

snapshots of Mennonite institutions, including retirement homes, historical societies, credit unions, and camps as well as Conrad Grebel College and Mennonite Central Committee Ontario. Moving even closer to the present, the concluding chapters address ways in which Mennonites have assimilated into the cultural milieu of Ontario, touching on much more contemporary theological issues (homosexuality, Jesus, and Salvation), and the recent histories of Mennonite institutions such as Rockway Mennonite Collegiate and Conrad Grebel University College.

In reflecting upon the book, I found that *In Search of Promised Lands* intersected with my own context and perspective in both helpful and problematic ways. On one hand, I valued the opportunity to learn more about the history of my ancestors. Steiner's narrative focus allowed me to see continuities and connections that I would never have had the chance to learn about otherwise. On the other hand, I found the overarching narrative of providence troublesome, even though Steiner works descriptively and does not appear to directly endorse the self-understanding of settler Mennonites as people bound for a promised land. Perhaps it is my philosophical bias, but I found myself looking for more methodological and historiographical reflection in the book. For example, Steiner's fascinating description of how Ontario did not contain all of the economic promise expected makes me wonder how Mennonites have understood God's promise—is providence economic, spiritual, social, all three, or something else? Given that the title of the book suggests that Ontario was or is a Promised Land for Mennonites, the book does little to engage with the possibility that the land (particularly the Haldimand tract) could well have been promised to someone else....This raises a larger question about the role of a historical book: should history be written as a collection of facts, dates, and stories alone; or should historical writing be required to justify what it values?

In conclusion, *In Search of Promised Lands* is both comprehensive and accessible, although its comprehensiveness may be a barrier to continuous reading. Both scholars and individuals interested in Mennonites will doubtless find the book to be a valuable resource and reference work. Reservations aside, as historical reflection on Mennonite groups continues, Steiner's proposed spectrum "from traditionalist withdrawal to conservative boundary maintenance to evangelical renewal to progressive assimilation" should serve as a helpful framework for further research and thought (15).

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Alan Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI, 2016. 336 pp. \$26.99. ISBN: 9780801048494.

Alan Kreider in his new volume, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire*, proposes that the shaping theme of early Christianity was “Patience,” understood as an attribute of God, a characteristic of Jesus’s life and teaching, and a defining aspect of a Christian lifestyle within the pagan Roman empire.

Well-known for his scholarship on the early church, Kreider did some incredible research for this book and liberally quotes such luminaries as Justin Martyr, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Lactantius, Cyprian, Tertullian, and many others. Drawing on eighty ancient sources and twenty-eight modern compendiums (the book contains seventeen pages of bibliography), he makes an excellent case that commitment to Jesus for believers in the first through fourth centuries CE meant, above all, a faith and lifestyle based on patience. The latter two luminaries above, along with Augustine of Hippo, wrote treatises on patience as a prime virtue. “In the strongest terms, Tertullian states that patience is at the heart of being a Christian. To be a Christian means that one has accorded to patience ‘pre-eminence in matters pertaining to God’ ” (21).

But neither Cyprian nor Tertullian stop with the heavenly. Just as Jesus was revered for actually living out a Good News message, Christians were called to adopt a new lifestyle—or “habitus” as Kreider calls it, borrowing a concept from French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. The “corporeal knowledge” of the early Christians—that is, the group-and-individual-shaping culture that set them apart from pagan Roman society—provided the necessary strength to endure severe suffering and become an attractive alternative community. “It is habitus that constitutes our profoundest sense of identity; that forms our deepest convictions, allegiances, and repulsions; and that shapes our response to ultimate questions—what will we live for, die for, and kill (or not kill) for” (40).

So, while theological belief was part of the picture, being Christian was essentially about the physical nature of faith—it was internal (posture during prayer, proper way to perform the sign of the Cross, the essentiality of the Kiss of Peace) and external (choosing one’s occupation, patience in business, radical nonviolence, caring for the poor and sick). And such strongly-shared habitus came about not by accident but through careful nurturing by the baptized gathering, local congregational leaders, and the prolific church “fathers.” In describing the formation and playing out of habitus, Kreider examines worship, Christian response to plague and martyrdom, gender roles and sexual mores, and, of course, the extended and complicated process of catechesis. Habitus of the Christians was what pulled outside observers toward this peculiar people and, when contrasted with the habitus of Roman-Hellenistic society, pushed pagans toward the church.

It is common knowledge that the early church grew rapidly, even in the face of suffering. Counterintuitively, it does not appear that fiery preaching or exhortation

to convert was the impetus for growth. Rather, it was the very “strange patience” and habitus inculcated during the frequent gatherings of the community that drove the rapid church growth during these centuries. While pagan onlookers were not welcome at most Christian worship services, friends of the Christians “out in the world” could see that these people behaved differently—and in a very attractive way. Believers didn’t necessarily share aggressively much about what their faith entailed, but they certainly lived out visibly what their mysterious faith taught. And the friends and onlookers were drawn to it. Two North African church leaders, Minucius Felix and Cyprian, both used the phrase “We do not speak great things, but we live them” (14 and 296).

But all good things come to an end. In two final chapters, one dealing with the Emperor Constantine and the other with Augustine of Hippo, Kreider describes in graphic detail how the concept of patience was redefined (by Augustine) and ignored (by the Emperor), leading to a huge shift of mentality within the Christian family. Kreider identifies the shifts of the period that most Anabaptists know well: Christian leadership becoming part of the “powers” in society and eventually taking on the mantle of “state” authority; Christian theology accepting state violence and even violence against fellow believers (as in disputations about theological heterodoxy); a shift to a Christendom mentality that included a 180-degree reversal to accept the swearing of oaths as “the bond that held society together”; and, of course, a shift to focus on inward motivation and away from outward habitus—so that individuals could become Christians without having to change their outward behavior. (This is also the era when expectations of “ordinary” laypersons diverged from those of the monks and clerics.)

Kreider adroitly explains these shifts, concluding with a rueful summary of how Christian mission became “an exercise in imperialism.” If we, as inheritors of this aggressive faith, wish to reconnect with the patience that characterized that earliest church, we might be tempted to “make facile generalizations or construct how-to formulas—those would be impatient responses!” (296).

Ending his tome there, Kreider does not give much more help to us as mission leaders. He points to reforming our own habitus. But still, there are several obvious implications for mission today in Kreider’s thesis:

1. Christian lifestyle is *the central construct* for mission. While institutional Christianity seems to focus most energy on proper scriptural interpretation, precise theological definitions, and institutional authority, Kreider helps us see that the early church had a rather simple idea of faith: formation of a conscious, faithful, alternative lifestyle with the help of the Holy Spirit, and careful Christian education rooted in the teaching and way of Jesus (296). Rev. Glen Guyton interprets the current Mennonite Church USA convention theme

for 2017, “Love is a Verb,” in terms reflective of Kreider’s heroes Minucius Felix and Cyprian: “Love is shown not in simply paying homage to some ancient text, but that love is shown through our actions. Love the verb models the example of our Lord and Savior Christ Jesus. This theme is so much bigger than one corporate entity. ‘Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.’—1 John 3:18.”⁸

2. Mission should focus on establishing a productive culture/habitus parallel to the destructive conventional human cultures. Far from pulling new believers out of their native society, mission should instead help them find new freedom, new meaning, and new ways to enjoy and practice God’s love in relationship with their neighbors in their native society. This means providing both free choice and a new option. Surely this must be good news for our relativistic and anti-mission-minded millennial culture. Dr. Myron Augsburger, writing in *The Mennonite*, urges Christ’s followers to a new understanding of ecumenism and evangelism: “We need to rethink the nature of evangelism to more properly engage in evangelistic work, for such is to be a witness of grace. Evangelism is never to be manipulation or coercion, but is seeking by life and word to make faith in Jesus a possibility for persons!...One [problem] is that in mission work we may be seen not as clarifying options for people, but simply as proselytizing.”⁹
3. Surely if patience was underappreciated during the Roman Empire, it must be far more endangered today. If maintaining the traditional patience of the early church was impossible for one of the greatest of saints, Augustine of Hippo, how can we as mission leaders steer our churches and mission efforts back to the ideal? Should we question the tough realities of “efficiencies” built into modern mission structures? Do we need to eschew the time-saving features of modern communications, technology, and transportation? Must we abandon such modernistic methods as goal-setting for world evangelism efforts? If such suggestions are impossible to fully implement in the faster-faster twenty-first century, at the very least Kreider implies that we should work to re-instill a mentality of patience into our Christian (missional) habitus. The resulting ferment should be worth the attempt!

⁸ Glen Guyton, “Love Is a Verb: Don’t Get It Twisted,” *The Mennonite* (blog), May 25, 2016, <https://themennonite.org/love-verb-dont-get-twisted/>.

⁹ Myron Augsburger, “Anabaptists: Ecumenical, Radical and Prophetic,” *The Mennonite*, May 20, 2016, <https://themennonite.org/feature/anabaptists-ecumenical-radical-prophetic/>.

Finally, I was impatient with two small matters of *Patient Ferment*. Where is discipleship in all of this? While we might forgive the Mennonite Kreider for not wanting to over-do the obvious comparisons with Anabaptism, I was a little puzzled to not find this familiar word even once in the index. Isn't discipleship just a fancy way to say habitus?

While Kreider makes a strong case for the patience theme throughout the book, and especially as he shows how the church's commitment to it was essentially sabotaged by Constantine and Augustine, he seems to spend even more time making the case for habitus. It seems to me that habitus has more to do with ferment than patience does. So while the title is not incorrect, the ubiquity of habitus in this story certainly justifies a prominent place for it in the title credits.

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Curtis W. Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity: Theology for Other Baptists*, Baylor University Press, Waco, TX, 2014. 466 pp. \$49.95. ISBN: 9781481300278.

Many denominations face deepening polarities as they engage in the social issues of our day. This isn't new. In the modern era, these polarities have been splitting along the lines of fundamentalism and liberalism. It is easy to blame the source of these polarities on secular political campaigns of the recent decades. It is rarer to assign responsibility for these divisions to the religious communities themselves. In his book, *Contesting Catholicity*, Curtis Freeman demonstrates the formative influence of the Baptist tradition in North America on disagreements that occur in the town square. Citing Carlyle Marney, Freeman suggests that fundamentalists have "stuck the window shut" while liberals "have stuck it open." In both cases, "one loses the use of the window" (56). In most organizations, the tendency is to compromise in managing these polarities. The third way is cast in terms of hope for a "middle" way. But there is "an invisible wall between liberalism and fundamentalism" that will not allow a way forward to emerge "without a paradigm shift" (86–87).

In his reading of modern church history, Freeman rightly names fundamentalists and liberals as "siblings under the skin." Both "inhabit the same type of theology (i.e., modern) even if they operate within different paradigms (Scripture vs. experience)" (86). Neither of these "possess sufficient resources for the constructive theological work that lies ahead" (87). In coming to terms with its own alterity (i.e., otherness), the church will find that the third way is not a compromised middle way but a *different* way.

Following in the furrow plowed by James McClendon, Freeman boldly explores the possibility of recovering and reclaiming the oneness of church for "Other Baptists,"