

# Book Reviews

## Fiction, Folklore and Poetry

David Elias, *Sunday Afternoon*. Coteau Books, 2004. Pp. 257. Paper, \$19.95

David Elias's first novel *Sunday Afternoon* returns to the landscape of his earlier short story collections *Crossing the Line* (Orca, 1992) and *Places of Grace* (Coteau, 1997). In "Hidden Places," a story from the first collection, Elias describes the Mennonite West Reserve through the eyes of a young boy gazing down from an elevated spot in Manitoba's Pembina Hills:

Two hours later they were standing in a clearing, high above the valley floor, looking out to the east. It had been a tough ride up, but the view today was worth it. The villages below were so many green islands on a blanket of yellow and black.

You could see Rosengart and Blumenfeld, Reinland and Nuehorst. Far off, at the horizon, were the white oil tanks of Gretna. That was almost thirty miles.

To the south, across the line, the arrangement was different. Instead of large green clusters, there were smaller patches of green, scattered evenly across the plain, each one standing apart. (*Crossing the Line* 17-18)

In three simple paragraphs Elias establishes the valley setting of his stories and contrasts the Mennonite village culture on the Manitoba side of "the line" with the single-family farm culture "across the line" in North Dakota. He also sows the seeds of themes that are picked up in later stories such as "Dickie Derksen":

His place was all by itself out in the country, where only two kinds of people ever lived: those that were too rich to live in the village, and those that were too poor. Rich people had a fancy place with a garage attached to the house instead of a barn, and windows out front big enough to see right into the living room where people sat looking back out at you.

Poor people had a place thrown together from scrap lumber or buildings dragged out of the village before they got torn down, a place where a few scrawny hogs and chickens scrounged around in the dirt and kids played outside all day, hungry and half-naked. (*Places of Grace* 73-74)

This is the West Reserve in the 1950s straddling the time between World War Two and the cultural shifts of the 1960s.

In *Sunday Afternoon* Elias combines the setting, themes, and many of the characters from his short stories and fashions them into a novel that takes place on one Sunday afternoon during *maddock schlope*, the traditional nap and procreation time for couples in the Mennonite villages. However, the time is now the early 1960s: the Cold War is at its height, John Glenn has rocketed into space, missiles are being installed in silos just across the line, and the world's tallest television tower has been erected not many miles away, and so not everyone in the village of Neustadt is sleeping or procreating on Sunday afternoon.

Stock Mennonite village characters, developed to three dimensions, stir in various restless states: Abe Wiebe, the gentle excommunicated soldier; Steven Zacharias, the sensitive teenager growing into a poet; Martha Wiebe, the spinster who looks after her widowed father and her bachelor brothers; Dickie Derksen, the mildly retarded boy; the gruesomely disfigured Martens brothers; the sharp-tongued Zacharias sisters; the village preacher who unwittingly awakens sexual pleasure in his wife. The valley in the shadow of the Pembina Hills becomes a mythical place squirming with sensuality, unknowingly anticipating a miracle.

Elias doesn't flinch from writing about the dark side of Mennonite village life and he shows the reader extremes of cruelty in the actions of characters such as Dickie Derksen's stepfather and the teacher Agnes Thiessen. The novel shows characters struggling to keep their creative spirits from being stifled by the almost Eden-like nature of the valley—those who escape temporarily find themselves drawn back to the valley and the village and even the church. At the same time the village is involved in forces both dark and light that will change the people and the community forever.

*Sunday Afternoon* is a fabulous novel (in the old sense of the word, related to fable) and I daresay that Elias has spent time with the works of Robert Kroetsch, especially *What the Crow Said* and *Seed Catalogue*. Elias uses the details of everyday village life and the gossip that goes with it to create myth and characters who do mythical things. However, Elias doesn't reveal the fabulous nature of the novel until the reader is completely enthralled by the sensuous setting and the compelling

characters and their conflicts; the miraculous nature of the ending may disappoint the reader who prefers a realistic ending growing out of characters' literal actions. Elias has a background in philosophy and his novel, as well as being very funny at times, takes the reader into philosophical argument. But more than the miraculous conclusion of the novel, it is the *reader's* rich Sunday afternoon in this Mennonite village in the valley in a particular moment that makes this novel one that deserves to be read and enjoyed widely, including by the non-Mennonite literary world currently enthralled with Miriam Toews's *A Complicated Kindness*.

For those of you who have been watching the East Reserve vs. West Reserve literary scoreboard for the past 20 odd years, I'd say *Sunday Afternoon* is a significant addition to the West Reserve's numbers.

*Armin Wiebe's most recent novel, Tatsea, won the McNally-Robinson Book of the Year Award and The Margaret Laurence Award for Fiction. Tatsea is reviewed in this issue.*

Armin Wiebe  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Jean Janzen, *Piano in the Vineyard*. Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2004. Pp. 74. Paper, \$9.95 (U.S.).

Jean Janzen is a California poet who has published five previous books of poems. Her work has been included in several anthologies, and she contributed several hymn texts to *Hymnal: A Worship Book*. In this latest book she explores themes she has explored before but which she shows no sign of exhausting.

The first section, "Broken Places," explores the many ways in which our lives fracture. The title poem in the section underlines the inevitability of both pain and our persistent efforts to alleviate it: "All of us shipwrecked, / clutching what we can" (20). There are echoes of the Psalms in some of these poems. "April Storm," for instance, speaks, as many Psalms do, of an overwhelming, unnamed sorrow. "In January" ends by calling on God to deal with the unjust—in this case, gun manufacturers.

Here, as elsewhere in the book, Janzen writes as someone secure enough in her faith to lament and complain. When she expresses doubt, it is not a rejection of faith but a doubt that wants to believe. That was, for me, one of the remarkable things about this book: the fact that its viewpoint is so orthodox, so anti-modern. The existence of God is not

questioned, nor does the poet feel any need to apologize for her faith. The presence of God is simply accepted, an assumption that underlies everything Janzen writes.

The cycle of garden poems that opens the second section is concise and vividly sensual. Garden images—common in Janzen’s work—offer multiple ways of engaging themes of birth, growth, sexuality and death. They also provide a natural way to express the connection between the sensual and the spiritual, an ongoing theme in Janzen’s poetry. In “January,” the pruning of rosebushes recalls the narrator’s cutting off her braids at the age of twelve. “April” and “May” are, perversely, associated with death. The other poems in this section did not have quite the same impact. It’s not that they aren’t good in themselves, just that they are not as compact and powerful as the garden cycle.

There is light and darkness in these poems, and Janzen embraces them both. She communicates an intense love for her surroundings in language which is full of color and texture. She is especially good at evoking the particular atmosphere of each season — the way summer heat, for instance, turns the air “thick as plastic, / ripe to the verge of rot and split” (29).

The third section is a short group of poems based on family stories. There are some very effective poems here, among them “Seeing It,” which demands that victims of torture be remembered for who they were, not just for how they died: “To write it so that you can see that Daniel / is not a blur, but wears scuffed shoes, / striped stockings, and a cap over blonde / curls” (45). Then there is “Borrowing the Horse,” in which the courtship of Janzen’s parents is turned into a luminous fairy tale:

She was the darling  
of the village, and he  
had only his good looks,

a sheaf of paper,  
and three books, which he  
lay down before he picked up  
the reins of the borrowed horse. (48).

The final section is about beginnings, about anticipating the new and unknown. It describes dreams of a wilderness that we enter “without map or tools” (61) and it characterizes death as a passage into an unfamiliar country. The last poem begins with an epigraph by Charles Wright: “Every true poem is a spark, and aspires to the condition of the original fire, arising out of the emptiness” (72). This poem, and by implication the entire section, expresses a desire to see that spark rise up.

Reading this collection, I found myself drawn into Jean Janzen's landscape and, especially in the third section, into the lives of the people she portrays. This is accessible, profound poetry that celebrates the presence of the spiritual in the world of the senses.

Joanne Epp  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

John Weier, *Stand the Sacred Tree: Journeys in Place and Memory*. Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 2004. Pp. 256. Paper, \$18.95.

In his latest work, Winnipeg writer John Weier has set himself a challenging task: to visit a number of countries (Iceland, Holland, Syria, Denmark, and Canada), and observe the inhabitants, both human and avian, in an attempt to find connections between them. The result is a book that is self-revealing and engagingly honest.

In the Preface to *Stand the Sacred Tree*, Weier explains that the idea for his book comes out of an earlier work, *Marshwalker*. In *Marshwalker*, Weier undertook a Thoreauesque observation of the Oak Hammock Marsh near Winnipeg. He states that his original purpose was "to explore wilderness, the wild places, where plants and animals grew more or less unattended" and "especially to catalogue the lives and movement of birds." His focus gradually expanded to encompass other interests, experiences, and personal observations. In the wake of the publication of *Marshwalker*, Weier was invited to visit the abovementioned countries, and he decided to "take [his] Oak Hammock expedition out into the world." The result is a combination of travel writing, memoir, and Weier's personal observations on family, marriage, birds, the environment, religion, and a host of other concerns and interests.

The book is presented in a fragmented, sometimes breathless style ("Peculiar today how we travel, how we treat the earth around us. Location. How we rush into it. Through it. At one hundred kilometres an hour. Or seven hundred. Gone! before we realize we've arrived."). Rather than providing a linear accounting of separate journeys, Weier interweaves the threads of his journeys. This approach often allows him to make interesting connections between varying experiences, but at times his use of repetition ("I wanted to know about Willow Island, about his experience of Willow Island, the nature of the place, the wilds of Willow Island. David, how did you come to know Willow Island?") can be distracting.

Overall, the reader will come away with few penetrating insights about the countries Weier visits, but perhaps this was not the intention. As Weier himself disarmingly points out, “these narratives won’t actually tell you a great deal about Syria, about Holland. [...] They show you instead the contemporary traveller, his reactions to place and people over a very limited time. A few hours. Days. Sometimes over a few weeks.” Weier and his wife, Mary, have many of the usual concerns of travelers: they worry about how much they are spending, about whether they are being culturally sensitive, about language and cultural differences. There is a quixotic air to Weier’s writing, and readers may at times find themselves worrying about his safety. In his quest for bird sightings, he wanders about in war-torn Syria wearing a pair of binoculars, despite warnings from the Canadian embassy and concerned Syrians. In a scene in Damascus, he impulsively approaches a group of armed Syrian soldiers: “I hadn’t planned anything. [...] Some impulse must have directed me. When I stepped close to that soldier under the palm frond—a boy, really, all three of them boys—I bent my long body and bowed down. I crowded into the shade beside him, draped my arm over his shoulder. A few centimetres from his nose to mine under that thin palm frond. A soldier and his black machine gun, I and my bare head, all in the shade of a palm branch. He laughed. That young man laughed. There hadn’t, in fact, been any doubt that he would.”

Weier seems much more comfortable in his observations of birds and other natural phenomena than he does when he describes his interactions with local citizenry. His account of a sojourn in Iceland and, in particular, his encounters with the “dazzling Icelandic horses,” brings to life the singular beauty of the Icelandic landscape and is one of the most interesting and rewarding parts of the book

Weier’s real subject, however, is himself, and he devotes much of the book to his interior journeys. One of the strengths of the book is in Weier’s recounting of Mary’s struggle with breast cancer and the resulting breakdown of their marriage. In these observations, Weier writes compellingly, unsentimentally and with great candour about the cracks that can develop in a relationship in times of stress.

*Stand the Sacred Tree* will be of particular interest to readers of Weier’s other books and to those looking for a very personal take on the travel memoir.

Barbara Simler  
White Rock, BC

Carrie Snyder, *Hair Hat*. Toronto: Penguin, 2004. Pp. 213. Softcover, \$24.00.

In this collection of linked short stories, Carrie Snyder writes with powerful subtlety. The central theme of *Hair Hat* is loss in its many guises: a young woman gone missing from the streets of Vancouver; a baby given up for adoption; a mastectomy; various forms of robbery, betrayal, and sudden death. In the context of these losses, the characters' deepest griefs and secrets are skillfully revealed through small gestures and casual comments. In "Harassment," for example, the narrator's decision not to leave his usual six-cent tip at a coffee shop reveals the inner demons that make him slightly threatening to others, though he himself is unaware of it. And in the middle of "Yellow Cherries," the narrator lets drop one simple, chilling sentence that splits the story wide open, tingeing its every detail with horror. Snyder has a talent for investing ordinary objects with meaning — a dirty shower curtain, a stolen CD player, and a child's teddy-bear chair all carry a rich, metaphorical resonance that's introduced with a light, deft touch. The only object in this book that seems overburdened with significance is the hair hat of the title.

The collection's title refers to a character who appears in every story, a man whose hair has grown into the shape of a hat. As a unifying central image, the hair hat fails. It is impossible to picture (despite the little cartoon illustrations), and its presence in every story begins to seem forced, even gratuitous, distracting the reader from the strengths of Snyder's writing, which needs no such gimmicks to succeed. The hair hat man is perhaps intended as a structural device to tie the stories together, but the stories are already convincingly connected by theme, narrative structure, and characters who know each other. Ultimately, by promising more than it delivers, the hair hat disappoints. When we finally meet him, the hair hat man's explanation is anticlimactic: "I wanted to do something different, to feel different" (178), he says. We learn that his hairstyle is a response to devastating loss, but the reason behind this bizarre response remains a loose end.

The strongest stories in the collection are "Yellow Cherries," about a young girl's fall from innocence; "The Apartment," about a lonely landlady's need to invade her tenants' privacy; and "Tumbleweed," about a mother's attempt to ignore the pain of her failing marriage. In each of these stories, Snyder touches on human failure with grace and compassion, drawing her characters with swift, telling strokes. The strongest story of all is "Personal Safety Device," narrated by Jenny, a young college student who discovers that the boy she likes has been charged with a series of rapes. Her reaction to this discovery reveals her conviction that she's been left out of everything. In the story's

comic opening scene, Jenny meets a salesman who tries to interest her in his product, the “personal safety device” that comes with a battery pack and convenient carrying case, and can be purchased for a mere \$19.95 a month. There are several levels of irony at work here. Jenny’s awkward unattractiveness has been a kind of built-in safety device that has kept her out of the rape suspect’s range. On another level, her self-centeredness “protects” her from getting close to anyone. Near the end of the story, she is humiliated after tripping and falling in front of the other students, but as she rises, assisted by ubiquitous hair hat man, she realizes that no one has even noticed:

Everyone else had turned away, dispersing. They were lousy with previous commitments: telephones ringing, email unwritten, notes unstudied, friends guffawing, teachers flirting, beer to drink, girls to rape, lies to tell. They could not care less about my clumsiness, my efforts and attempts, my foolish, foolhardy falls. (56)

Snyder’s insight into the human ego is often, as here, surprisingly unpleasant:

Jenny’s ultimate epiphany is undercut by her bitter self-pity. In a book that features loss as its central theme, the personal safety device may make a better central image than the hair hat. With its easy payment plan and batteries included, it serves as an ironic reminder of our vulnerability and the futility of our attempts to protect ourselves from loss or harm.

Catherine Hunter  
University of Winnipeg

Nathan Dueck, *king’s(mère)*. Winnipeg: Turnstone, 2004. Pp.69. Softcover, \$15 Cdn.

In a first book from a young Mennonite writer one usually finds at least a few poems dealing with some aspect of Mennonite experience. There is none of that here. Neither is there any trace of the autobiographical or confessional material that often appears in a young poet’s first book. It’s as if Nathan Dueck has skipped the first book altogether and gone straight on to his second.

Seen in the wider context of Canadian poetry, however, Dueck’s book fits right in. *king’s(mère)* is a long poem (perhaps a prose poem)

rather than a collection of poems. While admittedly an ill-defined form, the long poem has been prominent in Canadian literature since the nineteenth century. And the long poem as imagined biography/autobiography is also a well-established genre that includes works like Stephen Scobie's *And Forget My Name: a speculative biography of bob dylan* and Michael Ondaatje's *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*.

*king's(mère)* is an imagined life of William Lyon Mackenzie King, Prime Minister of Canada in the 1920s and through the Second World War. The title is a pun, of course: Kingsmere, in the Gatineau Hills of Quebec, was the site of Mackenzie King's summer home; but *mère* refers to his mother Isabel, to whom he was extremely devoted. Many more puns follow (perhaps a few too many on the name Willy), as well as much alliteration and word association. It's playful, restless language that takes Mackenzie King's story, tosses it around, turns it upside-down and shakes it to see what falls out.

Dueck draws on historical sources to create a fictionalized portrait of a man who is even stranger than most people thought. Mackenzie King was known during his lifetime as a mild-mannered, slightly dull bachelor, and after his death as a closet eccentric who communed with the spirit of his dead mother. The Mackenzie King in this book is passionate, lustful, sentimental, anxious, and at times immature. He has a relationship with his mother that goes beyond devotion, and loves his dog as if it were a son. As one of the back cover blurbs says, Dueck mythologizes an already mythic character and makes him larger than life.

Not much of what's in here looks like poetry. The text is composed of newspaper columns, fragments of dialogue, *faux* scripture, the text of a comic strip, letters and diary entries, among other things. Mackenzie King's voice is prominent, but we also hear his mother's voice, as well as her mailman's, the voice of Mrs. Wriedt, the medium, and the voice of a hospital nurse with whom Mackenzie King falls in love.

Poet Rob McLennan describes a long poem as "sequences of fragments that hold faster than any adhesive." This book feels like it shouldn't work — the component parts are just too widely disparate — but it does. The parts don't make much sense individually, but they gain meaning from being placed together. The text turns into a collage of found objects that, when viewed from the right distance, resolves itself into a discernible shape. While it's hard to find individual lines that demand to be quoted, the book nevertheless gives an overall impression of coherence.

One has to ask, of a new book about someone well-known, does this add something valuable to what we already know about Mackenzie King? I think the answer is yes. Dueck doesn't contribute any new *knowledge* of Mackenzie King, but he doesn't intend to. What he does

do is take a well-known story and give it the new form and flavour that make it his own.

It took me a while to grow accustomed to Dueck's style, and I'm not sure I've warmed to it even after several readings. Still, I can't help admiring what he accomplishes here. Nathan Dueck is a writer to watch.

Joanne Epp  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Miriam Toews, *A Complicated Kindness*. Toronto: Alfred A Knopf Canada, 2004. Pp. 246. Hardcover, \$29.95.

Perhaps the greatest kindness one can do Miriam Toews' most recent novel is not review it at all but simply continue the nation-wide conversation that's been provoked by the voice of Nomi Nickel, the 16-year-old protagonist and narrator. Typically, a reviewer comments dispassionately on intricacies of plot, layers of meaning, integrity of character development, multiplicity of themes, and depths of symbolic richness. None of these elements is readily evident in *A Complicated Kindness*. Most striking in this novel is its voice, a strident, bleak teenage voice that makes dispassionate observation nearly impossible. Every review I have read focuses on the voice—or evades it by commenting on other reviews. The people I've spoken to about the novel do the same.

The conversation began for me even before I'd read the novel. Non-Mennonite colleagues and friends kept asking if such a fundamentalist, isolated Mennonite community was realistic and did I know about shunning. Mennonite friends were similarly eager to enter the dialogue begun by Nomi—precocious, depressed, and desperate Nomi, determined to *schput* (mock) her way to freedom from the self-righteous, surreal town from which her sister and her mother have already, separately, vanished. Nomi offers what seem like random explanations and bits of stories, linked by her idiosyncratic patterns of association, and she pleads with us to understand. Like the school counselor she visits briefly and unproductively, we risk not hearing her need for clarity and security if we focus too closely on the bad-girl image she projects — the ultra-good-girl behavior of her early years having brought only guilt and fear.

Many who read the book with immediate delight find it humorous: “wickedly funny” is a favorite label. I, on the other hand, agree entirely with a Mennonite friend who described it as, “possibly the saddest book I've ever read.” It's not that I didn't get the Mennonite jokes;

I understand Low German. Indeed, having grown up in a Mennonite community as fundamentalist, if not quite as ingrown, as Nomi's, my childhood self was just as terrified as hers of the Rapture and of Hell. Perhaps I identify too closely with both Nomi's fears and the hollow laughter that attempts to purge both bitterness and anger.

The novel's uneven tone triggers such completely disparate responses. It edges too close to caricature to be a believable and compassionate examination of a tragic situation (family dysfunction and disintegration; a father's emotional and mental instability; a best friend's depression; a boyfriend's rejection), yet is far too painful and realistic to function as satire. Nomi's preoccupations veer wildly from the trivial to the profound, just as her language swings between the annoyingly incorrect ("me and Travis") and the surprisingly articulate: "The other day," Nomi explains early in the novel,

I found [my mother's] passport in her drawer [ . . . ] I wish I hadn't. [ . . . ] I sat on my dad's bed and flipped through page after empty page. [ . . . ] Just the ID information and my mother's black-and-white photo which, if it were used in a psychology textbook on the meaning of facial expressions would be labeled: Obscenely, heartbreakingly hopeful. (21)

In that regard, Toews has accurately registered a teenage mind with its uncertain expression and even more uncertain self-knowledge. The voice is appropriately fragmented, struggling to make itself heard and to find coherence in a situation that makes no sense.

A voice like Nomi's makes demands that not all readers are prepared to meet. I found the complete immersion in a teenage perspective claustrophobic, particularly on the first reading. On subsequent readings, I could see that Nomi actually addresses two audiences — the general, real, presumed non-Mennonite reader, and the English teacher to whom Nomi feels she has to explain herself. Much of my initial tedium was replaced, on a second reading, with genuine sympathy, but I still resist the novel's uneasy mix of bleakness and grim amusement. The chaos and claustrophobia of adolescence are exquisitely rendered but yield only a limited aesthetic effect.

For readers like me, the novel's chief strength is in its brief moments of devastatingly accurate perceptions of life and theology in East Village: "It's hard to grieve in a town where everything that happens is God's will," Nomi explains at one point. "It's hard to know what to do with your emptiness when you're not supposed to have emptiness" (173). Elsewhere, with one brief sentence, she dismisses the dubious relationship between isolation and goodness: "Somehow all the problems of the world manage to get into our town but not the

strategies to deal with them” (52). She herself is apt testimony of the truth of that conclusion.

Edna Froese  
St. Thomas More College  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

Douglas Isaac, *Past, Present: Tense ...* Ottawa: BuschekBooks 2004. Pp. 95.

Douglas Isaac invokes his muse – whom he addresses as “meine Ohma”(9) – in order to gain the insight necessary to “divine the clan history that befuddles me”(10) and to “relive our people’s struggle,” before asking her to see “what a wretch I have become” (11). How Mennonite can you get? It ’s all there – the obsession with the family story, the fascination with the Anabaptist story (especially the gory bits) and the self loathing for never being good enough to live up to those stalwart souls who suffered long before he/we adopted a comfortable position in front of the computer.

There is an awful lot of naming going on. Wretch is not the only name the poet calls himself; he is also:

- “a contortionist in avoidance/of confrontation” (23)
- “Such a spoiled male child”(24)
- “an undecided”(36)
- a Black sheep”, “Prodigal son” (only the first two of a six point list) (47)
- an “Insufferable self-centered egotist”(courtesy of his grandfather, Peter P, who haunts the book) (48)
- a “HYPOCRITE” (50), a “*bad boy*” (50)
- “Mien kleinet jungtje” (courtesy of Ohma) (51)
- “Doglass”(by his grandfather) (52 and every instance subsequently)
- “I, the author” (56)
- “ethnic” (57) “ETHNIC MENNONITE (Light)” (59)
- “child of darkness and death”(58)
- “*this narrator*” (by Peter P) (60) “*the narrator*” (63)
- “Impotent grandson” (67)
- a “dilettante, acting glib and tough (71)
- “*simply a chronicler/ here, an occasional apologist*”(73)
- “a real man” (75)

- “a Phoenix” (75)
- “saga-weaver” (79)
- “*simply mad/as the rest of us*” (82)
- “slightly mad, visionary, manic/depressive” (89)
- “a poet”(90)

Unfortunately, although he is a poet, he is not yet a good one. This poet draws attention not only to himself but also to the text, which, after the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we readers know cannot be trusted. In case we're not quite sure what we're reading, Isaac lets us know, drawing attention to the text, his story, describing it variously as:

- “ancestral history”(32)
- “epic” (32, 43) a *mock* epic narrative (49)
- “machinations”(40)
- “fabulations” (58)
- “*deconstructing this*” (61)
- “*My saga*” (63)
- “*confession*” (63)
- “mythic, a mere conceit poetic” (68)
- “*a history fabulated*” (70)
- “*this tale* (75)
- “Another in the inventory of fictions”(76)
- “revelations/ I bring”(77)
- “this narrative”(84)
- “this poem” (89)

There is a feverish energy in Isaac's desire for recounting: Menno; Buekels; Claas Epp; his association with revolutionaries; his metamorphosis into a Phoenix forcing sex during a Russian Mennonite bacchanal— all propel the bad-boy image, “playing soccer solitaire with the head/ of a young virgin. Her golden tresses/swirl, crimson rooster-tails in mire” (39). Excluding only his venerable “Ohma,” women generally fare poorly in this narrative, as do most of the men. In this story, there is really no one we can root for.

This work is prosaic, even within the relative leniency of the narrative long poem. Poetry, even narrative poetry, is tight as a sharply made bed and convincing. Isaac's offers messy post-modern bedclothes, another re-telling of sometimes Anabaptist, sometimes Mennonite history, and some rooting around the family tree. He begins by asking his ohma for insight and concludes with what he has seen.

I have witnessed child-hookers not  
taking Jesus as their saviour, but using

hallways to do their Johns (respected  
members of the bench, financiers, poets).

I've bleached works for junkies  
trembling too much to tie the tubing  
on – oh yes *Ohma* – I've seen it all

But what he's seen is not in this poem. And that's the problem and the hope. Isaac could let the ego stand, drop the dated post-modern pose and the false humility, and show us, instead, what he's seen.

Victor Enns  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Lorraine Janzen, *Learning to see in the dark*. Toronto: Wolsak and Wynn, 2003. Pp. 78.

"This is the shape of love, the heft and hew" – a promising opening for what turns out to be a middling collection of poetry, the first by Lorraine Janzen, a writer who teaches English at Nippising University in North Bay.

Despite occasional flashes of illumination, what's missing here is the rhythm of poetry, the economy of language that invites a reader into a writer's persuasive realm. In the section titled, "The Discovery Poems," the image of the sidewalk jump-rope over the dust of people "carrying a cultural memory" (17) names Mennonites' displacement of aboriginals and induces forms of white guilt, but it makes for poor poetry. This section includes some of the most prosaic writing of the collection, though it makes the interesting point that Mennonite faith hinged on the discovery of language, the power of words, with the result that they were "martyred over metaphors, insisting on symbols / to the last" (18).

The ambiguous line breaks, early on, disrupt the reading ("Like a beau/tiful ..., or "dis/covering") but thankfully these seem to fade away midway through the collection, as does occasional silliness like the paradox, "Inevitable. Unexpected" (26).

"Always wear a slip, or things my mother taught me" (30) is a tribute but it isn't poetry, sliding, as it does, into greeting card sentimentality. After two relatively strong stanzas with concrete, though familiar, images of canning, we come to the admonition, "To take pleasure in the moment" (32) and end with a list of lessons; the emphasis on woman's wisdom concludes with "the love to carry on."

I love pie and dug right into her “Pie Poems,” one of the best pieces in the collection. The extended metaphor, though, runs into trouble. Pastry can only take you so far before it falls apart in your hands and when we get to “Doing and doughing / all of your days” (44), we’ve all had enough.

We dress for Sundays. We’ve all been to church. Alleluia, what a pew. She nails the afternoon remembering “the grief / of lace doilies and cyclamen and African violets” (25) in “Sunday Best,” which resonates for anyone who has been to church and to grandma’s of a Sunday.

The work generally seems to improve as it moves along to “graveyard tunes” (53). Of death in “Dead Secret,” Janzen concludes, “Some things are better left buried. / Light a candle and leave.” Good work surfaces in “Seasonal cycle,” particularly in the third “Lady Of the Lakes” movement where “The sudden scent of summer mint / bringing sweetness to all this light”(73) manages to be both startling and fresh.

Overall, though, there is a looseness of language in this work, a slackness of purpose that invites our attention to wander. It seems, in this collection, that we’ve left the old country, bringing with us long narrative lines that can, by now, only be spoken in English and are difficult to turn into poetry. Carrying a narrative in poetry is always hard work; ultimately, in this collection, the story is not enough.

Victor Enns  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Armin Wiebe, *Tatsea*. Winnipeg: Turnstone, 2003. Pp. 249. Paper, \$18.95

Will every reader of this wonderful book express surprise at Armin Wiebe’s departure from his earlier work? With *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens*, *Murder in Gutenthal*, and *The Second Coming of Yeeat Shpanst*, Wiebe has developed and sustained a reputation as the comic genius of southern Manitoba Mennonite life. *Tatsea* takes us far from Wiebe’s trademark antics, sets us down in 1760, in the midst of Dogrib life in what is now the Canadian subarctic, and tells a story that threatens tragedy far more often than it celebrates comedy. Ultimately, though, this is an extraordinary story of life-affirming love and a representation of Dogrib life before encounters with European technologies wreaked irrevocable cultural change.

The novel begins focused on Tatsea, a strong-minded young Dogrib woman constrained, for the first time in her life, to the menstrual hut

when what she really wants is to steal away to go swimming. The narrative promptly shifts to introduce the other main character, Ikotsali, the frog-faced man who is a remarkably adept hunter possessed of legendary dream power; the hero of one of the group's central survival stories; and, incongruously, an outsider amongst his own people. The narrative promptly explains that incongruity by describing Ikotsali's physical defects, his small size, his hunched back, and the congenital skin condition that covers his face with oozing boils.

When Ikotsali rescues Tatsea's father from certain death, he earns the right to take Tatsea as wife, a situation that gives him great pleasure but mortifies Tatsea, repulsed as she is by the sores on his face. When she gives birth, however, she finds herself drawn, against her inclination, to Ikotsali's unfailing gentleness and the surprising pride and interest he shows in their girl-child. At this relatively lyrical point, the narrative takes off: early on a summer morning, after Ikotsali has left to collect birchbark and Tatsea has departed some little distance to bathe and swim, their camp is attacked by a group of Enda (Cree) raiders who kill and scalp everyone they find. They take Tatsea as their lone captive but not until after she has managed to hide her baby daughter high in a tree.

The rest of the novel is the story of the lovers' – for they become more thoroughly lovers in their separation than they have ever been before – struggle against extraordinary odds to be reunited. The narrative shifts regularly from Tatsea's story to Ikotsali's, juxtaposing their different situations: Tatsea the captive of first one group of Enda and then another till she arrives at an English fur-trading fort; Ikotsali struggling to keep their baby daughter alive and to find his wife. Throughout, Tatsea and Ikotsali are linked by dream visions of one another. Indeed, Wiebe's skillful use of magic realism respectfully evokes traditional dream power and intensifies the gripping adventure that unfolds.

Of all this wonder-full story's magical elements, perhaps the most poignant is its representation of a male member of a male-dominated society so determined to keep his baby daughter alive that he nurses her himself and in the process, forms an unbreakable bond with her. At one point, having found another group of Dogrib people, Ikotsali is directed to a young widow, a nursing mother who generously agrees to feed his daughter:

Ikotsali shuddered with joy and with sadness when he placed Tatsea's child in Dagodichih's arms and helped the hungry mouth find the overflowing breast.

But Tatsea's daughter refused the noisy widow's milk, howled relentlessly until she was inside Ikotsali's shirt again, sucking

ravenously while her father dripped warm fish soup from the hollow swan's-leg drinking tube. (101)

Like Rudy, the other Wiebe famous for his depictions of encounters between First Nations people and Europeans, Armin Wiebe credits a variety of documentary sources. My particular familiarity with Samuel Hearne's *A Journey from Prince of Wales's Fort* multiplied my pleasure at this novel's twenty-first chapter, since Tatsea becomes there the remarkable young Dogrib woman whom Hearne and his party discovered in January 1772 surviving alone on the Barrens. Like Rudy Wiebe as well, Armin Wiebe invites the possibility of censure on the grounds of cultural appropriation, but I am not the right reader to issue that criticism: I was thoroughly drawn in to this delicately sketched and compelling story of devotion, fidelity, and endurance, both in the material, observable, world and in spiritual realms outside of time and space.

Kathleen Venema  
University of Winnipeg

Julia Kasdorf, *Fixing Tradition: Joseph W. Yoder, Amish American*. Telford, PA: Pandora, 2005. Pp. 280. Paper, \$34.95 Cdn.

Julia Kasdorf's biography of Joseph W. Yoder (1872-1956), author of *Rosanna of the Amish* (1940) – which the *Mennonite Encyclopedia* identifies as “a semifictionalized biography” – is a welcome and engaging study of a popular American Mennonite writer and his time. *Fixing Tradition: Joseph W. Yoder, Amish American* is volume 4 of Bluffton College's C. Henry Smith series, which, according to series editor J. Denny Weaver, is intended “to publish interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary scholarship for the service of the church.” To be sure, as Weaver says, Joseph W. Yoder has been “virtually an unknown” in Amish/Mennonite circles – apart, that is, from some 425,000 individuals who have, since 1940, bought (and presumably read) his *Rosanna*. As a gigantic figure on the landscape of popular North American Mennonite literature, he cannot be ignored.

Julia Kasdorf remarks in her preface that she came to the life of Joseph W. Yoder “as a poet and writer,” believing at first that he could show her “how a person can become an author and also remain part of the Mennonite community” (13), how a person born into a minority culture might “become an artist without breaking ties with his place

and people of origin” (13). As often happens in an archive-based project such as this, Kasdorf’s research led her well beyond this initial question to the explication, for example, of Yoder’s embrace of muscular Christianity, “a literary, religious, and social movement” that “sought to develop strength of character through sport” (67); his career as a musician, singing teacher and college recruiter; and his decision, in the late 1930s (when he was almost 70 years old) to write and publish a book that would “tell the truth” about his people, the Amish (152).

This volume will attract readers who are curious about Yoder as well as readers attracted by Kasdorf, herself a prominent poet in American Mennonite circles. All will find much to savour here. Kasdorf as poet is discernible in the book’s compelling preface and epilogue, where she presents, as contextual bookends to the Yoder narrative, her own experience as a minority-culture writer. As author of the biography itself, Kasdorf the poet stands apart, her absorbing and easy-to-read biographical text driven by available fact and anecdote.

Even though Yoder’s intriguing story occupies over two hundred pages of the text, the man himself remains surprisingly elusive. We learn enough about his activities to wonder what motivated him to live as he did, but Kasdorf’s remarks finally reveal little about what actually drove this man, who seemed to love drawing attention to himself; who lived for eighteen years with a male friend (John M. Hooley) and his wife; who married for the first time at age 60; and who became “increasingly shrill” (232) and “obnoxious” (197) in his later years. Near the middle of her study Kasdorf observes that even though Yoder’s life was “thoroughly documented in published memoirs and through preserved correspondence,” he “left no traces of his eighteen-odd years of living with the Hooley family” (119). This observation would seem to invite further probing, but Kasdorf, here as elsewhere in the text, resists exploring further, and offers no speculation about the nature of the Yoder/Hooley relationship, except to remark in passing that it went through a “period of turbulence and uncertainty” (124) before the household split up.

The story of Yoder’s wife, Emily Lane, who lived with Yoder for the eight years immediately preceding the publication of *Rosanna*, is also shrouded in mystery. Here, too, Kasdorf refrains from adequately problematizing an apparently huge gap in her story. She introduces Emily merely as “a striking, white-haired woman who wore stylish clothes” (134), remarking that she was an “independent, forward thinking” Presbyterian who “supported temperance and women’s suffrage” (135). Nowhere does she probe the role Yoder’s wife might have played in the controversial, proto-feminist activities of his later life. If Yoder lived with Emily until his death in 1956 (Kasdorf reveals nothing about Emily’s fate, so the reader has no knowledge of when

she died), she would have spent 24 years as his companion. But she occupies only three paragraphs of text.

These two instances – Yoder’s life with Hooley and with Emily – demonstrate the challenges of a work such as Kasdorf’s. Like any biographer, Kasdorf was limited in her research by the number and nature of her sources. (I remember my husband Paul and I driving her to Aylmer, Ontario in March 1995, to interview David Luthy at the Old Order Archive there – Kasdorf’s only Canadian encounter, which yielded little.) Although her many interviews and substantial work in archives garnered an enormous amount of fascinating material about Yoder’s public life, the man himself remains, in large measure, a mystery, and the deeper currents that might account for his life remain unplumbed.

As for the volume itself, I would have wished that more attention had been paid to ensuring textual exactitude: many typos in the work, along with syntactical and other errors, unnecessarily undermine the best efforts this series and this volume represent. The brief caption for the illustration on page 53 (one of several very interesting and illuminating photographs in the text), which begins with Yoder’s father Crist being referred to as “Christ” and includes other glitches as well, is an example of the technical errors that pepper the book.

Joseph W. Yoder’s *Rosanna of the Amish* remains an Amish/Mennonite best-seller. Kasdorf’s study is a significant and captivating contribution to the burgeoning North American literature by and about Mennonites. One of the revelations of Kasdorf’s study -- that Yoder’s life story resists conforming to any straight-forward binary reading of the relationship between a minority-culture writer and his world -- serves to inform our understanding of Mennonite literary lives and literary texts in general. I hope others will take up the challenge Kasdorf throws out in this substantial exercise. May we see many more studies of Amish/Mennonite writers and the diverse cultural landscapes they inhabit.

Hildi Froese Tiessen  
Conrad Grebel University College  
University of Waterloo

Ervin Beck, *MennoFolk. Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History*, No. 43. Scottdale PA: Herald Press, 2004.

Ervin Beck, former Professor of English at Goshen College, has compiled essays based on years of study into a single book examining the folk traditions of modern Mennonites. Most of his material concerns

the (Old) Mennonite Church community of Swiss-German origin, with a smaller amount from Amish and Hutterite communities. The topics are wide ranging, and include folk tales, jokes and songs, as well as material culture such as painted glass and family record plaques. This range of material provides an introductory overview to topics previously neglected, in the hope that more interest will be generated in this type of study.

The book will provide surprises to some readers. The old folk tale of Menno Simons' evasion of capture on a carriage can also be attributed to a host of other religious leaders in different countries at roughly the same time. This story is part of a larger corpus of tales and jokes regarding Mennonites' ambiguous relationship with the truth: they were, it turns out, once considered inveterate liars, cheats, and tricksters.

At times Beck could have gone further and deeper in his analysis of folk tales. In one old story Menno is interrupted in his preaching by the authorities. In his haste to escape he falls into the barrel of molasses on which he was standing, and is covered in the substance, which would have left an easy trail for his pursuers. To remedy the situation, "all the women in the front row each took one long lick of molasses off his hosen [leggings]. And that explains why Mennonite children in Holland to this day have a sweet tooth" (92). Beck rightly attributes this tale to the trickster tradition, but says nothing of its metaphors of authority and gender, sexuality, or progeny.

Besides older folk tales, the author includes modern social phenomena such as urban legend, protest songs, and Relief Sale festivals. This raises a number of issues that are important in Mennonite studies, but for which there is no general agreement in either popular or academic discourse. Do modern Mennonite groups constitute ethnic groups? Certainly they did at one point, and the Amish and Hutterites are still considered as such among scholars. Ethnic groups are defined by both boundaries (maintained by the group and by outside forces) and inner cohesion (or understanding) in reference to dozens of criteria like language, politics, food, music, etc. Mennonites may thus be considered ethnic at certain times under certain conditions, when individuals may feel a desire to be so affiliated. Ethnicity then takes on a role in personal identity formation. Beck's collection of stories and interviews makes the argument that even though many mission oriented Anabaptists may feel that "Mennonites *should not* regard themselves as ethnics," the shared nature of their traditions constitute something of an ethnic coherence. Certainly the debate is still open.

Another issue raised by the book as a whole is the importance of the "mundane" in historic or social studies. Beck claims Mennonite folk studies in general have been ignored by scholars and the public alike

because of their mundane nature, but that such studies can be quite revealing about cultural values as they relate to religious values. For example, in a chapter on "Inter-Mennonite ethnic slurs," it becomes obvious that differences between Mennonite communities run deeper than theological arguments. Boundaries are maintained by colloquial and slang oral practice. Mennonite folk traditions are important because they are a part of daily life, and it is in the choices and practice of daily life that Mennonites have traditionally expressed their faith. Analysis of the mundane in Mennonite life will deepen an understanding of the interface of Mennonite theology and social interaction.

Roland Sawatzky  
Mennonite Heritage Village  
Steinbach, Manitoba

## History and Memoir

Karel C. Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair: Life and Death in Ukraine Under Nazi Rule*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004. Pp. 463. US \$29.95

Karel Berkhoff, Associate Professor at the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies in Amsterdam, has written a remarkable book about human agony and survival in the Ukrainian heartland occupied by German soldiers and civilians during World War II. With exhaustive exploitation of available archival sources in Ukraine, Germany and Canada, he has given us a stellar example of *Alltagsgeschichte*. This type of history depicts life on the local level or describes the everyday struggle for survival by Ukrainians, Jews, Russians, Ethnic Germans and other minority groups, including Mennonites, in the "Dnieper Ukraine." Nearly every endnote cites several primary sources in Ukrainian and Russian archives in the native language. This approach might suggest a pro-Ukrainian bias, but the broadly conceived thematic chapters demonstrate even-handed treatment of highly controversial issues. Sensational familiar events like the Massacre at Babi Yar do not inhibit systematic coverage of an ethos of destruction that pervades the entire Reichskommissariat Ukraine, which becomes a landscape of genocide in several ways.

The two preliminary chapters, sketching the Soviet Ukraine at the time of the German invasion and the realm of the Reichskommissariat,

are adequate, although a fuller discussion of the political, diplomatic and theoretical background would have helped the non-specialized reader to understand the events on the ground during the period of the occupation, 1941 to 1944. The following chapters are more analytical than narrative and take the form of empirical accumulation of facts, events and attitudes leading to separate interpretive conclusions. They analyze the holocaust of Jews and Roma, prisoners of war, life in the countryside, urban conditions, the artificially produced famine in Kiev, popular culture, ethnic identities and political loyalties, the practice of religion and piety, deportations and forced migrations. A general chapter entitled "Toward the End of Nazi Rule" describes the role of Soviet partisans, the "struggle against gangs" (anti-partisan activities of the SS), the brutal anti-Polish actions of Ukrainian nationalists and the violent reactions on all sides in the wake of the German retreat. There are surprises in nearly every chapter.

Readers will not be surprised to learn that "the vast majority of non-Jews ... just stood by and watched" as the holocaust unfolded. Many will be reassured to read that among Ukrainians "the Baptists and evangelical Christians seem to have helped Jews the most." Some will question the following conclusion: "with regard to ethnic Germans, there are contradictory reports on their views of Jews, but evidence that any of them saved, or tried to save, a Jew has not been found." (87-8). The German administration kept the collective farms intact and in the end made them even more exploitive, thus turning the initially friendly peasantry against the occupiers with a vengeance. The massive depopulation of the cities and the lack of social solidarity is hardly surprising in the light of the deliberate starvation policies. This policy was designed to turn the Ukrainian population into servile supporters of the German *Herrenmenschen* and their *Volksdeutsche* allies who received material privileges. When evaluating ethnic identities and political loyalties, Berkhoff provides his readers with the biggest surprise of all. He asserts that "the Nazi regime had nearly no effect on the mental outlook of those who survived, thus rejecting the two prevailing schools of thought, one holding that the invaders solidified the Soviet peoples support for Stalin's dictatorship and the other one which believes that the peoples in Dnieper Ukraine became more conscious of nationhood. There was a modest religious revival, but it was limited to a continued conversion to the Evangelical branch of Protestantism begun in late tsarist times. Berkhoff believes that "the widespread disinterest in the orthodox church and religion in general ... changed little under the Nazi regime" (252). This assumes that the religious restoration in Mennonite villages recorded by memoirist like Jakob Neufeld and Anna Sudermann were subsumed under his category of Evangelicals.

Since Berkhoff's dissertation took form under the supervision of Paul Robert Magocsi at the University of Toronto, whose much broader work on the history of Ukraine gave proportionately more space to the Russian Mennonites, it is curious that the author of this book gives them rather cursory uncritical treatment. Depending on somewhat outdated secondary sources and a single thin memoir, Berkhoff completely ignores a substantial secondary literature on Mennonites in Ukraine. He has mined the resources of the Ukrainian Center in Winnipeg but failed to explore any Mennonite archival collection.

The picture of Himmler at Halbstadt reviewing young Mennonite recruits for a Waffen-SS Cavalry Division with only minimal identification, as Mennonite pacifist youth volunteering to fight for Hitler's imperium, is more than misleading. Similar pictures were published in *Mennonite Life* (1986) and there certainly has been no paucity of discussion by Mennonites of their falling from grace symbolized by the Halbstadt episode and the friendly attitude of Mennonite villagers toward the representatives of the Third Reich. In short, the Mennonite experience of the occupation is not placed in the historical and ethnographic context the picture demands. Berkhoff has also missed an opportunity to mine two important recent books that impinge on the Mennonite experience, namely Michael Fahlbusch, *Wissenschaft im Dienst der nationalsozialistischen Politik?* (1999) and Andrej Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord* (2003). The latter's examination of the murderous course of Einsatzgruppe D through the southern Ukraine reveals the presence of a young Mennonite police officer who was a deputy commander of Einsatzkommando 12. He was an aspiring teacher from Muntau in the Molochna and joined the NSDAP (the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei) and the SS as early as 1931 in Danzig and the Security Service (SD) in 1936. He was responsible for organizing major massacres of Jews in Crimea and the Caucasus regions and is mentioned in a postwar Soviet war crimes trial at Krasnodar, first noted by Alexander Rempel, the son of a Russian Mennonite elder. Karel Berkhoff's picture of Mennonites under occupation in Ukraine is far from complete.

Gerhard Rempel  
Jupiter, Florida

Ruth Brunk Stoltzfus, *A Way Was Opened: A Memoir*. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2003. Pp. 365.

In this delightful book, readers hear the fascinating life story of Ruth Brunk Stoltzfus in her own unique and powerful voice, almost as though hearing it face-to-face in her living room. Through many personal quotes and journal entries, readers encounter this pioneer Mennonite woman minister's engaging personality. Ruth's steadfast faith in God, her zest for life, her deep love for family and her quick wit come through palpably in each chapter. In the end, one is impressed with the stalwart character of this woman, born of tall and strong Brunk stock (28).

For this reason, the title *A Way Was Opened* strikes me as particularly unfitting for the unfolding events revealed within its pages. The passive voice of this title misrepresents the active role Ruth repeatedly took in finding ways to express her ministry gifts. Ruth gives God credit for opening doors in her life saying, "God made a way when there wasn't any way for a woman to use the gifts the Spirit had given for public ministry" (14). Yet the story Ruth tells makes abundantly clear that she was no passive partner in this process. This woman, driven by a deep sense of inner call, actively imagined doors of opportunity and found numerous ways to test if they would open for her. For example, after Ruth imagined a radio broadcast for women she and her husband proposed her idea to a United Church of Christ minister who had connections in the radio business. Ironically, in letters to her mother and her sisters, Ruth described this turn of events as "the opportunity that has been thrown right in my lap" (85).

This savvy woman knew in her 1950s context that being too assertive was inappropriate for a respectable Mennonite woman. Later in the 1970s, she "prayed to God for strength to work for necessary change [to enable women's speaking ministries] with caution and with charity" (215). At various points, Ruth's memoir includes the critique she received from some men that she came across too strongly and threatened male leaders. It certainly is not the voice of one who passively waits for a way to be opened for her who writes, "I answered that I refused to strive to be incompetent, and that men would have to grow up" (229). *A Way Was Opened* clearly reveals that many times, God and Ruth Brunk Stoltzfus made a way where there was no way. Does the book title indicate that this ninety-year-old Mennonite minister still has to be careful not to come across too assertively in her church community?

No matter the reason for this title, I recommend this memoir to anyone interested in the history of Mennonite Church life between 1915 and the present time. Pastors and teachers should recommend

this book to Mennonite young people who have no experience of a time when Mennonite women were not allowed to serve as ordained ministers. The painful and amazing stories of pioneer Mennonite women pastors must be heard and remembered. Ruth's memoir reveals the nitty-gritty of the controversy over women in ministry in her Virginia Conference context

While not a scholarly work, this book provides historians of Mennonite history a significant window into the lives of Grant and Ruth Brunk Stoltzfus and an important chronological account of their ministries. Historians of Mennonite theology, like myself, will be disappointed that this memoir does not disclose more fully the substance of the theology Ruth embraced and proclaimed through the years. What specific beliefs about male/female roles and relationships did she communicate to her largely female radio listeners in the 1950s? What sexual theology did she and Grant articulate through their Christian Family Service ministries started in 1958? While snippets here and there reveal something of Ruth's theology, a substantial picture is not given.

Historians will find in this memoir a perspective on the well-known George Brunk I through the loyal heart and loving eyes of a daughter. Ruth acknowledges her father was involved in church controversies (35) and indicates she was aware as a child that some people did not like her Papa. She never tries to argue that her father would have approved of ordaining women for ministry saying "we must be accurate in our words about him" (276). However, historical evidence would prove her own words inaccurate when she claims "my father...never said anything about the covering being a symbol for a woman's submission to her husband" (349). Nonetheless, historians will find Ruth's comments about the George and Katie Wenger Brunk family of keen interest. This autobiographical account of the strong female church leader produced by this family sheds new light on their story. *A Way Was Opened* is a worthwhile and intriguing read.

Brenda Martin Hurst  
Eastern Mennonite University

Lawrence Klippenstein and Jacob Dick, *Mennonite Alternative Service in Russia: The Story of Abram Dück and His Colleagues 1911-1917*. Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press and Herald Press, 2002. Pp. iv, 163. Paper, \$20.00.

Harvey L. Dyck, John R. Staples and John B. Toews, edited, translated, and introduction, *Nestor Makhno and the Eichenfeld Massacre: A Civil War Tragedy in a Ukrainian Mennonite Village*. Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2004. Pp. 115. Paper, \$14.00.

The years between the end of the Tsarist regime and the Communist Revolution continue to haunt the collective memory of Russian Mennonites. The World War I period and the following Civil War in Russia were most traumatic for Mennonites there. If we were to extend the period to include the 1930s and 1940s, there seems little doubt that Mennonite suffering during the first half of the twentieth century equaled, perhaps exceeded, the suffering of the Anabaptists in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The two booklets, published by Pandora Press, deal with two important historical developments. One deals with the Mennonites who served their country before and during the war, at the end of Mennonite life in Tsarist Russia. The other deals with a most horrible beginning during the revolutionary period, namely destruction and death at the hands of lawless men. Both publications thus trace the beginning of the end of Mennonite communal life in Russia as it had existed for some 130 years.

In a sense Klippenstein and Dick's *Mennonite Alternative Service in Russia* still expresses a degree of optimism and some hope for the future. Russian Mennonites entered the war with a willingness to serve their country that had become their homeland. As a pacifist ethno-religious group, while wishing to remain true to their historic peace tradition, they willingly put their resources and lives on the line by caring for the wounded at the fronts, on Red Cross trains and in hospitals. Two of the Mennonite papers at the time urged their readers to take their service to Russia seriously. Editor Abram Kroeker wrote in the *Friedensstimme* just before the war: "Do we not owe it to our government and Russian neighbours to show that if a war ... broke out, we would be ready to serve the interests of the Fatherland [Russia], and to help the needy" (22)? Similarly, D. H. Epp, editor of *Der Botschafter*, wrote: "We need to show that we have kept the promise of faithfulness made to our forefathers ... our confession forbids us to spill blood, but binding wounds we hold to be a sacred duty" (22).

Lawrence Klippenstein, who did his doctoral dissertation on Mennonite pacifism and state service in Russia, provides a helpful

introduction in this book to alternative service (1-39), and Jacob Dick provides some stories from personal experiences of his father, Abram Dück, who served his country in forestry and medical work in the years 1911 to 1917.

The numerous black and white photographs in this book (43-163) tell us much about the Mennonite boys, *Tjeadels*, as they were called. These young men donned uniforms with shining buttons, they rode horses like soldiers--although they were not army men--they posed gladly, it seems, for photographs to be sent home, and their mustaches, which most of them wore, made them resemble Tsar Nicholas II whom they proudly served.

When the war ended these Mennonite young men returned to their homes, farms and businesses, experiencing not only feelings of betrayal by the country they had served, but also violence, the scourge of civil war, banditry, murder, and the end of a life as they had known it.

This tragedy is recorded in *Nestor Makhno and the Eichenfeld Massacre*, published as part of the Tsarist and Soviet Mennonite Studies Series of the University of Toronto, with general editor Harvey L. Dyck and associate editor John R. Staples. The booklet is dedicated to the 136 Mennonite victims who were massacred by Nestor Makhno's men on October 26 to 27, 1919, in the Nikolaipole volost, Ukraine. On May 27, 2001 descendants and friends of these murdered men, women and children gathered at the Eichenfeld/Dubovka site in Ukraine to remember these people's cruel fate. They placed a memorial stone in the form of a traditional Mennonite coffin--sculpted by Paul Epp--thus symbolically giving them a proper burial they had never received.

In true Mennonite communal fashion, the commemoration and the production of the booklet included a number of participants, both Mennonite and Ukrainian. The story of the massacre is told by scholars and witnesses who were interviewed. Some eyewitness accounts, written originally in German in earlier publications like the *Mennonitische Rundschau* (1926), were translated into English for this publication. Interviews of older Ukrainian people were conducted by Svetlana Bobyleva and colleagues (79-89). They retell stories of their parents and grandparents. Abram Kroeker's account of the killing of tent missionaries (72-26), and Peter Letkemann's list of 136 names of victims underline the gruesomeness of the massacre. The moving homily at the site by John B. Toews, included here (96-101), speaks of "forgiveness and reconciliation and future friendship."

While both Mennonites and Ukrainians leave no doubt that the victims of the massacre had not deserved their fate, there are those, especially on the Ukrainian side, who "believed that Mennonite self-defense groups [*Selbstschutz*] had provoked retaliation by firing on Makhno's forces" (80). Mennonites themselves, "as a mainly religious

community,” according to the editors, “viewed Makhnovite butchery equally as the scourge of God, as recompense for their moral failings” in Russia. “But whether interpreted as deserved or not, suffering triggered a powerful revivalist, penitential mood among Mennonites that shaped their outlook for decades to come” (36).

Indeed, questions and statements concerning the painful experiences at the time range from “We have sinned!” to “What would we have done in the face of rape and murder?” Some Mennonites still feel that armed resistance against the Makhno bandits was the right response. Others, at the time and later, believed that the formation of *Selbstschutz* was a betrayal of the Mennonite peace principles. The memorial service at Eichenfeld/Dubovka, with its emphasis on peace and forgiveness is, no doubt, an appropriate response to violence.

Harry Loewen,  
Kelowna, BC

Adolf Ens, *Becoming a National Church: A History of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada*. Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2004. Pp. 258. Paper.

Long time professor of history and theology at Canadian Mennonite Bible College (now University), Adolf Ens, provides readers with a detailed yet very readable account of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada’s (CMC) almost century of existence (1903-1999). This is a wide-ranging story, but Ens organized the book—commissioned by the Heritage Committee of the former CMC—around the theme of churchly evolution toward national status and identity. In this sense, the volume provides background for understanding the 1999 formation of Mennonite Church Canada (MC Canada), the primary, though not direct or exact, successor to CMC.

Ens begins with the settlement of Bergthaler immigrants in Manitoba and the coalescing of the Rosenorter Gemeinde in Saskatchewan—two groups that initially formed the Conference of Mennonites in Central Canada, as the body was first known. Conference membership swelled with the arrival of thousands of additional Mennonite newcomers in the 1920s and 1940s and spread east and west. Beginning in mid-century, mission churches incorporated some First Nations people into the conference, and by the 1970s congregations consisting of Asian immigrants were joining. Ens also provides background on the so-called Swiss Mennonites of Ontario that became CMC members in 1995 as a result of inter-Mennonite conference integration in eastern Canada in 1988.

Along the way, Ens describes the expanding and changing understandings of home missions and overseas service, the emergence and consolidation of Bible schools, and various attempts to support a church periodical. Chapter 5, which recounts events during 1954-1971, portrays some of the most profound changes. These developments included language transition to English and new patterns of polity. Ens' analysis of polity matters is especially insightful, whether he is describing the break-up of multiple-meeting-place Gemeinde into stand-alone congregations, or the shift in centralized leadership from repeatedly reelected committee members to appointed and salaried executive staff.

The book includes photographs, provincial maps, and a number of short primary source excerpts or anecdotes as sidebar illustrations. Appendices reproduce the 1904 constitution text, provide CMC leadership rosters and meeting chronologies. A series of nine tables (with extensive footnotes) reports information on each congregation admitted or withdrawn from CMC.

As the title indicates, this is a history of the conference; in that sense it is primarily an institutional history, rather than, say, a social or theological one. For example, the bureaucratic restructuring that replaced the Board of Christian Service with the Congregational Resources Board becomes the opportunity to reflect on the changing ways CMC engaged peace and social issues. And while the CMC story intersects with the institutional histories of the provincial conferences and congregations, on the one hand, and the continental General Conference Mennonite Church and inter-Mennonite Canadian entities, on the other, Ens keeps the focus on CMC. This is appropriate, though readers less familiar with these other bodies may sometimes find all the organizational connections confusing.

*Becoming a National Church* grew out Ens' close reading of primary sources generated by or for CMC. Perhaps predictably, this clear strength also becomes something of limitation, since the things that dominated those primary sources—position papers (*Referate*) in the early decades, programs and budgets in later years—drive the narrative, and context ends up being a bit thin at places.

Helpful in the opening chapters, for example, was Ens' broader discussion of early twentieth-century Mennonites and politics, which drew on his previously published work. In contrast, toward the end of the book, I wished for more analysis from Ens on the emergence and meaning of national church status and identity. On the one hand, this national evolution seemed natural, given the distinctive features of the Canadian social environment and the frustrations inherent in a binational relationships dominated by U.S. agenda. At the same time, the move toward becoming a national church seemed almost haphaz-

ard. Perhaps the process was as unreflective as it appears here, but I wondered if narrative reliance on board minutes and delegate votes gave a more ad hoc feel to the story than a less immediate perspective might have offered.

Ens has written an informative book that will serve not only academics, but also pastors and lay members of Mennonite Church Canada as they live with the legacies of CMC polity, priorities, and practices. It can also serve as a guide for MC Canada as that body continues to explore the implications of being a national church in relation to its own domestic neighbours and to a parallel U.S.-based Mennonite denomination. For that matter, members of Mennonite Church USA would do well to read this book to understand better the background of their denominational sibling and to reflect on the meaning—new for them—of national church status. I hope all these audiences will give attention to this book.

Steven M. Nolt  
Goshen College

Edith Elisabeth Friesen, *Journey Into Freedom: One Family's Real-Life Drama*. Winnipeg, Man.: Raduga Press, 2003. Pp. 242. \$34 Cdn.

Justine D. Neufeld, *A Family Torn Apart*. Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2003. Pp. 241. \$26 Cdn.

Over the past three generations scores of Russian-Mennonite refugees have recorded dramatic and moving stories of how they suffered persecution and violence in the brutal era that began with the Russian Revolution and continued through the Stalinist decades and World War II. Through strong faith, courage and often miraculous luck these survivors were able to escape tyranny and terror and begin lives in a freer world. Many victims, of course, remained behind forever. These published memoirs are valuable as social history adding to the Mennonite story. Vicariously, we can experience with these survivors their unwavering faith and almost superhuman determination to overcome all obstacles and get on with their lives.

For those who survived, their escape from violence and death opened up a freedom they had hardly dared to dream about. That is the persistent theme of Edith Friesen's *Journey Into Freedom*, the story of her Dyck family which, after years of displacement, deprivation and brutal treatment, finally managed to emigrate to Canada after

World War II. Their story is told as a “conversation” by the four Dyck siblings—Anne (the author-editor’s mother), Lydia, John and Martha—who were separately interviewed but whose comments have been spliced together to form a four-voice “interview” interspersed and enriched by Friesen with relevant historical sketches and dramatic “imagine this” vignettes. This makes for an innovative format that works well most of the time but occasionally becomes a trifle artificial and repetitious.

The Dycks were not a typical small-village Russian-Mennonite family. Raised in the urban setting of Nikopol, they were mostly unaware of their Mennonite identity, although they were staunch Christians. Growing up in a city gave them a degree of sophistication—“street smarts”, if you will. After losing their father in the witch-hunt thirties, they were left with their mother to fend for themselves. Anne, the eldest, became the acting head of the family as they scrabbled to keep from starving. Through a series of almost incredible miracles they managed to survive and finally got to Germany, where they faced brutality afresh from advancing Russian troops. On one occasion mother Dyck and her three daughters were saved from being raped when the mother fell to her knees and began praying loudly in Russian, something she had never done before. As Anne says: “Her prayers must have frightened the soldiers because they ran away and left us alone.”

Although Friesen’s book is skilfully crafted with various narrative techniques, she pushes her central theme of “freedom” to the point where it becomes somewhat tedious and confusing. Each chapter begins with three or four epigraphs on freedom by writers ranging from Aristotle and Cicero to Einstein and Nelson Mandela and many more in between. These quotations describe and define so many different kinds of “freedom” that the reader will be more perplexed than enlightened by them. After all, when all is said and done all “freedoms” are fragile and incomplete and threatened by restrictions and the brutal facts of life.

Justina Neufeld’s *A Family Torn Apart* deals essentially with the same tragically chaotic world as Friesen’s book, but her story is told in a very different way. Neufeld tells her touching--often harrowing--story in a direct, personal manner that ranges from simple narration to highly suspenseful and stirring stories artfully told. Justina was the youngest of ten children in the Neufeld family, with eight brothers and a sister. Father Neufeld was arrested during the Stalin purges and never seen again. Some of her brothers were conscripted into the German army later, and the whole family was scattered across half of Europe. Teen-aged Justina was sent to France to stay with her brother Gerhard and his wife, who were living there as refugees. She was never to see her mother again, as she and sister Anna were captured and sent back to the

Soviet Union. Two of her brothers courageously went back voluntarily so as to be re-united with the families they had left behind.

Justina, like so many other Russian-Mennonite refugees, was rescued by those heroic and indefatigable MCC workers Elfrieda and Peter Dyck and sent to the U.S., where she was able to go back to school. An excellent student, she graduated from high school in record time and went on to college, where she earned a degree in nursing administration and eventually an M.A. in gerontology. But her good fortune in creating a fine new life for herself has not obliterated her past, especially the loss of her parents and several siblings. Having gone back to Ukraine several times to search for traces of her lost world, she closes her book with the confession: "What I lost cannot be found by going back. A small chamber in my heart remains empty" (236) Here again "freedom" remains incomplete and tied to a bitter past.

These two graphically told family odysseys are well worth reading. While they don't have quite the historical scope and diversity of such recent books as David Rempel's *A Mennonite Family in Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union (1789-1923)* and Harry Loewen's collection *Road to Freedom*, they must be regarded as among the best of the Russian-Mennonite memoirs in English. Both books are vivified and personalized by appropriate family and scenic photos. Friesen's book merges different experiences and points of view into a comprehensive and affecting family history. Neufeld's story, by virtue of being told by a single narrator, achieves a gripping emotional intensity as she explores her inner self in the light of her own astonishing experiences and those of her family.

Books like these remind us once again that our enduring Mennonite heritage has been forged in the fires of persecution and suffering over the centuries, and that it has again and again been revitalized by the unyielding faith and triumphant hope of those who survived to tell their stories.

Al Reimer  
University of Winnipeg

Rudy P. Friesen with Edith Elisabeth Friesen, *Building on the Past: Mennonite Architecture, Landscape and Settlements in Russia/Ukraine*. Winnipeg, MB: Raduga Publications. 2004. Pp. 752.

*Building on the Past* is a massive catalogue of Mennonite architecture in Russia. Winnipeg architect Rudy P. Friesen has expanded

his previous effort, *Into the Past* (1996), to 752 pages. Based on his experience as an architect, his many travels to Ukraine and historical research, Friesen sets forth a comprehensive survey of Mennonite buildings and settlements in the former colonies.

Friesen reigns in the breadth and diversity of his subject by organizing the data according to region and type (13 colonies, plus estates, urban centres, and forestry camps). He also creates a system of evolutionary phases of architectural development in the Mennonite settlements. This helps to define trends and places individual buildings in historical context. Viewing architectural change as “evolution”, however, creates the impression that such shifts occur by themselves, inexorably and inevitably. This tends to remove the builders and users from the architecture. Friesen’s overlapping architectural phases include: Settlement (1789-1835), Progress (1835-1880), Flowering (1880-1914), Disintegration (1914-1999), and Recovery (1999-present). Such categories are incomplete, but help to give a general sense of at least the author’s understanding of the material. Loaded terms like “Progress” and “Flowering” are not particularly helpful, however, and these phases could also be interpreted as “expansion” and “decadence” respectively.

Historical context is provided through a balanced presentation of Mennonite history and introductions to each colony chapter, as well as a history of each village presented in the book. This history raises many questions and provides departure points for various readings or future studies of the built environment. How does the rise of Mennonite institutions in Russia after 1880, such as large schools, orphanages, and hospitals relate to the changing nature of the household and village community at that time? To what extent were these institutional buildings monuments to the wealthy patrons who planned and paid for their construction? Were Johan Cornies’ reforms of Mennonite domestic buildings followed in their entirety, or was there resistance and individual experimentation? How were labour activities and social interaction controlled in factory and institutional settings, and how did this reflect class or ethnic distinctions? It was not Friesen’s task to answer these questions, but they do arise from the abundance and detail of the material.

Friesen’s approach is that of an architect, with particular attention paid to stylistic influences (i.e. the “eclectic” late-1800s Russian approach, followed by the first “modern” movements such as Jugendstil and Art Nouveau), building materials, and decorative detailing. This is greatly supplemented by over a thousand images, which include recent and historic photographs, floorplans, and reproductions of historic advertisements. This mass of images threatens to overwhelm the book, but the layout design succeeds in balancing the visual material

with the text in an organized fashion. Photographs of tombstones, factory interiors, brickwork, window details, floors and gates all help to provide a more intimate sense of place, around which Mennonites made the daily decisions of their lives.

Mennonites were evidently fully engaged in materiality, despite claims to the contrary, and like all societies used the built environment as symbolic setting for social inculcation. Factories, institutions, and estate mansions communicate power, wealth and permanence, and stand out in stark contrast to the poor villagers and peasants in the surrounding areas. There are parallels here with architectural developments of Mennonite churches in Canada and communities in Paraguay. As with many architectural studies, the homes and gathering places of the poor are not well represented, although this is partly due to poor preservation and a lack of written accounts associated with these buildings. Vernacular architecture can provide a great deal of information concerning social values and ethnic interaction, but again this would be beyond the scope of this present work.

*Building on the Past* is ultimately a survey that helps to make sense of variety: one begins to understand the complexity and changes in Mennonite life through material culture. Urban and rural worlds contrast, simplicity is overwhelmed by the ornate and decorative, and the public and private take on a myriad of forms based on status and function. The book is essential for Mennonite historians and those interested in Russian Mennonite life, and will function as a handbook for anyone touring the former colonies.

Roland M. Sawatzky  
Mennonite Heritage Village  
Steinbach, Manitoba

Karl Koop, *Anabaptist-Mennonite Confessions of Faith. The Development of a Tradition*. Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2004. Pp. 178. Index.

Koop has offered a clear and insightful study of a neglected aspect of Mennonite history with the identity of the contemporary Mennonite church in mind. But the conditions he proposes in order to make this coherent tradition useful carry significant implications. In the preface, he sets forth this argument:

By moving beyond the early Anabaptist beginnings and giving attention to the Mennonite confessions of faith of the

early seventeenth century, we can recognize an identifiable and coherent Anabaptist-Mennonite theological tradition. My conviction is that this tradition is an important horizon for viewing the past, and can be a point of departure for theologians, church leaders, missionaries and ecumenists in the Anabaptist and Mennonite traditions who seek to understand their own theological heritage, and who endeavor to articulate their convictions in the context of the church and the world.(9)

Koop studies three Confessions of Faith from the seventeenth century: "The Short Confession" adopted in 1610 by the Waterlander Mennonites; the "Jan Cents Confession" adopted in 1630 by the Frisian and High German Mennonites; and the "The Dordrecht Confession" adopted primarily by the Flemish Mennonites in 1632.

As Koop turns to the study of history, he has in mind present challenges facing the Mennonite church. He asks about the role of doctrines and confessions in the Mennonite church, whether they are necessary, whether the writing of confessions belongs to a truly Mennonite or Anabaptist tradition or not, and how confessions can be embraced in a way that does not cause church splits. Koop maintains that writing confessions has always been part of the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition. It seems appropriate to continue to compose Confessions of Faith, and prudent to learn from past experience how to keep Confessions from dividing the Mennonite church.

According to Koop, the three confessions reveal broad agreement, despite certain points of difference. After discussing the way the three confessions treated the various doctrines, he identifies several distinctive notes they shared. He lists human capacity to choose between good and evil, personal regeneration expressed in daily discipleship, the voluntary gathering of the regenerate, communal interpretation of Scripture through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Baptism upon confession of personal faith in Christ, accountability within the Church, a life of peace, refusal to swear oaths, and the life and teachings of Jesus as the moral foundation. (148) Koop also speaks of three themes identified in all three confessions, namely, the importance of human free will, ethical responsibility, and mutual accountability.(148) Important as these were, they did not form the heart of the Confessions. Rather, they provided a lens, or *perspective* which helped to shape the heart of the confessions, namely, belief in God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, salvation, the church, the sacraments, the moral life, church discipline, and teaching on the Last Day. Koop characterizes the differences among the three groups as relating to "the relationship between inner and outer reality," or the "tension between personal regeneration and

a more external and communal emphasis.”(114-15) These differences were a matter of emphasis and did not take away from the development of an “identifiable and coherent tradition.”

In the end, Koop offers the Mennonite church two considerations if it is to appropriate this theological tradition for the present. The first is the importance of unity and the second is a recognition of the development of tradition. The tradition that Koop presents as *coherent*, was, he stresses, not uniform, for the convictions held commonly by the three confessions were not identical. There is a right way and a wrong way to ‘use’ confessions: one results in splits and the other values unity. The model that Koop holds up is one in which “...the confessions were not optional documents that could be taken lightly...(but) were considered secondary to the Scriptures and subordinate to the unity of the church.”(148) He warns against allowing confessional statements, doctrines and even concern for moral integrity to break up the church, since “...an ecclesiology faithful to the biblical account assumes the priority of a unified church.”(149)

Diversity existed not only among the three confessions, but also across time, between the seventeenth century confessions and the sixteenth century Anabaptists. Koop argues that this change is the result of a developing tradition, revealing both strengthening as well as decline. Koop presents the moves to a more orthodox doctrine of the incarnation, and away from the ban as positive. The growth away from the sixteenth century Anabaptists explicit theology of suffering and martyrdom might represent a decline. Koop suggests that in a “...context of prosperity and accumulation of wealth, Europeans and North Americans might do well to recall and learn something from the martyrs, who were able to let go of their earthly possessions, and who were willing to completely submit themselves to the will of God. For a recovery of this martyr tradition the confessions of faith may not be very helpful...”(151 I don’t know if I agree. Perhaps, meditation on the confessions which recall the whole heart of the faith are what will keep alive the tradition of obedience, submission and faithfulness, which could mean martyrdom – but usually just suffering. The confessions might provide a more profound basis for submission to Christ in new settings, than the memory of martyrdom alone.

Koop’s two points regarding unity and development are significant for their origins and their implications which lay and point beyond the Mennonite Church. Indeed, Koop ends by noting the necessity of an ecumenical orientation (152) and a regard for the experience of the church over the years. The notion of the development of tradition is a departure from the initial Anabaptist and Protestant impulse. Koop presents it as a discovery due to post-modern awareness, making the *sola scriptura* slogan sound naïve. If *sola scriptura* and the Anabaptist

zeal for a pure church are both problematic then there is good reason to look for some healing of 500 year old ruptures. Or put differently, it is significant to hold these two 'foreign' values as essential for making the Mennonite tradition that Koop identifies as one that might "give support to the church in the current context." (148) The incorporation of these two new values represents not just a minor adjustment but a major turning point. In working to identify a Mennonite tradition to support the current Mennonite church, Koop has strengthened the impetus for ecumenical conversation and bridge-building.

Rachel Reesor-Taylor  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Ted E. Friesen. *Memoirs: A Personal Autobiography of Ted Friesen* Altona, MB: Ted E. Friesen (Available from Mennonite Books, Winnipeg, MB), 2003. Pp. 180. Cloth, \$19.95.

Memoirs are a very instructive type of writing, revealing unknown things about people. They are, of course, bits that the writer chooses to share publicly, the "lighted" sides of one's life, though "dark" sides are often included as well. They offer a person's own perspective, and sometimes a self-analysis.

This volume illuminates the life and work of someone widely known in Mennonite and other circles. Ted Friesen grew up in Altona, Manitoba and ultimately chose to remain there -- with his wife, Linie, and the children, Eric, Tim and Paul -- even when many others, family members included, moved on. An introductory section about early life, schooling, and social setting, the story proceeds by decades, 1930s, 1940s, and so on. Always personal experiences are put into context, giving this autobiographical account a broader framework of meaning and significance.

This memoirist illustrates very dramatically how one can gain a well-balanced perspective on the larger world even while remaining part of a relatively small local community. Even though Ted was not able to finish high school and pursue post secondary education as he had hoped, other avenues such as wide reading, interacting with people outside the community, undertaking an intense pursuit of cultural interests far beyond the town, and simply extensive traveling, attending concerts and visiting art galleries, brought a strong awareness of the outside world and the good things it had to offer. The decade of the 1940s and World War II added the experience of conscientious

objection, even as other family members took a different direction, as shown in the recent National Film Board production, *The Pacifist Who Went to War*.

By the 1950s Ted had become well established in an internationally active printing firm, known today simply as "Friesens" of Altona. It brought with it a very busy life. His personal interests in music, art and literature, already fostered in his parental home, were also maturing quickly by then. His father, D.W., passed away early in that decade, and soon after that sad event, D.W. Friesens and Sons, owned and run by the brothers, Dave, Ted and Ray, appeared on the scene as an expanding, retooled business organization which would take its place on the business stage with vigour and very considerable success.

The author also tells of his venture into the larger field of church work, accepting membership in the Board of Christian Service for Conference of Mennonites in Canada, and the Canadian Mennonite Relief Committee. He also became involved in the founding of the radio station CFAM in Altona and that experience added to the fabric of his life. Further amplification of this important communications venture must await another volume!

With the 1960s came the grieving of the loss of mother, Sarah (Klippenstein) Striemer Friesen, a widow when she married D.W., and a "consummate homemaker." That decade also saw the loss a still-born child, Madeleine Ruth, and the death also of father Peter B. Krahn, a widely respected teacher. The decade brought three further public arenas of great interest and participation - Mennonite Central Committee (Canada), Mennonite Historical Society of Canada and the Altona Mennonite Church, which was founded during these years. Each remains very close to Ted's heart to this day.

Then came a fiftieth birthday for both Ted and Linie, anniversaries, much more travel and church work, some writing and publication with books on the Altona Mennonite Church, his Johann Klippenstein "line" (related to this reviewer), the village of Grigorievka in present-day northern Ukraine which once had been a home village for the Krahns, some work with videos and films, plans for retirement, and finally these memoirs also.

Ted's has been a full and productive life, and my brief sketch of his book can only hint at its rich details! Ted's concluding statement, "I have no special gifts", is a most modest summing up for a man named Altona's "Citizen of the Year" in 2000. His very extensive library of Mennonitica, art and music and his rich collection of personal papers are among the legacy from which others will benefit.

This volume, now given to others for their libraries, includes a fine selection of photos, and is excellently published by the "home firm", of

course. Memoirs such as these will surely inspire others to undertake similar venture, that is, to leave a legacy through which many people can be blessed and greatly enriched.

Lawrence Klippenstein  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Lucille Marr, *The Transforming Power of a Century: Mennonite Central Committee and its Evolution in Ontario*. Kitchener, ON and Scottsdale, PA: Pandora Press (co-published by Herald Press), 2003. Pp. 390 with bibliography and index. Paper, \$38.00 Cdn, \$36.50 U.S.

In the early 1990s David Worth, newly appointed director of Mennonite Central Committee Ontario (MCC) felt institutional memory slipping away. E. J. Swalm and Ross Nigh, both Brethren in Christ (BIC) pastors and prime movers in inter-Mennonite/BIC activities passed from the scene. C. J. Rempel, first director of the MCC office in the 1940s, was in his mid-seventies and in poor health. Alice Snyder, Margaret Brubacher, and Mary Harder, leading lights in the development of Ontario programs had all retired. Worth had good reasons to be concerned. He convinced the MCC Ontario board to appoint a History Project Committee to preserve and “tell the story of the way we were then and the way we are now.” This volume is an impressive result.

Lucille Marr, a well-trained historian and co-pastor with her husband of the Mennonite Fellowship of Montreal, spent eight years reading the documents, interviewing many leaders and participants, and writing what has to be one of the most interesting church agency histories. It is surely the best researched and written story of a regional or provincial MCC body. As such this is an important contribution to Canadian church history and of course Mennonite history.

Marr tells the story of MCC Ontario in great detail. But she does not overlook the Ontario setting or relevant Canadian political developments. She highlights the evolving nature of inter-Mennonite structures beginning with the Non-Resistant Relief Organization established during World War I. In the 1930s the NRRO became the Conference of Historic Peace Churches. This conference convinced the government in Ottawa to provide alternative service for Canadian conscientious objectors during World War II. The same body provided chaplaincy services for hundreds of young conscientious objectors in camps within the province and beyond. It was inevitable that the

Conference of Historic Peace churches would be one of the building blocks of what became MCC Ontario in 1964.

Rightly Marr" seeks to hear women's voices, for the MCC story is also theirs." Here again there is a pre MCC identity with the Ontario sewing circles who began cooperative work even before World War I. Their collecting and making clothing, blankets, preserving food provided resources for the several relief programs and for a time the Canadian Red Cross. During World War II sewing circle leaders established the Ontario Mennonite Women's Cutting Room preparing material for home based sewing. Soon they added a clothing depot and a food depot. These, too, became essential building blocks of the new organization.

The role of MCC headquartered in Akron, Pennsylvania, was not incidental to Ontario developments. Under the energetic leadership of Orie O. Miller and Ernest Bennett, MCC proposed establishing a Canadian office in Kitchener in December 1943. Ontario leaders were not sure about the expansion of this organization in such an assertive fashion into Canada even though they already cooperated with MCC in a variety of programs. Ontario women in particular took a number of cues on material assistance from the Ephrata, Pennsylvania material resource center.

What made the MCC move acceptable was naming a young Mennonite Brethren banker C. J. Rempel as director of the office. Rempel's successors, particularly businessman Edward Snyder and visionary Harvey Taves, increasingly directed the office's program toward Ontario and Canada issues. When MCC Ontario was formed the Kitchener office already at 50 Kent Avenue had its own Voluntary Service program, a teachers program in Newfoundland, a boys school known as Ailsa Craig Boys Farm (later Craigwood) and a local Mennonite Disaster Service group in tune with civilian defense concerns of the Canadian government. If Taves's health had not been so precarious the MCC Canadian office would have been even more creative and assertive.

The formation of MCC Ontario in 1963-64 was precipitated by the formation of MCC Canada. Marr candidly and deftly notes the dissatisfactions of western Canadians and with the Kitchener office and pressure from MCC Akron in determining priorities in Ontario. A critical issue was where relief monies should go: to the poor within the Mennonite household of faith or to the most needy people regardless of race or creed. It was "winds from the Canadian West" which forced "Ontario Mennonites to shift allegiance from their Pennsylvania roots to embrace the brewing 'Canadian Mennonite nationalism.'" Strong voices in Ontario supported the new Canadian organization even though Harvey Taves and a number of Ontario leaders vigorously opposed it.

Interestingly, just as Ontario agreed with reservations to the creation of a MCC Canadian office, now with similar reservations, Ontario Mennonite and Brethren in Christ accepted the leadership of MCC Canada based in Winnipeg. In both cases the Ontario inter-Mennonite leadership turned these events into positive moments of growth in local activity while continuing to provide strong support for both Canadian and international program.

In a review it is impossible to summarize the flowering of MCC Ontario since 1964. Harvey Taves's untimely death in 1965 at age 39 deprived the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ community of one of its most forceful voices. Remarkably MCC Ontario quickly found new and strong capable leaders. Marr might have mentioned that these leaders not only made local programs prominent in the MCC system, but also supplied strong leadership in both MCC Canada and MCC International. She does include in the text names of many Ontario workers both in North America and abroad. Since Ontario Mennonites and Brethren in Christ have been very generous in supporting MCC programs, it would have been interesting to chart contributions, particularly since 1944.

It would be difficult for an MCC insider not to be enthusiastic about this book. The inter-Mennonite scene in Ontario has been at the forefront of the MCC movement in North America and beyond. It is no accident that the North American office of Mennonite World Conference is in Kitchener. Marr traces this interest and adds much new information about MCC. She understands well the ethos of MCC. With a "bottom up" approach, Marr demonstrates that MCC is indeed a people's movement of women and men, both young and elderly. She is not afraid to point out weaknesses along the way, particularly the organization's failure to recognize the leadership potential of women participants. She highlights the slow but sure change in this regard.

I thought I knew the essential ingredients of the MCC stories. But Lucille Marr fills in more than a few gaps. This book is one of the two or three essential books for anyone, including any Executive Director of MCC International, wishing to understand the "transforming power" of this significant ministry.

John A. Lapp,  
Global Mennonite History Project  
Akron, Pennsylvania.

Donald Martin, *Old Order Mennonites of Ontario: Gelassenheit, Discipleship, Brotherhood*. Kitchener ON: Pandora Press (co-published with Herald Press), 2003. Pp., 381. Paper, \$35 US; 37.50 Cdn. Index, bibliography, 7 appendices

Donald Martin is a member of the Markham-Waterloo Conference of Old Order Mennonites in Ontario, a group that separated from the more traditional horse-and-buggy driving Old Order Mennonites about sixty years ago. The two groups cooperate in some areas such as schools and the use of meetinghouses and share a common Old Order identity, history, and theological perspective. Martin's book is an important contribution to the scholarly literature on Old Order groups because, to my knowledge, it is the only systematic account of Old Order history, theology, and practice written by an Old Order lay historian. Although Martin's focus is on Ontario, he sets his story in the context of broader Old Order developments and relationships in the United States as well. Martin's work parallels the writing of Isaac R. Horst, a Canadian Old Order horse-and-buggy author of *A Separate People* (Herald Press, 2000). Martin's work, however, is more systematic and historically grounded, whereas Horst's is aimed at a more popular audience.

Martin's purpose for writing is "to portray the Old Order Mennonites," to outsiders in a "non-compromising and non-offensive way" (25). The material is organized into twenty chapters and an epilogue that focuses on *Gelassenheit*, a concept which Martin stresses throughout the book. Indeed, the key argument of the book, is found in his first sentence of the epilogue: "The Old Order Mennonite community and the Anabaptist ethos of *Gelassenheit* are synonymous." Although *Gelassenheit* appears in Hutterite writings, Sandra Cronk was the first scholar to use the word in 1977 as a concept to understand rituals of submission and yieldedness in Old Order Mennonite and Amish communities. Martin is the first Old Order writer to use *Gelassenheit* as his primary conceptual category to organize historical material and interpret Old Order beliefs and practices. He argues that the ethos of *Gelassenheit* was the reason that Old Orders rejected outside cultural and theological influences such as pietism, fundamentalism, revivalism, missions, and individualism. Pietist scholars will not be comfortable with Martin's pejorative view of pietism which he juxtaposes against Anabaptism based on his reading of Robert Friedmann.

In addition to his historical analysis of the various Old Order schisms in Canada and the United States, two important chapters (8 and 18) focus on the distinctive features of Old Order belief and practice. In chapter 8 he identifies some distinctive beliefs—obedience, brotherhood, *Ordnung*, communalism, leadership, and the "Old

Order Stand”—that characterize his tradition. Later in chapter 18 he describes Old Order practices related to worship, communion, counsel meetings, weddings, funerals, family, holidays, gender and technology. These chapters provide rich insights into the Old Order worldview and theological commitments.

Unlike Horst's books, Martin provides more scholarly apparatus such as endnote references, a complete bibliography, several valuable appendices, and an index. The index however tends to focus on names more than topics and the topics that are included are somewhat random. There are entries for telephone, but none for technology, bicycles, automobile or car, despite the fact that the car was a major point of contention in several twentieth century Old Order divisions. The organization of the book follows a chronological time line, yet is somewhat uneven, and not always clear. The Groffdale Conference/Weaverland Conference division in Lancaster County (PA) of 1927 was reported as 1926 thrice on pages 150 and 151.

Martin's work is a welcome and important contribution to Old Order studies. And while its thorough scholarship makes for a significant contribution, it paradoxically is an aberration in a community characterized, historically at least, more by oral tradition and informal sentiments, than by abstract concepts and formal arguments.

Donald B. Kraybill  
Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies  
Elizabethtown College

Mil Penner, *Section 27: A Century on a Family Farm* (Lawrence KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002). Pp. 229. Cloth.

This is a splendid book, written by a farmer with a deft and poetic hand, a vivid imagination, a keen eye for detail and a well-grounded memory. It brings to life the world of Milford Penner, who, born in 1929, spent his boyhood on Section 27-21-4W near Inman, Kansas. But it is much more than an autobiography. It renders the history of a Kansas farm family, a Mennonite family, despite the book's featureless subtitle. In the process it also presents a picture of change in agriculture among Mennonites. It outlines new farm technologies, changing concepts of community, shifting gendered worlds, and challenging inter-generational relations. As Penner notes, the aim of the book is to "recall values, customs and a way of life with close ties to the land" (x).

The book thus links the modern Mennonite farmer to the land. Numerous works suggest that the Amish and Old Order Mennonites have maintained a special relationship to the land and of these David Kline's *Great Possessions* is perhaps the best known. Penner's book casts aside this notion of 'old order' exceptionalism, showing how modern farmers too can have a love for the land, an affinity for nature and respect for the earth. These Mennonites smell fresh dirt also from the seat of a tractor, observe the northern lights from the balcony of a modern house, and see the flowers from a passing pickup truck. They are farmers who are concerned about environmental desecration, despise the oil companies' many sink holes, wonder about the vulnerability of pulverized soil, grieve the disappearing bird types. And where they have been party to violence on the land they show that they can change their ways. Penner confesses his decades-long work in reshaping the land through irrigation projects, avenues in which "the bulldozer was my idol," and acknowledges the shortsightedness in which "conquest [was] the only value" (214).

The book also illuminates the culture of the progressive Kansas Mennonite community. It details the complex interrelatedness of Mennonite faith and ethnicity. Although Penner chooses the obscure word 'Low Dutch' to refer to the more common 'Low German' or 'Pautdietsch' dialect, his description of its cultural workings is highly convincing: when "Pop", for example, would repair a seized up combine in 100 degree Fahrenheit weather he would "speak to devil in Low Dutch," swear words only if translated into English. He describes everyday religiousness, sometimes critically: a minister visit young Milford before baptism, coming around at an inopportune time, and then after this "rite of passage" the minister never visits again. Culture comes in tone and shade and things not said: community members arrange for visits by exploratory telephone calls, speaking first about weather, and then haltingly they hint of their desire to visit. The family struggles with religious ethics: they wonder about working on Sunday and knows that immunity is assured when weather patterns threaten the crop or the land. Mil's pacifist impulses are tested in World War II, and are predisposed by the racist reflection "that if I were guaranteed I could fight the Japanese and not the Germans, I could join the army..." (181); in the end he becomes a conscientious objector, although mostly because "Pop" declares Mil's "pacifism" for him. The socialization of children occurs not through the rules of authoritative parents, but through "the combined influences of Sunday School, catechism, overheard adult conversation and lack of encouragement..." (187).

This book shows that autobiography can be highly affective in presenting Mennonite life in twentieth century North America. Mennonite history too often is strong in identifying a community's institutions.

Mennonite poetry and fiction are always adept at showing the pathos of artists caught on the periphery of the community. Mennonite sociologists differentiate the rural from urban worlds, variously lauding the former or the latter and questioning the authenticity of the other. *Section 27* is a work by a member of the community who knows how rural and urban forces are intertwined, recognizes the incongruent features of life, and declines the dichotomies of other disciplines. I found the book refreshing in its perceptiveness, its candor, and absence of self-righteousness.

Royden Loewen  
University of Winnipeg

John R. Staples, *Cross-Cultural Encounters on the Ukrainian Steppe: Settling the Molochna Basin, 1783-1861*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2002. Pp. 253. Cloth.

At the recent international conference “Molochna 2004: Mennonites and Their Neighbours (1804-2004),” John Staples presented a paper entitled “Putting Russia Back into Russian Mennonite History.” That certainly happened at the conference where more than two-thirds of the participants were non-Mennonite scholars. In this study of the settlement of the Molochna basin, Staples contributes significantly to this new and exciting era in Russian Mennonite research and writing. By focusing on this smaller geographic era he puts Russia back into the settlement experiences of Mennonite migrants during the first half of the nineteenth century.

Until recently, much of the Russian Mennonite story was shaped by the memories of people fleeing from impossible life circumstances. Many of these documents reflected memories of an idyllic lifestyle amid a physical landscape isolated from the outside world and were permeated by a nostalgia for a lost world. Conversely there was also anger when that world was destroyed by the Bolshevik revolution. By focusing his study on the Molochna basin, Staples challenges some of the assumptions characterizing the works of amateur and professional historians who studied Mennonites in Ukraine. He reminds Mennonite readers that we were not alone on the Ukrainian steppe. There were others – Orthodox peasants, Nogai, German colonists and Doukhobors. He makes a convincing argument for the fact that Mennonites, instead of being uniquely privileged, started the survival race with other settlers from the same finishing line. None had previous agricultural

experience in dealing with the arid steppe, most of the settlers could be defined as peasants and all subscribed to traditional religious beliefs. Furthermore, all received similar incentives from the Russian state. Yet in the end, the varied settlers ran the race towards prosperity very differently.

For Staples, the drought of 1832-34 marked a turning point insofar as Mennonites altered the paradigm of their existence in the Molochna basin. Rather central to that re-definition were the often controversial reforms of the entrepreneurial Johann Cornies. For Staples, the Cornies era was not so much a symbol of secularization as an indication of an acrimonious but healthy dialogue within the Mennonite community. Somewhat ironically, the quarrels of the late 1830s and early 1840s generated both piety and prosperity. Ultimately, it generated a civil system alongside the traditional congregational structure. Both entities, though reminiscent of the medieval church-state, significantly benefited the Mennonite settlers in the Molochna basin. By participating in the life of the local congregation they strengthened their religious identity. Concurrently their role in the Mennonite state allowed for inventiveness and innovation.

In contrast to the Orthodox state peasants, the Mennonites were in complete control of their land and their church. Orthodox peasant passivity in the local church failed to generate a strong religious identity nor did the state peasants have the freedom to change the established communal land system. In the end, similar starting advantages produced very different results. Initially, both Mennonite and Orthodox settlers were truly peasants and for a time, it seemed both would move beyond that category. Yet the Orthodox colonist regressed and again became a peasant while the Mennonite, according to Staples' apt phrase were "peasants in the process of 'de-peasantizing'" (p. 181).

The author's arguments for his revisionist views are convincing. He writes in a crisp, non-partisan style and almost by way of understatement says "here is the evidence." Utilizing Russian archival material, he offers significant corrections to traditional views generated by an abundance of in-house Mennonite documents. Thanks to Staples' research and the ongoing energetic contributions of Ukrainian and Russian scholars, a new era is emerging in Russian Mennonite studies. Hopefully the study will signal the first of many books that expand our understanding of the multi-dimensional experience of the Mennonites in Russia and Ukraine. Staples is to be congratulated for a first class study.

John B. Toews  
Regent College,  
Vancouver, BC

John H. Yoder, *Anabaptism and Reformation in Switzerland: An Historical and Theological analysis of the Dialogues between Anabaptists and Reformers*. Edited by C. Arnold Snyder. Translated by David Carl Stassen and C. Arnold Snyder. Introduction by Neal Blough. Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2004. Pp. 509. \$46.00 Cdn, \$39.00 US.

John Howard Yoder is best known for his scholarly contributions in biblical theology, social ethics and peace studies. Several of his earliest scholarly works, however, were in the area of Reformation studies, such as his dissertation on Swiss Anabaptism, published in 1962, and a later study also on the Swiss Anabaptists, published in 1968. Until recently, these studies by Yoder were available only in German-language publications. Thanks to the translation efforts of David Carl Stassen and C. Arnold Snyder, the English-speaking world now has access to these seminal writings, which have been combined into a one-volume work.

The book is divided into two parts. Part I is a survey of the origins of Anabaptism in and around Zürich with special attention to the dialogues and disputations (*Gespräche*) that took place between Swiss Anabaptists and Zwinglian reformers from 1523 to 1538. Part II is a systematic analysis of the dialogues. The book includes a preface by the editor, C. Arnold Snyder, which provides an assessment of Yoder's scholarship in the context of Anabaptist and Radical Reformation studies. Also incorporated is an introduction by Neal Blough, which maps out the central themes in Yoder's early work that would become integral to his more mature writings.

A publication of this sort deserves some explanation. After all, Yoder's scholarship reflects the Anabaptist historiography of the mid-twentieth century and thus represents a somewhat outdated viewpoint of Swiss Anabaptist origins. This raises the question of whether this publication is truly an event to be celebrated, as the editor of the volume claims. In continuity with the work of John Horsch, Harold Bender, and Robert Friedmann, Yoder's work clearly belongs to the genre of Anabaptist scholarship that sought to rehabilitate the Anabaptists from hostile mainstream historiography. Yoder did not only assume that the Anabaptists originated in Zürich in close geographical proximity to Zwingli. He also maintained that they stood in close *theological* proximity to this reformer, and that the Swiss Anabaptists provided the "Anabaptist" template by which other Anabaptist groups should be measured.

By the 1970s, this approach was superseded by empirical studies that emphasized the multiple origins of various Anabaptist movements, all with unique characteristics and none providing a template for the

rest. On the one hand, therefore, Yoder's work represents an older view no longer accepted by specialists in the field. Thus, some readers, conversant with the current state of Anabaptist historiography, will undoubtedly find Yoder's broad generalizations concerning Anabaptism unconvincing and even frustrating. Yoder would later learn from the revisionist historians and accept a broader definition of Anabaptism, but his work does not yet reflect this insight. On the other hand, readers will find it difficult to dispute the thoroughness and comprehensive nature of Yoder's investigations. His ability to painstakingly sift through vast amounts of primary source material, and his skill in finding larger patterns of meaning that cut across academic disciplines is remarkable. In this volume we discover Yoder's seminal thought that would permeate his later scholarship, and we see the extent to which his views on ecclesiology, christology, and history clearly derived from his early encounter with the Anabaptists of Zürich. The book should be of significant interest to historians and theologians of Anabaptism, and it will be essential reading for those seeking to understand the trajectory of Yoder's thought over a period of four decades.

Somewhat enigmatic was Yoder's move away from historical studies as he was approaching the mid-point of his scholarly career. After 1974, he withdrew from active engagement with sixteenth century Anabaptist scholarship, and moved on to write in other disciplinary fields. Evidently the methodological sea change in Anabaptist studies, less than a decade after he had completed his second volume of the *Anabaptist-Reformed dialogues*, was inhospitable to his intellectual sensibilities. Even though, already in his dissertation, Yoder acknowledged differences among the various Anabaptist groups, it was "the Anabaptism that endured" that mattered and was worthy of historical study. The early Swiss tradition, along with Anabaptists such as Menno Simons, Pilgram Marpeck, and the Hutterian Brethren would continue to be essential material for ecclesiological and ethical reflection. Until the end of his career Yoder remained tenaciously consistent in his methodology and continue to privilege the kinds of questions and concerns which in his opinion mattered most.

A central theme in Yoder's study is that the Anabaptists had an "inexhaustible will to dialogue." Ecumenical conversation, according to Yoder, was not simply a strategy to escape persecution, but emerged out of a particular theological epistemology and understanding of ecclesiology. While Yoder did not assume that truth emerged merely from the process of conversation—he held to epistemological norms—in his later writings he would emphasize the importance of testing one's own theology, not simply within one's own circle, but in conversation with others. A basic question that arises from this is whether the early

Anabaptists were truly as dialogical as Yoder understood them to be, or whether his interpretation of Anabaptism in this regard was skewed by his own ideals. Further investigation into the nature of religious dialogue during the Reformation age will hopefully clarify the extent to which Anabaptists freely chose to enter into dialogue as a conscious means of testing their own theological suppositions, and the degree to which they entered into dialogue as a matter of survival in the face of persecution.

Karl Koop  
Canadian Mennonite University

Sergei I. Zhuk. *Russia's Lost Reformation: Peasants, Millennialism, and Radical Sects in Southern Russia and Ukraine, 1830-1917*. Woodrow Wilson Center Press & The Johns Hopkins University Press: Washington, DC and Baltimore, 2004. Pp. xx, 457. \$60.00, US. Cloth.

This comparative study of sectarianism makes bold claims about the social, political, and cultural impact of Shalaputs, Stundists, Molokans, Mennonites, and related religious groups. Zhuk's main argument is that the social and cultural dislocation caused by colonization of the southern frontier, combined with the equally profound dislocation caused by serf emancipation in 1861, led to a religious awakening in southern Russia and Ukraine that is analogous to the radical reformation in the West. While Zhuk's evidence, derived from regional and central archives in Ukraine and Russia, is intriguing, his uncritical application of social-science theories, and his equally uncritical use of sources, result in a book that has little scholarly value.

Zhuk begins by describing "charter groups" of settlers in southern Ukraine. These groups play an important role in Zhuk's argument because they provided a base-line of sectarian doctrine with which subsequent immigrant groups interacted. A puzzling omission from Zhuk's charter groups is the Dukhobors. The Molochna region, where the Dukhobors lived from 1802-1845, is an important focus of the book. While the Molochna Mennonites, Molokans, Skopty, Khlysty, and Shalaputs receive close attention, the Dukhobors – the first large group of religious sectarians to settle in the region and the group that prompted the most controversy among Tsarist officials in the 1830s and 1840s – are altogether ignored.

Zhuk pays much closer attention to the Mennonites, but the results are unsatisfying. Early Pietist influence in southern Ukraine is a

vital component in Zhuk's account of the construction of Ukrainian and Russian radical sectarian identity, so the original sources of Pietist influence are fundamentally important to his argument. But Zhuk's claim that "during the 1820s, religious enthusiasm, influenced by 'Prussian Pietism,' took over all the Mennonite settlements of the Molochna," (157) is simply unsupported by the evidence. This example points to a central problem with *Russia's Lost Reformation*. Zhuk is uncritical of his sources, and worse yet, he sometimes seems to misinterpret those sources in the interests of his own argument. Zhuk's sole source on Molochna Mennonite Pietism in the 1820s is Delbert Plett's *Golden Years*, but nowhere does Plett claim that Pietism "took over all the Mennonite settlements." Just as troublesome as this misinterpretation is that Zhuk apparently does not recognize that Plett's self-published study of a minority group within the Mennonite settlement is not, by itself, an adequate source for characterizing the entire community.

Zhuk is equally uncritical of the sociological, anthropological and political theorists who appear so frequently in his book. Frederick Jackson Turner, Max Weber, Michele Foucault, Clifford Geertz, Victor Turner, Arnold van Gennep, and James C. Scott are all called upon in support of various claims, but Zhuk does not question or interpret their theories in light of his own evidence; rather, the theories are treated as paradigmatic, and touted by Zhuk as substitutes for sound archival evidence. A significant example is Zhuk's allegiance to Weber's protestant ethic as an explanation for the emergence of capitalism in southern Ukraine. Weber's work is vital to the modern sociology of religion, but the protestant ethic has been repeatedly debunked in recent scholarship. If Zhuk proposes to rejuvenate this theory, he must at least address the controversy that surrounds it. Instead, in a chapter entitled "Peasant Theologians and the Protestant Ethic," Zhuk accepts Weber unquestioningly, offering in support, a series of accounts of sober, industrious, economically successful sectarian peasants. This anecdotal evidence is not supported by quantitative socio-economic analysis that might prove or disprove it.

Zhuk's eagerness to link his sectarian subjects to late-Tsarist political radicalism seems to contradict his Weberian arguments. He claims that the radical sects particularly appealed to poor Ukrainian peasants, helping to motivate them to participate in radical political movements in the 1880s and 1890s (64, 363). While there may have been sufficient variety among sectarian groups to produce both prosperous capitalists and impoverished political radicals, Zhuk is oblivious to the apparent contradiction.

In fairness it must be said that Zhuk's chapter on the convergence of religious and political radicalism is the best part of this book.

Employing sectarian, official church, and police sources, he clearly documents this intersection of interests. Unfortunately (and despite the promise of the book's title) he does not pursue this story into the revolutionary years of the early twentieth century, noting in passing that "evangelical peasants did not participate in the political struggle during the Revolutions of 1905 and 1917" (384).

*Russia's Lost Reformation* does not succeed in mounting a convincing argument that imperial Russia experienced a radical reformation in the late nineteenth century. Although Zhuk frequently points out similarities between events in Russia and the West, the comparisons are mechanical and unsatisfying. When Zhuk describes the evolution of Shalaput religious practices away from castration toward "more rationalized and abstract ideals" in the 1870s, he observes that "the Shalaputs moved in the direction of religious enthusiasm, which was typical for all European Christian radicals, such as the first Anabaptists, early Quakers, Methodists, and Shakers" (113). This may be true, but is the similarity more than skin-deep? The Shalaputs emerged in the late nineteenth century, in far different circumstances than the early European Christian radicals to whom Zhuk compares them. The Shalaputs were in close contact with Mennonites who were experiencing their own religious upheavals – upheavals that clearly had nothing to do with the problems of the first Anabaptists. Zhuk's comparison could only have been valuable if he had explored the obvious differences, rather than commenting in passing on the obvious similarities.

Zhuk is no more successful in his attempt to claim far-reaching influence for his sectarians. He maintains in his conclusion that "the Shalaputs, radical Stundists, and Maliovanttsy . . . structured the popular oppositional discourse in imperial Russia" (399). This claim is not substantiated, and indeed Zhuk's own calculations would suggest a different story. When he attempts to quantify the number of Stundists in the Empire, he concludes that they made up just two percent of the population even in the regions where they were most populous (177). His appendices document just 34,623 sectarians out of a total Russian population of almost 126 million in 1897 (426). Still, he insists that the Stundists "influenced no less than one-third of the population" in some southern regions (177). How he arrives at this figure, and what he means by "influenced," are unclear. In the end there is little to recommend *Russia's Lost Reformation*. Zhuk's central premise, that cultural and socio-economic dislocation cause religious radicalism, might well be right. His extensive knowledge of regional and central archives, and his equally extensive reading in social science theory, offer the potential for important insights into this little-known story.

Unfortunately, theory and evidence do not converge, and this potential has not been realized.

John Staples  
State University of New York, Fredonia

## Peace Studies and Theology

J. Denny Weaver, and Gerald Biesecker-Mast, eds., *Teaching Peace: Nonviolence and the Liberal Arts*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003. Pp. 304

Fernando Enns, Scott Holland, and Ann K. Riggs, eds., *Seeking Cultures of Peace: A Peace Church Conversation*. Telford, PA: Cascadia, 2004. Pp. 260.

Two recent books on peace by Anabaptist scholars complement each other well. They inspire intellectual dialogue. Above this, they serve as impetus for taking the practical Historic Peace Church witness into different contexts, namely post secondary education and the universal church.

The first book, *Teaching Peace: Nonviolence and the Liberal Arts*, edited by J. Denny Weaver and Gerald Biesecker-Mast grew out of a conference by Mennonite colleges for new faculty. During the conference and later at Bluffton College, Weaver invited the staff to rethink how nonviolence could undergird and influence each colleague's discipline. The book is an outcome of that discussion.

The second book, *Seeking Cultures of Peace: A Peace Church Conversation*, is a compilation of selected essays presented during an international Historic Peace Church (Quaker, Brethren, and Mennonite) consultation, held in June 2001 in Bienenberg, Switzerland. The consultation occurred as a direct result of an invitation by the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1999. The invitation asked the Historic Peace Churches to offer direction for the WCC's "Decade to Overcome Violence, 2001-2010: Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace." *Seeking Cultures of Peace* offers some of the Historic Peace Churches' most recent work on the subject of theology and peacemaking.

The first two chapters of *Teaching Peace* both situates and frames the discussion of how nonviolence can play a formative role across academic disciplines. Biesecker-Mast's introduction lays the groundwork for a new foundation for Christian academics, namely by

imitating an alternative and activist Christian Church as understood by the Historic Peace Churches. This becomes the baseline for how professors can engage their academic disciplines. By beginning with a worldview where violence and its consequences are not “natural”, colleges and universities can offer academic instruction without accepting “violence-accommodating methodologies and pedagogies” as “fact” underlying the various disciplines (4).

The second chapter provides the guiding definitions for the book by defining the terms nonviolence and violence. Social-ethicists Stassen and Westmoreland-White argue that before definitions can be offered, the questions, “What is violence?”, and, “What is and what is not an acceptable use of violence?” need to be separated and answered. Succinctly, the authors review early definitions of force, coercion, and violence and offer their own definition; violence is “...destruction to a victim or victims by means that overpower the victim’s consent” (21). No definition for nonviolence is given by the authors, instead nonviolence refers to the practices and initiatives of Just Peacemaking Theory, which is based on the biblical understanding of *shalom*, and which Stassen has summarized from his early work.

The remaining 22 of 24 chapters each apply nonviolence to specific academic subjects. Two examples are given below. David Janzen offers a way around the violent God of the Old Testament and the nonviolent Jesus in the New Testament dichotomy. Instead of privileging the New Testament above the Old or feverishly attempting to harmonize Old Testament texts to New Testament texts, Janzen promotes a Christocentric approach to reading violent Old Testament passages. In this approach obedience to Christ’s nonviolent life and teaching is kept, a Trinitarian understanding of God remains consistent, and the character of God is no longer problematic. This is achieved by superceding authorial intent, which retains the entire Bible as authoritative yet highlights the nonviolent themes as those that most closely identify the character of God.

Jeff Gundy, in a chapter entitled, “Literature, Nonviolence, and Nonviolent Teaching”, explains that teaching nonviolently may be harder than teaching about nonviolence. In the first half of Gundy’s essay, he describes how themes of violence and peace appear within classic literature and film. While the literature rarely promotes peace itself, it is however an excellent opportunity to examine texts from a nonviolent perspective. The second and more intriguing half of Gundy’s essay reveals a nonviolent pedagogy, whereby Gundy argues against a top-down, bank-deposit style of teaching, using Stanley Hauerwas as his counterpoint. Gundy explains that teaching peaceably includes accepting students’ as they come and appearing fallible by not having the answer to every question. By exhibiting a confident, passionate

teaching style that refuses to treat students as blank slates, nonviolent teaching can offer a life long example of how to live nonviolently, modeling the very behavior that is studied in class.

*Seeking Cultures of Peace* offers a more theological treatise on Christian peacemaking. The essays are written to the universal church as opposed to Christian colleges and universities. The book's sixteen chapters encompass the rich and varied cultures and faith traditions united under the Historic Peace Church banner. Of additional value is the Epistle from Bienenberg, a statement of peace convictions and suggestions and a study paper addressed to the wider church, created and signed by the participants.

Two of three major groupings of essays are clustered under the themes, "The Gospel of Peace in Context: Shaping Identity", and "Building Cultures of Just Peace"; this compilation of essays boasts an international list of authors, a quarter of which are female writers. Similar themes inhabit both books, with author J. Denny Weaver continuing his argument for a nonviolent atonement. Scott Holland, in his essay, "The Gospel of Peace and the Violence of God" addresses a similar question as does David Janzen in the previous book. Another theme is evident as well in the outline of an accessible peace theology that includes a high Christology to the wider church, while at the same time leaving room for other formulations for a Christian peace theology.

The two books combined offer an impressive argument for extending the Historic Peace Church witness into schools of higher education as well as the universal church itself. Either alone or together, *Teaching Peace* and *Seeking Cultures of Peace* would be welcome additions to any university library or serious student of Peace Studies. As conversation starters, these books have more than fulfilled their role.

Korey Dyck  
Menno Simons College