

Andrew P. Klager, ed., *From Suffering to Solidarity: The Historical Seeds of Mennonite Interreligious, Interethnic, and International Peacebuilding*. Eugene: Pickwick, 2015. Pp 409. Softcover, \$46.58.

In this fine collection of essays, the reader is offered a multivalent introduction to and assessment of the relationship between Mennonites—both historic and contemporary—and peacebuilding. To begin, the first section provides a brief summary of several of the moments that have been critical in developing or displaying nonviolence as constitutive of Mennonite identity. Although much of this material will be familiar to regular readers of this journal (e.g. the influence of medieval Catholic spirituality and Renaissance Humanism on early Anabaptism, the emergence of alternative service to accommodate conscientious objection, and the origins of Mennonite Central Committee), these contributions helpfully orient the reader to the diverse and difficult conditions that have both shaped and tested Mennonite peace commitments. In short, the first section successfully, even if episodically, links

Mennonite identity firmly to its historic peace witness not through its theological or normative claims but through its history, through select performances of costly peace over the past centuries.

Klager's purpose in gathering these essays, however, is not merely to elevate Mennonites as a nonviolent people; his purpose is to illuminate how this witness has become operationalized in the service of peacebuilding, a practical transition that can then be used to "inspire identity groups, whether ethnic, religious, or otherwise, to act in solidarity with those who suffer in similar ways today" (2), hence the transition from suffering to solidarity in the book's title. The second section of the volume, therefore, engages the volatile transitions in North American Mennonite life and thought in the last few decades (and, in this sense, the section echoes the transitions present in Keith Graber Miller's *Wise as Serpents, Innocent as Doves*). Here, one also finds the deep diffidence of Mennonite self-description on display. On the one hand, the discourse-shaping developments in the work of John Paul Lederach are celebrated, as is the enormous amount of energy Mennonites have invested into "breathing life into what was intended to be the goal of human rights" (172).

On the other hand, it is also in this section that one finds the sharp realities of Mennonite experience: they too have supported Nazis, violently abused their spouses, benefitted from genocide, and created myths that support an idealized vulnerable victimhood that often belies the obverse reality. In the Introduction, Klager notes that the Mennonite contributors to the volume tend to be more self-critical than the non-Mennonite authors and his observation is borne out clearly in this second section. He then suggests, quite congenially, that this sensitivity might be a testament to a latent or unacknowledged Mennonite humility. On this point I disagree, but I disagree because of what is at stake in this section of the volume.

In short, this section attempts to account for the evolution of Mennonite self-consciousness as agents for peace in the world. Or, to restate, it unwittingly acknowledges that simply being born within or growing up within a Mennonite community is insufficient to create peacebuilders. A metanoia, something like adult conversion, is necessary for Mennonites to become Mennonites who are active peacemakers. In their recounting of the failures—both historic and contemporary—the Mennonite authors are acutely aware of the diversity within their own family. Acknowledging persistent failure is not, therefore, an act of humility; it is a recognition that nonviolent peacebuilding requires very specific practices, habits, and dispositions that may be

cultivated uniquely and even favorably within the Mennonite world, but they are neither effortless nor ubiquitous within that world. And, for this reason, each of the contributions here concludes with a programmatic vision for Mennonites, visions that address the internal insufficiencies of the tradition itself. Understood this way, it is clear that the authors are not merely humble; they are realists who assume the Mennonite church is also a locus for conflict and constantly in need of attention, encouragement, and reformation. What they have learned through this recognition is, in fact, what they have to share with the rest of the world.

Finally, the third section of the volume turns to an array of stunningly positive evaluations of contexts—Egypt, Indonesia, Colombia, Palestine-Israel, the Congo, and Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo—that have been shaped by or intertwined with Mennonite peacebuilding approaches in recent decades. The peacebuilding elements appropriated in each of these contexts is idiosyncratic, as one might expect, but the themes of mutuality, capacity building, dialogue, exile, and holistic engagement permeate all of them. Perhaps most pronounced, however, is the recognition of a promising yet precarious future that is open-ended in all contexts.

In gathering these essays, Klager acutely focuses the knife-edge that so many societies, and so many people in our North American society, live on. He is convinced that, although the Mennonite tradition is far from perfect, it has something unique to offer, something that separates Mennonites from other religious traditions, something urgently needed that is usable in the service of peace for non-Mennonites today. From this perspective, this volume is insightfully coherent. The narrative assembled here is certainly not seamless, nor is it intended to be. Rather, it poignantly and powerfully sketches key moments in the Mennonite transition from sixteenth-century martyrdom and suffering to the other-embracing peacebuilding enacted in the twenty-first century invitingly for the purpose of inviting other religious groups in the midst of suffering and violence—whether perpetrators or victims—to see themselves in this story and to come to similar conclusions...hopefully in less than four centuries!

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