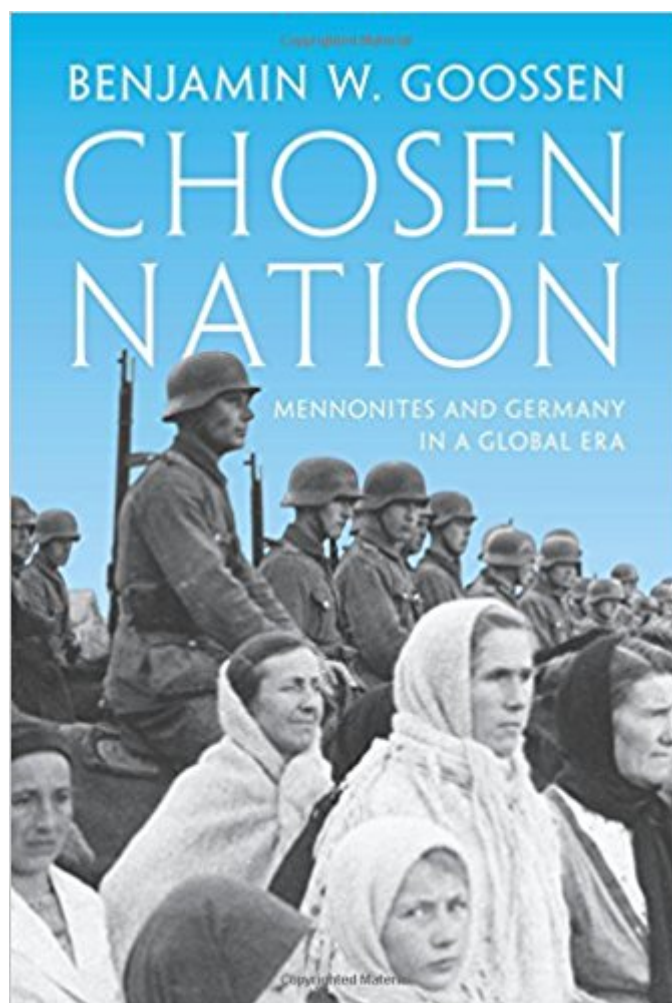


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# Chosen Nation: Mennonites And Germany In A Global Era



## Synopsis

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the global Mennonite church developed an uneasy relationship with Germany. Despite the religion's origins in the Swiss and Dutch Reformation, as well as its longstanding pacifism, tens of thousands of members embraced militarist German nationalism. *Chosen Nation* is a sweeping history of this encounter and the debates it sparked among parliaments, dictatorships, and congregations across Eurasia and the Americas. Offering a multifaceted perspective on nationalism's emergence in Europe and around the world, Benjamin Goossen demonstrates how Mennonites' nationalization reflected and reshaped their faith convictions. While some church leaders modified German identity along Mennonite lines, others appropriated nationalism wholesale, advocating a specifically Mennonite version of nationhood. Examining sources from Poland to Paraguay, Goossen shows how patriotic loyalties rose and fell with religious affiliation. Individuals might claim to be German at one moment but Mennonite the next. Some external parties encouraged separatism, as when the Weimar Republic helped establish an autonomous "Mennonite State" in Latin America. Still others treated Mennonites as quintessentially German; under Hitler's Third Reich, entire colonies benefited from racial warfare and genocide in Nazi-occupied Ukraine. Whether choosing Germany as a national homeland or identifying as a chosen people, called and elected by God, Mennonites committed to collective action in ways that were intricate, fluid, and always surprising. The first book to place Christianity and diaspora at the heart of nationality studies, *Chosen Nation* illuminates the rising religious nationalism of our own age.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Chosen Nation is a remarkable exploration of the entangled histories of nationalism, race, and religion since the nineteenth century. Goossen tells the story of how Mennonites came to think of themselves as a German diasporic community in concert with the construction of the German nation. Based on stunning archival research, this is a beautifully written book."--Tara Zahra, author of *The Great Departure: Mass Migration from Eastern Europe and the Making of the Free World*"This is a fascinating, deeply researched account of a transnational religious group's encounter with modern German nationalism and its ongoing reinvention as an ethnicity, nation, race, and confession. Presenting a new unflinching scholarly voice from within the Mennonite community, *Chosen Nation* explains and reflects on the origins and consequences of the disastrous mid-twentieth-century Mennonite attraction to German nationalism, acceptance of Nazi racial ideology, and, in some cases, participation in genocide."--Terry Martin, Harvard University"Chosen Nation is a tour de force. In crystalline prose, Goossen argues that Mennonite and German identities were never stable, but created over time and deployed in specific historical circumstances, with the Mennonite articles of faith in tension with yet often supporting the modern nation-state--even during the Nazi period. This is an eye-opening guide to the vexed history of German Mennonites in the modern era."--Helmut Walser Smith, Vanderbilt University"In this age of globally resurgent nationalism, Goossen delivers a timely reminder of the malleability and ever-shifting nature of such ideological collectives. His brilliant analysis takes us through two hundred years of Mennonite history and to a vast array of places--from Kazakhstan to Paraguay, from Germany to Canada--to show how religious and national identities emerge, intersect, and shift, often with lightning speed. This book is an important contribution to the thriving field of global history and to the politics of our times."--Sven Beckert, author of *Empire of Cotton: A Global History*"Developing a historical narrative of German Mennonites that runs through the age of high nationalism and into the present, *Chosen Nation* shows how some Mennonites found ways of accommodating the antagonistic positions of religious allegiance and loyalty to country. This is an important book."--H. Glenn Penny, University of Iowa"What is so impressive about *Chosen Nation* is how it demonstrates that the history of a small, very unusual, and rather marginal religious group, the Mennonites, illuminates crucial themes in the development of Germany, Europe, and the modern world."--Jonathan Sperber, author of *Karl Marx: A Nineteenth-Century Life*"This fine book

sheds light on the integration of the Mennonites into German society as part of the construction of German nationalism in the twentieth century. Goossen's use of government archival sources for Mennonite activity during World War II is groundbreaking and his assessment of Mennonite proximity to and involvement in the Holocaust is a significant achievement."--Mark Jantzen, Bethel College

Benjamin W. Goossen is a scholar of global religious history at Harvard University.

An excellent study ,but some German speaking conservative Anabaptists have issues whether their views are adequately represented. For me personally it was very informative.

So far very informative with an intellectual but joyous writing style

Excellent original research.

Carefully researched and well documented, this study of Mennonites before and during the Nazi era in Germany will disturb anyone with a romantic view of Mennonite history or of the "volk" in any culture. How is it that a small group so resistant to state authority in the 16th century that they were willing to die by the thousands rather than submit, became willing to support in the twentieth century one of the most authoritarian forms of the state ever -- facism? This book reveals degrees of compliance with and even support of Nazism that should cause deep self- and group-examination. The factors examined include the movement for a "union" of German identity, based on language, for Mennonites spread out across the world, the practice of endogamous marriage, which eventually created an almost pure Aryan ethnicity, vulnerable to the idea of racial superiority as propounded by the Nazis, and a deep aversion to communism based on the sufferings of (German-speaking) Mennonites in Russia during and after the Bolshevik revolution. I would have liked to see more examination of the loss of pacifism as a key doctrine in the German Mennonite "Unionist" context in the late 19th century. One of the most important reasons for the Mennonite diaspora in the first place was the search for places that would not require military service. Often those who felt the desire to be nonresistant most forcefully left Germany. Those who remained found it easier and easier to justify militarism in the new modern kind of state. Does pacifism protect a group from too close an alliance with any state and blindness to evil perpetrated by that state? When pacifism is tolerated (as in America today), do Mennonites become vulnerable to the same kinds of ideas

(racism, facism) that blinded the German "volk"? Does the desire to assimilate eventually catch up with even the most radical Christian groups? These are examples of the kinds of questions that will stay with me for a long time after reading this book. The conversation Ben Goossen has begun will be important for many years to come, as will this ground-breaking book.

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