayal or disillusionment that Kampen names, and I see it in my undergraduate students or in “lay” Anabaptist-Mennonite circles. The growing tendency to reject Anabaptism, or even religion altogether, as a significant marker of one’s identity is related exactly to the shortcomings identified in this volume. The Bender-Yoder variety of Anabaptism, as Martens points out (12-13), was attractive partly because it could provide a clear justification for Anabaptist identity as distinct from Christianity in general. But if this justification is no longer viable (and I agree that it is not), why make the effort to contest Anabaptist identity at all? What does the adjective “Anabaptist” add to feminism, queer theology, Christian ecumenism, postmodern philosophy, etc.? In other words, I am concerned that the contestation of Anabaptist identity in academic theology masks a more profound problem of irrelevance opened by the demise of the Bender-Yoder trajectory.

We do get hints of an answer in some of the essays: Bergen, for example, argues that Mennonite identity is “never simply ours to dismiss” (120) because Mennonites continue to be shaped by their history and the need to rectify past injustices done in the name of Mennonite identity. But in general, the relevance of Anabaptist identity is assumed in this volume rather than argued. Especially in the North American context where religious identity in general is no longer a given, this seems like an important gap in the conversation. This is not necessarily a criticism of the book itself, whose purpose is to lay out possibilities of Anabaptist theological method. Rather, I think that this volume can be an important foundation for further conversation that addresses some of these existential questions about Anabaptist identity.

Justin Heinzekehr
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Energy, Economics, and Ethics: The Promise and Peril of Global Energy Transition

New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2019

KENNETH MARTENS FRIESEN

Kenneth Martens Friesen's book *Energy, Economics, and Ethics*, is relevant to anyone who uses electricity, drives a car, buys groceries, and uses a cell phone. Our dependence on fossil fuels is an "addiction to oil." Friesen recalls how we became addicted to fossil fuels and how energy transitions took place. He carefully dissects our challenges with energy transitions today and in our future. Our energy consumption is not slowing down; in fact, it can only increase. He uses four energy stories from the United States, Germany, China, and India to make his data feel concrete and accessible.

The United States and Germany are leading in CO₂ emissions, but China and India are not far behind. The issues are economically driven, the challenges are deeply ethical. These challenges are complex: 1) fossil fuels are not sustainable; 2) pollution and health issues remain critical; 3) developing countries are increasing energy consumption and standard of living; 4) sixteen percent of the wealthiest nations consume eighty percent of the world's natural resources; and 5) there are hidden costs to improved quality of life.

Friesen effectively illustrates the critical need for solutions using energy history viewed through the lens of one family in each country. In the U.S., the author shares his own family's energy history, from the Dust Bowl (1930s) to today. His father lived in an 1,800-square foot wood-framed house with little insulation, heated by a wood stove, and walked to school. In the 1970s he lived with central heat powered by natural gas and AC powered by electricity generated from nuclear or hydroelectric energy. Like many middle-class families, they owned multiple cars (p52). Today the author's family utilizes solar energy and drives electric or hybrid cars.

The Industrial Revolution and our pursuit of the "good life" made coal indispensable. Friesen states, "... economic benefits of coal were considered far more important than the lives of the expendable miners at the bottom

rungs of American society” (55). This statement is a somber reminder that ethical and moral issues continue to exist in our need for energy. One study estimates that it would take five earths to support human population if everyone’s consumption pattern were similar to the average American (CSS).

In the 1970s Friesen says, “...the OPEC-led oil embargo was a wake-up call to the U.S.” (60). This led to government mandates such as manufacturing fuel-efficient cars and establishing the EPA. Energy-saving initiatives were short-lived, following the 1980s discovery of oil in Alaska and increased oil exploration in the Gulf of Mexico. The oil crisis became a dim memory. The use of coal rose and fell alongside political and ideological changes in national leadership. There have been some initiatives in energy transitions to solar, wind, and biomass, but often the cost and capacity failed to attract consumers. “In the U.S. the ethics of energy seems clearly connected to economics” (68).

The lens of the Chinese family begins with Giang Chu Cheng born in 1951 in a small village, raised in a bamboo sod home without running water, electricity, or a toilet. Transportation consisted of their two feet (71). Today, he cooks with natural gas, has electricity, a ceiling fan, and a radiator for heat. His son lives in a large city, drives a Buick, and flies around the world for his job. In one generation, the energy transition has been dramatic. Friesen asks, “how did China develop so rapidly and what are the implications for the world in terms of energy, economics and ethics?” (73).

The Indian family’s story begins in the 1940s in a small village. Their home had mud walls, no electricity, and used wood from the forest for fuel. The family farmed rice and had a water buffalo for milk and muscle. Transportation was by bicycle or a cart and oxen. Now the son has a cement block house, ceiling fans, air conditioning, and a gas stove. As the middle class rapidly expands, India has started to invest in solar energy, signaling shifting perspectives on its environmental future.

India is a good example of most of the developing world. The statistics are convicting, thirteen percent of the world’s population does not have access to electricity. Forty percent of the world lacks access to clean water or clean fuels for cooking (Ritchie and Roser, 2019). Friesen persuasively argues that the sooner these nations move towards renewable energy, the better to avoid

developing a dependency upon fossil fuel like the U.S. and Europe.

The ethical question is compelling: Is it moral for twenty percent of the world's population to consume eighty percent of the world's resources? Friesen wisely suggests that "simply not using energy or significantly reducing energy consumption is often the best form of eliminating CO₂ emissions" (127). To reduce, reuse, and recycle resources is a matter of economics and ethics. In chapters 7-9, Friesen looks at the future of renewables and nuclear energy and increased efficiency. He analyzes the pros and cons of electric vehicles and examines the long-term sustainability of solutions such as carbon pricing and carbon removal.

Friesen mentions trees as a solution but finds it limited in scope and efficiency. I have a more positive view of the contribution of plants and find that photosynthesis is pretty efficient in taking solar energy, CO₂, and water and making easily-renewable biomass. There are many possibilities for human creativity and capacity to find solutions, we just need the economic and ethical motivation. As Friesen puts it: "...how do we encourage steps to wean us from our current dependence on fossil fuels?" (151-152).

This is a well-written book that can serve a wide audience. Whether you see this as a textbook which provides technical explanations and solid data for seeing the trends in energy use or you are a concerned consumer and steward of resources, you will be prodded to think more seriously about the future of global energy needs and transitions. Hopefully, you will be inspired to make a difference in your personal choices.

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Grace Ju Miller
Taylor University

Mucho más que una Cruz: Imágenes de la Salvación para Diversos Contextos

Buenos Aires: JUANUNO1 Ediciones, 2019

MARCOS BAKER, ED.

The books of Marcos (Mark) Baker are born *in mission* and *for mission*. The Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano brings light to what I have just said with the following story:

The preacher Miguel Brun told me that a few years ago he had visited the Indians of the Paraguayan Chaco. He was part of an evangelizing mission. The missionaries visited a chief who was considered very wise. The chief, a quiet, fat man, listened without blinking to the religious propaganda that they read to him in his own language. When they finished, the missionaries awaited a reaction.

The chief took his time, then said:

“That scratches. It scratches hard and it scratches very well.”

And then he added:

“But it scratches where there isn’t any itch.”¹

Baker’s interest has to do with the idea of scratching *where there is an itch*. His purpose, specifically in this book, is to show the meaning of the cross in diverse contexts. Baker puts together a collection of essays that share the message of the atonement in a relevant way *according* to the audience and setting.

Baker (Ph.D., Duke University) knows firsthand the challenges of speaking about the atonement in diverse contexts. His experience as a missionary in Latin America along with his ministry in a prison in California has been translated into years of teaching mission and theology at Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary.

In order to create this book in Spanish, Baker looked for writers from diverse theological backgrounds and contexts (49). They use different aspects of the salvific meaning of the cross and resurrection. In that way, each writer “scratches where it itches,” challenging their audience. Each chapter starts with

the missiological context of the author and concludes with theological and missiological reflections arising from that context.

With this contextual missiological approach, Baker does not ignore the need to speak about guilt. Rather, his concern is to show that freedom from guilt is not the *only* message about the cross to be shared in every place and time. Therefore, his main thesis has to do with the idea that context matters. That thesis is essential in the missiological task, according to Baker. He affirms: “If we privilege only one narrative as it were the only one, other images of the cross get distorted or just ignored” (165).

Aiming to illustrate how diverse images interact with different contexts, Baker organizes in this book a kaleidoscope of scenarios where the message of the cross is shared: a prison, a rural church, an evangelical university, an urban local congregation, a seminary in the United States; an indigenous tribe in México; a church in Buenos Aires (Argentina) and another one in Bogotá (Colombia); and rural settings in the Peruvian jungle. Academic and middle-class communities contrast with settings of poverty, suffering, and violence, mixed in the environment of personal encounters, sermons, Bible studies, and age diversity (e.g. adults and teenagers).

The essayists’ backgrounds are also interesting: there are Orthodox, Evangelicals, Anabaptists, Protestants, and Pentecostals. They are involved in church planting, evangelism, preaching and pastoral ministries. In this way, Baker gives practical shape to his words about context, enriching the significance of the Cross. “The gospel of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is like a diamond... It has many faces, and to appreciate it fully, we need to see them all: Jesus as a victor; a sufferer; a martyr; a sacrifice; a redeemer; a reconciler; a justifier; an adopter; and a representative,”² Baker says.

In this book, for Spanish readers, Baker uses the work of John Driver *La Obra Redentora de Cristo y la Misión de la Iglesia* (1994)³ and its own texts *¡Basta de Religión!* (2005), *Comentario Bíblico Iberoamericano de Gálatas* (2014), and *Centrado en Jesús* (2013). He also mentions *El Evangelio en 3D: Cómo Presentar el Evangelio en las Culturas de la Culpa, la Vergüenza y el Temor* (2016) by Jayson Georges. Another resource that Baker uses in English is his book *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross* (2011, 2nd Ed.), written along with Joel Green.

Mucho más que una Cruz is a contextualized Spanish version equivalent—but not identical—to Baker’s book *Proclaiming the Scandal of the Cross* (2006), where we find Biblical bases for his approach, a review of atonement theology past and present, and issues of communication and contextualization as well. However, in Baker’s work I miss interaction with current Anabaptist authors who have writing extensively on atonement.⁴ In the same way, it would be interesting to bring to the table Catholic theologians who have addressed this topic. In Spanish, we could mention the Colombian Jesuits Rafael Gutiérrez Cuervo, Alfonso Llano Escobar, and Alberto Parra.

Baker’s book is an excellent resource for practitioners and church workers. Deeply rooted in Biblical theology and based on missional contextualization, it provides an important overview of atonement theology and pastoral practice from an Anabaptist perspective. This is a work desperately needed in Spanish settings.

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¹ Eduardo Galeano, *The Book of Embraces* (W. W. Norton Co. N.Y., London, 1989), 30.

² Mark D. Baker, *Proclaiming the Scandal of the Cross: Contemporary Images of the Atonement* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2006), 104.

³ Cf. John Driver, *Understanding the Atonement for the Mission of the Church* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1986).

⁴ Cf. J. Denny Weaver, Gregory A. Boyd, Darrin W. Snyder, Michael Hardin, Michele Hershberger.

Tolkien's Sacramental Vision: Discerning the Holy in Middle Earth

Craig Bernthal

LECHLADE, U.K.: ANGELICO PRESS/SECOND SPRING, 2014

“I wish it need not have happened in my time,” said Frodo. “So do I,” said Gandalf, “and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.”¹

We have had the opportunity to welcome Fresno State professor emeritus Craig Bernthal to Fresno Pacific University classes twice since this book was published, providing great occasions for students to enter the scholarly conversation. His presentations were ideal additions to classes on Tolkien. Our occasions to learn with him were “a chance meeting, as we say in Middle Earth.”²

There is always a danger of trying to understand an author’s purpose through analysis of his or her writing, but Bernthal makes sure we see how the Christian vision, and specifically the Roman Catholic articulation of that vision, permeates and suffuses Middle Earth. Many know the Lord of the Rings (LotR), but Bernthal includes the *Silmarillion* and the larger mythology (as well as works relating to it) in his consideration.

Tolkien’s *Sacramental Vision* (SV) reveals how Middle Earth is steeped in a deeply Roman Catholic sacramental vision. Since sacraments are primarily a part of the liturgical church tradition, I will define further: a sacrament, such as baptism and eucharist, is an outward and visible sign of inward and spiritual grace. And thus, outward events (the selection of Frodo [confirmation], Aragorn’s healing [unction]) have a greater significance in Tolkien’s sacramental universe. The seven sacraments in Roman Catholic thought are: baptism, eucharist, marriage, unction, ordination, penance, and confirmation.

Bernthal even shows how aspects of the sacraments dear to Roman Catholics, e.g., the monstrance for the eucharistic bread, are implied in Tolkien’s mythology: Tolkien’s foregrounding of the phial of Galadriel is reminiscent of the priest’s use of the monstrance. Indeed, lembas itself is an allusion to sacramental bread.³ Bernthal shows how the images of the women in Tolkien’s works often closely reflect Roman Catholic views of Mary. Galadriel’s other-

worldly wisdom especially evokes her. Bernthal includes images to help make vivid these compelling comparisons.

Bernthal's definition of "sacrament" is more refined and literary than mine (a specific kind of symbol referring to a reality greater than itself), but as a Christian in the Anglican tradition, I feel a great kinship with his understanding: the song that created the world and holds it together still resonates through it at the end of the Third Age. My favorite quote from Bernthal is a perfect guide to understanding the point of SV: Tolkien constructed his mythology "of Celtic, Anglo-Saxon, and Norse myth, with biblical elements as well...giving them a Christian moral and spiritual shape, the way a magnetic field lines up iron filings."

A central aspect of the value of Bernthal's work is that he both acknowledges Tolkien's dislike of allegory, and yet shows how the works' meaning extends far beyond its captivating characters. Bernthal's point is that an allegory is limiting: the legendarium is not just representing one thing. While Middle Earth may be seen as Europe, it is also a theological battleground. The Shire is the home of an admirable, if lazy, people, but it is also the source of great strength for Good: the very wise, like Gandalf, are able to see both aspects.

One of the most useful extended treatments of Bernthal's work is the review by David Rozema.⁴ Although he has few negative comments, he states that he believes Bernthal underplays the importance of sacramental vision in other Christian traditions. While I don't deny that sacraments play an important part in other Christian traditions (notably my own, the worldwide Anglican Communion, and of course Eastern Orthodoxy), the sacramental universe of Roman Catholic thought seems especially significant to understanding Tolkien.

In my correspondence with Bernthal, he granted much of Rozema's critique on this matter. I believe he need not have done so. The Roman Catholic vision of sacramentality imbuing our actions and choices is significantly different from other Christian approaches. Tolkien's characters' decisions, from "ordained" roles to marriages, reveal this reality. And Rozema's support for the interconnection of symbol and allegory is true throughout: the Hobbits seem allegorical for English yeomen, even in their location on the map of Middle Earth, but they also symbolize those who are protected by the sacrifices of others. In this sacramental universe it may be the simple, like Samwise, who are able to resist evil more effectively than the very wise.

In a university in which we try to be ecumenical, our engagement with Tolkien's work in multiple classes, as well as with a Roman Catholic scholar, is properly introducing our students to a larger conversation. The Roman Catholic sacramental vision of the universe is amply supported by Tolkien's writing, and Bernthal has done yeoman's work in explicating it—that is a contribution that is surprisingly late in the scholarship on a twentieth-century giant.

“We still remember, we who dwell, In this far land beneath the trees.”

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Fresno Pacific University

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- ¹ *Fellowship of the Ring*, Book 1, Chapter 2. While the exchange does share with the sacramental vision theme of Bernthal's work a sense of greater significance to individuals and actions than a less purposeful worldview would support, I primarily include it because in this passage Tolkien speaks so well to our moment.
- ² *Lord of the Rings*, Appendix. Though Gandalf also says “if chance it was” when he refers to the unlikely events leading up to the members of the Fellowship coming together at Rivendell.
- ³ And, of course, it is also an allusion to the many holy individuals, like the Venetian Virgin, who were able to subsist on the Host.
- ⁴ David Rozema, “Symbol or Allegory?” As far as I can tell, Rozema has only made this excellent review available on Academia.edu. He shares my concern that Bernthal is a little too easy in his assessment of the films in terms of their adherence to *LotR*. Bernthal granted there was some to truth to this concern in correspondence with me. I especially think the films misunderstand Bilbo and Aragorn in basic ways.

John George Nicolay: The Man in Lincoln's Shadow

Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2019

ALLEN CARDEN AND THOMAS J. EBERT

Professors have long recited the fact—likely apocryphal—that there has been a book published about the Civil War for every day that has passed since the guns fell silent in 1865. Yet John George Nicolay, private secretary to President Abraham Lincoln, has managed to escape serious scholarly attention. There have been few book-length works focused solely on Nicolay; two biographies (including one by his daughter Helen Nicolay) and a doctoral dissertation represent the extent of the scholarly attention. Perhaps this seems reasonable, given what might appear to be Nicolay's minor role in the immensely eventful Lincoln Administration. Carden and Ebert have crafted a well-written and earnest book which constitutes a persuasive argument for situating Nicolay as an influence on Lincoln's rise to political office, as well as crediting him for organizing both his presidency, and his memory.

Carden and Ebert outline Nicolay's youth in his native Germany and his early years in the adopted homeland of his family, as far as sources allow. Much of the material covering Nicolay's early life comes from his daughter Helen's biography of her father. Once settled in Illinois, the sources begin to become more numerous and reliable, and the authors have mined them well. Their description of Nicolay's early relationship with Lincoln eschews hagiography; at several points in their narrative, for example, they emphasize Nicolay's political naïveté, while not diminishing his usefulness to first candidate, and then president, Lincoln.

Among the valuable insights that Carden and Ebert provide is their illustration of Nicolay's role as an unofficial liaison between Lincoln and the important German-American communities of the Midwest. Lincoln's main opponent in the 1860 Republican nomination campaign was William Seward, long known for his anti-nativist position and strident rhetoric. Lincoln tried to hold to a more moderate opposition to the virulent nativism of the "Know-Nothing" movement, which ran strong in the northeast and mid-Atlantic regions. In the political game of inches that was the Republican nomination campaign in 1860,

nativist votes were important to victory, and the authors flesh out Nicolay's importance to keeping Lincoln in the good graces of the German immigrant communities, themselves also essential to any Republican nomination victory. Nicolay, a native German speaker, seems to have been Lincoln's point man in the future president's acquisition and running—from behind the scenes—of a German-language newspaper, the *Illinois Staats-Anzeiger*, which enabled him to have a voice in the German-American communities of the Midwest.

Carden and Ebert's book most aptly describes the essential role Nicolay played in shaping the duties of the office Americans would come to know as "White House Chief of Staff." While he never held such a title, his primary task as Lincoln's "Private Secretary" was to prevent people from occupying on Lincoln's time. Nicolay's skill in saying "no" to the various office-seekers, petty politicians—not to mention the array of seers and mystics with crack-pot schemes to save the Union and end the Civil War—made him essential to the success of the Administration. The authors quote William Stoddard's assessment of Nicolay in this role: he had "a kind and amount of authority which is not easy to describe." The fact that he remained the only private secretary throughout Lincoln's presidency is evidence of his indispensability. (The authors do well to point out that the various other men who publicized themselves as "private secretary" had been appointed merely as aides to Nicolay himself, including his later co-author John Hay.)

The authors show much of Nicolay's life away from Lincoln as well. His lifelong romance with Therenia Bates, from his hometown of Pittsfield, Illinois is woven throughout the narrative, and provides valuable insight into Nicolay's personality and sense of humor. Carden and Ebert also give much-needed attention to Nicolay's life after Lincoln. He served for five years as American consul in Paris, and subsequently was appointed to the office of Marshal of the Supreme Court. This latter was the crowning glory of an early-sidelined legal career, and provided Nicolay with a well-earned sense of personal accomplishment.

Nicolay is best known for his role in curating Lincoln's popular memory, mainly through his and Hay's massive biography of the late president, the ten-volume *Abraham Lincoln: A History*. The authors provide detailed information on the construction of the Lincoln mythology; this portion of the book is the culmination of their consistent illustration of Nicolay's worshipful attitude to-

wards Lincoln. He could see no wrong in Lincoln, and was determined to allow others to see none either. His and Hay's biography is at least in part the fruit of Nicolay's other essential contribution to the Lincoln presidency: his excellent organizational skills. Carden and Ebert contrast these organizational skills with Lincoln's own quaint habits of disorder—carrying important papers in his hat and then losing them, for example. It is not too much to say that Nicolay preserved the Lincoln presidential record as much by proper filing as by contributing to the 10-volume biography.

Carden and Ebert have shone a light long missing from Nicolay and have extensively mined the sources available to do so. They present a picture of a man, if not in full agreement with Lincoln's every political position, certainly unable to see any of his flaws. If anything was lacking in these pages, it might have been a more diligent look into Nicolay's views on the race question in the pre-War period. His references to blacks are, as is typical for the period, demeaning. The authors consider his language as a proxy for other ideas, primarily anti-slavery, but this argument would have benefitted from further exploration.

Carden and Ebert have put much-needed flesh on the bones of Nicolay's role in Lincoln's rise to power, and they well-illustrate his pivotal role in curating, if not entirely creating, the Lincoln mythology. *The Man in Lincoln's Shadow* has placed John George Nicolay firmly in the light.

Richard Cook
Georgia Gwinnett College

Women Talking

New York: Bloomsbury, 2018

MIRIAM TOEWS

Content note: mention of sexual assault and rape; also, some plot spoilers.

Women Talking will break your heart—if, at this point of 2020, you have some heart left to offer. Toews describes her work as a “reaction through fiction” enacting “female imagination” against the true case of Mennonite men and youth who used animal tranquilizers to enable sexually assaulting their colony’s women and girls. Though some were tried and convicted in 2011, 2013 reports indicated that attacks continued.

The narrative unfolds from the perspective of August Epp, the colony’s schoolteacher, who is tasked with documenting the women’s covert meetings. The meetings, portrayed to the men as just “women talking” while quilting or childbirth-attending or jam-making, will determine whether they do nothing, stay and fight, or leave. What will the women choose? Why do they request August’s attendance? What does he know that offers a modicum of safety to those he accompanies? Toews does not explain all at once or lay out a linear series of events. Rather, we peer around August’s shoulders as his note-taking surfaces buried memories, past and present intuitions, and kaleidoscopic visions of colony horror. It takes thirty pages to hear why a grandmother in the group wears false teeth; forty-three to learn the reasons a mother seeks contraband antibiotics for her three-year-old daughter; forty-nine to be casually told that the woman August loves sustains a pregnancy caused by her rapist. We discover on page fourteen that August markedly resembles his father; not until the very end of the book do we grasp its the full implications.

August’s disclosures break shard readers’ consciousnesses into with shards of terror, beauty, confusion, and pain. Toews’ pacing of events interwoven with August’s recollections keeps the reader engaged, although the bruises, broken teeth, and rope burns, incidentally described as scene-setting details, make one pause reading to wince or e, heavee, rage. Toews’ technique of never identifying feelings but merely recounting dialogue or stating observable facts in August’s flat diction demonstrates how thoroughly the women, and August to

a lesser extent, have been silenced. Existing Enduring under such conditions constricts the women's jokes, hopes, biblical interpretation, and social visions.

For example, in response to a suggestion that they ask the men to leave the colony, one of the women replies, "None of us have ever asked the men for anything...Not a single thing, not even for the salt to be passed, not even for a penny or a moment alone or to take the washing in or to open a curtain or to go easy on the small yearlings or to put your hand on the small of my back as I try, again, for the twelfth or thirteenth time, to push a baby out of my body" (116). On the heels of this devastating admission, the women imagine the similar absurdity of their animals demanding they "turn around and leave the premises" (116). August recounts that the entire group simply cannot stop laughing at the notion of making a first and only request for the men to leave.

Toews' narration starkly demonstrates misogyny's pernicious reach. As in all forms of systemic oppression, what people can find to laugh at witnesses to the resilience of the human spirit, but it also reveals the depths at which the cruelty they are forced to endure imprints their lives. Also as in all forms of systemic oppression, Toews' exposure of the colony's depravity remains the telling rejoinder to those who advocate 'just enough' hierarchy: surely, good Christian men will not rape but only occasionally pressure their wives for sex, demand instead of twelve or thirteen only four (or five or six) children before enacting some form of birth control, punch walls before faces, lovingly rather than punitively lead their womenfolk, and figure out by themselves how to guard scriptural interpretation from their own sinful nature so that events like those of the Molotschna Colony will never take place.

Women Talking deftly names that endeavor for what it is: self-deception. Entrenched, idolatrous, murderous, idolatrouself-deception. But even to name that sin demands additional investment from those victimized. "A very small amount of hate is a necessary ingredient to life," the mother of the raped toddler proclaims (27). Hatred fomented by the women keeps the wronged alive; provokes them to seek their children's protection; equips them to take what they realize is the fruit of their own labor; determines a course of action fitting to their beliefs and needs. Ona, the woman August loves, asks, "is forgiveness that is coerced true forgiveness? ... Can't there be a category of forgiveness that is up to God alone...?" (26). And so the women make their choice, a decision

that places them at risk of chronic vulnerability as they seek the distance necessary to render true forgiveness (108-9; 213-6).

Toews' "female imaginary" thus remains stretched between two poles, both impacted by male perpetrators. Grace, strength, courage; despair, hatred, rage. No matter what they ultimately decide or how they carry it out, the women are indelibly marked by the damage done to them, forced to construct desperate bulwarks against the harm perpetrated from without rather than enjoy the freedom of simply allowing their characters and interests and joys and loves delights to arise from within. The quest for liberation is not a war for ultimate independence—this hubris is both impossible and undesirable—but for a healthy and equitable interdependence. Such a life remains beyond the grasp of so many today: women, especially those subordinated by religious constructs (including those of the actual abusive colony, the Manitoba Colony); queer teens kicked out of their families; persons of color forced yet again to protest for their lives; those bound into poverty by a socio-economic order predicated on the lie that for some to thrive, many must lose.

August decides to redirect what little power he holds to protect the vulnerable and struggle against the strong; as I write, I witness observe some white people putting their bodies alongside persons of color in front of state-sanctioned violence. *Women Talking* proposes that the smallest remaining pieces of our hearts can still be pricked, still bear witness.

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