

examples of the way economic ideologies and forces have shaped Anabaptist-Mennonite experience locally and worldwide.

Finally, like all good works of synthesis, *Radicals and Reformers* left me pondering the functional boundaries of its subject. In a way, this issue is the flip side of the contingent, contextual approach Osborne takes, as noted above. On the one hand, he warns readers away from expecting any master narrative, whether in the vein of a normative “Anabaptist Vision” or an institutional trunk history from which marginal movements branch off. This is a story “without an authoritative center,” he insists, even though that claim may “feel like a shaky foundation” to some readers (347), especially when little “shared sense of a common identity [remains] intact” (323). And yet, on the other hand, there *are* common threads tying this story together, as there are in any piece of historical scholarship. Early Anabaptists, different though they were, recognized one another as fellow travelers, even though and perhaps because they often disagreed mightily. And so, despite a geographically expansive set of experiences, Osborne discerns “a worldwide pattern” (232) that provides a certain shape to the story he tells, porous boundaries notwithstanding. There is, it turns out, an “Anabaptist center” of discipleship, service, and peacemaking (237–39), often inflected by persecution or Pentecostalism (239–41). Even stories highlighting a yawning gap between ideals and reality, which Osborne does not shy away from (though neither does he linger over them), imply a particular kind of community, one that hopes to be “instructe[d]” by such failures (13).

In the end, Osborne contends that the ties that bind diversity exist in the “imagined communities” created when people tell and hear one another’s stories as their own (62, 122, 346, etc.). Although “it remains to be seen who will consider themselves part of the Anabaptist story” (325) in the future, historians like Osborne are not neutral chroniclers. Our choices about whom to include and omit contribute to whether and how individuals see themselves in the stories we tell, with implications for how they rehearse their own identity and, consequently, how and with whom they imagine belonging. Osborne has included an expansive cloud of witnesses in this book, inviting a wide array of readers into imagined Anabaptist communities. In this dynamic process there is no final word, but *Reformers and Radicals* is now an important contribution to that storytelling process and one that I am grateful we have.

Elizabethtown College

STEVEN M. NOLT

New Moves: A Theological Odyssey. By J. Denny Weaver. Telford, PA: DreamSeeker Books. 2023. \$21.95 USD.

Any memoir will chronicle multiple “moves” in life, whether geographical, religious, ideological, or intellectual. J. Denny Weaver’s choice of chess moves as a metaphor, however, is itself revealing. In his book *New Moves*, he uses chess

rather than some more organic metaphor to frame what he makes clear is a “theological memoir” not an autobiography (19).

Over the course of his career, Weaver transitioned from math major to biblical studies major to historian and then to systematic theologian. It is in his work as a theologian trying to outwit defenders of Anselm—the medieval monk and bishop who proposed a theory of substitutionary atonement which later hardened into Protestant dogma—that Weaver’s chess metaphor becomes especially apt.

To whatever extent Weaver’s legacy proves a decisive win over Anselm, his book should interest historians as well as theologians. For what has driven Weaver is another more tectonic move: the shift among Mennonites during his lifetime away from a solid commitment to Christian pacifism. While the intricacies of his prophetic resistance to that move will interest many readers, years from now others may find here a primary source for tracing some of the dramas accompanying the decline of Mennonites’ witness as a historic peace church.

Professionally Weaver was first a historian of sixteenth-century Anabaptism as well as American religion. His narration reflects numerous story lines shaping the Mennonite Church through the second half of the twentieth century and on into the twenty-first. Mennonite identity seemed secure as he grew up in a congregation outside of Kansas City. Identifying as a “Jesus boy” (27), he imbibed an enduring sense that in his church-centered world, Mennonites try to follow Jesus’s example and simply shouldn’t go to war. Related matters, though, could prove changeable, including whether the biblical basis for a Mennonite peace position required fundamentalism, what to do with a dawning sense of racial injustice and white privilege, reasons that Mennonite nonresistance might need to become “active nonviolence” in order to fully reflect the arc of the biblical narrative, and why narrative itself might be a better carrier of Christian theology than abstract propositional statements and doctrines.

Admittedly stubborn about his deepest convictions, Weaver demonstrates a commendable vulnerability in recounting how he changed his mind at key points. There is humor in the storytelling—ironic humor as he recounts how reading Charles de Gaulle’s war memoirs while serving with Mennonite Central Committee in colonial Algeria piqued his interest in history even as it accelerated his shift away from a US-centric worldview; self-deprecating humor as he recounts navigating a room full of Black womanist theologians at the American Academy of Religion. But there is also evident pain from feeling humiliated at meetings of Mennonite feminists—yet he turned that humiliation into continued learning as he absorbed narratives very different from his own.

What transformed Weaver from historian to systematic theologian was a nagging question that he asked naively at first, then pressed when his mentors seemed to have no answer, then pursued doggedly through the rest of his career. Namely, he wanted to know if there was a specifically Anabaptist-Mennonite perspective on central Christian doctrines like Christology, Trinity, and atonement (85–86, 226). Ever since Harold S. Bender’s “recovery of the Anabaptist vision” had taken hold among Mennonite leaders a few decades before Weaver attended seminary in the late 1960s, it seemed that there was supposed to be an Anabaptist perspective on everything (76). Why not these doctrines? Weaver found that

Mennonite commitment to following Jesus's peaceable teachings had made some difference among nineteenth-century preachers who used the traditional imagery of substitutionary satisfaction atonement (99). Yet reactions to his question seemed to confirm the pernicious power of that theory to displace Jesus's own life and teaching. In hindsight, reactions from fundamentalist evangelical Mennonites were not surprising. Weaver's real and abiding surprise were reactions from Mennonite scholars whom he expected to welcome his work as a way to integrate Mennonite peace ethics and theology: they seemed indifferent at best or antagonistic at worst.

Indeed, much of the drama, if not the pathos, of *New Moves* comes from Weaver finding himself a prophet unrecognized in his own Mennonite house yet vindicated by others. His key move (which he helpfully summarizes in a theological excursus at the end of his introduction) was to name and reject the way that Anselm's atonement theory underwrites violence. Violence, after all, is intrinsic to the story it tells, in which a vindictive God supposedly needs bloodshed to assuage his anger at his subjects' rebellion and thus restore his honor. For God the Father to send his Son to die in this way would constitute nothing less than "divine child abuse"—the provocative and confirmatory phrase that Weaver learned from feminist scholars Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Ann Parker in their critique of patriarchy.

As the Black Theology of James H. Cone likewise confirmed, no atonement theology could be true to Jesus's nonviolent defense of the human dignity of the marginalized unless his death first made sense in history, not simply as a cosmic legal transaction, but as the tragically logical outcome of an unflinching trajectory of challenging oppressive powers-that-be. An early Christian tradition offered the alternative Christus Victor theory of atonement that Gustaf Aulén's classic by that name retrieved. Weaver's task was to update it into what he first called "historicized" then "narrative Christus Victor" (175–76). Drawing on the Gospels, the writings of Paul, and the Book of Revelation, he applied it in the context of contemporary movements for God's Reign of life-giving justice. Whereas substitutionary satisfaction theory didn't really require Jesus' resurrection, in the Christus Victor model it is resurrection, not bloodshed, that vindicates God's will and Jesus's way. Further to its credit, it derives not from abstract philosophical or creedal categories but from the very narrative of Jesus.

Weaver's own narrative includes vignettes of hard-won affirmation. Neatly bookending his career as a self-conscious theologian are an informal commissioning by Cone in the hallway at the American Academy of Religion, urging him to take the message to white folks (147), and later a gratifying "I am so blessed by your scholarship" from next-generation Black theologian J. Kameron Carter (218). In between are words of encouragement from womanist and feminist scholars like Rebecca Parker (178) and an unnamed Mennonite woman who told him his work was allowing her to give the church another chance (176). By the end of Weaver's career, at least some Mennonites were finally listening (157–58). Meanwhile, in ecumenical circles, although pushback from defenders of Anselm unsurprisingly continued (182–83), dynamics were shifting. By various accounts, Anselm's place

has been at least well enough upset that no one will be able to write atonement theory in the future without taking the work of this once obscure Mennonite thinker from a small Midwestern college into account (179, 229).

The ecumenical reception of Weaver's arguments for a nonviolent atonement does tease a question, though. If his theological journey started by asking whether Mennonites had a specific take on core Christian doctrines, and then gained momentum with the conviction that their theology should not be beholden to the classical creeds of small-o orthodox Christian tradition, perhaps the rejection of Anselm does not require rejection of the creeds' authority after all. Some contemporary Christian theologians may indeed be ready to dispense with the creeds. But many more are quite glad to agree that though the Nicene Creed alone is inadequate because it skips over the life, teachings, and ethics of Jesus, it is still true and indispensable (cf. 182–83). None less than Pope John Paul II sought to mitigate this kind of gap by adding a fourth round of "mysteries" to Catholics' recommended weekly cycle for praying the rosary. These additional "luminous mysteries" offer prayerful reminders of major events in Jesus's life, including his baptism and proclamation of the Kingdom of God. To supplement is hardly to hold at arms' length. Weaver may be satisfied that the narrative of Jesus should be enough to provide a common starting point for inter-Christian dialogue toward greater unity. But ecumenists who regularly identify the classic creeds as a further basis for greater Christian unity may not entirely concur.

It seems quite possible, then, to cheer on Weaver's overturning of Anselm in favor of narrative Christus Victor and still to respect the authority of the creeds. A key reason emerges if one interrogates something with which Weaver proudly identifies—not simply the chess playing that frames *New Moves*, but a closely adjacent disposition: mathematics.

"The mentality that long ago relished mathematics also functioned for me in theology," writes Weaver as he wraps up his book (227). A mathematician stubbornly presses on in search of clear answers, he explains; so too a persistent, admittedly competitive theologian. Weaver seems to be admitting to a longing for sure, timeless, abstract principles after all, for that is what mathematics identifies. But let that pass. For indeed, in some Protestant traditions theology often does seem to work like mathematics. Qua tradition, theology can develop, but it does so in a way that is more like writing additional lines to a theorem or the code in a long algorithm where a single typo—a single 1 or 0—can crash the system and result in heresy. In such a context, where Anselm's theory is no longer the mere thought experiment that he intended but has long ago become dogma, Weaver's mathematical mentality and love of chess may have been exactly what was required. Through it, he could home in on the problems of substitutionary satisfaction atonement theory, overturn Anselm, and develop a convincing alternative.

But what if theology is more like an ecology—something organic, interdependent, more stable and life-giving when more complex and thus self-correcting; something to be tended, not programmed, sometimes by pruning but also by fertilizing what has already been passed down by elders through ages? Such a conception of theology would happen to coincide more closely with the

root worldviews of many of the marginalized peoples with whom Weaver seeks to stand in solidarity. But it would also happen to coincide (despite ahistoric claims by some newly fundamentalist Catholic apologists) with the character and dynamics of the long Catholic tradition.

There is a lesson here for readers who find themselves convinced by some but not quite all of Weaver's arguments. It may even be a lesson that need not provoke dogged countermoves from Weaver. For intriguingly, despite all of his opposition to the fourth-century Constantinian settlement by which Christian leaders accepted state-backed violence, his memoir reports almost no direct disputes with Catholics. Instead, he relates warm encounters in his formative years and unexpected support as his career matured.

The lesson? If the great threat to Mennonites' peace witness is a Protestantism that demands assimilation into national entities and assent to militaristic ideologies (now more evident than ever in the phenomenon of Christian nationalism), then the long (pre-Reformation) and wide (now global) ecology of the Catholic tradition might offer at least as many resources as challenges, and even the challenges could prove fruitful ones. For if we are gardeners more than mathematicians, we will learn to weed and prune even while working within ecosystems that we respect as gifts, not flat chalkboards—or competitive chessboards.

University of St. Thomas, MN

GERALD W. SCHLABACH