
Book Reviews

Review Essay:

The Enduring Protest of Christian Socialisms:

Vaneesa Cook, *Spiritual Socialists: Religion and the American Left*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2019. 272 pp. \$49.95. ISBN: 9780812251654.

Philip Turner, *Christian Socialism: The Promise of an Almost Forgotten Tradition*, Cascade, Eugene, Oregon, 2021. 236 pp. \$29.00. ISBN: 9781725259409.

Roland Boer, *Red Theology: On the Christian Communist Tradition*, Haymarket, Chicago, Illinois, 2020. 294 pp. \$19.60. ISBN: 9781642593723.

Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, 3rd ed., University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 2021. 496 pp. \$29.95. ISBN: 978-1-4696-6372-2.

Socialism is having a moment in the West. To be sure, that moment is shared along with a number of movements protesting the present social, political, and economic order. The rising polarization of social movements is contributing to a haze of understanding around just what is meant by the term socialism within this milieu. If you listened to Fox News or various alt-right media outlets, you would understand that a vote for Joe Biden was a vote for socialism. Left-leaning activists and academics, on the other hand, were trying to clarify that Biden was simply an extension of the capitalist status quo.

Churches have also taken sides. Duke sociologist Mark Chaves notes that churches have become more explicitly political since 1998, with left-leaning churches showing dramatic increases since 2012.¹ Recently, many of the most active political expressions have included explicitly Christian expressions, whether marching on Capitol Hill on January 6 or in the streets supporting Justice for Black Lives Matter.

A number of recent publications have attempted to shed some light on the relationship between Christianity and socialism, demonstrating a long and diverse history of engagement. I will briefly summarize three such books, saving

¹ Eric Ferreri, "In Trump Era, More Progressive Churches Get Politically Active," Duke Today, September 15, 2020, accessed April 19, 2021, <https://today.duke.edu/2020/09/trump-era-more-progressive-churches-get-politically-active>.

a fourth—the one with the least religious focus, *Black Marxism*—for the end. What we find in these sources is diversity, not only in understanding socialism between the right and left wings of contemporary politics but also *within* expressions advocating for socialism. One common strand within that diversity, whether embracing or denouncing socialism, is an acknowledgment that socialism stands as some form of protest over the present state of the world.

Of the four books reviewed here, *Spiritual Socialists* by Vaneesa Cook and *Christian Socialism* by Philip Turner are the most tightly focused in terms of time and place. *Christian Socialism* names an identified movement in England that emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century, while “spiritual socialists” is a term Cook gives to a group of individuals in the United States in the first half of the twentieth century. These movements filled the space between left-leaning liberalism, on the one side, that focused on individual rights as well as the belief in incremental, even inevitable, progress and, on the other side, the more radically oriented Marxists, who sought revolutionary overthrow of economic and political structures.

These works reflected clear divergences in both understanding and focus of study. On the American side, this ranged from distrust of political institutions, as seen in Dorothy Day’s Catholic Worker movement, right up to the “Kingdom” politics (and policies) of the eventual vice president of the United States Henry Wallace. For Cook, a common core can be found in the fundamental commitment to change in individual lives and the belief that from this change small seeds of the Kingdom could grow. So while spiritual socialists might have used laws and policies to address what they considered to be a social problem, they did not understand the laws and policies as ends in themselves; for them, it was important to understand God’s Kingdom as *separate* from specific political forms. The Christian Socialists of England were mostly ministers and academics who focused on matters of moral regeneration and social duties instead of focusing on institutional changes in law or economics. Many of them explicitly rejected support of state socialism. For them, moral persuasion and education served as the primary agents of change and formation through the activity of the church. Common to both movements was a sort of idealism that believed the church could express its values outside the influence of existing social structures. That is, the church, either in thought or deed, needed to maintain clear boundaries from that of the world and its structures.

This tight and focused picture of socialism and Christianity in England and America at the turn of the twentieth century stands in contrast to Roland Boer’s sprawling account of what he calls the Christian Communist Tradition. In *Red Theology*, Boer begins with the *locus classicus* of the tradition being found in the call to have all things in common as recorded in the book of Acts. To be clear, Boer is not claiming an exhaustive account of this tradition. He acknowledges

that various times and places have been well documented elsewhere, such as the liberation theology and politics of many Latin American church movements.

After addressing aspects of the Apostle Paul's political theology, Boer spends most of his time on the period of the Reformation to the present day. He speaks to two major themes in the Christian Communist Tradition: (1) the common critique and protest of the state of the world and (2) the political ambivalence within the biblical and theological tradition through which runs various forms of protest. This ambivalence, he states, could lead groups to communal escapism or revolutionary violence. Here Boer maintains that the Bible does not definitively answer the question of politics or protest but rather contains fragments and gestures of various forms and expressions regarding such. He traces the impulse of Acts 2 and 4 through monastics, revolutionaries, and reformers who all had their own way of temporarily resolving the political ambiguities and contradictions of the Christian tradition. Moving into the modern period, Boer takes seriously the theological convergences and divergences of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, as well as the Christian influences at the margins of the Russian Revolution.

What is most interesting about these three books is how each charts its particular understanding of Christian-inflected socialism into the present. *Christian Socialism* affirms the church's call to refrain from directly engaging matters of social policy and politics and to focus instead on the work of cultivating social ideals rooted in understanding oneself in need of grace and therefore ill-equipped to bestow salvation to self and others—instead, viewing salvation as a gift that can only be given by God. (It should be noted that Boer's notion of grace actually *enhances* one's freedom to engage politically). Turner concludes with sustained attention on British theologian John Milbank, who advocates for a virtue ethics that relies on transcendence outside the all-encompassing pressures of our current socioeconomic forces. Milbank, while offering practical critiques of contemporary society and some outlines of potential policy changes, reaffirms that, in the end, "common good" is a gift of the church still to come and so one must faithfully wait and cultivate virtues in the meantime.

Spiritual Socialists ends with a focus on the role of race in America in the past fifty years, in the midst of individual minority groups gaining political power through self-identification with movements such as the Black Panther Party or the American Indian Movement. Through the figures of Pauli Murray and Cornel West, Cook offers the image of spiritual socialists attempting to transcend theologians such as James Cone, whose agenda was felt to be "too particularist and too much about power." In line with Turner's account, Cook concludes by clarifying the legacy of spiritual socialism as a grassroots vision of the Kingdom of God that must grow *up* rather than be enforced from the top down.

In stark contrast, Boer concludes *Red Theology* with a tour of Asia—namely, China and Korea. In these final chapters, he offers a rare, and likely controversial, look at how Christianity came to the East and the political consequences of this expansion, such as the simple translation of the name of God into the vernacular causing a confrontation with the Chinese dynasty. During the Taiping revolution, the biblical tenets of material distribution and equality became a source for organizing society. In the twentieth century, several Chinese Christians continued to develop revolutionary models from their understanding of Jesus and the gospel. These writers did not abandon the “spiritual” element but understood that the spirituality of Christianity inevitably leads to revolution in the face of imperial violence and injustice.

In the context of North Korea (DPRK, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea), Boer identifies the relationship between state socialism and the church in the wake of the Korean war—a period in which Christians tended to focus their energy on rebuilding the nation as opposed to fixing bombed churches. This relationship with the state has continued into the present, with active work toward Korean unification. Boer concludes with the question of what would happen if Christian communism *actually* gained power. Forcefully pushing past Turner and Cook, he explores the manner in which one must think beyond both cultivating virtues and performing critique, by acknowledging that after the Exodus the Israelites needed to understand what it was to live in the land. Here Boer opens the possibilities of collaboration as seen between China and Korea, as well as possible models that were explored during the German Democratic Republic in East Germany.

To summarize, Turner and Cook outline traditions that used the message of the gospel to protest the material, political, and economic realities of their time and place. Both traditions set boundaries with respect to their understanding of Christianity because *to engage too closely* in their protest would, in their view, threaten to compromise or contaminate the gospel. Boer is less hesitant in this regard as he tries to interpret the theology of existing historic events while taking seriously theology and political power in the present. He is interested not in preserving orthodoxy but in creating openings for new alliances. Here, he relays a mess of expressions carrying the communist impulse from monastic to revolutionary to collaborative.

At this point, I suggest a fourth recent publication—Cedric Robinson’s *Black Marxism*, originally published in 1983 then revised and updated as a third edition in 2021. Subtitled *The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, the book charts the lives of Africans since their arrival in the Americas, describing their responses to conditions of slavery and its afterlife. Robinson rigorously denies that either Europe or Christianity served a key role in the formation of this unique tradition. Rather, he describes the tradition as evolving from the “accretion, over generations, of collective intelligence gathered from struggle.”

Beginning with a critique of European radicalism and its incipient racism, Robinson documents the erasure of African history in Western consciousness. He then undertakes an archaeology of the Black Radical Tradition, beginning with the expressions of early maroon communities, who had escaped from slavery, then moving to the full-scale revolution in Haiti. Continuing to excavate, Robinson describes experiments in nationalism and internationalism in the United States and then shifts to a more detailed engagement with three key figures of the twentieth century: W. E. B. Du Bois, C. L. R. James, and Richard Wright.

In Robinson's account of the Black Radical Tradition, there is no question of preserving canonical purity or of questioning in principle what it would mean to be in power. One simply worked and acted and thought from where one was. Everything of value was formed, tested, and ultimately forged in the struggle—including full-scale victories, as in Haiti, and various collaborations with communism and socialism as well as experiments with nationalism and internationalism.

Black Marxism is duly recognized for demonstrating both to the West and to the Western church how deeply race is implicated in the formation of the modern world. *Black Marxism* also stands on its own merit as an example of navigating history, theory, power, and practice, with the knowledge that doing so involves neither purity nor neutrality. Robin D. G. Kelley in his preface to the third edition lists scores of modern Black movements and concludes that “all these movements and thinkers have, at one time or another, engaged, embraced, or were influenced by Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism*.” This accretion of knowledge was at work on plantations as well as in escape and rebellion, and is now also present through organizing on the streets. It worked in the church and outside of it. It explored well-being within the capitalism of America, traveled to Russia to explore communism, and figured its own plans along the way. Because of the questions of survival that pressed daily, this tradition was never afforded the luxury of asking questions of purity.

In this way, *Black Marxism* and the Black Radical Tradition remain a clarion call to the church in how it understands its relation to the world. If most iterations of socialism are ultimately a form of protest, then they would do well to learn from *Black Marxism* specifically and the Radical Black Tradition in general. This tradition rejects the orientation of the Christian Socialists that eschew struggle as a direct form of knowledge and formation. Similarly it challenges spiritual socialists in their general avoidance of particular forms of power that arise at sites of resistance, as well as their avoidance of expressions such as the Black Panthers or even the work of James Cone. Finally, there is some convergence with Boer's own work of recovering and articulating the Christian communist tradition as he allows struggle and ambivalence to be necessary parts of on-the-ground knowledge and organization.

For Boer the challenge from Robinson is more straightforward: *Black Marxism* demands that race be understood as central to any conversation around economics and politics. (Nowhere does Boer address the issue of race as it relates to either Christianity or communism.) Robinson notes that Lenin did take the Black population in America seriously as an important group to add to the movement of communism. Robinson is also clear, however, that Black leaders began to realize that a Marxist response to present conditions always fell short in addressing the role race played in forming the world order. With Richard Wright there is a level clarity in the Black Radical Tradition understanding “that it was necessary that Blacks transform the Marxist critique into an expression of their own emergence as a negation of Western capitalism.” (299) The reality of being Black became inseparable from the response to capitalism. It is no longer excusable, if it ever was, to omit an analysis of or grounding in race related to economic and political structures.

Overviewing these recent interventions is the question of how the church should engage present issues of race, politics, and economics. Even *within* the divisive and often dismissed category of socialism, the church is far from being uniform in agreement. This is important to understand as churches, particularly left-leaning ones, increasingly engage in various forms of protest within the political realm. Boer’s assertion of the fundamental ambivalence of Christian political theology is important here. There is no inspired or self-evident path. You can find precedent or justification for nearly any political form, whether from the Bible or church history. Rather than lament this, we can take our cue from the Apostle Paul’s exhortation to “judge for yourselves” (1 Cor 11:13). I would argue that this sort of material responsibility is reflected in the Black Radical Tradition and is precisely what the church needs.

Common to all varieties of Christian socialism is a critique and protest of the world as it is. And that protest must include a thoroughgoing protest of the church’s own supremacist legacy,² which is still lived out implicitly or explicitly by many of the Christian socialisms. Christian supremacy must be traced back to the very first formations of the church. In its political ambivalence, neither the Bible nor the gospel necessarily lead to the supremacist legacy of the church, but such a legacy can indeed be traced to the church’s earliest formation. In

² Amaryah Shaye Armstrong notes in her theological work on Cedric Robinson that when the Christian Left tries to claim a progressive agenda as the heart of the gospel there remains a risk of “erasing both the history of Christian order as the maintenance of racial order, and the black radical work that went into making black life theologically meaningful, valuable, and a source of theological knowledge.” Armstrong, “Christian Order and Racial Order: What Cedric Robinson Can Teach Us Today,” *The Bias Magazine: The Voice of the Christian Left*, June 3, 2020, accessed August 31, 2021, <https://christiansocialism.com/cedric-robinson-racial-order-christianity-socialism/>.

the same way that Robinson's pursuit of race carried him to the formations of Western modernity, so too must Christians pursue their protest as deep as the logic carries them.

To critique and protest the world (a deeply biblical and Anabaptist posture) means reckoning with the world the church has had a critical role in birthing. We can no longer assume in advance we will know what Good News will look and sound like other than witnessing its fruit among those who have been abused by the world. Many Christian socialist traditions, however, continue to preserve some notion of Christian purity or supremacy within their theological understandings and expressions. The church has still not learned to take its cue from expressions like the Black Radical Tradition—a tradition that never understood itself outside the existing powers of the world but rather learned to fashion a message of protest in the struggle and then was willing to continue learning. It is well past time to discard supremacist theology and take our cue instead from the Black Radical Tradition.

The church does not need to fear contaminating or misrepresenting the gospel for Christ. Socialism is not a compromise of the gospel, but neither is it self-evidently equated with the gospel. Socialism reflects an impulse of protesting a world that refuses to share and that punishes with poverty. Socialism becomes part of the gospel—it becomes Good News—when it meets Christ in the places of celebration and the struggle for another way.

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Aaron Griffith, *God's Law and Order: The Politics of Punishment in Evangelical America*, Harvard University Press, Boston, 2020. 335 pp. \$35.00. ISBN: 9780674238787.

At the crux of *God's Law and Order*, author Aaron Griffith narrates “a massive change in the evangelical approach to the crime issue” (95). Billy Graham looms large in Griffith's account. While Graham's early engagement with prisons emphasized individual conversion as the Christian response to crime, the 1960s facilitated a growing enthusiasm for the state's role in enforcing the law through policing and incarceration. In step with the emerging political stardom of J. Edgar Hoover, Barry Goldwater, and Richard Nixon, Graham and other evangelicals—including the National Association of Evangelicals—played a central role in the origins and expansion of “law and order” politics in the United States.

Griffith is familiar with evangelicalism. Like me, he was an undergraduate at Wheaton (Illinois) College, an evangelical institution where, also like me, in 2005 he attended a student chapel session that was host to Burl Cain, who was

then the warden at the Louisiana State Penitentiary. I remember being drawn to Cain's folksy storytelling and horrified at his Christian justification for serving as state's executioner for those condemned to death (to paraphrase: if the state's going to kill someone, it should be a Christian who does it). I was not then a Mennonite, but I credit Cain for stoking in me an increasing suspicion of Christian-sanctioned state violence that eventually drove me into the open arms of Anabaptism.

Cain frames Griffith's account of *The Politics of Punishment in Evangelical America*. He represents a contradiction in evangelical concerns about crime and punishment—concern for the victims of law-and-order politics, coupled with overwhelming support for the very system that renders people its victims. In stark terms, “[Cain] was the facilitator of the spread of the gospel even as he presided over the execution process, including the lethal injection of his brethren” (261). Cain aptly shares a name with the biblical Cain, who was also the willing agent of his own brethren's death. Griffith's style is understated, and he leaves the obvious question unasked: Can Cain's “gospel” really be called good news?

The unasked question haunts the pages of this book.

Griffith leaves no doubt about evangelicalism's troubling role in shaping the United States's punitive carceral system, even while he works hard to show the complexities of the story. On the one hand, there are people like Consuella York, an African American Baptist laywoman who ministered at Cook County Jail in the 1950s. York represents for Griffith a persistent evangelical impulse toward compassionate prison ministry. Tom Skinner, on the other hand, demonstrates the possibility of an evangelical systemic critique. Skinner, a Black evangelist from Harlem, leveled a prophetic challenge against the racism intrinsic to white evangelical attitudes toward law and order: “The police in the black community become nothing more than the occupational force present . . . for the purpose of maintaining the interests of white society” (146). Skinner preached to a young, mostly white evangelical audience in 1970 in my current hometown of Urbana, Illinois. He publicly challenged Billy Graham for his harmful views on matters of race and the law.

But for Griffith, it is perhaps Chuck Colson who best represents evangelicalism's capacity to bring together compassionate prison ministry (concern for the individual) and prison reform advocacy (systemic critique) under one tent. Colson, who was incarcerated for his role in the affairs of the Nixon administration, experienced firsthand the dehumanizing effects of a US prison. After his release, he founded Prison Fellowship ministry and organized political power for prison and criminal justice reform, a combination often lacking in evangelical circles.

While Griffith offers these examples to show diversity within evangelicalism's engagement with the criminal justice system, they also serve as exceptions to the evangelical rule. Indeed, their respective fates illustrate how little room white evangelicalism allows for dissent. According to Griffith's own narrative,

York is a marginal figure to begin with, Skinner was roundly dismissed for challenging white evangelical racism, and Colson eventually made accommodations to align with the power forming around Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority. Colson's criminal justice reform agenda—including support for Anabaptist modes of restorative justice—got swallowed up by evangelicals' comfort “with America's capacity to mobilize violence” (247) and evangelicals' waging of cultural wars over things like gender, race, abortion, and the military.

Griffith's desire to show the complexity of the story sometimes conflicts with a more robust critique of the dominant impulses within white evangelicalism, leaving key questions unasked and unanswered: Why do white evangelicals today overwhelmingly support political movements that promote (carceral) punishment as society's best response to crime? Why do they presume that our society's definitions of crime are static and natural, rather than decisions to exercise particular modes of state control? Griffith insists that outcomes like these were “not a foregone conclusion” (95), yet that assessment belies his own data, which shows how critiques and alternative approaches were summarily ignored, rejected, or co-opted by the movement. Reading *God's Law and Order* left me asking whether evangelicalism is simply incompatible with a non-punitive (or even modestly less punitive), racially just approach to crime.

Those who follow this trajectory will find significant theological work to do. In the first chapter, for instance, Griffith mentions the history of lynching and its connection to “sacred concepts like sin and atonement” (20) but does not return to it in detail. The question remains: How might evangelicalism's commitment to penal substitution (not to mention its corresponding conversionist soteriology) undergird a theology of punishment? It's hard to reconcile Colson's advocacy for restorative justice with a doctrine of divine redemption that demands the punitive execution of a brown-skinned convicted criminal named Jesus.

A similar question could be asked about white evangelicalism's relationship to state power. Evangelicals past and present have invoked Romans 13 (“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities . . .”) to justify harsh law enforcement, capital punishment, punitive sentencing, and the now-widespread use of incarceration in response to immigration, among other things. This appeal persistently avoids the reality of criminalization: crime is a fluid concept always being defined and redefined by the “governing authorities.” Given Griffith's observations that white evangelicalism predictably sides with definitions of crime that protect white interests and disproportionately harm People of Color, we might conclude with Skinner that white evangelicalism is more concerned with “social control” than “preaching the gospel” (146).

In the end, Griffith paints a challenging portrait of the relationship between white evangelicalism and the state's mechanisms for punitive justice. With him, I would hope for an evangelical “conversion” on criminal justice, but I'm left

with the impression that white evangelicalism has little room for dissenting views on racism or state power, and I'm also left wondering why. Griffith's work may be best read alongside authors like Anthea Butler or Kelly Brown Douglas,³ whose accounts of white evangelical thought, white supremacy, and justice can help make sense of the present moment.

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Elaine Enns and Ched Myers, *Healing Haunted Histories: A Settler Discipleship of Decolonization*, Cascade, Eugene, Oregon, 2021. 426 pp. \$38.00. US ISBN: 978-1-7252-5535-7.

Healing Haunted Histories weaves together the stories of Indigenous peoples of North America with those of Russian Mennonites who now find themselves in these lands. It is a practical handbook for those on a journey of healing and reconciliation. While it has application for all settlers, it is especially relevant for those of Anabaptist ancestry.

The book is a combination of a family memoir, a decolonization workbook, and a critical theological analysis. In tracing her own ancestor's migration and settlement journeys, Elaine Enns explores histories of trauma and resilience in her family and in the wider Mennonite community. She treats these stories with tenderness and grace but does not let the Mennonite community off the hook: there is a tremendous response-ability among Mennonites to be taught by the experiences of trauma and persecution, and to use this learning to deepen relationships with Indigenous people. Mennonites must acknowledge and heal from their own painful past in order to not carry these wounds into their relationships with Indigenous people. Those who heal from their own experiences and from participation in colonization can begin to work in solidarity with First peoples. For Mennonites, reconciliation must involve a deep reckoning with the past and dealing with the haunted histories of Anabaptists before coming together in joint healing with First Nations peoples.

To organize the book, Enns and Myers have created a framework of Landlines, Bloodlines, and Songlines. Through the concept of *landlines*, the authors explore how experiences of displacement and settlement have shaped both Indigenous and Mennonite peoples. They follow this by looking at *bloodlines*—

³ See Anthea Butler, *White Evangelical Racism: The Politics of Morality in America* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2020); and Kelly Brown Douglas, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God* (New York: Orbis, 2015).

the social and generational factors that shape particular responses to trauma and assimilation. And they present a vision for how *songlines*—the cultural and spiritual gifts and traditions imbedded in both Mennonites and Indigenous peoples—help build resilience and create new narratives of hope and restored relationship.

In *Healing Haunted Histories*, I learned how Indigenous peoples and Mennonite Settlers have become interconnected. I grieved the ways that my own ancestors have unknowingly participated in colonization. For me this book was very helpful because it presented a clear structure and process for the work of decolonization in my life. As a descendant of Dutch and German Mennonites who settled in Russia and then on the Canadian Prairies, I gained a greater understanding of how to situate myself in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission processes currently underway in Canada. Settlers have come to Canada from many different places and contexts, and the journey that my Mennonite ancestors have taken to these lands requires a particular approach to racial reconciliation and healing. My faith distinctives also invite me to have a particular Anabaptist-flavored response to injustice, involving restorative solidarity.

I especially appreciated the theological interlude where Enns and Myers revisit the Gospel story from Luke 9, where Jesus sends out the twelve disciples on a “missions trip.” The authors provide a fresh interpretation of this passage that emphasizes how the good news of the gospel heals, liberates, and restores. I learned from their remarkable re-telling of the story how Jesus’s commissioning of the disciples contrasts with the concept of Manifest Destiny that characterized missions and colonization in North America. Enns and Myers highlight how Jesus specifically taught his disciples to enter a community as a humble guest, to share the gospel in a way that honors and elevates the customs of the host community, and to graciously leave the community untouched if it rejects the gospel message. I found myself wishing I had read the Luke 9 passage with this lens many years ago.

Healing Haunted Histories is an accessible book that provides useful tools for Mennonites who want to face the legacy of settler colonialism and to dismantle colonial relationships. The reader is warned: “A discipleship of decolonization is both demanding and liberating” (24). Enns and Myers have provided a thorough process for looking at both Mennonite history and the Mennonite present through a restorative justice model that gives hope for renewed relations.

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Denise M. Nadeau, *Unsettling Spirit: A Journey into Decolonization*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 2020, 348 pp. \$39.95. ISBN: 978-0-2280-0157-7.

By an “unsettled spirit” I mean one that has to constantly re-examine its understanding and to revisit, reinterpret, and renew its relationship with the spirit world. . . . This has been . . . about how I understand, think, and live in the world with the earth. (254–55)

Unsettling Spirit is an account of the author's journey into decolonization. Denise Nadeau's purpose in writing this book is to expose the ways in which the project of colonization has seeped into her very being, and then to offer insights about how to move into being a decolonized person. It is an honest, refreshing accounting of a complicated life.

Nadeau has organized her writing into five distinct “parts” through which she weaves the narrative of her own life experiences: (1) colonization's connections to Christianity; (2) white supremacy's impact on how settlers move through the world; (3) the need for settlers to understand their relationship to the past and to the land they are living on; (4) the gift of relationships with Indigenous peoples; and (5) a call to the liberating practice of “returning to the heart,” where we can “move beyond judgement and division to see our essential oneness with all living beings” (257).

I was drawn to read Nadeau's book after participating in two events this past year. The first was the annual conference of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America-Bautistas por la Paz, at which the plenary speaker was Puerto Rican scholar Luis Rivera-Pagán. The conference pointed me to Rivera-Pagán's book *A Violent Evangelism: The Political and Religious Conquest of the Americas*,⁴ which outlines the ways the church was complicit in the historic role of religion in conquest. Learning about this history deepened my desire to dissociate from the Christian tradition, especially the institutional church.

Nadeau recounts similar struggles throughout her journey with the Roman Catholic Church. Her attention to the ways in which evangelism perpetuates a colonizing mentality and practice is insightful and damning, but she chooses not to abandon the faith she was brought up with. Instead, she explores her faith in relationship to her work with Indigenous communities, where she is opened up to the reality that “God's spirit is present in all cultures—the spirit was at work in the world before Christ” (48). She also becomes keenly aware of the need for the work of missions in the Christian church to be about how to address colonization, the power imbalances inherent in church structures, and the harm the church has inflicted upon Indigenous peoples (50).

⁴ Luis N. Rivera-Pagán, *A Violent Evangelism: The Political and Religious Conquest of the Americas* (Louisville: Westminster, 1992).

The second event I participated in this year was a book club initiated by Steve Heinrichs in which we read *Canada at a Crossroads: Boundaries, Bridges, and Laissez-Faire Racism in Indigenous-Settler Relations* by Jeffrey S. Denis.⁵ This book unsettled me deeply as I have always believed that relationships and education could be our way out of the mess of deep injustice that is so present in Canadian society. The book is a sociological study that exposes the lie of the claims that are part of a “Canadian” sensibility—that we are somehow different from other colonizers. The only way out of the mess we are in is to deal with the racial inequality that is deeply imbedded in the White Supremacist state of Canada. The state’s engagement in apologies and reconciliation statements while it continues to disrespect Indigenous law⁶ exposes its true nature—colonial to the core.

A commitment to the Christian faith has been a part of me for over forty-five years, and I was looking for something to somehow keep me grounded in that faith. Something in me does not want to let go of that grounding, even though my deepening understanding of colonization has shaken that commitment. At the end of the book study on *Canada at a Crossroads*, I was given a copy of Nadeau’s work, and it has renewed hope in me that my life has not been a bad joke. There is so much in Nadeau’s story that I can identify with—her informed critique of colonialism and capitalism, her struggle with the white savior complex, and desire to understand where her people come from, to mention a few. I am grateful for her careful study, her thorough research, and her accessible writing style.

Nadeau ends the book with a discussion about the heart, drawing on her own experience with Indigenous ways of knowing, Judaism, Zen Buddhism, and somatic training, all of which refuse binary understandings of heart and mind and instead embrace an embodied understanding of the relational nature of all beings. I come away encouraged to continue finding “fellow travellers in many traditions who see that the way through is on the path that embraces the spirit dimensions of life” (261).

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⁵ Jeffrey S. Denis, *Canada at a Crossroads: Boundaries, Bridges, and Laissez-Faire Racism in Indigenous-Settler Relations* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020).

⁶ We witnessed this disrespect for Indigenous law last year when the Royal Canadian Mounted Police invaded unceded and sovereign Wet’suwet’en territory to make a path for a pipeline project.

Kent Roach, *Canadian Justice, Indigenous Injustice: The Gerald Stanley and Colten Boushie Case*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 2019. 309 pp. \$34.95. ISBN: 9780228000730.

In early 2020, when Joel Bernbaum, Yvette Nolan, and Lancelot Knight created *Reasonable Doubt*, a docu-drama that ran in Saskatoon's Persephone Theatre, the audiences were thrown into a maelstrom of emotion. The play's theme was an explanation of Indigenous relations in Saskatchewan in the wake of the Stanley-Boushie trial. Viewers left troubled and perplexed, with few answers but a profound insight into the two sides of justice: one for Indigenous peoples and one for Settlers.

Reasonable Doubt is, for the stage, what *Canadian Justice, Indigenous Injustice* is for the pen—an uncovering of the inequities in our midst. The author is Kent Roach, the Prichard-Wilson Chair in Law and Policy at the University of Toronto, a member of the Order of Canada, and author of seminal books on Canadian criminal justice. He does not pound out his message; instead, he tells us a story, whose words reveal and show that the Stanley-Boushie case is one hundred and fifty years in the making.

Will Brown has cleverly designed the cover jacket that shows the Battleford Courthouse divided down the middle—one side red and one side white—an ominous indication of what the book might be all about.

In August 2016, a twenty-two-year-old Cree man, Colten Boushie from the Red Pheasant Reserve, was shot dead by Gerald Stanley, a white farmer from nearby Biggar, Saskatchewan. In February 2018, an all-white jury in Battleford, Saskatchewan, acquitted Stanley of murder and manslaughter charges. The trial left Canadians bitterly divided.

So, what is *Canadian Justice, Indigenous Injustice* all about? It is not a commentary or an opinion piece. It is instead a search, a huge effort to discover why the results of the Stanley-Boushie trial turned out as they did. The audience Roach is writing for would include someone like me with not a lick of knowledge of law but with a desire to understand what Canadian justice is all about when it relates to Indigenous peoples. The 300-page search is done with utmost care that includes 800 footnotes and a full index that gives any critical reader confidence that the author is telling a valid story. Roach is a scholar, but his genius is that he understands how important it is to tell a story. He allows the dozens of cases he cites to be the links that chain one event to the next. And when the book is finished, there is a solid chain. Indeed, the book's ten chapters are arranged with events that begin with the signing of Treaty 6 (1876) and end with the aftermath of the 2018 trial.

Roach's first link establishes that Treaty 6, signed in 1876, was flawed with fundamental translation difficulties and cultural misunderstandings. Big Bear wanted a treaty "that would make our hearts glad" (19), and Alexander Morris

was absorbed with “the Queen’s Law that punishes murder with death” (19). The differences would soon become apparent. The Battleford court trial in 1885, just a kilometer from where the Boushie-Stanley trial was held, convicted eight Indigenous men of insurrection, denying them legal counsel and translation services in the process. They were hanged and their bodies not returned to their families but buried in a secret place. *The White Man Governs* (34) principle would soon become an established pattern. In both the Battleford 8 trial and the Regina Riel trial, all jurors were white.

One hundred thirty-three years later, another all-white jury would acquit a white man of murder and manslaughter. Colten Boushie and his friends entered the Stanley farm on August 9, 2016, with the intent to steal a vehicle. In the bizarre events that followed, Gerald Stanley shot Boushie in the head with a handgun, killing him. Eighteen months later, when the trial would take place in Battleford, a number of key events had already occurred there. Roach carefully examines the method of jury selection, particularly the practice of *peremptory challenge*, whereby the prosecutor and the defense can challenge jurors. Stanley’s defense team objected to thirteen jurors. The end result was that an all-white jury was selected that would determine whether a white farmer with a stash of guns in his possession would be found guilty of second-degree murder or manslaughter.

Roach shows us with repeated examples that *peremptory challenges* have been used that resulted in all-white juries. In those cases, the white defendants were acquitted. Roach suggests the results are not *wrongful convictions* but rather *wrongful acquittals*.

If jury selection was a controversial issue, then a second sticky issue was the *hang-fire* phenomenon that defense lawyer, Scott Spencer, took up. It is the argument that, in rare cases, a gun does not fire immediately when the trigger is pulled. While there are cases where a gun has fired with a half-second delay, Stanley maintained that his gun fired thirty seconds later, something he claimed resulted in the accidental killing of Boushie. The jury may have been convinced.

Chief Justice Martel Popescul, who presided over the trial, banned television coverage in order to reduce tensions. But his banning of the visible eagle feather that the Boushie family brought to the court created doubt about bias. Belinda Jackson, Colten Boushie’s friend, was the only witness to the actual shooting. When she could not recall if one shot or two shots were fired, her testimony was suspect. Roach cites other trials where credibility of Indigenous persons is considered suspect.

Premier Wall made initial calls for anti-racial biases, and his successor, Premier Moe, followed suit. But the mood of rural Saskatchewan farmers, with their belief that guns protect against theft and robbery (especially before the RCMP arrive), was, and is, strong. Roach calls it a “phantom self-defense argu-

ment” (168) “that might lead to a belief that a farmer’s farm property trumps a thief’s life” (168).

Following Stanley’s acquittal, Roach asks, “Can we do better?” Prime Minister Trudeau introduced Bill C-75, legislation that banned *peremptory challenges*. But fundamentally, Roach concludes that until justice is served and outcomes like that of the Boushie-Colten case are an aberration and not a run-of-the-mill occurrence, there will be *Indigenous injustice*.

I attended the lecture at the University of Saskatchewan in 2019 when Roach spoke about the complexities of law and politics. He argued that it takes good legal minds to do many things. But he said only courageous politicians can effect change that will result in the removal of systemic bias in the legal system. I went away wondering when those courageous messianic politicians would arrive. Then I reflected that ordinary people like me can empower young politicians who will someday rise to become courageous game changers.

JAKE BUHLER was a school principal for fifteen years before serving with Mennonite Central Committee for six years managing Indochinese refugee programs in Thailand. He then worked for the Canadian Government in Vietnam and Thailand on poverty alleviation programs for fifteen years. He and his wife, Louise Wiebe Buhler, have two grown daughters. Jake currently lives in Saskatoon, is a member of Osler (Saskatchewan) Mennonite, and is active in all things Mennonite.

Harold R. Johnson, *Peace and Good Order: The Case for Indigenous Justice in Canada*, Random House, Toronto, 2019. 160 pp. \$24.75. ISBN: 978-0771048722.

First of all, let it be clear that I have not attended Harvard Law School. And I have never studied law, except for the book of Leviticus. I *have* been in prison on several occasions—as a visitor/advocate. And I have attended court on many occasions—accompanying persons who requested my support. Those cases ranged from minor theft to traffic charges to murder and rape. I have been chairperson of the board of a Legal Aid Society, chairperson of the provincial association of Legal Aid Boards, and a member of the provincial Legal Aid Commission. I was expelled from the commission on a technical matter: I reported that a certain resolution I presented to the commission was “unanimous” rather than “carried.” These experiences give me some insight into our “justice” system.

From my experience, Harold Johnson is not exaggerating in his assessment of Canadian law and the justice system and how it is failing Indigenous peoples. I have seen police officers, police chiefs, defense lawyers, prosecutors, and, yes, even judges, at their very worst. I have also seen some at their very best. I once had a judge turn to me and ask: “Reverend Neufeld, what do you think I should

do in this matter?” I learned that law and Canadian justice are not synonymous with truth. It is from this background that I venture to make a few comments on this book.

First, speaking of backgrounds, author Harold Johnson’s is impressive. He moves from the trapline to a uranium mine, to university, to law school, and finally to Harvard—the top of the law ladder—to the courts as a lawyer, and back to the trapline. Johnson has seen a lot. And I am inclined to agree with his assessment that if Indigenous peoples are to experience and practice “Peace and Good Order,” a different path from the current “justice” system must be chosen. Johnson argues that the treaties—those solemn covenants made between Indigenous peoples and the Crown—provide justification for it. Holding the promises of the past, he clearly articulates that legal path forward. Whether that path can be negotiated is another matter.

Indigenous persons in Canada are ten times more likely than a white person to be shot and killed by a police officer. Ten times. I believe, with Johnson, that we need fewer police and more trauma councilors. In ever so many situations, four to six uniformed, heavily armed officers in black is not a solution. In fact, it creates a bigger problem. We’ve known this for decades. Sixty years ago I was an officer serving under the child welfare act. I remember visiting a family where a psychotic parent posed a threat to security. I asked an unarmed plainclothes detective to accompany me. He was trained to deal with situations like that and was not an immediate visual threat.

For Johnson, the shooting of twenty-two-year-old Colton Boushie (Biggar, Saskatchewan) and murder of fifteen-year-old Tina Fontaine (Winnipeg, Manitoba) represent the great inadequacy of the Canadian “justice” system. The question remains, Can the world wait for us to slowly scratch away at “improving” our system, or is a radically different culture of justice needed? For Johnson, it’s the latter. The Indigenous community can establish their own jurisdiction in the matter of law. And they must.

The radical adversarial posture of the current legal system—of both prosecution and defense—distorts the scene from the very beginning of any judicial procedure. The judge is mandated to rule on the basis of the evidence presented. In practice, that often means that the lawyer exercising the greatest creativity with the facts wins. Perhaps that’s why Johnson declares so boldly: “I feel ashamed of [my] time involved with the justice system,” and “I view my time as a defence lawyer as a failure.”

I agree with Johnson that the current administration of justice is not a solution. It is part of the problem. And we need to address it, with urgency, because the Indigenous community suffers tremendously under its oppressive weight. Indigenous women, for example, now account for 42 percent of women in federal custody. Forty-two percent. (Indigenous people only comprise 4 to 5 percent of the total population in Canada.) This needs to change. And that change

will benefit not only Indigenous peoples but also the many non-Indigenous peoples who are hurt by the systemic problems within our legal system.

For Johnson, our prime focus should be on healing and reconciliation, not punishment. I think many of us in the Peace Church would agree. We need to challenge lawyers and judges in our midst to dare to speak out in an effort to move from punishment via incarceration to something that seeks to restore loving behavior to those who have “fallen short.” As a church, we should become more informed on justice matters and then humbly seek to become an agent for radical change, following all those change-agents—Indigenous, black, yellow, and white—who are leading such critical efforts even now.

DAVID NEUFELD *has a degree in theology, not law. A former pastor, David served in Leamington and Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario, and in North Battleford, Herschel, Fiske, and Aberdeen, Saskatchewan. Whether in Vietnam or India with Mennonite Central Committee or in Canada, he has always been active in community development. Now eighty-two years of age and retired, David lives with his wife, Sue, at Bethany Manor in Saskatoon, where he occasionally gets to preach to other old people who generally live above the law.*

Juan Francisco Martínez and Jamie Pitts, *What Is God’s Mission in the World and How Do We Join It?* Herald, Harrisonburg, Virginia, 2021. 87 pp. \$12.99. ISBN: 978-1-5138-0566-5.

My husband, Todd, and I served in China with Mennonite Church Canada International Witness. When we were back in North America speaking in churches we noticed two distinct groups of people within the congregations we visited: One group was so excited to see us; they had been praying and giving generously for the ministry in China, and they held us up on a completely undeserved pedestal. The other group either skipped church the Sunday we spoke or directly confronted us to explain that mission work is colonial and evil. We often wondered if either group really understood what we were actually doing, or even what “mission work” meant.

Martínez and Pitts have a message for both of these groups and for the entire church: “It is not that the church has a mission, but that God’s mission has a church. . . . God invites us to be part of the task” (40). This ambitious addition to the series *The Jesus Way: Small Books of Radical Faith* seeks to identify the incarnational mission of God in Jesus, outline the history of mission, and address key issues in mission. It goes in-depth on two main themes—incarnational mission and the church as missional community.

In the book *Calloused Hands, Courageous Souls*, Robert J. Suderman says that the Good News cannot be Good if it doesn’t fit into all cultures in all plac-

es of the world, and it cannot be News if it doesn't challenge all cultures in all places of the world.⁷ Martínez and Pitts point out that “because humans both reflect the fact that we are God’s creation and are harmed by sin, our cultures and our churches also reflect both” (48). For them it follows that “there is no Christian culture or Christian nation” (48) and that “incarnational missionaries live in this tension between adaptation and confrontation” (51).

In our first orientation on our way to China in 1991, the late Atlee Beechy, Professor Emeritus of Goshen College, said, “When you get to China, take off your shoes. You are standing on holy ground.” He made it very clear to us that God had been at work in China long before we would arrive there and God’s work would continue long after we left. Our job was to see what God was doing and be signposts to God’s work. Martínez and Pitts add to this understanding, saying that as signposts we make visible what God is doing in the world through “communities of intentional invitation where mission is a natural part of who we are and how we understand our reason for existence in the world” (43).

For Martínez and Pitts, the church is mission: “God’s mission is at the core of what it means to be a community of believers in Jesus Christ” (41). This link between God’s mission and our vision of what it means to be church is not new. I am reminded of Anicka Fast’s 2016 article in *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, “The Earth Is the Lord’s: Anabaptist Mission as Boundary-Crossing Global Ecclesiology.” Fast writes:

An older generation of North American Mennonite mission scholars and historians, younger voices speaking largely from within a Mennonite World Conference context, and a variety of thinkers from the Global South are all richly expressing the key Anabaptist conviction that ecclesiology and missiology are essentially connected.⁸

This is an energizing view of what it means to be a church! Consider how Emmanuel Katongole—a Ugandan Catholic priest and professor at the University of Notre Dame—understands the implications of this vision: “The goal of mission is not primarily aid (humanitarian assistance); it’s not even partnership. We engage in mission to establish friendships that lead to the formation of a new people in the world.”⁹

7 Robert J. Suderman, *Calloused Hands, Courageous Souls: Holistic Spirituality of Development and Mission* (Moravia: World Vision, 1998), 58.

8 Anicka Fast, “The Earth Is the Lord’s: Anabaptist Mission as Boundary-Crossing Global Ecclesiology,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 90, no. 3 (July 2016): 357.

9 Emmanuel Katongole as quoted in Fast, “The Earth Is the Lord’s,” 371.

Friendships and the Formation of a People

The goal is not for mission to build the church but for the church to form a new creation. Mission is integral to that purpose as it is formational to the community that engages in it.

It is on this point that I would have been interested to hear more from the authors. In what way does mission change the church? What happens within individuals, congregations, and larger church bodies as they seek to participate in God's mission? Mutual transformation takes place when deeper understandings about what it means to follow Jesus arise through interaction with the other. There is something holy about the space where we meet together from differing cultures and backgrounds. How is this important in the formation of the new creation?

During a recent online conversation between the Colombian Mennonite Church and Mennonite Church Canada, Pastor Patricia Rosero from the Iglesia Cristiana Menonita Santa Marta (Usme, Cundinamarca) said, "The aspects of our faith that we don't put into practice will remain ignored, neglected or spiritualized; they will never come alive." Do we believe that God is active in our world, healing and reconciling? That belief comes alive in a personal way when we seek to join God's mission in the world.

To those who put the mission workers of our church on a pedestal and for those who throw up their hands that mission is colonial, this book is a profound reminder of who God is, who Jesus is as God's mission incarnate, and where the church fits into God's mission in the world. It is an excellent resource for study and discussion in congregations that likely include members of both groups.

After twenty-five years of living and working in China, JEANETTE HANSON, Director of International Witness for Mennonite Church Canada, is copying the Chinese three-generational living style in Rosthern, Saskatchewan.