
Book Reviews

Katharine Hayhoe, *Saving Us: A Climate Scientist's Case for Hope and Healing in a Divided World*, Atria/One Signal, New York, 2021. 320 pp. \$22.99. ISBN-13: 978-1982143855.

Katherine Hayhoe is a climate scientist, an evangelical Christian, a long-term Texas resident, and a brilliant communicator. In *Saving Us*, she doesn't say anything that can't be found elsewhere, but she says it so well that this book is a must-read for anyone seeking constructive and effective ways to address climate change.

Hayhoe covers a lot of the ground you would expect to read about: the reality of the climate crisis, its impacts, the technologies and policies that can make a difference. But this book's importance lies elsewhere—in helping us navigate the challenges of communicating with each other about this fraught topic.

Most readers of this review will be familiar with the tension between commitment to truth and commitment to relationship. Sometimes we must tell people truths that they don't want to hear or just can't hear. (And sometimes people need to give us messages that we don't want to hear.) While there is something fundamentally wrong about building relationships that depend on the assumption of untruths, sometimes the truth appears to get in the way of opportunities for meaningful relationship.

For multiple reasons—political polarization, false narratives in popular media, reluctance to face fears—this tension is particularly acute when it comes to the findings of climate science. And this is where Hayhoe is most helpful.

In the chapter “The Problem with Facts,” she says:

Basing our opinions and judgments on reason rather than emotion is the lofty goal laid out by Greek philosophers. It continues to be pursued by scientists today. But Plato might be disappointed to learn that modern psychology strongly suggests that when it comes to making up our minds about something, emotions usually come first and reason second. If we've already formed our opinions, more information will get filtered through those pre-existing frames. And the more closely that frame is tied to our sense of what makes us a good person, the more tightly we'll cling to it and let potentially opposing facts pass us by. As Jonathan Haidt explains in *The Righteous Mind*, “People made moral judgments quickly and emotionally. . . . We do moral reasoning not to reconstruct the actual reasons why we ourselves came to a judgment;

we reason to find the best possible reasons why somebody else ought to join us in our judgment.” (53–54)

Hayhoe illustrates this motivated reasoning via the response of a farmer at a workshop on how climate change affects agriculture in Texas:

Everything you said makes sense, and I'd like to agree with you. . . .
But if I agree with you, I have to agree with Al Gore, and I could never do that. (55)

She continues:

As Peter Boghossian and James Lindsay explain in *How to Have Impossible Conversations*, “Think of every conversation as being three conversations at once: about facts, feelings, and identity.” I thought I was having a conversation about farming and water; but we were also talking about how we felt about climate change, and about how we saw ourselves in relation to it. “It might appear that the conversation is about facts and ideas,” these authors continue, “but you’re inevitably having a discussion about morality, and that, in turn, is inevitably a discussion about what it means to be a good or bad person.” The farmer had listened to what I’d said and given it a fair shot, and he even agreed with it—logically. But he realized that he’d have to give up his moral judgment to accept this new information. It just wasn’t worth it. (55–56)

Another example recounts a filmed encounter in which Hayhoe and (former Republican congressman) Bob Inglis tried to convince megachurch pastor Rick Joyner of the validity of the findings of climate science—through argument and through demonstration of impacts on oyster fishermen in a place he knew well. She describes Joyner as

. . . a smart man. In addition to being the head of a large and successful organisation, he is a pilot who understands weather nearly as well as a local meteorologist. And he’s also a Dismissive. . . . All of this meant he was better at motivated reasoning and more likely to be polarized by additional information than the average person, rather than less. And that’s exactly what happened.

The more we spoke, the more his rejection hardened. . . . He definitely felt that his identity, not his opinions, were being challenged and judged. Unfortunately, the result was to drive [him] even further away, and today his denial is stronger than ever. The same zombie arguments Bob and I responded to back then continue to be hauled out and re-aired at family gatherings, in group text conversations and phone calls. And it’s not entirely his fault, either. It’s the way our brains work. (57)

When opinions are polarized, when identities are at stake, it’s just very hard to reach people with rational argument.

So how do we then communicate difficult messages? Over several chapters, Hayhoe goes on to show that it is counterproductive to use emotional shortcuts of guilt, fear, and shame. She explains how it can sometimes be appropriate to communicate anxiety or anger but only if at the same time we offer hope. “Sermons on hellfire and damnation are only effective in spurring action if there’s a chance, however slim, of redemption and forgiveness” (82).

And she ends up—maybe predictably, but it’s worth being reminded—with this:

So how do we move beyond fear or shame? By acting from love, I believe. Love starts with speaking truth: making people fully aware of the risks and the choices they face in a manner that is relevant and practical to them. But it also offers compassion, understanding, and acceptance: the opposite of guilt and shame. Love bolsters our courage, too: what will we not do for those . . . that we love? And finally, it opens the door to that most ephemeral and sought after of emotions, hope. (83)

We live in a time of global emergency, when our need for both hope and love is intensifying, not least to fuel motivation to address the crisis. Hayhoe offers us important tools for the task.

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Review Essay

Mark Jantzen and John D. Thiesen, eds., *European Mennonites and the Holocaust*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2021. 337 pp. \$39.95 CND (paperback). ISBN-13: 978-1487525545.

In 2015, in my capacity as a member of the executive board of Mennonite Church USA, I was the chair of the Resolutions Committee for the July delegate assembly in Kansas City. Earlier that year, months before our national convention, I got a call from an unidentified number. “Hello, this is Isaac,” I answered. Without warning, the person on the line began to lambast me for allowing, in my role as chair, a resolution to be scheduled for presentation to the delegates that included our acknowledgment of Christian antisemitism. The person quoted a line from the church document that the delegates would be considering in the summer: “We acknowledge the need for repentance of our own complicity in the history of violence committed by Christians against Jews.” I explained that my committee had determined that the resolution met all of the requirements, and that our executive board had approved the language

of the paragraph in question as appropriate for consideration by the delegate body. Confidently, the man told me that Mennonites were not complicit in anti-Jewish violence and certainly did not play a role in the Nazi atrocities of World War II—*alleged* atrocities, he added.

Shocked and bewildered by his claim, I tried to argue that Christians in the West haven't finished reckoning with the complicity of our traditions in the Holocaust, that our ancestors in the faith failed in their solidarity with Jews, and that we need to remain vigilant in how Christian anti-Judaism sneaks its way into our theologies. "You don't know what you're talking about," he cut me off. "You're not even a real Mennonite. You're not from our people." Then he hung up.

Over the past twenty years as a member of the Mennonite church, I've discovered that my ecclesial siblings who are able to trace their lineage from a long line of Mennonite descendants are always having to engage in the complicated work of sorting through the relationship between their ethnicity and their faith, their biological genealogy and their church commitments. For them, the one has everything to do with the other, which means the inclusion of people like me involves a double-take at their own sense of belonging, a rethinking of what they mean when they claim a Mennonite identity. Are they Mennonite because of their baptism, their church membership? Or are they Mennonite because of the plight of their great-grandparents? Perhaps a little of both?

For most Mennonites, my claim to membership in the Mennonite tradition is welcomed as good news, as an affirmation of the faithfulness of their biological ancestors. For them, my existence as a non-ethnic Mennonite is a sign of a healthy tradition, evidence of a Christian people capacious enough to include believers beyond the ethnic family. For others, however, like the man on the phone, my presence in the church—further, my leadership position—pushes them beyond the limits of their tolerance, which leads to their entrenchment in a church identity that is also a racial identity. My Mennoniteness doesn't extend down far enough, certainly not into my bloodline, especially since my biological family comes from an other-than-European land: I am of a foreign blood and soil, according to the caller.

The recent historiographic turn to consider Mennonite complicity with the horrors of the Nazi regime in twentieth-century Europe drops us into the heart of these negotiations of identity. Mark Jantzen and John Thiesen's edited volume, *European Mennonites and the Holocaust*, invites us into important conversations not only about Mennonite culpability but also Mennonite identity. On the one hand, this is the book I can now recommend to Mennonite Holocaust deniers. I've met one such man, and I imagine there might be others. On the other hand, as a non-European Mennonite, I wonder how the authors in this collection consider my identity as implicated in their narratives.

The argument of the book, as a whole, is for (ethnic?) Mennonites to come to terms with their (our?) involvement in the Holocaust. The editors make the ethical import clear with the Bible passages they chose as epigraphs: “When you offer many prayers, I am not listening,” they offer, citing God’s condemnation from the first chapter of Isaiah. “Your hands are full of blood!” They also include the words of judgment from Jesus’s parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25: “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’” In their introduction, the editors comment on their selection of these passages to frame the book: “The biblical epigrams at the beginning of this book refer to Mennonites who collectively have blood on their hands but cannot fit that image into their self-understanding.” They shift pronouns from “their” in this sentence to “we” in the next. “We see ourselves as sheep doing good in the name of Christ, not as goats deserving judgment” (18). These subtle shifts in subjectivity occur throughout the book without attention to the complications of representation regarding who speaks on behalf of whom, as well as the complexities of claiming an other’s moral obligation to receive such storytelling as an articulation of their own identity.

Those complexities aside (I will return to them later), the violences documented in the book are horrific. The authors recount stories of people who participated in the Nazi genocide, as well as stories of people who looked away while communities of Jews were displaced and massacred. The histories retold in these pages range from active complicity to passive benefit. As a reader, the book unnerved me—the accounts of the way that racial violence takes hold of an entire society and the ease in which the nonresistant could remain quiet in the land while their neighbors disappeared.

A haunting site, around which three chapters revolve, is the district of Zaporizhzhia in what is now Ukraine, where, upon Hitler’s seizure of the region, his soldiers methodically eradicated the Jewish population. “In total, in the Zaporizhzhia region, more than 14,000 Jews and 10,000 POWs and around 600 Roma were murdered,” Dmytro Myeshkov writes in chapter 7. “When the city of Zaporizhzhia was occupied by the Germans in October 1941, the Jewish population numbered 1,841 persons. By spring 1942,” he continues, “they had all been murdered” (210). That same spring, across the river from the mass executions, the beleaguered remnants of the historic Mennonite settlement in Khortytsya, now liberated from Soviet repression, gathered for an Easter service—their first in a decade, Aileen Friesen recounts in chapter 8. “Even though the [Jewish] massacre did not happen close to the church,” she writes, “it is not hard to imagine that rumours about this event drifted to the Khortytsya side of the Dnieper River” (230).

I followed one of Friesen’s endnotes to a 2015 interview with a survivor of the Zaporizhzhia massacre. In the video, Leonid Lerner recounts the gruesome

cruelty of that day—March 28, 1942, he remembers, the first day of Passover. “In spite of everything,” he says, “the Jews were preparing to celebrate Pesach.” German soldiers went door-to-door, interrupting the holiness of the day, and forced Jews to march to the outskirts of the city where they were lined up on a hill and ordered to take off their clothes. Lerner says he can’t forget his little brother’s face when a soldier pierced through him with a bayonet. “And I still remember his eyes.”¹

Each number added to the millions of killings during the Holocaust points to an unimaginable terror—one atrocity sloughed upon another, mounds of death. “A statistical compilation of those slaughtered in a pogrom,” Horkheimer and Adorno wrote in 1944, “conceals its essence, which emerges only in an exact description of the exception, the most hideous torture.”² *European Mennonites and the Holocaust* reaches through the numbers into the events, into the lives of the perpetrators of violence, into their communities. The book attempts to describe the hideousness of history.

The tension within the book has to do with whether the individuals who were complicit in the atrocities were Mennonites—and, relatedly, if their identity as Mennonites implicates those of us who claim Mennonite identity today. To stick with the chapters on Zaporizhzhia for a moment, Myeshkov pinpoints the obscurities involved in incriminating a perpetrator’s identity in the act of violence:

In each case one must ask which characteristic or bundle of characteristics is decisive or sufficient for identifying this or that person as a Mennonite. The profound changes that took place in the Mennonite community in Ukraine and Crimea as a result of social upheavals during this era only make the task more daunting. Violent modernization accelerated the changes in Mennonite identity and exacerbated the generational conflict that was already developing in the early twentieth century. (218)

Some aspects of the past are more knowable than others. Historians make the best of the available archives in their attempts to capture a person’s iden-

1 University of Southern California Shoah Foundation, “Shooting of the Jewry of Zaporozhye in the Sovkhoz Named after Stalin in March, 1942” March 1, 2022. I accessed the interview through the online collection of the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center, <https://babynyar.org/en/library/collection/36/5186>.

Note: The Ukrainian city and region commonly rendered in English as Zaporizhzhia can also be spelled (as evident elsewhere in the review) as Zaporizhia or Zaporozhye (the latter a transliteration of the Russian spelling).

2 Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 92–93.

tity. Myeshkov is honest about the difficulties involved in positing a person's Mennoniteness. In Friesen's chapter, she locates in the archives a self-identified Mennonite resident of Zaporizhzhia who joined the *Sicherheitsdienst*, the Nazi secret service, as an intelligence officer—Jacob Fast who “listed his religion as ‘Mennonite,’” according to the German immigration and naturalization office (238). Friesen carefully documents how a person identifies their Mennonite identity. At the end of her chapter, however, she gestures toward the widespread involvement of Mennonites as informants who cooperated with the German forces, noting that after the German defeat, under Soviet interrogation, Nazi soldiers and agents named local collaborators who had “Mennonite” surnames—“men with Mennonite last names,” Friesen writes, who were “intimately involved in the violence perpetrated during the occupation” (241). In this case a surname was enough, according to Friesen, to imply Mennonite identity.

In their description of the criteria for who counts as a Mennonite, the editors outline “overlapping possibilities” of identity, which includes the status of a person's genealogy. “A simplistic approach is to assume that a Mennonite is someone with a ‘Mennonite name’ who comes from a ‘Mennonite family’” (12); “A cultural approach casts a wide enough net to include those whose grandparents and parents were Mennonite, even if the person in question never entered a Mennonite church” (14). Doris L. Bergen, in her brief introduction to Gerhard Rempel's chapter, provides a full-throated defense of this biological approach to Mennonite identity. “It is second nature and a kind of game to spot ‘Mennonite names,’” Bergen writes about her experience of growing up in a Euroethnic Mennonite community. This method “implies a practical approach that, in my assessment, turns out to be the most historically sound way to deal with the challenge of defining who counts as a Mennonite for purposes of studying ‘Mennonites and the Holocaust’” (38).³ This *most historically sound* approach, which Bergen notes as a kind of game that Euroethnic Mennonites play with each other, occurs throughout the book. The irony, of course, is that this method of determining Mennonite identity mimics the Nazi racial logic of peoplehood—“the importance of the biological background of existence,” as Horst Quiring, a Mennonite minister and theologian in Berlin, lauded the Nazi commitment to the “mightiness of the blood” (131).⁴

3 Here is one example among many in Gerhard Rempel's chapter, “Mennonites, War Crimes, and the Holocaust,” where he considers a person's blood relations as enough to identify the individual as a Mennonite: “An atrocity had been committed by the son of Mennonites near the former Mennonite settlements of Templehof, Suvorovka, Olgino, and Terek” (62).

4 Several authors in the volume point to the theological contributions of Horst Quiring, a Mennonite pastor with Nazi sympathies, as an influential voice—beginning with his 1938 book *Grundworte des Glaubens*—in articulating a Euroethnic Mennonite identi-

In chapter 2, James Irvin Lichti writes about the sinister complicity of this so-called “Mennonite game” with Nazi ideologies of nativism:

The seemingly innocuous habits of genealogy and “the Mennonite game” dovetailed all too tidily with these racial notions: a susceptibility to Nazi racial ideology ran through German Mennonite congregations and surfaced even in periodical content. Nazi propagandists used this racialized version of Mennonite history to their own ends, promoting the “racial purity” of Mennonite communities throughout the world in racial periodicals, popular novels, and a feature-length studio movie. (88)

Blood kinship as Mennonite belonging proved admirable to German racial anthropologists. This likeness troubles Lichti, who seems to worry about the perpetuation of conceptions of Mennonite identity that correlate to *Völkisch* constructions of peoplehood.⁵

I acknowledge that my own Mennonite identity is ecclesial; while Hinojosa and Francisco surnames are familiar to me, I don’t know anybody named Jantzen or Wiens. My Mennoniteness has everything to do with the relationships I’ve formed according to congregational membership. Strangely, the editors of this volume do not include this as one of their many criteria for a person’s identification as a Mennonite. (The category they call “theological identity” has to do with the subjectivity of belief rather than the objectivity of baptism and church membership—see pages 12–17.) Despite the editors’ omission of this identity, several of the authors demonstrate their careful research in determining whether a person was baptized or joined a Mennonite church. For example, this concern is central to Alle G. Hoekema’s chapter on Dutch Mennonites.⁶

ty in alignment with Nazi formulations of racial purity. “What it means to be a people has only recently become clear,” Imanuel Baumann quotes from Quiring’s book. “A people is not formed by a commonality in land, language, or history, but has its deepest foundation in the community of blood or race” (111).

⁵ For a helpful account of Nazi constructions of racial identities, see Claudia Koonz, *The Nazi Conscience* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 2003), especially chapters 5 (“Ethnic Revival and Racist Anxiety”) and 8 (“The Quest for a Respectable Racism”).

⁶ Hoekema, in “Dutch Mennonites and Yad Vashem Recognition,” includes the story of the van Drooge family, whose father, Alexander, was a Mennonite pastor. Residents of the Dutch village of Makkum, the family was involved in the underground resistance efforts against Nazi occupation and participated in clandestine operations to hide Jews and assist in their escape. I hadn’t known of this Mennonite family that had tried to convince the parents of Etty Hillesum to hide their family in the Mennonite parsonage. (When they were youth, the van Drooge parents had been students at the high school where Dr. Louis Hillesum, Etty’s father, was the director.) To read the accounts in this book—like this one about the Hillesum family—is to be entangled in the endless looping of history’s

This is not to discount the storytelling and historical research documented in the book. The “Mennonite game” approach to historiography investigates a person’s situatedness in a familial clan, and many of the authors of these chapters engage in the intimate work of revisiting uncomfortable truths about their own family stories. “Many of the scholars in this volume have a personal involvement with their subjects,” the editors disclose, “though not all have chosen to discuss those ties” (19). For these reasons the book is courageous. The authors offer us a profound gift in their remarkable bravery—confession of their progenitors’ complicity in what was done and left undone, to interrupt the repression of legacies of harm that take hold of our lives.

In chapter 6, for instance, Colin P. Neufeldt recounts his grandparents’ (and their community’s) willingness to benefit from the Nazi occupation in Poland: “These Mennonites had witnessed Nazi brutality toward the Jews, yet they chose to continue working for the Nazi authorities” (184). In chapter 11, Hans Werner notes his father’s military involvement: “My father fought as a soldier both for the Red Army and for the Wehrmacht (the regular German Army)” (294). In the concluding chapter, Steven Schroeder wrestles with his heritage as a descendent of Mennonites from the Danzig area who engaged in military duties: “My grandfather and many other relatives served in the German military, and I remember the portraits of them in Wehrmacht uniforms that hung on my grandparents’ walls” (308).

To narrate these violences is courageous work, an example for all of us who have not had the fortitude to unfold our family stories, to lay out an unflinching account of the iniquities of ancestors in order to enable repentance. Schroeder ends his chapter with an invitation for other Mennonites to join his family’s Mennonite identity, to engage in an ethics of atonement: “Regardless of our respective religious views and practices, our cultural affinity to Mennonitism, or our last names, this is our heritage—a heritage that impacts our personhood, our engagement with the people around us, and the broader world” (315). This is quite the assumption, in terms of speaking for anyone and everyone who considers themselves Mennonite—as if Schroeder’s genealogy subsumes mine, as if I am required to find a place in his family tree in order to belong in the Mennonite story. A generous interpretation would involve a decision to hear in his declaration, despite the colonial overtones, a petition for others to bear the burden of his heritage with him, to take his assertion as a plea for solidarity—his cry as an appeal for companions so that he would not have to suffer alone the guilt he feels for his family’s history.

As a Mennonite without any bloodline connections to Euroethnic Mennonites, my avenue into these horrors has been my belonging within Western

“what ifs,” the unnerving hope for alternate endings to undo the tragic, to wish for the slightest of changes that would have made all the difference in the world.

Christianity. I am part of a faith that facilitated the rise of the Nazi regime. The following studies over the past several decades have proven fundamental for me in understanding the sinister complicities of European Christianity in Nazism: Robert P. Erickson's *Theologians under Hitler: Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus, and Emanuel Hirsch*; Doris L. Bergen's *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich*; and Susannah Heschel's *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany*.⁷

As I read *European Mennonites and the Holocaust*, I thought a lot about the current religious and political situation here in the United States as evangelical Christianity has become synonymous with the quasi-fascist politics of the Trumpian movement. As a Pew Research Center study revealed last year, the election of President Trump resulted in more US citizens declaring themselves evangelical; his political campaign served as a missional event for evangelicalism, his rallies as evangelical revivals.⁸ We've been warned about such ominous possibilities; we've had prophets—for example, George Jackson's dispatches from prison ("the U.S. as a fascist-corporative state")⁹ and Sheldon Wolin's discernment regarding the fascist transformation of the US political project into "Superpower Democracy," "Inverted Totalitarianism."¹⁰ Dorothee Sölle, was perhaps the most prescient in linking the Christianity of Nazi Germany to evangelicalism in the United States when she coined the term "Christofascism" to describe the situation on this side of the Atlantic, where a particular theological culture has produced a faith befitting those who crave political dominance.¹¹

European Mennonites and the Holocaust certainly offers a caution to ethnically European Mennonites whose ancestors were all too willing to recognize their

7 Robert P. Erickson, *Theologians under Hitler: Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus, and Emanuel Hirsch* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987); Doris L. Bergen, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

8 Gregory Smith, "More White Americans Adopted than Shed Evangelical Label During Trump Presidency, Especially His Supporters," September 15, 2021, Pew Research Center, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/09/15/more-white-americans-adopted-than-shed-evangelical-label-during-trump-presidency-especially-his-supporters/>.

9 George L. Jackson, *Blood in My Eye* (Baltimore, MD: Black Classic, 1990), 134.

10 Sheldon S. Wolin, *Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

11 Dorothee Sölle, "Christofascism," *The Window of Vulnerability: A Political Spirituality*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1990), 133–41. William E. Connolly, who does not seem to be aware of Sölle's work, provides a more recent account of the effect of evangelicalism upon the US political situation in *Capitalism and Christianity, American Style* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

Mennonite identity as a racial identity in order to take advantage of a hierarchically racialized social order. That historical realization, I imagine, has affected the consciousness of their descendants who now benefit from their whiteness while making a home in the settler colonial regimes of North America. I had hoped to find more in these chapters that would extend these important issues beyond consciousness-raising work for those who are able to locate themselves in the European Mennonite family tree.

One place in the book that can spur a conversation—beyond the quasi-ethnic studies approach to the Mennonite tradition—occurs at the end of Arnold Neufeldt-Fast’s chapter on German Mennonite theology, where he hints at a diagnosis of a theological problem still operational in our churches—that is, a penchant for theologies of victory instead of theologies that cultivate a disposition of vulnerability. “Theologically, there has been a growing consensus,” Neufeldt-Fast writes, “that all *Christian* talk of God requires reference to God’s own Trinitarian self-definition in weakness and death for the sake of life” (140).¹² This observation resounds with Johann Baptist Metz’s summons in 1981 for Christians in the West to put the brakes on triumphalist doctrines of victoriousness.¹³ “Christianity victoriously conceals its own messianic weakness,” he observed. “Does there not exist something like a typically Christian incapacity for dismay in the face of disasters?”¹⁴ Metz warned against a distinctly progressive Christian preference for theological narratives of victory, and instead encouraged conceptions of messianic weakness that would render our theologies vulnerable to tragedy, a posture open to the undoing of the self-assured coherence of theological narratives of victory—the undoing of narratives that confirm our own sense that we are on the right side of history, that we are always on God’s side and never in a position to be numbered among the enemies of God.¹⁵ Perhaps this direction of concern should lead us to re-exam-

12 Neufeldt-Fast points to Jürgen Moltmann’s *The Crucified God* for this line of exploration. I think Moltmann’s proposals end up instigating more problems than they solve in terms of the intra-Trinitarian relations (i.e., *God in se*). Alan Lewis explains the achievements and shortcomings of Moltmann’s theological project in chapter 7, “From God’s Passion to God’s Death,” of *Between Cross and Resurrection: A Theology of Holy Saturday* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 197–257.

13 Johann Baptist Metz, “Christians and Jews after Auschwitz,” *The Emergent Church: The Future of Christianity in a Postbourgeois World* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1981), 22.

14 Metz, “Christians and Jews after Auschwitz,” 25.

15 The editors note the following tendency among progressive North American Mennonites: “By the twenty-first century, progressive Mennonites [in Canada and the United States] had shifted from rejecting military service as a key component of a collective identity to seeing Mennonites as proponents of peace and justice claims on be-

ine the prevalence of *Christus victor* theologies within North American ecclesial life (especially among US Christian progressives),¹⁶ because such triumphalist theologies locate the faithful on the side of the victor, not on the side of the people in need of repentance and forgiveness.¹⁷ Christian proclamation should also inspire us to confess sins—to acknowledge that, for example, when we read the New Testament gospel narratives as invitations into the Christian life, we often find ourselves with the disciples who betray Jesus.

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half of downtrodden minorities; this view encouraged them to understand themselves as a people always on the ‘right’ side of history” (18). Notice that the editors assume a twenty-first-century Mennonite identity that does not already include “minorities.”

16 For example, J. Denny Weaver has characterized his work, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, as an attempt to revive Gustaf Aulén’s articulation (in 1930) of a *Christus Victor* theology, which Weaver renders into a theory of Christ’s nonviolent atonement. Although he notes some concerns with Aulén’s version of the Christus Victor theory, Weaver locates his own approach as a revitalization project: “I argue that a revised form of it commends itself to the twenty-first century” (J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001], 15). Devin Singh has recently pointed out that Weaver’s nonviolent atonement model depends on the logic of economic colonialism: “We need to consider the dynamics of economic annexation and colonialism that are modeled in such a narrative” (Devin Singh, *Divine Currency: The Theological Power of Money in the West* [Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018], 184–85). Also see J. Alexander Sider, “‘Who Durst Defy the Omnipotent to Arms?’: The Nonviolent Atonement and a Non-Competitive Doctrine of God,” in *The Work of Jesus Christ in Anabaptist Perspective: Essays in Honor of J. Denny Weaver*, eds. Alain Epp Weaver and Gerald J. Mast (Telford, PA: Cascadia, 2008), 246–62.

17 For a brief account of the Christus Victor theory of atonement that contextualizes it within social power relations, see James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Doctrine: Systematic Theology*, Volume 2 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1994), 199–203. I’m grateful to Jamie Pitts for pointing me to McClendon’s astute observations regarding how the meaning of Christus Victor theories shift according to the church’s social status—that the significance has everything to do with whether Christianity operates with majoritarian or minoritarian power within society.

David C. Kirkpatrick, *A Gospel for the Poor: Global Social Christianity and the Latin American Evangelical Left*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 2019. 288 pp. \$55.00. ISBN-13: 978-0812250947.

David C. Kirkpatrick's *A Gospel for the Poor: Global Social Christianity and the Latin American Evangelical Left* focuses on the history of the Latin American evangelical "left" movement, presenting its background and influence on global Christianity. Several sources that Kirkpatrick resorts to for building his narrative—such as bilingual interviews, unstudied personal papers, and far-flung archival documents—evidence the originality of his work, providing insight into the untold stories of the political drama of the Latinos/as within the leadership of global evangelicalism. Kirkpatrick aims to show that the current social emphasis within American and European evangelicalism arose primarily from the influence of this Latin American movement. As a Latin American who was once part of this evangelical movement, I will concentrate on Kirkpatrick's revised picture of the origins and development of the movement, and conclude with a brief observation about his narrative as a whole.

To situate the Latin American evangelical "left" movement within a global perspective, Kirkpatrick introduces his work by focusing on one of the most important evangelical gatherings of the twentieth century—the International Congress on World Evangelization, which took place in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1974. This focus on Lausanne allows him to connect the story of the Latin American movement with the story of two of its leaders, Rene Padilla and Samuel Escobar, both of whom had key roles in the congress. After this setting, the first chapter presents the controversial theological elements that Latin American theologians brought to Lausanne, together with the responses from American and British leaders, such as Billy Graham and John Stott. For Kirkpatrick, the presence of Escobar and Padilla on the platform at Lausanne was not only a symbol of the emerging leadership from the Global South but also a symbol of protest. He highlights how both Escobar and Padilla resort to the notion of *misión integral* (integral mission) to criticize the "mutilated Gospel" of the American middle-class evangelicals. This notion is a key theological concept raised by Latin American evangelicals within missional work. Kirkpatrick's account of Padilla's speech at Lausanne explains integral mission as a comprehensive view of Christian salvation, which touches all aspects of life, including the concern for social justice and the ethical demands of discipleship. For Latin American evangelicals, says Kirkpatrick, Lausanne was all about negotiating this "social" Christianity within the very structures of global evangelicalism. In this respect, the result of the congress—that is, the Lausanne Covenant—must be perceived as a political compromise between Latin Americans and the global evangelical movement led by the North.

In chapter 2, Kirkpatrick shows the background and development of the Latin American evangelical movement before Lausanne, claiming that it is a mistake to consider the movement as a mere version of liberation theology. In that respect, he shows the unique way that the sociopolitical context of violence, oppression, and dependency connected with the evangelical experience. Escobar and Padilla, together with Pedro Arana, were leaders of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES) in Latin America in the 1960s, which placed them at the heart of the evangelical global movement, permeating their theological reflection and approach to the political climate of Latin America. Kirkpatrick's narrative shows that for Escobar, Padilla, and Arana the imported evangelical understanding of the gospel was not an option because that discourse did not provide an answer to the questions posed by the Latin American context and liberation theology. As an alternative, the movement originated a parallel space for theological reflection to maintain its evangelical identity—that is, *La Fraternidad Teológica Latinoamericana* (FTL), the “Latin American Theological Fraternity/Fellowship.”

As chapters 3 and 4 show, the FTL was born as a rejection of North American and British paternalism but without cutting off relationships with those evangelical networks. The FTL pulled global evangelicalism toward social themes without disconnecting from the North Atlantic world. In this respect, Kirkpatrick notes in chapter 5 that the assumed postcolonial narrative for the emergence of the FTL as an independent Latin American evangelical movement must be nuanced by highlighting the missionary sources that shaped the movement, helped in its development, and allowed the global expansion of its ideas. For Kirkpatrick, the origin of the current global “social” Christianity can only be told in a transnational story that involves the mutual influence of evangelicals in the Southern and Northern hemispheres.

For Kirkpatrick, integral mission theology is not a version of liberation theology, and this becomes clear as he pays attention to the evangelical movement's criticisms of the liberationist theological method. However, as chapter 6 shows, there was also a rich ecumenical dialogue between evangelicals and liberationists. The FTL included Protestant theologians inclined toward liberation theology, such as Orlando Costas and José Míguez Bonino, although the dialogue was more at an interpersonal level than an organizational one. Kirkpatrick says that the dialogue with ecumenical theologians helped widen the purview not only for the Latin American evangelical movement but also for the global evangelical movement, which made room for the inclusion of a “social” evangelicalism. However, as he explains in chapter 7, integral mission theology was later appropriated by international NGOs as a depoliticized synthesis of “pursuing justice and offering salvation” (142), although many missiologists are still challenging the political conservatism within global evangelicalism by resorting to the theological legacy of Latin Americans.

In *A Gospel for the Poor*, Kirkpatrick states that his goal is to offer not only a descriptive story of the Latin American evangelical movement but also a prescriptive narrative that demands for others to recognize the importance of Latinos/as within evangelicalism. In this respect, there are many details in Kirkpatrick's narrative that could be taken as prescriptive elements for the presence of Latinos/as within global evangelical Christianity. Here I will consider three elements: (1) the multidirectional conversation within evangelicalism, (2) the importance of personal relationships, and (3) the theological alternative that Latin Americans represented for global evangelicalism.

First, throughout his narrative, Kirkpatrick attends to the connections between the Latin American and North Atlantic evangelicals, highlighting that these movements were part of a multidirectional conversation within global evangelicalism. In that sense, global evangelicalism should not underestimate Latino/a's contributions. In the same way, it is important to remember that Latinos/as have received multiple benefits from the North besides financial support—for example, the profusion of theological conversation partners that shaped the development of Latin American missional theology. The dangers of neo-colonialism did not deter the dialogues that created the possibility for interdependency, which has produced the present movement of critical global evangelical Christianity.

Next, Kirkpatrick's account centers on the lives of the people who have shaped this movement through their persistent conversations. These relationships have overcome many organizational and institutional divisions. In this respect, it is imperative to recognize the value of friendship within global evangelicalism, and the political skills of leaders who brought together different organizations and institutions for common goals.

And finally, a third important element in Kirkpatrick's work is the claim that the Latin American evangelical movement produced not a different version of liberation theology but an evangelical alternative to it. However, as Kirkpatrick's narrative also shows, it is possible to call into question the movement's own evangelical identity. Latin American theologians recognized early on the troubling theological issues within their evangelical tradition and therefore pushed global evangelicalism toward an alternative. In this respect, the connections with Anabaptists that Kirkpatrick highlights—such as John Howard Yoder's involvement with the FTL and the "Radical discipleship group," the presence of Anabaptist Brethren missionaries, and Ron Sider as a conversation partner—subtly influenced the discussions of Latin American theologians. This might explain some of the theological emphases that North American Anabaptists and Latin American evangelicals share in common—for example, a focus on the kingdom of God; the centrality of the church and the biblical narrative rather than other communities and ideologies; and the nature of the gospel and mission as an indivisible union of words and actions.

In sum, *A Gospel for the Poor* provides a good picture of the origins and development of the Latin American evangelical “left” movement, highlighting the importance of the Latinos/as within global evangelical Christianity. However, the foreign origin and target of Kirkpatrick’s work—a North American perspective directed to North American and European readers—permeates his narrative. For example, Kirkpatrick’s use of the designation “left” is hardly neutral. He explicitly states that this designation avoids a blanket categorization of the movement, since many Latin American evangelicals rejected *misión integral*, underscoring that “the emerging coalition of the Latin American Evangelical Left refers primarily to a political orientation rather a theological one—theologically conservative and evangelical while pushing boundaries on socially progressive ideas” (13). Yet, Escobar, Padilla, and the FTL never assumed a partisan perspective nor intended to bring a partisan ideology to global evangelicalism. This Latin American movement consisted of theologians and pastors who were trying to respond to their social and political context with their own understanding of the gospel and with a theological discourse that had political consequences but that could not be subsumed under a political category. In that respect, the main goal of the movement was not to influence the political discourse of global evangelicalism but to change the missional practices that the evangelical theological discourse originated. Therefore, the global impact of this Latin American evangelical movement could be better evaluated not by assessing its influence over North American and British leaders nor by determining its role in shaping the theological statements of international conferences, but by noting the extent to which it is forming the life and mission of local evangelical churches around the world.

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Adam McKay, director, *Don't Look Up*, Hyperobject Industries, Bluegrass Films, Netflix, 2021. 138 minutes.

<https://www.netflix.com/ca/title/81252357>.

Released December 5, 2021, *Don't Look Up* is a star-studded movie written and directed by Adam McKay that quickly became Netflix's #2 most-viewed feature of all-time. It is a powerful reflection on climate change and political inaction—inaction that, according to McKay and friends, is rooted fundamentally in science denial, in addition to greed and desire for technological fixes. For some, this crisis of science denial makes the movie not simply an allegory for climate change but also a commentary on the COVID-19 pandemic, helping us understand some of the public responses to vaccinations and safety mandates.

Don't Look Up is a dark comedy that offers a profound critique of current political and corporate realities and how they block concerted action on climate, particularly in the United States. It is also an effort to engage us—the viewing public—and to stir and animate us to action. To that end, I'd like to use this movie review to explore my response to climate change and to challenge you to do the same. In the process, I will try not to give away anything in the movie in case you have not seen it. I do recommend watching it and gathering with others for a time of reflection, discussion, and even prayer. *Don't Look Up* offers many gems of insight. For me, it is like a parable.

“We have exactly 6 months, 10 days, 2 hours, 11 minutes, and 41 seconds until a comet twice the size of Chicxulub tears through our atmosphere and extinctions all life on Earth.”

—Kate Dibiasky, scientist who discovers Comet NEOWISE, in *Don't Look Up*

The film begins with the discovery of a comet on a collision course with Earth. In six months, all life will be wiped out unless drastic action is taken. Much of the movie is about the efforts of two “ordinary” North American scientists who try to get their government and the world to take the discovery seriously.

Today, despite ever-increasing extreme weather events, despite ever-more conclusive scientific reports (we think of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Sixth Assessment Report¹⁸), it is clear that the critical issue of climate change is ignored by many. For various reasons,¹⁹ so many people “don't look and don't think” and “do ignore and do deny.” And yet our fate with climate change—even if we fail to do anything—is not nearly as clear or as sudden

¹⁸ The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, “Sixth Assessment Report,” 2021–22, accessed March 4, 2022, <https://www.ipcc.ch/assessment-report/ar6/>.

¹⁹ See George Marshall, *Don't Even Think about It: Why Our Brains Are Wired to Ignore Climate Change* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015).

as having a comet slam into us (in the same way that an asteroid devastated Earth some 66 million years ago).

We can act and make a difference with climate change in ways that we can't with a comet. The choices and actions we make—not just those made by the politicians or the big tech and military forces as described in the movie—really do matter. Though there is some political engagement by the public in the movie, it is underplayed. And, of course, the question of lifestyle changes and communal activism (eating differently, consuming less, farming and heating buildings more sustainably, and so on) doesn't really apply to comets. But let's set that aside, and focus on what we can take away from the movie. And I'd like us to do so by engaging a thought experiment.

I invite you to imagine what would happen if you and I received this news today: “You have six months to live, unless we can work a miracle!” Let us assume you process this harsh news from a Christian perspective. I suppose this might be like receiving the shock news from a doctor that I have stage IV lung cancer or something like that. Except in this situation, we all get the same news—*six months*.

How would you respond? How would I?

I imagine I'd deny it at first. Or seriously hope the news is wrong. What would convince me otherwise? Would more evidence? Second opinions and a battery of medical tests? Or is it when I share this with friends and family and I hear back stories like, “Yes, I had a friend who died in six months, just like the doctors said.” Or maybe: “I know a gal who tried this and was totally cured.” Or how about: “The tests can give false positives. Have faith!” Sound familiar? *Is it the science or the relationships that carry the day with us?*

The next stage is anger. I want to blame someone. If the news was cancer, I might try blaming the government, industry, or anyone with deep pockets as I argue for compensation. Regarding COVID-19, who can I blame? And who do they blame? Technology? Our economic system? The pharmaceutical industry who profits big-time (or maybe not as much as we think)? Corrupt politicians who are in the pockets of big business? But what or who can I blame regarding an impending disaster from a comet? God is sovereign, I believe. So do I pray for more time? For God to divert the comet? Have mercy, Lord. I want to live! Why is this happening?

Some might argue that maybe I should even pray for the end to come sooner. After all, I can't wait to be with Jesus, right? Paul said, “I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far” (Phil 1:23). I have to confess that this seems to be more theory to me than trusted fact. Something I take by faith, but I am *of little faith* (Matt 14:31).

Questions abound in this liminal time, this crisis time, about my relationship with my maker. I wonder if I have found the *narrow gate* (Matt 7:13–14)? Do I *have love for others as Jesus loved me* (John 13:34)? Can people actually love

like that? I fall short for sure. Have I been *feeding, clothing, and comforting* Jesus (his image-bearers described in Matt 25:35–36)? Have I been *losing my life for Jesus's sake* (Matt 10:39), or have I been seeking to find out who I am? Will Jesus say to me, “*Well done, good and faithful servant*” (Matt 25:21), or will he tell me, “*I never knew you*” (Matt 7:23)? Yes, I know it is *by grace I have been saved through faith* (Eph 2:8), but am I *doing the good works which God prepared in advance for me to do* (Eph 2:10)?

I wonder how I would spend the last six months of my life? How would you? Perhaps *relax, eat, drink, be merry* (Luke 12:19)? Would *go and make disciples of all nations* (Matt 28:19) take on new meaning and urgency for me? Would I look for opportunities to be like the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37)? Would I, as a middle-class Canadian (and by definition a rich man), wake up to the misery of the world's poor—the Lazarus's of the world that *lie at my gate* (Luke 16:19–22)? They suffer disproportionately and unjustly from the climate change I and the wealthy nations of this world cause. Even worse, the poor did almost nothing to contribute to climate change. Would I, in this moment, finally be able to cast mammon aside, and only *worship God* (Matt 6:24)? Surely I would make my priority, at long last, to *first seek his kingdom and his righteousness* (Matt 6:33), wouldn't I? What would you do?

“I'm sorry. Are we not being clear?”

“We're trying to tell you that the entire planet is about to be destroyed.”

—Kate Dibiasky

Like the gospels, *Don't Look Up* invites all who have ears to hear, to radical change of heart. And to action. It is a parable, calling us to address a climate crisis that, according to the United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres, represents an “existential threat.”²⁰

For Christians, *Don't Look Up* can serve as an opportunity to examine our lives and our lived responses—yes to climate, yes to creation, and, ultimately, yes to our Creator. Here's an opportunity for reorientation.

“We really did have everything, didn't we? I mean, when you think about it.”

—Randall Mindy, scientist in *Don't Look Up*

I encourage you to watch the movie and then, on your own and with others, consider: What biblical passages come to your heart as you contemplate the film? How is the Holy Spirit moving and speaking to you and your circle?

“Dearest Father and Almighty Creator, we ask for Your grace tonight, despite our pride. Your forgiveness, despite our doubt. Most of all Lord we ask for Your Love to soothe us through these dark times. May we face whatever is

20 UN News Global Perspective Human Stories, May 15, 2018, United Nations, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/05/1009782>.

to come in Your divine will with courage, and open hearts of acceptance.
Amen.”

—Yule, prayer at dinner table scene in *Don't Look Up*

Watching *Don't Look Up*, I felt moved to commit the rest of my career and my life to climate justice. How will you spend the last six months or six years or sixty years of your life? Lord give us grace, love, and courage.

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**Paul Plett, director, *I Am a Mennonite*, Ode Productions, 2021.
58 minutes.**

<https://itunes.apple.com/ca/movie/i-am-a-mennonite/id1586383037>.

“What makes a Mennonite a Mennonite?”

With this question, Canadian filmmaker Paul Plett invites us to follow him on an exploration of his own personal story. Through interviews and monologues, this documentary traces Plett’s family heritage while also trying to answer larger questions of what being a Mennonite is all about. His goal is to observe where Mennonites are going spiritually by first answering the questions of where they are and where they have been. Many others have taken on this noble task, but since Plett identifies as a Mennonite himself, he starts with his own background in order to uncover what threads weave him into the larger Mennonite story.

Pulling off his stereotypical straw hat, suspenders, and fake beard, Plett emphasizes that Mennonites come in all shapes, colors, styles, and fashions. Mennonites look as “normal” as he does, or like any person could look. However, it becomes clear through interviews with his family and friends that the definition of “Mennonite” is in the eye of the beholder. For some it is strictly about family bloodline and cultural practices. For others it is about values and principles. And for still others it is about a specific expression of the Christian faith.

To find out more about what being a Mennonite means, Plett traces his family’s footsteps to the former Molotschna Colony in present-day Ukraine. He tries to find remnants of his family’s presence prior to their migration to Canada. The only evidence of their village, however, is old tombstones and the stories that come with them. Plett continues on to Amsterdam in the Netherlands to track down information about a relative who is his family’s oldest known link to the Mennonite movement of the sixteenth century. Unfortunately, he comes up short once again. It is at this point that he starts to switch his focus.

From Amsterdam, Plett travels north to Friesland in the Netherlands to see the town where Menno Simons (the Mennonites' namesake) got his start in the Anabaptist movement. In conversation with the pastor of the Mennonite church in Simons's hometown, Plett focuses in on the spiritual heritage of the Mennonite faith. He marvels at how one man made such a large impact for those who were questioning the status quo and seeking spiritual renewal.

At this point in his journey, Plett no longer needs evidence of his family's ethnic connection to the early Anabaptists. He is a Mennonite because he can identify directly with Menno Simons through the community Simons founded. In his final monologue, Plett concludes that the most significant part of being a Mennonite is belonging to this global community. As he returns home, he expresses his desire for his family to also find their place within it.

There is something special about accompanying a pilgrim on their journey to self-discovery. It inevitably causes us to reflect on our own identity and belonging. In my case, I realized that I could not see myself in Plett's story. Yes, I too am a Mennonite, but the difference between us is that I have no historical connection to the ethnic and cultural heritage he describes. I am a Mennonite by confession, and although I truly appreciate the cultural values and practices that come from the Swiss/Russian tradition, they have as much to do with being a Mennonite as my Filipino/German/Canadian background does.

Although Plett distinguishes between ethnic, cultural, and religious aspects of Mennonites, he ends up with the same convoluted message with which his interviewees began the documentary—that being a Mennonite can mean all of these things and more. It seems that everyone can pick and choose what defines them as Mennonite, because the most important part is seeing oneself as part of the community. What is most striking is that he makes this conclusion in the very place where Menno Simons first became convicted against such ideas.

If Plett truly wanted to discover where Mennonites have been, he would have focused on what identified this sect of Christians in contrast to those around them. Nowhere in the early Anabaptist confessions do we find any notion that Mennonite identity can be passed down through bloodline or culture. In fact, it was the complete opposite. Mennonites died for the belief that faith in God must be chosen and that the true test of faith is discipleship, not ethnic, cultural, social, or political heritage.

If Plett had truly wanted to discover where Mennonites currently are going spiritually, he would have at some point ended up in dialogue with the faith community of Mennonite World Conference. The more we can avoid holding up one tradition as being "truly Mennonite," the more we will celebrate the global diversity among us and the cultural differences that make us who we are. Although we owe a lot to our early European siblings, what ultimately draws us together is not their story but our common story of faith in Jesus and our desire to work together in God's church.

Yes, heritage and history are important. Yes, we can learn a lot from the people who came before us. However, there is a danger in our North American insistence that being Mennonite is rooted in ethnicity and cultural heritage. If this is our belief, then our witness may look more like cultural assimilation than introducing people of all backgrounds to Jesus and the Mennonite lens through which our faith can be lived out.

The issue with this film is not that Plett sought out his familial roots or that his conclusion focused on community, but that in his open definition of community, being Mennonite actually means very little. This might be satisfactory for someone whose heritage prescribed a Mennonite identity, but for anyone who has chosen to join the Mennonite tradition, this conclusion comes up short.

One marker of a successful documentary is whether it answers its own questions. Plett began by asking where Mennonites are heading spiritually. Unfortunately, because of the trajectory of his journey, we never get a clear answer. If we really want to know where Mennonites are heading, we would do well to gather together people of various backgrounds who are choosing this faith tradition and ask them, “What makes you a Mennonite?”

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