

Book Reviews

Jennifer Graber, *The Gods of Indian Country: Religion and Struggle in the American West*, Oxford University Press, New York, NY, 2018. 288 pp. \$33.00. ISBN: 978-0-19-027961-5.

Numerous peoples have been forced to grapple with attempts by American settler communities to transform them. The realm called “the religious” is one site where these interactions have played out. In *The Gods of Indian Country: Religion and Struggle in the American West*, Jennifer Graber explores one such story. The book follows a series of encounters between the Kiowas Indians¹ and settler Americans in the radically changing American West of the nineteenth century. Using a variety of primary source materials—most notably, Kiowas calendar entries, ledger drawings, tipis, and shields—Graber is able to describe in detail the significant changes that occurred among the Kiowas people in their movement from the open lands of Indian Country to the divided lands that resulted from the process of land allotment in the late-nineteenth century, paying particular attention to the role of ritual interactions with sacred power in this movement. Graber “tracks the ways that ‘religion’ was central to Americans’ acquisition of Indian lands, as well as Kiowa efforts to defend their sovereignty and secure their community’s survival in the face of American territorial expansion” (13). In the process, the reader is caught up in a story that unveils the harsh realities of colonial power, and the role that sacred objects and practices played in both the imposition of that power by settler communities and the attempts at response by the Kiowas.

Paying attention to the source materials from both the missional communities involved in the westward expansion of the United States and the Kiowas communities grappling with this expansion, Graber is able to draw out a number of key themes. She illustrates how Protestant reformers and missionaries working among Native communities in the American West constructed a particular designation—“Friends of the Indian”—in contrast to the dominant logics employed by Americans pushing for military approaches to the so-called “Indian problem.” Using letters, memoirs, governmental and denominational reports, and newspaper and magazine articles, Graber shows how Protestant ministers and missionaries, calling themselves “Friends of the Indian” would repeatedly work to acquire land in Indian Country and argue publically for the transformation of Native peoples

¹ Graber uses the term “Indian” because the term is commonly employed by American writers to refer to Indigenous people in North America. In Canada, the term has become more derogatory.

through peaceful means.² They sought to both Christianize and civilize the Kiowas people in the face of American expansion, thus avoiding the need for military force in the settlement of the West. By naming themselves “Friends of the Indian,” they became situated among the Kiowas as a benevolent presence, actively working to change Kiowas ways of living without having to resort to military violence.

But this designation also served to mask their support and participation in the colonial violence that coincided with the expansion of the United States. Claiming to protect the Kiowas from the threat of American military aggression, the Friends of the Indian worked to acquire land among the Kiowas and pursue a variety of methods of “civilizing” them. During the nineteenth century, the Friends of the Indian mounted a successful campaign that directed Kiowas peoples onto newly formed reservations, over which the Friends of the Indian maintained full control, all in the hopes of both Christianizing and civilizing Kiowas through peaceful means. “To secure the West, white Protestants needed to control the region’s politics, economics, and religious life” (174). They opposed traditional Kiowa interactions with sacred power, and prescribed Indian assimilation through land dispossession and compulsory education, all the while presenting these strategies as gifts to Kiowas and proof of American benevolence. They were successfully keeping Kiowas safe from military aggression but still exposing them to the violence of colonial power through assimilation practices and land dispossession.

The Gods of Indian Country also shows how Kiowas survival of American occupation involved ritual interactions with sacred power, and their ability to adapt as needed. Using Kiowas primary sources, Graber demonstrates how, in the face of the expansion of colonial power in the American West, Kiowas Indians would employ a variety of new ritual practices to keep their people alive and well connected on an increasingly small stretch of land; they continued and adapted their practices and sacred objects as a means to sustain themselves in the face of the powers imposed upon them by the Friends of the Indian and the American state. As these pressures intensified toward the end of the century, they engaged new sources of power and new rites like peyote ingestion, Ghost Dancing, and affiliation with Christian schools. Graber, through her examination of Kiowas material culture, displays the resiliency of the Kiowas people in the face of colonial power as they maintained their long attachments to place and the sacred power that dwelled among them.

2 Mennonites were involved in this work. From 1880 to 1901, Mennonite Boarding Schools were established in the Cheyenne and Arapahoe Indian Territory (later known as Oklahoma). For information on Mennonite involvements in Indian Country, see Steve Heinrichs, *Confessing the Past: Mennonites and the Indian School System* (Winnipeg: Mennonite Church Canada, 2013), https://www.commonword.ca/FileDownload/18842/2013_IR_Confessing_the_Past.pdf?t=1.

A crucial part of their ability to do this was maintaining their ritual practices and adapting them when appropriate.

Graber's text is academic in scope, bringing together a variety of scholarly fields (historiography, religious studies, Native studies) in intriguing ways. It also carries significance for the church as it engages in missional practices in North America and across the globe. Graber does well in showing how many of the Protestant missionaries and reformers engaging with the Kiowas were genuine in both their concern for protecting them from the threat of American military force and ensuring their continued survival in the changing American west. That they continued to obscure the ways in which they exposed the Kiowas to the violence and coercion of colonial expansion only adds to the tragedy of the story. Even good intentions can become violent and horrific when co-opted by colonial power.

What's more, there are many ways in which we see this same impulse emerging in our churches today. For example, the language of friendship is often heard in the work of Indigenous-Settler Relations here in Canada. The desire to be friends with our Indigenous neighbours is growing among the Mennonite churches in my community. But I worry that this desire, especially when it remains severed from the work of actively dismantling the colonial powers that continue to take hold of Indigenous and settler communities across North America, will once again obscure the ways in which our efforts at befriending Indigenous peoples will nevertheless expose them to the continued violent realities of colonial power. Reading this book will remind readers of the need to constantly examine our missional practices, teasing out the ways in which even our best intentions can work to further encourage the expansion of colonial violence. The desire to be "friends of the Indian" is alive and well in a church whose missional impulses remain uncritically examined.

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Jayson Georges and Mark D. Baker, *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures: Biblical Foundations and Practical Essentials*, IVP Academic, Downers Grove, IL, 2016. 291 pp., incl. three appendices, endnotes, and two indices. \$24.00. ISBN: 978-0-8308-5146-1.

This important work by Jayson Georges and Mark D. Baker begins with a rather startling quote from a Muslim immigrant in Germany claiming that "there is nothing in this entire world that you need to protect more than your honor. Because you're nothing without your honor. You'd be dirt, just dirt and nothing else. If someone tried to take my honor, then I'd do anything to get it back. Literally

anything” (11). For most Western readers, this will sound a bit strange, if not extreme, and that is precisely why this study deserves attention.

According to the authors, there are three primary cultural “types” present in the world: (1) *power-fear culture*, where people are terrorized or threatened by the unseen spiritual world and seek power to overcome it; (2) *innocence-guilt culture*, shaped by individualism and relying on personal conscience, justice, and laws for regulating social behavior; and (3) *honor-shame culture*, characteristic of collectivistic societies where shame and exclusion are applied to people who fail group expectations, and where honor is awarded to loyal members of the community. All societies, claim the authors, share concepts and elements of the three cultural types, although favor is generally granted in specific contexts to dominant tendencies of one type over the others.

Why is this important to gospel communicators and engaged members of the global Christian family? The authors set forth four reasons. First is the predominance of honor-shame perspectives in global cultures. According to Georges and Baker, no less than eighty percent of world cultures—throughout most of Asia, Middle East, Africa, and Latin America—run on honor-shame operating systems. North Americans and Western Europeans are “the odd ones out” with only a “minority share of the global market” (19). Secondly, this has—or should have—a significant effect on global Christian realities as church demographics shift southward. Western theology, we are reminded, “does not exhaust the full meaning and application of biblical truth. [It] itself is not ‘wrong,’ but simply incomplete and limited by cultural blinders” (22). Thirdly, the surge of immigration into Western contexts compels those who live there to become more conversant in the worldviews of their new friends, colleagues, and neighbors. Multiple illustrations are offered by the authors as examples of how misunderstandings and awkward social situations could have been avoided or navigated more smoothly with increased awareness of these cultural differences. And, in the fourth place, the world’s honor-shame cultures—homelands to Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and Taoism—present an ongoing missional challenge and opportunity for the church in its embodiment and witness to the good news of Jesus Christ. Accordingly, “a biblical missiology in honor-shame terms may be strategic for fulfilling the Great Commission of making disciples of all nations” (21).

The structure and content of this book assist readers in delving more deeply into honor-shame perspectives and implications. In Part One, Georges and Baker explore the theme through the lens of cultural anthropology, highlighting the “heart” and “face” of honor-shame cultures. Part Two examines Old and New Testament texts relevant to the topic, such as the national lament found in Psalm 44: “You have made us the *taunt* of our neighbors, the *derision* and *scorn* of those around us. You have made us a *byword* among the nations, a *laughingstock* among the peoples” (43, italics added by Georges and Baker). It is the authors’ firm conviction that

“biblical theology consistently addresses honor and shame because the cultures of the biblical world revolved around those values. The dynamics of honor and shame saturate the biblical texts and shape the narrative of salvation history” (68). Part Three turns to six themes central to practical ministry matters, developing in more depth implications for spirituality, relationships, evangelism, conversion, ethics, and community. Three appendices round out the study with helpful lists of key scriptures, biblical stories, and recommended resources on honor and shame perspectives.

For readers of the *Anabaptist Witness* journal, it is worth noting that Mark D. Baker, one of the authors of this volume, is himself a member of the Mennonite Brethren branch of the Anabaptist family. He served for ten years as a mission worker in Honduras and is currently professor of mission and theology at Fresno (Calif.) Pacific Biblical Seminary. Joining him is Jayson Georges, who has spent nine years in Central Asia doing church planting and microenterprise development. Together, they are primarily concerned about the church’s witness in today’s world and aim to lead readers in a paradigm shift “to see God’s world and God’s Word through a new lens” (30). If this is your first encounter with honor-shame issues and cultures, their contribution in this publication will do just that.

JAMES R. KRABILL lives in Elkhart, Indiana, and has served without shame for over four decades in various capacities with Mennonite Mission Network—earlier Mennonite Board of Missions—despite the fact that younger generations no doubt wonder how he couldn’t manage to “get a life.”

John-Mark Bergen, director, *This Is Why We Go*, Mennonite Brethren Mission, Fresno, CA, 2014. <http://www.mbmission.org/this-is-why-we-go>.

In 2014, MB Mission produced an eighty-seven-minute documentary called *This Is Why We Go*, which takes viewers to three countries hosting members of MB Mission’s Trek program. Trek is an intense, short-term discipleship-in-mission program aimed primarily at young adults. After two months of training in Abbotsford, British Columbia, the young people featured in the film spent seven months in either Mexico, France, or Burkina Faso sharing the gospel with some of the “least-reached people in the world.” Upon their return, they spent another few weeks debriefing.

The filmmaker, John-Mark Bergen, begins his documentary with an unusual (and unnecessary) story about how and where the documentary got made, but soon enough we are flying to Guadalajara, Mexico, home of the Matthew Training Centre (MTC), which trains local disciples for mission. MTC is the base from which Trek members are sent to places, like a poor remote village in the mountains,

where they will work very hard (e.g., carrying water, scraping corn off cobs) for an opportunity to read the Bible to people who can't read.

The first forty minutes of *This Is Why We Go* has the feel of an adventure film as we follow these young people to places that have no running water or electricity, let alone internet access; places where life's purpose revolves entirely around finding enough food and water to survive another day.

But that feel changes dramatically when we fly to Paris, where Trek members stand on street corners, handing out literature to North African immigrants, most of whom are Muslims and therefore among the least-reached. Apparently, churches in Paris (a city repeatedly described as secular) are not as keen on doing this type of mission as North American mission agencies are. When not on the street, Trek members engage in activities like playing soccer to try to form relationships with people who have no friends, usually as an excuse to tell them about Jesus.

The final destination of our Trek journey is rural Burkina Faso, where a Trek member teaches English as an excuse to talk about Jesus. Here again the unreached people are generally Muslims, most of them young children whose parents sometimes get angry at their kids for going to church. Long-term mission workers look after orphans, no doubt a valued service.

The film takes a detour in Burkina Faso, visiting the town where Bergen grew up and showing how his parents' mission work has borne fruit, with a church that now attracts as many as 250 people and had nineteen baptisms the day they visited. To me, this felt like a cheat in a film that's supposedly about Trek rather than the success of MB mission efforts over the years.

From a technical point of view, *This Is Why We Go* is a well-made documentary. The cinematography is strong, the film is fast-paced, and the editing work—which highlights the well-thought-out structure of the documentary—is excellent. Apart from Bergen's ill-advised focus on some of his own story, which probably takes up fifteen minutes of the film, he has done a commendable job of conveying the Trek experience.

And one cannot help but admire the young people who have sacrificed ten months of their lives to be part of that experience. They all faced stresses and challenges that will make them stronger, and they have all gained a broader perspective on the world. Some (in Mexico, at least) were even led to question the values of their materialistic Western culture rather than push their values on others. Throughout, they display a laudable enthusiasm for their difficult task and do their best to help the people to whom they are reaching out.

Nevertheless, I found the content of *This Is Why We Go* overwhelmingly disappointing as an example of Mennonite/Anabaptist mission work, highlighted by

the documentary's title. The reason these young people "go" is to tell unreached people about Jesus, who loves them, gives them what they need, and is the only way to salvation. I find this way of doing mission particularly problematic for Mennonites. The Trek program makes no mention of Mennonite distinctives like peace and social justice. Trek members talk about doing what Jesus asked them to do by bringing people what they need. That need is not what the people have identified as a need but what MB Mission identifies as a need; namely, to hear about Jesus and the Bible. The Jesus I know (and much of the Bible I read) is more concerned with undoing oppression and addressing structural injustice, serving the poor and the needy (needy because they lack the resources to flourish, not because they haven't heard about Jesus). Mission work focused on addressing the real needs of people is what will help those people understand who Jesus is.

The mission work on display in *This Is Why We Go* also is inherently paternalistic, with little acknowledgement of the power dynamics involved, especially in Trek's short-term work (it's hard work, but they will go home in seven months). This is highlighted by the work in France and Burkina Faso, where the focus is on converting Muslims. What does it mean to talk about loving and respecting Muslims regardless of what they believe (as stated by mission workers in the film), when you tell a Muslim woman every day for months that Jesus loves her or you tell children, against the express wishes of their parents, Bible stories about how Jesus died for them?

This Is Why We Go is occasionally inspiring, but mostly it feels wrong to me. Quite apart from the flaws inherent in short-term mission, which my own long-term mission experience helped me to see, the time has surely come for a paradigm shift in evangelical Christian mission—focusing on being Jesus in the world instead of bringing Jesus to the world.

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Jim Antal, *Climate Church, Climate World: How People of Faith Must Work for Change*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, Maryland. 2018. 221 pp. \$25.00. ISBN: 9781538110690.

The August sky was an eerie brownish-orange as the morning news warned Edmontonians not to exert themselves outside. Thick smoke smelling of charred forests blanketed the city, and air quality was so poor that even healthy young people stayed indoors. On a family vacation, we drove through heavy smoke in Southern British Columbia, never able to see the mountains as the province experienced a second year of record-breaking forest fires. It was a fitting time to read *Climate*

Church, Climate World, to ponder the effects of human action on the environment, and to consider the roles and responsibilities of the church in response to environmental issues.

As an Albertan, I find myself stuck between “the sides” in a divisive discourse about pipelines, the environment, and the economy. It is easiest to avoid the discussion entirely because it is explosive and impossible to engage without encountering hard feelings and inadequately informed opinions on all sides. On one hand, I have great respect for the many conscientious and generous people I know who earn a living through the oil industry. I worry about the increasingly dangerous “overland pipeline” the railway has become, and I am anxious about the economy should change happen too abruptly. On the other hand, I resonate strongly with the imperative of environmental protection, and I want a system that does not exploit nonrenewable resources. As a child of the Creator, my faith life must be one of caring for all people and all creation. My church must be a voice for this caring. The church, however, struggles with its own cacophony of voices and opinions and is likewise stuck between sides, unable to have open and healthy discussion on the issues and responsibilities we face with climate change. Perhaps the church and the environment are both at a crucial crossroads. There is opportunity for positive change as well as the possibility of catastrophe.

Antal’s book offers a well-written and well-supported encouragement for individual and communal engagement with the issue of climate change in ways that could lead to positive change. Many of the practical frustrations I hear in Alberta are raised clearly and helpfully in this book’s pages. One of these, the argument that our necessary use of fuel renders protesting the oil industry hypocritical, is gently and effectively addressed. Quoting an example of how slave owners were not suddenly hypocrites when they joined the abolition movement, Antal points out that “people enmeshed in a flawed system are not exempt from the struggle to transform that system” (70). He encourages confession of complicity along with active engagement of the theological, social, economic, and spiritual work that spurs transformation.

The needed transformation feels overwhelming, another common excuse for inaction that I hear (and viscerally share) among Christians. Antal, however, argues that faith communities have a moral imperative to repurpose themselves for this transformation, because it is so important that it cannot be ignored. Instead of being relegated to just another optional ideology or issue for congregations, climate change is the “umbrella issue” under which all others fit. Antal writes, “If the work of the church is to make God’s love and justice real, and since climate change amplifies every other social justice issue, it falls to the church to create the conditions in which people can face the reality of climate change and respond to God’s call to take action to protect God’s gift of creation” (123). He makes a strong case for preachers and churches to engage hopefully and consistently in the issues of climate

change in every aspect of church life and work: “We need to accept that we are not called to be a church for ourselves. We are called to be a church for others” (135).

This umbrella perspective is helpful. When I consider even a few of the issues my home church, and others like it, have faced in the last number of years—“greening” our buildings, charitable relief work, responding to disasters, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and our response, and learning to communicate across differing opinions—it is quite clear how these can all fit under the umbrella. Repurposing the church to be less about individuals and more about communal salvation is a faithful and hope-filled move into our shared future. Antal writes, “A repurposed church that explicitly values continuity of creation could declare our moral interdependence with our billions of neighbors the world over as well as our countless yet-to-be-born neighbors” (74).

What I appreciate most about Antal’s book is the practicality of his reasoning and the insistent conviction that the church is a meaningful agent of change. His practical suggestions face the uncomfortable issues of climate change head on, dismantling apathy without inflicting unnecessary guilt. While I am energized by his belief in the voice of the church and the examples of how this voice is crucial to social change, a needed critique of the church is missing; the rise of populist religion and an oft-repeated history of being resistant to needed social changes is a huge and difficult matter right now. While the church is a catalyst for change, it can also be a formidable obstacle to it, rationalizing and interpreting scripture to meet its own desires.

Climate Church, Climate World is thought-provoking, hopeful, and practical. I would love to see this book as “urgent required reading” for church leaders. I wonder what might happen within a denomination that takes this on as a study? Could a repurposed and revitalized church emerge? With discussion questions concluding each chapter, the book is also an accessible and engaging focus for book clubs and Bible study groups and is sure to inspire passionate, helpful engagement with beliefs, issues, and the practice of faith as we long for the return of blue skies and a smoke-free future.

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