

Book Reviews

History and Social Science Reviews

Martin William Mittelstadt and Brian K. Pipkin, eds., *Mennocostals: Pentecostal and Mennonite Stories of Convergence*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2020. Pp. ix + 178. Softcover, \$29 US.

The Mennonite experience in America has intersected with Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity almost since the time of the Azusa Street Revival began in 1906, yet to date very little scholarship has explored the fruitful crossings and generative tensions between these two strands of Protestantism. This slim volume contributes to the literature by bringing together ten personal essays by scholars, pastors, and missionaries who have been mutually enriched by the Anabaptist-Mennonite and Pentecostal traditions. The contributors locate themselves in specific denominational contexts (e.g., Mennonite Church USA, Assemblies of God, United Methodist Church, etc.) but explore experiences of theological “convergence” in formation and ministry. The titular portmanteau “Mennocostal” describes well the mutual enrichment explored in each of these essays.

The essays in the volume reflect varied vocational and academic disciplines. Theology, biblical studies, and religious studies are foregrounded; United Methodist pastor Matthew Paugh, for example, offers reflections on the theology of John Wesley as “grist” for ecumenical dialogue among Anabaptists and Pentecostals, while editor/contributor Martin W. Mittelstadt describes his scholarly and personal formation by way of the various Mennonite and Pentecostal “lenses” he has used to read and interpret the books of Luke and

Acts. Other authors emphasize history, ethics, ecumenical studies, and like disciplinary approaches. Readers who want to know more about the Mennocostal “convergences” outside North America should read the essays by César García, the general secretary of Mennonite World Conference, and North American missionaries Rick Waldrop, Ryan Gladwin, and Gerald Shenk.

One of the volume’s most distinctive and valuable contributions comes from the field of literary studies. In her essay “Stories We Live By: Convergences in Community Narratives of Mennonites and Pentecostals,” Natasha Wiebe compares stories from her childhood among both Mennonites and Pentecostals with other narratives produced by Mennonite and Pentecostal writers. She convincingly shows that both Mennonite and Pentecostal communities have “storylines” that animate community life; sometimes these storylines overlap, and other times they are at odds with one another. She concludes that “storylines are not just stories; they provide frameworks through which we act, shaping our worship as noisy or quiet; offering practices for ‘being in the world, but not of it’; and determining how we converse—or not—about subjects that challenge community beliefs or potentially disrupt community harmony” (156). Her contribution offers an interesting way forward for Mennonites and Pentecostals seeking to understand one another, a path that goes beyond locating shared doctrines to interrogating the historical narratives and memories that give substance to collective identity in the present.

Editor Mittelstadt acknowledges in his introduction one of the volume’s glaring weaknesses: its lack of diversity. He insists that he and Pipkin “sought diversity” in recruiting contributors and succeeded in recruiting writers from different vocational orientations (ministry and the academy) and from both within and outside North America. Yet they also admit that they ultimately “failed to secure additional gender, ethnic, and global south diversity” (xv). Indeed, the volume contains only one contribution by a woman (Wiebe) and only one essay by a voice from the Global South (García).

I was also dismayed by the foregrounding of John Howard Yoder in this volume. Without a doubt, Yoder’s work was foundational for understanding theological connections between the Anabaptist and Pentecostal traditions, a point made by several different contributors. Yet there is little attempt to reckon with the now-well-known abuse committed by Yoder and how that reality shapes our ongoing use of his scholarship in theological, ethical, and ecumenical reflection. Is Yoder still the best figure in which to locate the genesis for Anabaptist-Pentecostal “convergence”? What is gained and what is

lost by foregrounding Yoder in these explorations? The contributors give no evident attention to these questions.

Such weaknesses and concerns aside, this volume is a welcome addition to the literature on Anabaptist-Pentecostal intersections. Speaking personally, as a Christian whose own denominational tradition, the Brethren in Christ Church, blends Anabaptist and holiness theologies, I found myself resonating strongly with many of the experiences recounted by the authors in this collection. Overall, it will be most useful for readers interested in accessible, personal reflections on the relationship between Anabaptism and Pentecostalism. As Mittelstadt notes in his introduction, readers would do well to think of this book through the framework of “testimony,” that form of spiritual autobiographical reflection well known in both Mennonite and Pentecostal traditions. Like testimonies shared in worship services, Mittelstadt contends, the essays in this volume “call listeners to an active faith” and “witness—dare I say prophesy—to a growing chorus, that is to collective voices committed to the best of both traditions” (xvi). Readers seeking this kind of reflection will benefit from this collection.

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Marshall V. King, *Disarmed: The Radical Life and Legacy of Michael “MJ” Sharp*. Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2022. Pp. 216. Hardcover, \$40.79.

Disarmed is a moving and inspiring story of a young man’s deep and abiding commitment to peacemaking in contexts of violence. It is the story of someone taken too soon and one in which the questions of how and why will never fully be explained. Michael “MJ” Sharp was the son of a Mennonite pastor, educated at a Mennonite college, and someone who demonstrated a gift for compassionate listening early on in life. He continually demonstrated efforts to approach others with acknowledgement and a desire to understand rather than judge, and this gave him the ability to connect with people in a variety of contexts and on a level that very few can manage.

Michael’s family and friends chose Marshall V. King, an award-winning journalist based in Goshen, Indiana, and adjunct professor of communication at Goshen College, who also, like MJ, graduated from Eastern Mennonite College. King interviewed more than one hundred friends and colleagues from around the world to build a