

Reviews of Religious Studies and Social Science

Mark Thiessen Nation, *John Howard Yoder: Mennonite Patience, Evangelical Witness, Catholic Convictions*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2006. Pp. xxiii + 211. Soft cover, \$20.00.

Whether it needs one or not, John Howard Yoder's legacy has found another rather enthusiastic apologist in Mark Thiessen Nation. Fortunately for us, Nation's *John Howard Yoder* is not only enthusiastic in tone, but also ambitious, intelligent, and clearly articulated. In short, Nation has provided an excellent introduction to the life and thought of John Howard Yoder for a generation of readers new to Yoder and the contextual issues that shaped his theology and ethics.

The promise Nation states at the beginning of the text is to "unfold how Yoder's whole life and his writings" demonstrate a commitment to what he referred to as his "special ecumenical vocation" (xix). To fulfill this bold promise, Nation begins with a biographical sketch of Yoder, prefaced by a genealogical account of Yoder's origins that begins with his "great-great-grandfather." The point of this preliminary excursus is to illustrate briefly how Yoder's Mennonite theological, cultural, and familial debts – especially his patient concern for the unity of the church – continued to shape his engagement with the wider world later in life.

Building on this conclusion, the second chapter turns from Yoder's life to his thought, and Nation moves on to argue that Yoder's entire academic career – from his early engagements with Bender to *The Priestly Kingdom* – was an attempt to communicate "in broadly Christian terms" what he learned from sixteenth-century Anabaptism (31). In the third and fourth chapters, Nation further specifies how the two particular sixteenth-century Anabaptist themes of ecumenical dialogue and the peaceful politics of Jesus find their idiosyncratic expression throughout Yoder's academic career.

In the final chapter, Nation steps from his descriptive tone, and appropriating what Yoder has offered, concludes with his own constructive Yoderian vision – supplemented by Stanley Hauerwas, Arne Rasmussen, Miroslav Volf and others – for Christian social responsibility.

As it stands, Nation's *John Howard Yoder* is a great place to begin understanding Yoder's life and thought sympathetically, and the thick footnotes provide ample direction for further reading. That being said, Nation's self-confessed endorsement of Yoder, emphasized by the statement that "I offer no substantial criticism" (197), leads to a few difficulties within the text.

The first of these obstacles arises in the subtitle: *Mennonite Patience, Evangelical Witness, Catholic Convictions*. In utilizing these particular descriptive designations, Nation imitates in his own way Yoder's rhetorical style of revising and redeploying terms for his own purposes. Nation really means Anabaptist in place of Mennonite, evangelical devoid of all the trappings of American Evangelicalism, and ecumenical in place of Catholic. The text itself effectively demonstrates that sixteenth-century Anabaptism, concern for the good news of Jesus Christ, and ecumenical dialogue are all intertwined in Yoder's thought, and using these terms up front would have avoided misleading allusions and saved Nation at least five pages of terminological explanations (xix-xxiii). Beyond this mere textual issue, however, the subtitle's straining for a larger ecclesial relevance seems to be symptomatic of the deep insecurity within much Mennonite theology (including this text) that is still haunted and negatively determined by the Niebuhrian sectarian charge.

A second more substantive difficulty with the text is the absence of a critical perspective calling Nation's seemingly effortless interrelations and conclusions into question. Granted, Nation's conclusion provides two and a half pages of reflections "which may be perceived as criticisms" (with only one bibliographic footnote). Yet, even these are interpreted within his optimistic perspective as signals of "remaining research projects that would extend Yoder's ongoing influence" (197). Nation seems to assume that Yoder's opponents (e.g., Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Ramsey) are also Nation's own critics, and as such, Yoder always offers the appropriate redefinition and rebuttal. With few exceptions, Nation constructs a conversation in which the only contemporary voices that engage Yoder are endorsing voices – repeatedly cited almost verbatim – such as Philip J. Wogaman (xvii, 125), Richard B. Hays (26, 144), and Walter Wink (xviii, 27, 109). And, in the end, Nation's faintly hagiographic failure to engage contemporary critical voices seriously (e.g., Oliver O'Donovan and A. James Reimer) leaves a vacuum that detracts significantly from all that is positive in this excellent, accessible introduction to the life and thought of John Howard Yoder.

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Bergen, Jeremy M.; Doerksen, Paul G.; Koop, Karl, eds. *Creed and Conscience: Essays in Honour of A. James Reimer*. Kitchener, Ont.: Pandora Press, 2007. Pp. 306. Paper, \$32.00 Cdn.

This collection of essays honors A. James Reimer, one of the most visible voices of the last quarter century in the debate about the character of Mennonite theology. Reimer has taught undergraduate courses in the Religious Studies Department of the University of Waterloo, graduate courses in the Master's program at Conrad Grebel University College and at the Toronto School of Theology, as well as being the founding director of the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre. Many contributors to the volume express appreciation for Reimer's career as theologian, professor, churchman, graduate student advisor and thesis director, and ongoing friend.

The book's chapters include John Rempel's just-short-of-laudatory biography (what else would one expect in a *Festschrift*!) and fifteen essays organized under five themes that illustrate Reimer's interests—engagements with Scripture, the Anabaptist tradition, modernity, the ecumenical tradition, and political theology.

The essays of the book are generally strong. Those considered strongest or most useful will depend on the interests and agenda of the reader. Here are a few that appealed to me. I appreciated the two essays on Dietrich Bonhoeffer—Fernando Enns's assessment of Bonhoeffer, in particular his leaving open the question of Bonhoeffer's pacifism, and Peter Frick's examination of Bonhoeffer's obvious offense at the racism he encountered during his studies in the United States. Jeremy Bergen's analysis of the function of the Holy Spirit in Reinhard Hütter, Amos Yong and Eugene Rogers demonstrates that theological problems are not solved by asserting that a particular argument has a trinitarian foundation. Denis Janz provides a concise summary from primary sources of Luther's views on political ethics and war, including Janz's ironic observation that when wielding the sword on behalf of the God-ordained kingdom of the world, for Luther "Christians, it seems, may do anything that non-Christians can, with the only difference being the sweetness in their hearts" (245).

Many of the essays refer to Reimer's longstanding conviction that theology for Mennonites, as well as all other theology, should build on classic trinitarian theology as expressed in the classic creedal tradition, with Mennonites constituting one particular denomination that shares this tradition with the universal church. However, aside from Karl Koop's comparison of Reimer with John Howard Yoder and Fernando Enns, a footnote in Peter Erb's article, and Paul Doerksen's mention of Reimer's differences with Yoder on Constantinianism, there

is little indication anywhere in this volume of challenges or alternatives to Reimer's theology. It would have contributed to the book's importance had the editors added a sketch in the introduction to list issues involved and the spectrum of views on the subject of what constitutes a proper of theology for Mennonites and where James Reimer's position resides within that lineup.

The absence of an index also limits the usefulness of the book.

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Steven M. Nolt and Thomas J. Meyers, *Plain Diversity: Amish Cultures & Identities*, Young Center Books in Anabaptist and Pietist Studies. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007. Pp. x + 241.

In *Plain Diversity: Amish Cultures & Identities*, Steven Nolt and Thomas Meyers begin by acknowledging that most modern Americans are able to identify the Amish. They then proceed to challenge popular, simplistic, and essentialist notions of who the Amish are, offering a new framework for understanding what is arguably one of the most fascinating, popular, and least understood minority cultures in North America. Amish identity, they argue, is the evolving outcome of a conversation between historical, cultural, social, contextual, and ethnic variables. Understanding both the diversity of Amish identity and its underlying unity is the goal of this well-researched, carefully argued, and wonderfully accessible work.

Following an introductory chapter in which they discuss the origins of the Old Order Amish, describe generally the organization of an Amish community, and discuss Amish settlement in Indiana in broad terms, Nolt and Meyers begin by exploring the components of identity internal to Amish culture: (im)migration history; organizational structure, including the *Ordnung*; and Amish ethnicity. These, they argue, interact in a variety of ways, shaping different Amish settlements. The first chapter of the section on "Patterns of Peoplehood," which is entitled "Migration," looks at the Amish as a people shaped by history, both the history of migration to the New World and the local historical context of settlement in North America. Using settlement in Indiana as a case study for exploring Amish settlement as a whole, the authors describe distinct migration patterns, noting different migrations from Europe as well as patterns of interaction between the immigrant streams. Each new settlement, they note, combines the multiple

histories of early European immigration, movement from one North American site to another, interaction between different communities along the way, and the memories of journeys, conditions, and events passed down from generation to generation.

Exploring further in the chapter on “*Ordnung*”, Nolt and Meyers offer a clear analysis of the evolution of *Ordnung*, and its contribution to shaping both the unity and the diversity of every day Amish life. The discussion presents the *Ordnung* not as a simple set of rules and restrictions, but as a multifaceted guide to Amish practice, shaping not only religious life but also dress, transportation, and occupation. Through *Ordnung*, the authors make it clear that the Amish live their religious beliefs. Yet, as they also demonstrate, *Ordnung* is inseparable from history and memory and the particular geographic context in which the group finds itself.

In the third chapter of this section, Nolt and Meyers explore Amish “Ethnicity”, an element of Amish identity largely neglected in other studies of the Amish. Describing ethnicity as “most basically, a shared sense of peoplehood” (55), the authors explore differences and similarities between the Swiss and Pennsylvania German Amish in language, dress, community organization, and patterns of interaction with the world. Yet again, they note, ethnicity interacts with history, *Ordnung*, and geographic and social context.

Clearly, the Amish “mosaic” is a complicated picture, and, in the second section of this work “Comparative Communities,” the authors present three case studies of Amish settlement in Indiana to illustrate the complex interaction of the internal components of Amish identity with contextual factors unique to the circumstances of settlement and the region in which the group has settled. Chapter Five focuses on the “Elkhart-LaGrange and Nappanee Settlements” to explore how external economic and community forces interact with the internal forces shaping Amish communities. Although ethnically similar, the authors note that the Elkhart-LaGrange settlement and the Nappanee settlements have different origins and migration histories. For example, unlike in the Elkhart-LaGrange settlement, which was established by a mix of settlers moving west from Pennsylvania and Ohio, the Nappanee settlement was established by Amish drawn to the region through family connections, leading to a complex web of bloodlines and religious practice. Further, the Nappanee settlement was more affected by later immigration from Europe than was the settlement in Elkhart-LaGrange. Finally, the two communities find themselves in different regional contexts. Thus, according to Nolt and Meyers, although the two settlements have confronted many of the same stresses, including the departure of more change-minded members for Beachy Amish congregations and the impact of what the

authors call the “Amish Mission Movement,” the communities have evolved different ways of being Amish, patterns of identity encoded in their *Ordnungs*, and revealed in occupational patterns, education, and health care practices.

In Chapter Six, the authors take on the “Swiss Settlements of Eastern Indiana,” exploring the way in which the distinct Swiss ethnic identity has been shaped by historical events and is revealed in church-community organization and cultural practices. Although the authors’ assertion that the Swiss are not an Old Order affiliation (100) and their subsequent referral to at least one apparent member of a Swiss church-community as “Old Order” (110) and their contrast of the Swiss to “other Old Orders” (119) is potentially confusing, the authors present ample evidence that the Swiss Amish are culturally distinct from their Pennsylvania German counterparts. Swiss ethnicity, revealed in distinct language, dress patterns, buggy style, and community governance, has affected the way in which church-communities of Swiss origin have confronted regional events and has shaped their interaction with other Indiana Amish communities.

In the seventh chapter, “Transplants from Lancaster, Pennsylvania,” the authors explore the case of Amish settlers from southeastern Pennsylvania, who, because of their particular settlement history and church heritage, have become, in the authors’ terms, “an ethnic group in its own right” (122). Nolt and Meyers argue that these Amish, who have established settlements in Wayne and Parke Counties, Indiana, have maintained ties to their Lancaster roots that continue to shape their interaction with the local non-Amish community and with Amish communities elsewhere in Indiana. Further, discussing differences between the Wayne and Parke County settlements, the authors are able to reveal the subtle ways in which the interaction between contextual and internal variables fosters difference even in closely related communities.

In the last case study, “The Paoli-Salem Communities,” Nolt and Meyers present an analysis of four of the five small settlements in southern Indiana’s Orange and Washington Counties. In this rural setting, one finds the very conservative Paoli church-community, established in the late 1950s by Amish concerned about the adoption of new technology and openness to non-farming occupations in the larger settlements of Elkhart-LaGrange, Nappanee, and elsewhere. One also finds an ultra-conservative Swartzentruber Amish settlement, which was established by settlers from Ohio, Michigan, and New York, and a Swiss settlement, started by families from Adams County, Indiana. Finally, there is a settlement of New Order Amish, a community established by a group that included both Old Order Amish and Old Order Mennonite settlers, that has evolved to become more Amish in

its church practices while, like other New Order groups, adopting a more modern lifestyle and emphasizing a more individualistic notion of “spiritual values” and salvation. In exploring the interaction of these four groups, the authors demonstrate that tradition and innovation mix in fascinating ways.

The case studies presented by Nolt and Meyers reinforce the notion that the Amish are a diverse people—historically and ethnically, in their traditions, and even in the governing structure of individual church-communities. In the final section of this work, “Diverse Amish Worlds,” Nolt and Meyers attempt to answer the question that follows naturally from a portrait of the Amish as a diverse people: “In the face of plain diversity, how might we make sense of varied Amish worlds?” (162). Or, in other words, what unites these disparate groups as “Amish”? In Chapter Nine, “Diversity and Unity,” the authors add the last ingredient to the equation that yields diverse, but distinctly Amish, identities. There is, they assert, an on-going internal tension between, along one axis, tradition and rational logic, and along another, communal authority and individual authority. These two major axes of tension, according to Nolt and Meyers, intersect, and the relationship between them provides a means of siting Amish identity. In other words, groups vary in the extent to which they rely on tradition, which vests authority in history and the group’s lived experience, or rational logic, which, according to the authors, is forward thinking. Further, the authors note, to be Amish means assenting to the *Ordnung*, which vests authority over the individual in group consensus. But communities differ in the scope of the *Ordnung* and the degree and context in which community authority might yield to individual experience and justify individual decision-making. The resulting “Amish mosaic” results, the authors claim, from the interaction between settlement factors, such as migration history, ethnicity, and *Ordnung*, the community-specific resolution of internal conflicts, and the particular geographic, social, and temporal context in which the community finds itself. There are numerous ways of being Amish.

And yet, the authors argue, Amish communities recognize each other as Amish, suggesting that, despite the differences, there is an underlying unity in the Amish world. Using the metaphor of conversation, Nolt and Meyers argue, in the tenth and final chapter, entitled “Amish Community as Conversation,” that the diverse Amish world is united and defined in the on-going dialogue within the church-community and between the church-community and its past and the non-Amish society. Ultimately, they suggest, the Amish “exist as a community to the degree that they carry on a distinct conversation, in a different social grammar that is separate from the cultural mainstream” (192).

In discussing diversity and unity, language is often problematic, in this work as in others. The authors talk about engaging “the Amish community,” which suggests the Amish are a monolithic, culturally uniform group. Yet, as their work demonstrates so well, the Amish are a diverse people. Similarly, to refer, as the authors do in the very last paragraph of *Plain Diversity*, to “the Amish dialogue” and “the Amish conversation” is to suggest that there is but one dialogue or one conversation. Nevertheless, this work argues implicitly that there are multiple dialogues and conversations, raising the possibility that it might be useful to understand Amish unity not in the conversation but in the variables shaping and constraining the conversation, which Nolt and Meyers have so clearly pointed out.

Accessible to those new to the study of the Amish but challenging for those engaged in the on-going study of Anabaptist cultures, *Plain Diversity: Amish Cultures & Identities* is a welcome and important contribution to the study of Old Order communities, and the insights it offers will add much to the more general discussion of the construction of cultural identity.

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Karen M. Johnson-Weiner, *Train Up a Child: Old Order Amish & Mennonite Schools*. . Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007. Pp. xii + 289. \$49.95, hard cover.

Recent scholarship of Old Order groups has emphasized diversity. One example is *Plain Diversity: Amish Cultures and Identities* by Steven Nolt and Thomas Meyers (2007). There are now more studies that extend beyond Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, and more studies that include Old Order Mennonites as well as Old Order Amish. *Train Up a Child* reflects all these trends by setting up a framework of Old Order schools that is extensive geographically (nine communities in five states), by establishing a range of traditional to change-accepting schools (labels such as “conservative” and “liberal” being slippery in this context), and by investigating both Amish and Mennonite church-communities. The complexity of the task is daunting.

Old Order groups are “united by history” (vii), but divided by dress, lifestyle, and relationship to technology. Each affiliation defines itself both in relation to the dominant society and to other Old Order groups. Schools, then, reflect and shape Old Order values, but in different ways

as each community seeks to sustain and enhance its own distinctiveness. Johnson-Weiner takes these insights and examines Old Order schools and communities in New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan.

Anchoring the traditional wing of the typology of five kinds of Old Order Schools Johnson-Weiner sets up are the Swartzendruber Amish in upstate New York (Chapter 3). These Swartzendruber schools serve as useful contrasts to all the others. They have no gas lamps or lanterns, no indoor plumbing, wood or coal stoves, no cellars, and almost no parental involvement. Teachers emphasize obedience and memorization; as Johnson-Weiner says, "Children ask their teachers questions, but they never question their teachers" (p. 62). Texts are "archaic," such as McGuffey readers and a 1919 spelling text. Schools are marginal in Swartzendruber life, since faith is taught at home and church, so they receive little attention from adults. Schools prepare students for limited economic interaction with the outside world, while reinforcing religious and linguistic difference.

Johnson-Weiner discusses similar factors regarding the other four types of schools: small schools in small settlements (Ohio, New York); mainstream Amish schools (Holmes and Wayne Counties, Ohio); progressive Amish schools (Elkhart and LaGrange Counties, Indiana, and Centreville, Michigan); and Old Order Mennonite schools (Lancaster County, Pennsylvania). In each case, she compares physical facilities, degree of involvement by parents and ministerial leaders, ratio of instruction in English to German, range of subjects in the curriculum, source of textbooks (reprinted rural textbooks or those written and published by Amish and Mennonite publishers), and whether teachers receive some professional training.

One fascinating point of comparison is whether Old Order schools engage in overt religious education. Many make a distinction between inculcating religion versus engaging in religious instruction. Swartzendruber schools do not include religious or Bible teaching, and they are not Sunday Schools on weekdays. Schools in Holmes and Wayne Counties, Ohio, and Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, often house students from several Old Order groups and must therefore be cautious about including religion in the curriculum. On the other hand, schools in northern Indiana are relatively homogenous and can be considered Christian schools, to the degree that schools are an extension of church (p. 136). These schools utilize texts that promote evangelism and mission, and teachers see their task as training future church members as well as future industrial workers in the Indiana mobile home industry.

Train Up a Child is part of the series published by The Johns Hopkins University Press, "Center Books in Anabaptist Studies." It is well

produced, based on archival and participant-observer research, with a useful bibliography, though the notes follow the unwieldy APA format. The chart on pages 16-17, comparing the five types of schools point by point, is particularly valuable. In terms of theory, Johnson-Weiner cites Marshall Sahlins's assertion, based on his work in Hawaii, that people transform culture in reproducing it, but mainly she uses more static terms such as "boundary maintenance," "preservation," and "negotiation" as explanatory rubrics. Perceiving cultural creativity in the diverse school systems may have led the author to insights beyond descriptive narratives.

Johnson-Weiner makes her point that schools are an excellent venue to explore the diverse identities of Old Order Amish and Old Order Mennonite church-communities. These identities also appear in publishing enterprises, and she compares Old Order Amish publishers in Aylmer, Ontario; Baltic, Ohio; Gordonville, Pennsylvania; and a relatively new publisher, Study Time, in northern Indiana. Distinctive identities, diverse schools, different publishers, all reflect the variety of Old Order faith and life.

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