

Journal of Amish and Plain Anabaptist Studies

Volume 11
Issue 2 *Health and Healthcare among the Plain
Anabaptist People*

Article 20

2023

Review of: *My Brother's Keeper: Race Relations in Mennonite Perspective*—Nathan Zook

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Recommended Citation

Smucker, Byran, and Winfred Zimmerman. 2023. "Review of: *My Brother's Keeper: Race Relations in Mennonite Perspective*—Nathan Zook." *Journal of Amish and Plain Anabaptist Studies* 11(2):244-46.

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ciety, Amish have trends and many of the photos in the book were taken 25 years ago and do not remotely resemble today's Amish dress. Stavisky's assumption that artwork is not hung on the fridge as to not encourage pride, is incorrect. Artwork and small notes from children are displayed all over the house. Children are considered a gift of God and the family size is rarely discussed before a couple marries. Both assume there will be children, and lots of them. Therefore, artwork drawn by small hands is viewed the same way as the child, a miracle not to be ashamed of. Mirrors are not considered prideful but a means of keeping yourself neat. As for Stavisky stating that the reason wall-to-wall carpeting is not used because it is worldly is laughable. Rather, who would consider such carpeting even remotely practical in a household of eleven or twelve people?

While Amish women are frugal, suggesting that they give gently used baby gifts makes them sound cheap. They take great delight in gift giving. The gifts are new or homemade. And the more progressive Amish woman, while she may hang her clothes out to dry, will not be using a wringer washer but rather a modern automatic washer powered by solar or battery. And the newer houses will have either granite or Corian countertops, a point Stavisky missed.

Stavisky debunked the myth that is portrayed on television that rumspringa [a term used less

and less by the Amish themselves] is a time of wild parties. But she was incorrect about the late nights. Amish youth have curfews the same as the rest of the world.

Except for the few misconceptions I have noted, Stavisky's book is a delightful portrait of a society of women that mystifies many. The author does a wonderful job showing her readers that while sameness and oneness are prevalent in Amish society, the women in this culture are individuals. She also helps us see that the Amish woman under her plain garb and quiet demeanor is neither less common nor more amazing than her neighbors of mainstream society. She is a woman living life the way she chooses, simple and quiet.

My name is Barbie Stoltzfus and having grown up Amish in Lancaster and still practicing the lifestyle I felt I was able to determine the accuracy of Stavisky's book. I write short stories for magazines in the Amish community and am married to Elam Stoltzfus and the mother of five children. I have one son-in-law and one granddaughter named Laura Ingalls who I declare to be the best. While all stages of mothering are amazing, I do admit being partial to the middle-aged stage.

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Review of: **Zook, Nathan. 2020. *My Brother's Keeper: Race Relations in Mennonite Perspective*. Harrisonburg, VA: Christian Light Publications. Pp. 106. \$8.95.**

Review 1 by Byran Smucker
Miami University

My Brother's Keeper is a book about race from a conservative Anabaptist point of view. The book, by Nathan Zook, has three parts: first, a brief history of racism; second, reflections on how the church should respond to issues of race; and third, exhortations for Christian responses to current racial issues. Personal anecdotes, as well as excerpts from interviews with ethnic minority Mennonites, are woven throughout and increase

the book's readability. Full disclosure: I count Dr. Zook as a friend.

The subtitle of this thin volume is *Race Relations in Mennonite Perspective*, and as someone who grew up within the conservative Mennonite community, I believe it is an apt description. As an example, throughout the book there is an assumption that discipleship is connected to particular lifestyle guidelines that are applied across a congregation. For instance, Zook warns that one danger in cross-racial ministry is watered-down discipleship (p.60-61), and it appears that, at least in this case, "church standards" are used interchangeably with discipleship. Another example of the (conservative) "Mennonite Perspective" is the way in which societal evil is to be opposed. Instead of direct confrontation and social action, Zook advocates a quiet approach that consistently

demonstrates God's love. Often, more activist approaches involve the leveraging of political and other powers and these powers clash with traditional Anabaptist understandings of Jesus' teachings on nonviolence. Furthermore, such approaches usually involve working with nonbelievers, and this also presents potential pitfalls. An interesting issue that was not addressed is whether it is possible or even desirable to adopt a more direct approach to bringing God's kingdom to earth, while maintaining conservative Mennonite values of nonresistance and separation from the world.

Even though this work is clearly from a conservative Mennonite perspective, Zook presents a refreshing view of racial issues. He does not shy away from describing unsavory racial history, such as the Japanese internment camps in the 1940s. He strongly repudiates the "curse of Ham" interpretation of Genesis which has been used by professing Christians to justify racism and slavery. He advocates for integrated churches, from both a practical and theological perspective.

There are also tensions implicit in some of the arguments of the book. The aforementioned exhortation not to lower church standards for people from non-majority cultures is challenged by the author's recognition that expectations of ethnically distinct persons in existing monoethnic congregations are often "rooted in our own cultural attributes" (p.69). On p.86 there is encouragement to a sort of color-blindness, at least in our descriptions of one another, but on p.103 there is an acknowledgement that ignoring race and racial issues could be insulting or off-putting to those who have experienced hurt related to race.

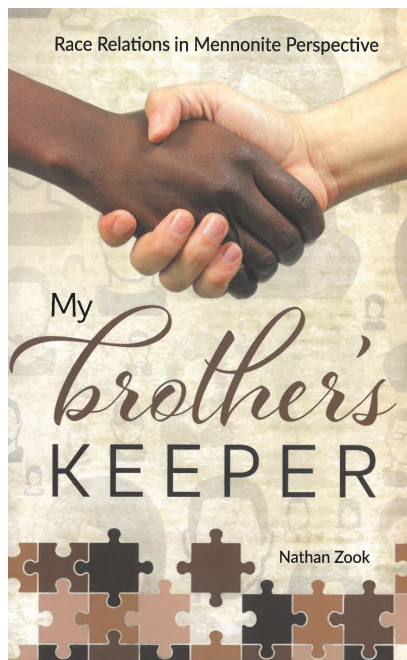
The conservative Mennonites in North America are dominated by "ethnic Mennonites," those who are of European descent and have a multigenerational ancestry within the church. Based on the clear commitment of Zook to an integrated and multicultural church, one may have expected a stronger internal critique of this largely monocultural community. Perhaps he missed an

opportunity to more clearly call his church to what he sees as an ideal laid out in Scripture, though his more indirect critique may be in keeping with the low-key approach of conservative Mennonites to cultural problems. One other small critique is the relative lack of references, particularly early in the book. For one particular example, in his criticism of Darwinism on p.9, his arguments would be strengthened if he cited statements such as "Scholars later embellished [the theory that races were subcategories of humans] to advance the idea that each race represented a different species within the natural world" or "scientific textbooks commonly portrayed more developed human specimens as having thinner lips, light skin, and straighter hair than less developed species." Without references, readers are left to accept these statements on the authority of the author, rather than being pointed to a source which would allow them to explore the ideas more deeply.

These items aside, I hope *My Brother's Keeper* will be read widely among conservative Anabaptists and help to shape both the thinking and practice regarding racial issues within the church. It is worth reading whether you are a conservative Mennonite hoping to gain perspective regarding these topics, or if you are outside the tradition with the desire to better understand conservative Mennonites' thinking about race.

Review 2 by Winfred Zimmerman
Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church

Nathan Zook, in *My Brother's Keeper*, writes an informative and enlightening book on race relations within the Mennonite perspective. It is written in a personable style which makes it easy to read and to follow the thoughts of the author from chapter to chapter. The book is broken into three sections that help the reader gain a better understanding of race and prejudice. The first section deals with the history and reasonings behind racial institutions and bigotry. The second section goes in depth into conservative Anabaptist experiences.



The third section shows how a Christian believer is enabled to work through modern-day practical issues such as adoption, marriage, and race-based privilege.

Many individual illustrations add color and texture to the book's prose. Some include fascinating historical details which are not common knowledge, including the first known anti-slavery petition. Others are stories from various cultures and countries, lending a balanced perspective to our own culture's story. The author is careful in his illustrations to give an accurate window into the various nuances of prejudice, and as such, is successful in portraying what the real reasons for racism and bigotry are. Along with his illustrations, he includes the solutions for the real underlying issues and helps the reader understand what went right or wrong in a given situation. He also

demonstrates compassion for those caught in racial or minority problems.

As I read this book, I was reminded of my mother's stories of growing up and going to public school in rural Virginia. She was a minority white student in a majority black population. Those stories perfectly meshed with what this book portrays. Also, many of the specific instances given by the author resonated with what I have experienced.

This book made me think twice about some of my own sympathies and preconceived ideas. As such, I believe it is an excellent read to be thoughtfully considered, for any Christian who wishes to practice the Golden Rule in living with our brothers of all colors and backgrounds.

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