

Despite the reservation noted above, I believe that sister church relationships offer a helpful way forward in theology and mission for the twenty-first century. In an Anabaptist framework, sister church relationships offer a tantalizing opportunity for witness in a world at war. Could Mennonites build sister church relationships with congregations in Iraq, Iran, and Syria as a witness against the totalizing power of war? We could offer a powerful witness of a concrete way of rejecting “othering” in favor of seeing our global counterparts as true brothers and sisters in Christ.

Lutheran pastor David Kline notes that “we no longer understand ourselves as keepers of the Great Commission for the sake of the world but as companions on a shared journey with a shared commission” (139). As Kragt Bakker has shown, sister church relationships offer intriguing possibilities for increased theological engagement and an expansion of our vision for mission. For the Mennonite church, these intentional engagements can move us beyond the cultural fortresses we have been tempted to build around our theological and ecclesial engagements, and can open possibilities to new life as our partners around the world share their gifts with us and as we receive them with humility, grace, and gratitude, and give of ourselves in return.

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Steven P. Miller, *The Age of Evangelicalism: America's Born-Again Years*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2014. 221 pp. \$24.95. ISBN: 9780199777952.

During the 2004 American presidential campaign, candidate George W. Bush sought his second term with overt appeals to the evangelical electorate. At one campaign stop in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, President Bush was received by a local religious group and presented with a quilt embroidered with the statement, “I Love America.” This stitched sentiment was presented not by the head of the local patriotic megachurch or by Lancaster’s family values activists but by members of the local Amish community. The fact that Bush was able to capture the minds and hearts of these pastoral pacifists in the midst of the war on terror is one of the many novel pieces of evidence for what historian Steven Miller calls *The Age of Evangelicalism*.

The overarching argument of the book is that evangelicalism is at the *center* of American history since the 1970s. Typically understood as a subculture or sect, evangelicalism according to Miller is actually constitutive of American culture and politics themselves. The claim is not so much that periodic evangelical gusts fanned certain flames in American society but that evangelicalism was actually the air being breathed—or in some cases, choked on.

Miller is not giving a simple account of the rise of a “Christian America,” via either

the Republican Religious Right or progressive evangelicals, though both feature prominently in the narrative. Neither is he arguing that most Americans became evangelicals or even that their visions for America were always legislated. Instead, Miller contends that evangelicalism simply provided “a language, medium, and foil” that helped Americans make sense of the world (5). This third term “foil” is crucial, for Miller argues that even ardent anti-evangelicals were forced to inhale evangelicals’ noxious fumes, a fact that caused these resisters to alter their own messages and visions for America.

The details of this story are found amid politics and paintings, screeds and songs, bills and Branson, Missouri. Miller begins his story with what he calls the “seventies evangelical moment,” a period when America jumped at the opportunity to be “born again” after Watergate. Importantly, this decade would produce America’s first publically “born again” president, the Sunday-School-teaching, Southern Baptist Democrat from south Georgia, Jimmy Carter. Carter’s homespun Christianity capitalized on the therapeutic brand of faith emerging in American culture at the time, an evangelicalism more focused on personal integrity than nationalism. But Carter’s evangelical America would soon be surpassed by Ronald Reagan’s as the emerging Christian Right helped drive most evangelicals to the Republican side in the 1980 presidential election.

Though not an evangelical himself, Reagan was an evangelical’s president. He would implement the “God strategy” with great effect, using overtures to the Christian Right that created his persona of defender of *all* religious life in America. The GOP would seize upon this mantle for the next several years, gradually causing Americans on all sides of the political and ideological spectrum to equate religion with Republicanism. Only at the “Obama pivot” were Democrats able to renew their religious vision, in large part because of Obama’s paeans to progressive evangelicals like Jim Wallis. Yet again, evangelicals were the instigators of this change. Miller’s overall political narrative is characterized by nuance and depth, reworking overused binaries and attending to overlooked figures and movements that other treatments of this period neglect.

Miller supplements the political story with dips into intellectual history and pop culture, illustrating how evangelical ideas influenced highbrow discourse even as “evangelical chic” helped to define the social history of America at this time. The influential concepts of the “naked public square,” “culture wars,” and even the academic study of American religion itself are shown to be products of evangelical influence. The genre of Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) emerged alongside *Left Behind* novels, Thomas Kinkade paintings, and “purpose-driven” self-help guides, all capturing hearts and minds even as they grabbed a share of their respective media markets.

Miller’s riveting references to intellectual and pop cultural currents make me won-

der if his book ends too soon. He places the eschaton of the age of evangelicalism at the 2012 presidential election, the first national race since 1976 where evangelicals were neither overtly courted nor represented among the candidates. He is surely right that the political fortunes of evangelicals took a sharp decline at this juncture, but analysis of the decline of evangelical cultural influence is lacking here. The evangelical right and left may have lost significant power as polarizing political forces, but what about their persistent impact in framing quintessentially American modes of entertainment, therapeutic self-help, or charity? Profitable faith-based cinema like *God's Not Dead*² or *Heaven Is for Real*,³ immensely popular preachers like Joel Osteen, and the giant aid organization World Vision are just a few examples that signify continued and evolving evangelical success even as they also display quintessentially American cultural characteristics. Perhaps examples like these are evidence that the age that began in the 1970s has simply entered a new phase. They also may confirm that Miller's narrative is at times driven too much by the evangelical political story. More discussion of the pervasive power of evangelical intellectual life, "chic," and especially how non-evangelicals adopted or resisted these forms would have made his argument all the more compelling.

Readers of this journal will likely be interested in the ways that Anabaptists—who are not a significant part of Miller's narrative—show up in the book. Whether in his descriptions of the Amish welcome of Bush (highlighted above) or of the profound influence of Anabaptists in evangelical social justice movements, or in his characterization of Mennonite-lite thinker Stanley Hauerwas as the Francis Schaeffer of the evangelical left, Miller makes it clear he believes that Anabaptists are part of the evangelical epoch in some way. This novel historical placement of Anabaptists as active participants in the culture-making of post-1970s America should open up all sorts of questions for members of our tradition who would rather consider ourselves a foil to the age's excesses.

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Berry Friesen and John K. Stone, *If Not Empire, What?: A Survey of the Bible*, CreateSpace, 2014. 354 pp. \$17.00. ISBN: 9780692344781.

For a little over a decade now, "empire criticism"—an interpretive method that aims to uncover the anti-imperial message in various biblical texts—has been on the ascent, especially among New Testament scholars. Friesen and Stoner's book makes

² *God's Not Dead*, directed by Harold Cronk (Scottsdale, AZ: Pure Flix Entertainment, 2014), film.

³ *Heaven Is For Real*, directed by Randall Wallace (Culver City, CA: TriStar Pictures, 2014), film.