

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.

a real contribution to this approach, not only by presenting a popular account of empire criticism—one that will be especially valuable for Anabaptists—but also by trying to show that this anti-imperial message is continuous with a tradition that runs from the Old Testament through to the early church and is embodied especially in Christ. The key word in their book is *empire*: “a system of coordinated control that enriches itself through overwhelming socio-economic and military power at the global level” and “portrays itself as the primary source of security and peace in the world” (7). The authors, for their part, view empire as the primary threat to life and peace on earth, and they attempt to show how valuable the Bible can be as a source of imaginative and political resistance to this global threat.

But hasn't the Bible often been a tool of oppressors? Friesen and Stoner argue that the history of the Hebrews is actually a history of two competing visions of God, one allied with the political and sacral centers of imperial power, the other the friend of the dispossessed and marginalized. Moreover, throughout the book, the authors provide an accessible account of the ancient contexts and alternative worldviews that so often prove crucial to a robust interpretation of such biblical stories. By directing our attention to these historical and imaginative contexts, Friesen and Stoner not only push the willing reader past simplistic Sunday School interpretations but also lead us to deeper, richer, and more demanding readings of long-familiar texts. For example, they reveal the original *political* meanings of words such as “gospel,” “salvation,” and “ekklesia” (church). Their interpretation of Revelation is especially beautiful and instructive. The stories, as they tell them, offer fresh insight into the faith of Jesus and the character of YHWH's kingdom, correcting distortions and cultural complicity that have too often embedded themselves in Christians' belief systems.

There are many who will profit from this book. It will be edifying to Anabaptists, especially to many of us who already have an anti-imperial worldview and who want to make sense of the Old and New Testaments within our established worldviews. I imagine that the book will also be of interest to radically minded non-Christians who seek an alternative to empire and who will find surprising and fascinating information about the relevance of biblical history to their project. On the other hand, the book may be unconvincing to Christians of other traditions and those unfamiliar with the empire-criticism approach to the Bible. Friesen and Stoner are not biblical scholars in their own right, nor do they often appeal to the work of ecumenical biblical scholars; rather, they rely almost entirely on a single work by Wes Howard-Brook for their textual interpretation. As Friesen and Stoner know well, anyone can justify their doctrine with Scripture, so even in a popular work one desires more scholarly references to establish the credibility of various readings. On more than a couple of occasions, the authors claim to understand texts that have puzzled Christians and scholars for centuries—the messages are anti-imperial, of course! They may well be right, but without further reference to

reliable sources, a skeptic could very easily dismiss their entire project.

One might also worry that the book relies too heavily on a binary categorization of texts as either pro-empire or anti-empire. Anti-empire stories are praised, while pro-empire stories are vilified as coming from places of imperial power; indeed, Friesen and Stoner often seem to run the Bible through a kind of imperially poisoned-well hermeneutic—any text written by those close to the levers of the empire’s power necessarily serves the interests of empire. Members of the empire are *always* and unforgivably suspect. Empire ruins and poisons everything; thus, those in league with the empire cannot have authentic relationships with God. Any Old Testament book or story that holds a “David-and-Solomon” worldview (or honors the kings in any way) or that emphasizes temple worship is pro-empire and dismissed. Because this anti-imperial lens is laid upon the Scriptures, one is led to ignore or even deny the other ways God may speak to us through the Word, even through those ghastly pro-empire voices (Joshua, Judges, 1 Samuel, First Isaiah, the David tradition, etc.). The sheer wrongness of empire is so absolute that the reader is led to imagine that empire may be the only real evil about which we ought ever to speak. But those of us with a long experience of the redeeming but also flawed reality of our churches might wonder: is it really the case that small, nonviolent, forgiving, and suffering communities are guaranteed to be righteous? Is centralized power the only world-destructive malice with which we have to contend?

These questions lead to a final concern: Friesen and Stoner’s exhaustive focus on the political leaves one to wonder, where is God? To their credit, the authors do believe that life is more than political community: life involves love and loss and the entire panoply of human relationships (201). Nevertheless, there are only a handful of references to life also being about a living relationship with God (YHWH). Instead, Christianity seems to be first and foremost a political revolution. The work and message of Jesus is simply the formation of an alternative community, a new social system, one founded on justice, compassion, forgiveness, and nonviolent resistance rather than domination, vengeance, and bloodshed (see 248–49, 271). Indeed, these are all essential to the kingdom of God, but the presence of God itself is strangely elided by Friesen and Stoner’s account. Throughout the vast majority of the book, prayer is not mentioned as an important facet of this community—as if the strength to stand against empire and the wisdom for justice, compassion, and nonviolence could be imagined apart from calling on God’s Spirit in, with, and for us. For readers who believe—and believe it is extremely important—that God comes near to us, lives in us, and transforms our spirits with, yes, a kind of supernatural love, the vision of community presented by Friesen and Stoner may appear too much like a merely political vision of utopia.

My concerns notwithstanding, *If Not Empire, What?* is a valuable and instructive book, especially for those of us eager to work for the kingdom of God and to con-

front the empire. Throughout their book, Friesen and Stoner reiterate the radical, anti-imperial voice that the body of Christ needs to hear again and again if it is to make manifest the kingdom of God, here and now. It is a hard message but one we need to hear until all of our lives—political as well as spiritual—are fully conformed to the life of Christ.

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Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Eduardo Mendieta, eds., *Decolonizing Epistemologies: Latina/o Theology and Philosophy*, Fordham University Press, New York, 2012. 321 pp. \$35.00. ISBN: 9780823241361.

“The maintenance of life is an expression of knowledge” (19). This is how Walter Mignolo begins his opening essay in the edited volume *Decolonizing Epistemologies: Latina/o Theology and Philosophy*. Serving as a kind of capstone for the collection, Mignolo’s claim captures a thread and a position that runs through the other contributions, albeit in different ways. The volume concerns the question of epistemology—of what we know and how we know and how we know what we know, and, most importantly for Mignolo and friends, how we produce what we know. The claim that the maintenance of life—meaning all spheres of life: economic, political, social, religious, as well as the banal acts by which each of these are constructed each day—is an expression of knowledge suggests that everyday life reveals our epistemologies, and at the same time, that everyday life produces our epistemologies. In their essays, the authors of this volume attempt to decolonize these default epistemologies that order our lives—epistemologies that occur at the intersection of power and knowledge, of coloniality and liberation.

Mignolo’s essay sets the stage for the remainder of the volume. He reviews the interactions between modernity, coloniality, postmodernity, and decolonization. Coloniality refers to the ideological structure undergirding various forms of colonialism and is, he argues, “constitutive of modernity” (23). Thus, there is a eurocentric linkage between knowledge and coloniality—eurologocentrism—which polices the boundaries of what counts as knowledge and who counts as an epistemic subject/agent. The work of decolonization is to de-link knowledge from eurocentrism (and thereby coloniality). “Decolonial thinking,” Mignolo writes, “means to dwell and think at the border (the slash “/” that divides and unites modernity/coloniality)” (26). Further, “decolonizing epistemology and decolonial epistemology have to be anchored in geo- and body-politics of knowledge” (27). I want to highlight two essays that perform this epistemology well and raise some provocative points of contact with Mennonite/Anabaptist theology and epistemology.

In her essay “Mujerista Discourse: A Platform for Latinas’ Subjugated Knowledge,”