

# BOOK REVIEWS

*Sandra Birdsell, The Russländer.* Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2001. Pp 352, Cloth, \$34.99.

The first page of Sandra Birdsell's *The Russländer* is written as an article from a 1917 Russian newspaper, with the headline "Massacre at Privol'noye." Although this account is fictional, it accurately reflects the violent chaos that accompanied the revolution. The article contains a list of the names and ages of eleven victims, many of them children. Then the reader turns the page and is quickly swept into a story that takes place seven years earlier, a beautifully rendered story of everyday life, in which many of the persons on that grim list play vital, compelling roles. Thus, from the very beginning, the reading experience is suffused with a keen and constant reminder of impermanence.

Like any coming-of-age novel, the arc of this story moves us from private to public concerns. But in this particular historical setting, the consequences are devastating. The main character, Katya Vogt, is eight years old in the opening scenes. Her father is the overseer for a wealthy Mennonite landowner, and class distinctions are clearly the source of much tension. But in the near-sighted eyes of young Katya, Privol'noye is a kind of paradise: "What went on beyond the borders of her Russian Mennonite oasis was not worth noticing" (5). Often, Katya's myopic viewpoint limits the narrative scope to a tiny arena: "The cold air was a hand pushing against her breastbone, her breath a white cloud in front of her face, her scarf matted with crystals and rough against her chin" (15). Yet this small space is rich with details that not only reveal much about the domestic life of the times, but also speak of the intimate connections that tie the child's world together:

Katya knew there was a mouse hole in the pantry behind a bottom drawer,

a drawer that held cooking utensils, a soup ladle whose ivory handle had turned brown when her mother had absentmindedly set it on the stove the day Gerhard was born. Everything in the house reminded her of something, a moment; a shaft of light moving with particles of dust brought to mind a time when she had sat on her mother's lap.... (29-30)

As Katya grows up, the narrative point of view gradually broadens. Vague rumours of social and political unrest disturb the smooth surface of paradise and finally, brutally, the forces of history destroy Katya's sanctuary forever. Although the reader has anticipated this terrible loss since the very first page, the aftermath is crushing, as Katya is thrust into a wider world, connected to her sheltered past only by the faint scent that still lingers on the clothes of her murdered sister.

One aspect of the novel's structure disturbed me at first. As we read, we slowly realize that this whole tale is being recalled by an elderly Katya, as she's interviewed in a Manitoba senior's residence by a visiting historian. At first I found this narrative device awkward and unsatisfying. Several flashes forward result in a jarring use of the future tense, yanking us out of engrossing scenes and suddenly forcing us to view them as distant memories. And I was disappointed to learn very little about Katya's life in Canada. But on a closer reading, I had to set that reservation aside, for I could see that this device, like the newspaper article that opens the novel, has its place. Even as Birdsell's vivid imagery lends to each scene an intense immediacy, she is constantly reminding us that these people and their way of life have vanished from the earth. Every little thing—even the mouse hole, the soup ladle, the simple roughness of a scarf against a child's chin—is and was always utterly fragile, achingly temporary. All we have left, finally, is story. The elderly Katya thinks of her own generation as guardians of the past, those who survive and remember, "so those who had not come through were resurrected to continue their lives" (303).

Birdsell's novel is more than a fictionalized history of a people. It has at its heart a deeply moving contemplation of grief and the power of memory, of death and resurrection. In the final pages, the novel's structure is revealed as an appropriate frame for these themes, as the narrative rhythmically and brilliantly seems to fold back into itself during a poetic vision of Katya's final destiny. Sandra Birdsell deserves high praise for her assiduous research work, her writing skill, and her profound insights into the human condition.

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Rudy Wiebe, *Sweeter Than All The World* Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 2001. Pp. 438, Cloth, \$35.95.

*Sweeter Than All The World* will in all likelihood stand as Rudy Wiebe's definitive Mennonite novel. It is a big, lavish, multi-faceted work brought to life with intricate artistry on the largest possible canvas of Mennonite life and history. It's hard to imagine any novelist ever rendering a more complete account of the Mennonite saga that has been unfolding in many countries of the world over the past five centuries. It is, among other things, a vast expansion and culmination of Wiebe's earlier Mennonite novels *Peace Shall Destroy Many* and particularly *The Blue Mountains of China*. And in thus coming full circle, Wiebe shows how much he has grown in stature and sophistication as a writer and novelist.

Rudy Wiebe has always written about Mennonites—their faith and history—unabashedly, without self-consciousness, as though they are the most important group of people in the world and not an obscure sect unknown to most of the world. To Wiebe, Mennonites throughout their history have had the potential to serve as a model of non-violent society to the rest of the violence-ridden world, as well an inspirational model for radical Christianity. But for all his passionate belief in Mennonite Christian ideals, Wiebe has remained a probing, ruthlessly honest artist who has avoided the simplistic solutions of didacticism. The closest he ever came to that was in *First and Vital Candle*, his second novel, and even there the artist was more eloquent than the preacher.

Adam Wiebe, the main protagonist in this sumptuously layered novel, is a well-to-do doctor (through early investments) in Alberta whose life is becoming increasingly entangled as his marriage disintegrates, his children grow more alienated, his extra-marital affairs multiply, and his identity as a Mennonite erodes in an ever more materialistic and devalued society. Instead of giving in to cynicism and despair, however, Adam begins to look back and to examine his Mennonite spiritual and cultural inheritance. Increasingly, he finds meaningful historical focuses that help him to shore up his own identity and make him reach out to others—his family and the chain of his kinship through the centuries. In fact, that well-known characteristic of Mennonite kinship is explored as never before in a Mennonite novel. A dramatic link Adam discovers in his kinship chain is that of his seventeenth-century namesake Adam Wybe, a brilliant, self-taught engineer who effectively invents the cable car in the process of building walls and bastions around the town of Danzig. Another kinship link is an artistic one, that of the eighteenth-century portrait painter Enoch Seeman, whose father, also a portrait painter, is forced out of his Mennonite community near Danzig for committing the sin of painting “graven images.” The family eventually settles in London, where Enoch becomes a fashionable portrait painter of aristocrats and royalty. Adam also discovers more recent kinship links which tie him directly to relatives in Russia and South America. Ironically, in tracing the Mennonite diaspora, filled as it is with challenges, persecution and tragic consequences, Adam discovers personal and family connections that help to lift him out of his self-imposed spiritual and social isolation.

As one might expect, the double-faced theme of violence and non-violence runs through the novel in various forms. Provocatively juxtaposed, the opening chapters alternate scenes of cruel violence perpetrated against the early Anabaptist Mennonites with vividly—sometimes gruesomely—depicted hunting scenes in northern Canada involving Adam and his friends. Is Adam's passion for hunting and killing wild animals an ironic commentary on the terrible acts of violence committed against his early ancestors? Is the bored and disillusioned Mennonite doctor (whose profession is dedicated to saving lives) shooting caribou in the northern wilds meant to be a sad parody of the age of martyrdom in which his ancestors died so heroically for their faith? Or are the hunting scenes meant to contrast a natural and thus acceptable form of violence with the subhuman and thus unnatural violence of humans against humans? The novel raises many interesting questions of this kind.

Another major theme, again as one would expect, is that of the Mennonite diaspora. For centuries Mennonites have been forced, or have forced themselves, to migrate to different countries and continents. Indeed, one might say that the only constant "homeland" they have ever had is their Anabaptist faith. And because of their efforts to separate themselves from the "world," they developed isolated agrarian communities they believed to be God-ordained. All too often, however, their possession of land proved to be more transitory than their faith and they were forced to move on. Even an urban Mennonite like Adam Wybe was not allowed to own land or live within the town of Danzig, although he worked as an engineer within it. Adam Wiebe, on the other hand, is free to live wherever he likes, but knows himself to be an exile from his homeland of faith and increasingly yearns to return to that homeland through his search for his Mennonite identity.

The difficulties for the reader of *Sweeter Than All The World* are to be found in its style and structure. Wiebe has never been an easy novelist to read—at least not since his first novel *Peace Shall Destroy Many*. His style is dense and demanding, although it always rewards careful reading. As for structure, the scope of this novel is so great, its historical elements so copious and extensively researched that only the attentive reader will be able to follow its many strands as they interweave to create the rich tapestry of the narrative. Rudy Wiebe knows as well as any novelist that when you write a historical novel it is hard to find a balance, to have it both ways: that is, to create a believable world of the past through research, while at the same time developing a unified, living narrative within that historical context. To illustrate: *The Blue Mountains of China*, precisely because its historical background was scanty and more suggested than realized, was able to generate and sustain a raw, compelling emotional and dramatic power that this novel, because of its complex historical dimensions, only generates sporadically. On the other hand, *Sweeter*, with its almost overwhelming historical fullness and diversified structure, would probably require several careful readings to fully meld form and content in the reader's mind.

All of which brings us to another technical question: Do the many speakers or narrators who address the reader directly from their various historical niches in time

come alive as characters, or do they remain more or less disembodied voices from the past? Using such fictionalized speakers is of course preferable to laying out the historical background in descriptive prose. But it is difficult to individualize so many speakers or voices to the point where they begin walking as well as talking, so to speak. Some of these speakers have a sameness of voice which renders them somewhat obscure and colourless, especially when they speak through old diary entries or ancient memories. There is a certain risk in using narrators who function in isolation, disconnected as they are from the main plot. It's a measure of Wiebe's artistry that most of these speakers do come across vividly and are justified through their function as kinship links that help to form the overall pattern of the novel.

As in his previous novels, Rudy Wiebe takes artistic risks in *Sweeter Than All The World* (the irony of the title is only one of many ironies in this novel), risks that do not always work, of course. But Wiebe's creative fearlessness, his challenge to the reader to take it or leave it, more than anything else makes him exciting to read. He has always been a novelist who follows the inner light of his creative instincts rather than pandering to readers by giving them what they expect, especially to Mennonite readers who are looking for confirmative fiction rather than challenging fiction from Mennonite writers. And even if the vast historical sweep of the novel seems a bit overpowering at times, it also serves to remind us that Rudy Wiebe is motivated by a deep love for his people, for their spiritual aspirations, their place in history and, above all, for their courageous commitment down the centuries to set up a church and society that reflects Christ's law of love and non-violence in a world that tends to regard such a way of life as irrelevant fantasy.

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Sarah Klassen, *Simone Weil: Songs of Hunger and Love*. Toronto: Wynn and Wolsak 1999. Pp. lxxxii + 82, Paper, \$14.00.

"In the beginning the world bursts open/ a shimmering opal" ("Beginning"). In the end, there is "[t]he unmistakable wingbeat of grace" ("Dirge"). These lines encompass Sarah Klassen's latest book of poems mapping the life of Simone Weil, the French philosopher, activist, and mystic. In between these lines, *Songs of Hunger and Love* follows Weil from her birth into a French Jewish family, through her teaching of philosophy, her work in factories, her political activism, and her relationship with God, to her death of tuberculosis and hunger in 1943 at age 34.

Klassen divides the book into three sections: "I. Hunger," "II. God Exists Because I Desire Him," and "III. We Can Only Cry Out." Woven through this trinity of themes is the constancy of Weil's passion. In the same way that poets like Patrick Friesen and Di Brandt write out of the Mennonite context of spiritually charged boundaries, Klassen writes Weil as the embodiment of the tension between flesh

and spirit. Though Klassen works from historical biography, she creates her own version of Weil by sensitively crafting a voice that can sing, cry out, rage, and whisper in the reader's ear. In "Hunger I," the voice of a young Weil foreshadows her obsession with the body's mortification and the soul's transcendence:

I was born hungry.  
 Nothing in the whole world would ever be enough.  
 Daybreak to dusk my small mouth gaping  
 like a bird's for food.  
 It wasn't mother's-milk, her warm breasts given  
 gladly, my father's need to make things better  
 I desired.

Only blue sky, the stunning depth of it,  
 a sudden harmony of curved light, an organ chord  
 could prune the sharpest edge off  
 my wanting.

The poet's voice fades to the background, and allows the subject to speak. The reader nearly forgets there is a Sarah Klassen behind the language, a necessity in voice-driven writing and clear evidence of the craft of these poems.

Although the collection presents the life and death of Weil, it cannot simply be called a biographical long poem. Klassen engages in the distillation process, giving the reader refined insights into Weil's character. These poems value essence over chronology, emotion over hard fact. The result is poems that can be read for their richly textured language as well as for their narrative content. "Revolution" shows the balance between Weil's experience as an anarchist in the Spanish Civil War and Klassen's attention to the poetic craft:

Restless and discontent with being  
 a spy, I yearned to stand  
 openly between two soldiers  
 a loaded gun in my hand. I was impatient  
 for Spain, for my red scarf,  
 for my militia uniform. Someone granted me  
 reluctant permission to select a gun.

At the river crossing my heart beat rapidly with joy.  
 The sky was sapphire, everything so still  
 and beautiful. A silver tingling  
 at my fingertips. . .

Set against Weil's impassioned political activism is her religious fervor. Weil claimed to have had visitations by God, though many believed her severe migraine

attacks triggered these mystical encounters. Klassen sides with Weil's truth without romanticizing the spiritual. Throughout this collection, the body and the soul wrestle with each other to portray a woman whose obsession with the spiritual seems at odds with the flesh and bone that keep her earth-bound:

Holy week in Solemes a sharp throbbing  
 pounded the plain sound of Gregorian chant  
 with the force of hammer blows into my brain.  
 I abandoned my body  
 dropping it like an old coat  
 or a troublesome doubt in a corner  
 and offered my unburdened spirit  
 naked to the lyrical and holy  
 mystery of music.

(“Stations”)

Klassen's strength as a poet stands out in her ability to write an authentic faith that is full of both devotion and doubt. Her version of Weil is fully human in her relationship with God, one moment wooed by Christ, the next in despair.

Whether she's entering Weil's politics or writing her gradual starvation, Klassen's lyrical grace, a staple ingredient of her writing, pervades these poems. Throughout this collection, images colour the language like stained glass in a church window. *Songs of Hunger and Love* casts a shaft of light into the relatively empty corner of Canadian spiritual writing, and pursues with poetic elegance a compassionate exploration into the enigmatic life of Simone Weil.

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Sarah Klassen, *The Peony Season*. Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 2000. Pp. 248, Paper, \$16.95.

Sarah Klassen's poetry (*Borderwatch*, *Violence and Mercy*, *Journey to Yalta*, *Dangerous Elements*, *Simone Weil: Songs of Hunger and Love*) has been praised for its evocative compression, its startling juxtaposition of the ordinary and the extraordinary, and its thematic scope. Although several of the stories in *The Peony Season* have been published individually, the collection as a whole marks Klassen's prose debut. Like her poetry, Klassen's short stories articulate a range of experience and emotion as family and ethnic histories are recovered, identities shift in culturally-unfamiliar space, and the banal and tragic events of daily life vie for prominence. While the stories in the collection are remarkably disparate, all fifteen share a focus on the possibilities and the limits of human connection and insight.

Some of Klassen's strongest stories depend on exquisitely nuanced renderings of human emotion. In "Thursday, Friday, Sunday," for instance, a middle-aged narrator attends a Good Friday service while returning repeatedly, in her imagination, to the previous day's events, her teenage daughter's expulsion from high school for attacking another student with a broken bottle. Kate's anguished and apparently helpless speculation on the reasons for, and the consequences of, her daughter's actions resonate delicately throughout the story with the small but powerfully empathic gestures of her and her daughter's friends. In "Picnic at Lake Sharon," another first-person narrator, this one the teenage daughter of missionaries in Zaire, silently resents everything about her extraordinary life and wants only to finally be old enough to leave it all behind. To Lori's — and the reader's — surprise, the resolution she brings to an unexpected crisis subtly transforms her perception of herself, her extended missionary "family," and the nature of miracles.

Klassen's peculiar gift, however, is the gift of allusion. In the very best of the stories collected here, ordinary events take on suggestive possibilities. "Invisible," for instance, reveals its disturbing depths slowly: by the story's end, we are just beginning to understand the central character's wracking limitations. Eleven-year-old Elaine is waiting for the return of the charismatic older sister she mutely adores, but her wait, we slowly realize, is futile: fourteen year-old Wilma has drowned just months before in a canoeing accident. What we also learn is what Elaine only partially understands: that she is flawed in every way that her "golden" sister was gifted. "The Little Mexican," perhaps the most allusive of the stories, points provocatively to mysterious levels of existence, perception, and connection, as Ada, a solitary, middle-aged woman comes to depend on the possibility that 'the little Mexican' she finds one day at the periphery of her garden will, at some future time, re-enter her life more completely.

Perhaps because of the too-obvious parallels they draw between North American events and "old country" history, some of the stories set completely or partly in eastern Europe are the weakest of the collection. In "Mafia," however, a middle-aged Canadian narrator convincingly describes the distance that exists between her own protected innocence and the bewildering strategies her young Lithuanian friend adopts to survive the terrifying social and economic exigencies wrought by political upheaval. And in "A Journey to Prague," the collection's potent finale, an apparently innocuous middle-aged high-school teacher on a bus tour of eastern Europe reveals surprising complexities as he struggles to come to terms with his mother's death. Drawn to, and repelled by, his fellow passengers, Graham grapples — as all Klassen's protagonists do — with powerful, and powerfully conflicting, desires for connection and solitude.

But "School Cycle," with which the collection begins, is by far the strongest story included. Composed of four precise vignettes, "School Cycle" visits the lives of eight characters who share a Grade 11 English classroom for varying chunks of their lives. Klassen deftly evokes the peculiarly complex social relationships of high school, exposing each character's poignant desire for connection and the



daunting misconceptions — and, sometimes, the shattering ignorance — that shape their assumptions about one another. In this story, Klassen comes closest to capturing in prose the pristine moments of connection and disconnection that her poetry so startlingly conveys.

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Julia Kasdorf, *The Body and the Book: Writing from a Mennonite Life*. Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press, 2001. Pp. xvii + 207, Cloth.

In *The Sleeping Preacher* (1991) and *Eve's Striptease* (1998), Julia Kasdorf portrayed poetically what it is to come from an Amish community and what it is to inhabit a woman's body. Her new work, *The Body and the Book*, is a collection of essays about the life, work, and authority of the writer who is both Amish and a woman.

She confesses in the introduction that "I still find myself sitting in that edgy space between not wanting to interrupt and wanting to announce that I am here and that I have many things to tell." This tension reflects the long road Kasdorf has traveled from the idyllic Pennsylvania valley of her childhood — with its close-knit, rural community and its values of hard work, mutual aid and not creating a disturbance— to the city, the university, and the literary community. Although she left the valley as a young child, she carries it with her, and part of her struggle as writer is the burden imposed on her of representing a group whose way of life and values the road has taken her away from. Kasdorf understands the risks and losses inherent in leaving a community and then renegotiating her relationship with it. She also knows the writer's need to find her place in the literary world she enters as an outsider and to forge a relationship with readers.

Kasdorf's uneasiness when her first book was in production will remind those who follow the evolution of Canadian Mennonite literature of the community's reaction to the initial works of Rudy Wiebe and Di Brandt. While some in the Pennsylvania valley community took offense at an audacious young Amish writer setting down *their* story, the literary community sometimes reduced the value of her writing to its ability to represent a sub-culture.

Kasdorf builds her essays around stories set in vividly portrayed places and peopled with a lively assortment of characters. There is Aunt Bertha, who taught Kasdorf the Amish way of life and loved her. "Bold, boisterous...and bossy too," this woman became a muse to the young writer. When she inherited Aunt Bertha's 1978 Chevrolet Impala it reminded her "to speak up, to risk the transgressive gesture," and that "authority comes from the experience we gain by running off and

talking with strangers.” There is Marilyn Monroe whose physical allure gave her the kind of power an Amish girl should not desire. And Lucy Hochstetler whose Amish bishop father kept her chained to her bed.

As for male characters, there is Kasdorf’s father who took his family out of the Amish community to live in a larger world. There are also the Mennonite patriarchs toward whom she maintains an ambivalent attitude: H.S. Bender who represents “Mennonite intellectual authority”; novelist Rudy Wiebe who became a mentor if not a model; and John D. Ruth, whose seemingly affirming responses to Kasdorf’s work often proved upon second reading to impose meaning on her writing and to assign a role to her as writer.

In the end it is the Slavophile author and philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin whom Kasdorf finds most helpful in his emphasis *not* on “how individuals remain part of the chorus, but how the chorus comes to be ‘individualized’ or expressed within each person.” In “Bodies and Boundaries” she writes movingly about communion, where the church gathers as one body (of Christ), each member taking the bread (body of Christ) both individually and simultaneously. She prefers this model to the “aching” Anabaptist metaphor of the community as “pulverized grains” and “grapes crushed,” a sign of the high “cost of belonging to the Body of Christ.”

Images of the body abound in this book. This will not surprise readers who know from her imagery-rich poetry how strongly Kasdorf is drawn to the visual. The illustrations range from posters featuring Marilyn Monroe through family snapshots to photographs of patriarchs like John Howard Yoder seated with his male colleagues. In “Preacher’s Striptease,” the cover illustration for her first poetry collection launches an exploration of how the pull of the patriarchal community, the power of language, and the reality of the female body shape the writer and her writing. “Work and Hope” traces the many editions of *The Martyrs’ Mirror*, with reference to the evolution of a seventeenth-century image (printer’s mark) that appeared in most of the editions: a woodcut of a peasant digging under the caption *Arbeite und Hoffe* (work and hope). When this symbol of solid Mennonite values, after many redesignings, emerged at the 1995 Millersville conference on Anabaptist women’s history, “the Anabaptist Adam had been replaced by an English-speaking Mennonite sister.”

Kasdorf’s research, thinking, and storytelling are as diligent as Ana Baptist’s energetic digging; her writing is clear, authoritative and graceful. Both readers and writers will be grateful for the poet’s interruption and her insistence that the poet’s work of remembering is “at least as worthy as working the earth.”

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Detlef Brandes and Andrej Savin. *Die Sibirierndeutschen im Sowjetstaat 1919-1938*. Essen: Klartext, 2001. Veröffentlichungen zur Kultur und Geschichte im östlichen Europa, 19. Pp. viii, 495. Cloth.

The story of the mass migration of Mennonites to Siberia prior to World War One and their fate after the revolution has not attracted much scholarly attention in Mennonite studies. The pioneering works by J. J. Hildebrand (*Sibirien*, Winnipeg, 1952) and Gerhard Fast (*In den Steppen Sibiriens*, 1957) provide important overviews while John B. Toews has published an important article on the region ("The Mennonites and the Siberian frontier (1907-1930)." *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 47 (1973), 83-101). There are also memoirs written either by the descendants of the original settlers or by the many Mennonites banished to Siberia under the Soviets. Such memoirs are often rich in human pathos but they lack an understanding of the context in which Mennonites existed. In recent years a number of important articles and books have appeared written by Soviet scholars of Mennonite and non-Mennonite descent who have had access to the rich archival sources in Siberia. Such scholarship began before the fall of the Soviet Union as Siberian academics often had more freedom in research and writing than their colleagues on the other side of the Ural Mountains. In recent years a number of significant works have appeared in print by, among others, Larissa P. Belkovec, Victor I. Brul' [Bruehl], Olga A. Gerber, Lev M. Malinovski and Petr P. Vibe [Wiebe]. Much of this work is in Russian, but the recent revival of research on Russian-Germans in Germany has seen an increasing number of their articles translated into German and, along with work by German scholars, published in the annual journal *Forschungen zur Geschichte und Kultur der Russlanddeutschen*.

This book, however, is the first major study of the relationship between the Siberian Germans and the Soviet state. It is written by a young Russian scholar in Siberia, Andrej Savin, in association with a leading German academic from Heinrich-Heine University in Düsseldorf, Detlef Brandes. The book draws largely on unpublished material from the regional state archives of Altai, Novosibirsk and Omsk, supplemented by contemporary published books, pamphlets and periodical articles. It represents an important contribution to our understanding of the fate of the Siberian Russian-Germans under the Soviets prior to the Second World War and contains significant references to the Mennonites in the region.

The basic structure of the book is chronological starting with the Revolution and Civil War. At first many Russian-Germans welcomed the idea of change through revolution but the early attempts by the Bolsheviks to enforce their authority and the chaos of grain requisition and forced taxes during and after the Civil War alienated the early support. The chapters then move through the New Economic Policy, Collectivization, dekulakization, famine and finally the Great Terror. The last period, however, is not dealt with in as much detail as the 1920s and early 30s. The first five chapters are largely the work of Savin who obviously has considerable knowledge of the archival sources. Within the chronological structure a number of

key issues are examined. These include religious policy, education and youth affairs, control of local government, economic reconstruction and the impact of attempts to emigrate abroad. In all these areas Mennonites feature prominently.

The discussion of the work of foreign Mennonite relief agencies in Siberia during the famine in 1923 and 1924 and the reaction of Soviet authorities, presents new information and perspectives on this period (62-81). The use of German and Austrian communists to convince Mennonites of the benefits of the new regime proved unsuccessful. Chapter Three is devoted entirely to the Siberian work of the Moscow-based *Allrussischer Mennonitischer Landwirtschaftlicher Verein* (AMLV). This was one of the two important Mennonite organizations formed in the USSR following the Civil War, the other being the *Verband der Bürger Holländischer Herkunft* in Ukraine. Both organizations continued Mennonite strategies established in Tsarist times to maintain a high degree of Mennonite autonomy, not just in religious matters, but also in economic, social and cultural affairs. Their existence is perhaps unique in the early Soviet period but somewhat inevitably the VBH was closed in 1925 and the AMLV in 1926. At the local level the book shows that the AMLV continued to operate in Siberia into 1930. The activities of the AMLV are dealt with in detail on the basis of Siberian sources but the organization's own records, seized by the Soviets, have been located by Professor Terry Martin of Harvard University in the State Archive of the Russian Federation in Moscow.

In economic matters relations between the AMLV and the state were amicable. The book provides details on the work of cooperatives and the economic reconstruction of Mennonite settlements. But the AMLV's wide-ranging activities had obvious political overtones. In fact its leaders were skilled in dealing with Soviet officials in order to gain advantages for Mennonites. In the Soviet environment of the 1920s this led to increasing suspicion. By 1926 the Central Committee of the Soviets was told the AMLV was more than a simple cooperative venture and in reality it operated as a religious-nationalist organization working against Soviet power and was in control of the property owning, kulak strata of Mennonite society (124). The fact that its title included the name of a religious leader — Menno Simons — revealed its sectarian nature (136). There were also problems with Mennonite attempts to maintain their non-resistant status and conscription to the military.

In the early Soviet period Mennonites claimed that in Tsarist times they, like some other sectarian groups, had been a persecuted social group (83-84). Ironically the designation "sect" had been something Mennonites had fiercely resisted in the late Tsarist period; now it proved a useful political ploy. At first this argument met with some sympathy among old Bolsheviks, but following the dismantling of the Orthodox Church the Soviets reverted to their ideological opposition to all religion. The "sectarian" nature of Mennonite life threatened Soviet efforts to banish religion. This became a problem in the struggle to control young people and secure the future generation in the name of communism or Mennonitism. Young Mennonites failed to join Soviet organizations and instead were active in religious

youth groups organized by ministers often disguised as choirs (166). A central issue concerned the schools, an area over which Mennonites had developed a degree of control in Tsarist times. After the Revolution Mennonites supported Soviet laws which declared a strict separation of church and state. By appealing to this principle they suggested that schools should be a neutral territory where neither religion nor atheism was taught. This position was first formulated in 1924 by the *Kommission für Kirchenangelegenheiten* (KfK), although Brandes and Savin seem unaware of this. In Siberia this argument was reasserted in 1926 in a remarkable "Memorandum" addressed to the Soviet authorities by Johann F. Dirksen, leader of the Mennonites in the Slavgorad region (181-83; 447). Unfortunately, like a similar resolution which was submitted to the Soviet leadership by the KfK leaders meeting in Moscow in 1926, it appeared that Mennonites were setting conditions under which they would cooperate with the authorities.

The Mennonites believed they had something to bargain with. First they were leaders in the economic reconstruction of Siberia, ably assisted by the extensive economic support from the AMLV. Secondly the threat of mass emigration, as in the 1870s, might gain concessions from the government. Brandes and Savin reveal that the emigration movement was a matter of major concern to the authorities. But as the AMLV was closed, emigration abroad was forbidden and the collectivization of private land began, the Mennonites suddenly realised they had nothing to bargain with. The rush of hopeful emigrants to Moscow in 1929-30, 73% of whom were Mennonites (297), and the international attention this attracted, has been known for some time. But here its impact at the local level in Siberia is discussed in detail for the first time. One official, noting the Mennonite's love of biblical citations, reported how they compared their position to that of the Jews, trapped in Pharaoh's Egypt (355). The Soviets, hoping to find an explanation for the desire to emigrate, carried out a careful analysis of the class origins of those involved (288-91). The figures reveal that all classes were involved, including poor Russian-Germans who according to ideology were supposed to support the Soviet state. The Soviets seemed puzzled by the continuing strength of religion and cultural identity among Russian-Germans and a lack of proper class-consciousness.

The emigration movement soon became connected with protests towards collectivization and *dekulakization*. This involved acts of mass resistance by Russian-Germans including a "strike" where farmers refused to plant grain. "Non-resistant" Mennonites were reported to be the strongest group involved in such protests (348) leading them to be described as "fanatics" (337-38). One group of Mennonites resorted to taking GPU officials hostage in an attempt to get a Mennonite "kulak" released from prison. Other Mennonites, however, accepted leadership positions on collective farms and one even became the head of the local NKVD.

Mennonite acts of resistance, combined with their extensive links with Mennonites living abroad, increased the suspicions of Soviet officials (390) and many were arrested. As famine followed collectivization and aid from abroad flowed in, Soviet distrust intensified. By now the Soviets had abandoned any hope that

revolution would soon sweep the world and felt threatened by both capitalist countries and the rise of fascist states. The Nazi accession to power in 1933 sealed the fate of many Mennonites, whether they cooperated with the Soviets or not. In 1934 a series of purges began in the Russian-German communities based around accusations of allegiance to fascist Germany (the alleged “*Hitler-Hilfe*” (389-406)) and acts of sabotage. This resulted in a marked increase in arrests, imprisonment and executions (406). Even so, these purges were not on the scale of those which were to follow in 1937/38. These purges impacted on all sectors of Soviet society but fell more heavily on the Russian-Germans, including Mennonites, because of their alleged class background, resistance to Soviet power and suspicions of their links to Nazi Germany. The authors report that during this time the number of Russian-Germans executed in Siberia was proportionately almost twice that of the Russian-Germans in Ukraine (424).

The book has an excellent subject and person index. The latter includes brief biographical details on a number of individuals, Soviet and Russian-Germans. A large number of Mennonite names are included and the fate of many makes for sad reading. Many Mennonites will find friends and relatives recorded. This is a very fine account of the fate of the Russian-Germans, including Mennonites, who pioneered the Siberian lands before the Revolution only to suffer so terribly under the Soviets.

James Urry  
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Gerald C. Ediger, *Crossing the Divide: Language Transition Among Canadian Mennonite Brethren 1940-1970*. Winnipeg, Man.: Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 2001. Pp. 236.

When Rudy Wiebe published his first novel, *Peace Shall Destroy Many* (1962), I read it and liked it. This Saskatchewan Mennonite Brethren (MB) youth had just finished his M.A. in English, and had been hired to be the new editor of the English *Mennonite Brethren Herald*. There was much excitement in the air because Frank Epp had just started another English paper, *The Canadian Mennonite*, in Altona. Now these two creative educated “Young Turks” would inspire those of us who had longed for English flagships in largely rural-German worlds. In less than a year however, Wiebe was turfed out of his position and was teaching at Goshen College. I never understood what really happened. Gerald Ediger’s book on the language transition helps explain why. The language transition involved much confrontation and disillusionment and brought many churches to the brink of schism, involving much denial, suppression, and resistance to change (Ediger’s words).

*Crossing the Divide* includes eight chapters, the first four devoted to setting

the scene of confrontation with the arrival of the Russlaender. Committees were organized to preserve the German language, alienation and conflict ensued between young and old and much disillusionment followed before the inevitable German surrender occurred in the end.

In Chapters 5 to 7 the author presents three in-depth case studies of MB churches in Winkler, Northend-Elmwood, and Southend-Portage Avenue, the last two in Winnipeg. Winkler, where the Mennonite Brethren began in Canada, shows the initial accommodation, gathering resistance, denial, suppression and manipulation before they were led to the brink of schism (all Ediger's words). The MBs who had stayed in Ukraine fifty years longer, had become better-to-do, more educated, and more attached to the German language. When they came to the prairies in the 1920s, German had become a major part of their higher status identity in Russia used to communicate richer, more refined ways of thinking and living. It would not be easy to give up these major advantages and exchange them for English, which really had not become that developed on the wild open prairies as yet, especially among the 1870s Mennonites.

The first Mennonite church was established in Winnipeg in 1907 (Northend MB church, which later became Elmwood MB), and faced a similar challenge. It began as a mission church serving other Germans in Winnipeg. They too were led into incremental bilingualism of German and English and, after much frustration, alienation and malaise, spent much of their energy staving off linguistic segregation between the young and the old. Here the enlightened proactive, persistent, skillful, long-term pastoral leadership of I.W. Redekopp was a major reason for successful transition and enlargement of the tent. Here the struggle between the valued German language and its internal congruence, and more genuine missionary outreach in English to the community, became a constant issue. These were choices between culture (language) and mission, both valued ends. Contradictions in the way church bulletins were prepared, committees were formed, services were held, and monies were spent seem unbelievable today.

Now I understand more clearly why Rudy Wiebe got into trouble in Winnipeg in 1962. Wiebe grew up in northern Saskatchewan where the transition from German to English had occurred sooner, and where resistance to accommodation had been less severe. When this newly-minted MB youth from Saskatchewan came to edit an English language *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, which many of the German stalwarts had fought against for years, he raised a serious red flag in the German-English bullring. Ediger quotes from Wiebe's inaugural editorial saying, "The time has come when some biblical frankness in the right places would be advisable." Had Wiebe grown up in the heart of "German" Manitoba, he might have toned down his brashness, but coming from "English" Saskatchewan myself and being the same age as he, I remember well that we had waited long, and now it was time. In the meantime Wiebe has become one of the best known Mennonite writers who has won two Governor General awards, and we heard him talk at McNally Robinson bookstore speaking to a standing-room audience in Winnipeg recently. The Executive Secretaries of both MCC Manitoba and MCC Canada (both MBs) sat at

the head table this time! The German Language Committee was dissolved in 1962 and has not been heard from since. What can we learn from all this?

The first lesson is that when culture (language) and mission clash, mission will win. We ask, "How could these better-educated 1920s immigrants not have seen that their youth were at stake?" The conflict between gathering too many eggs in one basket, where many may rot, and sharing good news, seems to be the age-old dilemma. When I called Ediger we wondered, "In what way is this large concentration of 25,000 Mennonites in Winnipeg in fifty churches doing the same thing today?" Is conflict between style of worship (music, etc.) and outreach the issue today? How are we doing?

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University of Manitoba

Esther Epp-Tiessen, *J. J. Thiessen: A Leader for his Time*. Winnipeg, Man.: CMBC Publications, 2001. Pp. 346.

Esther Epp-Tiessen has written a masterful biography of J.J. Thiessen of Saskatoon, a Mennonite church leader who stood at the centre of the life of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada for several decades beginning in the 1930s and ending in the 1960s. For sixteen of these years he was conference chairperson.

Thiessen was one of those who fled the Soviet Union in the 1920s for a new life in Canada. Born in 1893, he began life when the Russian Mennonite commonwealth was at its apex, enjoyed a devout and happy home life, was recognized early as a talented youngster, was exposed to excellent teachers and the renewal emphasis which flowed from Gnadenfeld and the schools in Halbstadt, and from his early years seems to have been blessed with a sense of balance in the way he integrated an appreciation for traditional Mennonite church and community life and openness to renewal.

As a young man he began a pattern which he continued throughout his life—showing a concern for the individual person while working to build bridges between people. It was a pattern that stood him in good stead, whether it was as mission worker in Saskatoon, minister and elder at First Mennonite Church in Saskatoon, chairperson of the Conference of Mennonites, chair of Canadian Mennonite Bible College or member of the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization or the Mennonite Central Relief Committee—to name a few of his involvements.

Epp-Tiessen's biography provides a vivid picture of Thiessen's early life and first ventures into a more public role. She describes the setting into which he was born and the conditions within the narrower Mennonite world and the wider Russian context admirably. For Thiessen and his wife Anna, the revolution and its aftermath were traumatic, but the optimistic nature with which he was blessed likely allowed him to recover more quickly than many, even though they lost a child and he once



narrowly escaped being hacked to death. Fascinating tidbits abound in the book. For example, when the emigration movement began, Thiessen was asked to accompany several echelons of emigrants to the Latvian border. On one such trip he met Vincent and Alice Massey en route to Moscow to represent the Massey Harris Company and helped them out as a translator. Massey later became the Canadian governor general and never forgot Thiessen.

Epp-Thiessen's biography does a number of things exceedingly well. She provides a context for Thiessen's story. One always gets a sense of the historical context and issues within which Thiessen was working. She fleshes out the personality of this leader. One gets a wonderful sense of his strengths and weaknesses, his habits, his relationship to others at home and publicly, his work patterns, and the way in which he exercised his leadership. She writes well. One of the very satisfying aspects of this biography is simply the good writing style which is interesting, forceful and clear. It is not repetitious and is illuminating.

Through the many years that Thiessen was involved in public life, the Conference of Mennonites went through major changes. Thiessen succeeded David Toews as chairperson of the Conference of Mennonites and lived through the change from a very personal style of leadership to one which was much more congregational, the change from German to the English, and the transition from a time when women had no voice to one when they did. He was the key mover in the founding of CMBC. Because of his roles, he was sometimes caught in the midst of controversies; invariably he tried to find mediating positions, though not always successfully. Though he never owned a car, he kept a very busy schedule and did much pastoral visiting—even hitchhiking with Saskatoon's mayor to get somewhere. His correspondence was enormous. His workload seemed energized by his interaction with people. Yet the spiritual purpose of his work seldom dropped from focus. It is hard to read his story and not be challenged on numerous levels.

There are some minor weaknesses in the book, such as the clash of this late twentieth-century author's sensibilities about the worldview of J.J. and Anna Thiessen. For example, she finds it virtually impossible to understand how Anna Thiessen could be so supportive of her husband's busy life. She buys into the interpretation that men went to war to demonstrate their "maleness." She argues that Thiessen's theology of suffering was likely not capable of responding to the circumstances brought on by someone like Stalin—an interesting perspective given that Thiessen was intimately aware of the nature of that suffering. Epp-Thiessen gives no indication of where a more sophisticated theology might go. In a few places, errors slipped by the proofreaders. To name two: the Kornelsen sisters are not pictured on page 163 of *Heritage Remembered* (footnote, 316); Thiessen's Halbstadt class reunion came after 53 years, not 43 (296).

But those are minor items. This is a wonderful biography. It should appeal to a wide range of readers far beyond the Mennonite church conference which Thiessen called his own.

Harold Jantz,  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Alle Hoekema, *Dutch Mennonite Mission in Indonesia: Historical Essays*. Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2001. Pp.148 (including index), soft cover.

Alle Hoekema is a Dutch missiologist whose Ph.D. dissertation (1994) focussed on indigenous Protestant theology in Indonesia. As a teacher at the Mennonite Seminary in Amsterdam his expertise includes the history of the Dutch Mennonite Mission in Indonesia. This volume (Number 22 in the Institute of Mennonite Studies' Occasional Papers) gives readers the opportunity to learn from a master researcher and writer through a collection of essays dealing with the stated subject.

In the introduction Hoekema states that the essays do not constitute a history; rather they are reflections on a history. This reviewer is familiar only with the broad outline of the story Hoekema describes, but so clear is his exposition that surface familiarity is enough. He deals with themes such as the motivations that led Dutch Mennonites to send out missionaries (they participated in the larger missionary picture of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but always aware of their Mennonite identity); the importance of learning the culture and language of the Indonesian people (such learning and the resulting emphasis on translating the scriptures were a source of significant stress between missionaries and mission agencies); connections with Mennonites from other parts of the world (especially the connection with the Russian Mennonite churches); and ecumenical relationships within Indonesia itself (expressing the constant desire to work with other believers, while maintaining a distinctly Mennonite identity).

Hoekema's clarity of thought and illustration help us to examine these themes in some detail. His consideration of ecumenical relationships among the churches in Indonesia illustrates this point. The Mennonite churches held onto their Mennonite distinctiveness, but felt pressure to work with other church groups. The size of the Christian population in a predominantly Muslim country was a significant factor in the move towards ecumenical relationships, alongside theological and political considerations. In the end, Mennonite churches tended to be able to work with other churches where no particular Mennonite distinctive was threatened. The drive towards a separate identity, however, also kept them apart from other churches even when a strategic partnership could have helped them

This situation sounds very like what we experience in North America, but with the overtones and shading specific to the Indonesian and Dutch contexts. Hoekema's analysis gives us clear insight with which to illumine our questions in our own context.

The chapter on connections with Mennonites from Russia gives more of the specific nature of Mennonite identity. He refers to "fourteen German-speaking Mennonites from South Russia who served as missionaries and nurses of [the Dutch Mennonite Mission] in Sumatra and Java between 1870 and 1940" (75). Exploring the ethnic and theological connections between the Dutch Mennonites and their cousins from Russia illuminates the way that Mennonite missionary impulses could merge with the broader scene.

A German missionary spokesman by the name of Friedrich Fabri espoused personal conversion combined with the propagation of the kingdom of God (83). He brought together individualism with a commitment to German colonization. The idea of colonies fitted well with the experience of the Mennonites from Russia. Although they gave to it a meaning quite different from Fabri's, filtered through their experience of Mennonite colonies, his language provided a way for them to enter into the missionary world of their day.

The tension between being truly Anabaptist and participating in the mission of the larger church remains with us today. The Mennonite church has held itself apart from others at some points and identified with them at others, often resulting in some confusion on the part of missionaries and supporters alike. Hoekema's work helps unravel the strands in the tapestry Mennonites have woven.

The limitations of this fine book are inherent in narrowly-focussed studies. It steps aside from larger issues in order to see clearly what was happening among Dutch Mennonites in Indonesia. Thus Hoekema does not try to answer larger issues of separation from the world and from other churches raised by the paragraph above. That is not his purpose. Instead he helps us to see what was happening in one place at one time. When we set it alongside other similar studies, we can move towards more general questions. The book is not intended as a work for general consumption. It succeeds as a snapshot of moments in the life of the Indonesian church. We need more such pictures – from a variety of perspectives and places.

Daryl Climenhaga  
Providence Theological Seminary

Isaac R. Horst, *A Separate People: An Insider's View of Old Order Mennonite Customs and Traditions*. Waterloo, ON and Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2000. . Pp. 262. \$20.79 Cdn.

Isaac R. Horst, *Separate and Peculiar: Old Order Mennonite Life in Ontario 'Bei sich schwer un ungewöhnlich: Alt Mennischde Weg vun Lewe in Ontario*. Waterloo, ON and Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001. Pp. 133. \$20.79 Cdn.

Isaac Horst, an Old Order Mennonite living in the Mount Forest, Ontario area, has written or compiled 32 books since he was 61 years of age. Most have been self-published; these are the first produced by a "major" publisher. Although an insider, Horst has always been closer to the fringe of the Old Order community. He grew up in the heart of the Waterloo County Old Order community, but readily admits he was not a very successful farmer. When the Ontario government began "consolidation of the public schools, it led the conservative Amish and Mennonite groups to

begin their own parochial schools in the mid-1960s. This gave Horst opportunity to pursue an interest in teaching in their schools. He also was an early leader in founding the Old Order community in Mount Forest, an hour away by car from Waterloo County.

Horst has always been interested in the “why” questions of life, and in a different context may have pursued higher education. One of Horst’s cousins, who has served many years as a Mennonite pastor in Toronto, recalled that Isaac’s grades in their one-room school were consistently better than his own.

Horst’s most important published works were his first, *Up the Conestogo* (Mt. Forest, ON: The Author, 1979), a narrative history of the Old Order Mennonites in Ontario, and *Close Ups of the Great Awakening* (Mt. Forest, ON: The Author, 1985), a history and analysis of the Mennonite Church divisions in the late nineteenth century that led to the present-day Mennonite Church, Old Order Mennonite Church and Evangelical Missionary Church. Particularly significant in the latter volume was his translation into English of many source documents formerly unavailable to the scholarly community. For Canadian Mennonites Horst was probably best known for his regular columns (1989-1997) in the *Mennonite Reporter*, reflecting on life in the Old Order community.

*A Separate People* and *Separate and Peculiar* are both “tourist” books, directed to persons who want to learn more about Old Order Mennonite customs and beliefs. *A Separate People* weaves many of Horst’s *Mennonite Reporter* columns into the narrative structure of tour leader for an “elderhostel” group (that includes Russian Mennonites) that visits the Waterloo Old Order community over several days. Horst has given lectures to such groups at Conrad Grebel University College, and has informally led tours on numerous occasions. He successfully addresses all typical questions of the outsider — the role of women, use of technology, apparent inconsistencies or illogical distinctions in practice, limits on education, care of the elderly, lack of missions, how church discipline works, and how young people are retained in the church, to name only a few. Although the narrative feels somewhat stitched together, *A Separate People* is the more substantial of the two books in the detail and rationale provided for particular practices and beliefs. If there is an underside to Old Order life, it is not explored here — but that was not the intent of the author or the publisher. There is no bibliography or index in the volume — a real shortcoming for students or others who use this book as an entrée into study of Old Order life. Another printing should include both.

*Separate and Peculiar* is a more puzzling book. It is the second edition of a work Horst self-published in 1983, with the addition of a parallel text in Pennsylvania German (Pennsylvania Dutch). This book uses a fictional narrative approach and briefly discusses some of the same practices covered in more depth in *A Separate People*. Some of the illustrations and the glossary of terms in *Separate and Peculiar* would have been helpful if added to *A Separate People*. The book’s unique “hook” is the Pennsylvania German text, but the author encounters the same issues as Low German writers. What spelling and grammar is to be used? Pennsylvania German in Ontario differs in significant ways from Pennsylvania

German in Pennsylvania. Horst has chosen to use a spelling system developed in Pennsylvania, with adjustments for Ontario pronunciation. The market for *Separate and Peculiar* is unclear, since both books are the same price and cover much the same material.

Nonetheless it is good to see Isaac Horst's insights on Old Order Mennonite life given wider circulation. Materials on the Amish are much more readily available, and it has often been difficult to suggest survey books on the unique Old Order community in Southern Ontario. *A Separate People* is a good beginning.

Sam Steiner,  
Conrad Grebel University College

Sharon Hartin Iorio, *Faith's Harvest: Mennonite Identity in Northwest Oklahoma*. Normanok: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999. Pp. xv + 320. Maps, photographs, appendix, bibliography, index. \$29.95 hardcover.

The Oklahoma Land Rush of 1893 is one of the stock scenes of Western movies. The line of wagons and horses racing headlong into open country at High Noon and pioneers competing with Sooners who claimed land a bit too early, are familiar stories. That German-speaking Russian Mennonites participated, along with other foreign immigrants, is rarely depicted. Nonetheless, seizing tracts of land in the former Cherokee Outlet was the beginning of many Mennonite communities in northwestern Oklahoma.

Sharon Iorio, associate professor of sociology at Wichita State University, portrays both the spectacular and the mundane in Oklahoma Mennonite history. The land rush, the introduction of hard winter wheat to the American grasslands, the persecutions of both world wars, the everyday exertions of faith and family, and the theme of immigrants becoming Americans all receive attention. Iorio traces the construction and reconstruction of Mennonite ethnic identity across several generations and establishes a claim for fundamental continuity in the midst of profound economic and social change.

Iorio's main approach is to utilize personal narratives and family histories in order to present Mennonite culture "as viewed by the individuals who inhabit it" (5). These sections of the book, about 40% of the text, are usually pieced together from interviews, newspaper accounts, recollections of children and grandchildren, diaries, and other primary and secondary sources. The remainder of the text provides sufficient, albeit skeletal, historical context to frame these personal experiences. In short, Iorio takes an ethnographic approach and allows the lives to represent themselves with very little commentary.

The personal accounts are valuable and will prove useful as sources of Mennonite experience, mainly Mennonite Brethren and General Conference

Mennonites of Russian ancestry. For example, the account of Harry Martens, who volunteered to participate in a military medical experience in a World War II Civilian Public Service camp, is positively chilling (217-226). Physicians sprayed his throat with scrapings from the throats of soldiers with “atypical pneumonia.” Later, Martens served in postwar relief efforts in the Mediterranean region.

Despite the inherent interest of such life histories, the book offers little that is new in terms of historiographical or theoretical frameworks for Mennonite history. Most citations are from internal sources, even those that make observations about broader political, economic, and social trends in the world at large. Iorio displays some of the typical limitations of insider ethnic history, although she claims the position of “marginality” (11) in relation to the groups she studied. The depiction of noble pioneers in the wilderness virtually erases Native American history. Iorio takes a filiopietistic point of view concerning heroic ethnic persistence of religious faith despite social and economic accommodation. She treats World War I as a traumatic period of forced assimilation without reference to the processes, such as the shift from German to English, that began before the war and continued afterwards. In sum, the greatest strength of the book—Iorio’s commitment to offer an insider point of view—is also its greatest weakness, as there is little basis for historical context or critical reflection on the personal narratives she has collected.

*Faith’s Harvest* offers fascinating and significant stories told by Mennonite men and women in northwestern Oklahoma. It represents a contribution to studies of Mennonites and related groups on the North American prairies and plains. However, historians should rush elsewhere for usable theoretical constructs in researching and writing Mennonite history.

Steven D. Reschly  
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Donald B. Kraybill and Carl F. Bowman, *On the Backroad to Heaven: Old Order Hutterites, Mennonites, Amish, and Brethren*. Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001. Pp. 330. \$29.95.

Donald Kraybill, a Mennonite, and Carl Bowman, a member of the Church of the Brethren, collaborate in producing this excellent study of four Old Order groups in North America: Hutterites, Mennonites, Amish, and Brethren. All four of these groups live off the beaten tracks of North American society or, as they say, on the backroads. All of them trace their roots to the radical Anabaptist reforms of the sixteenth century.

The authors’ stated purpose is to describe these four exceptional religious groups within the context of the United States, which they describe as an exceptional nation within the larger community of nations. The various Old Order groups are thus doubly exceptional.

The authors further seek to probe the secret of the success of these Old Order groups. Despite all the pressures from the larger, modern, aggressive, society within which they live, they are all doing well and growing rapidly. Rejecting much of the consumer and leisure-oriented forms of our society, government hand-outs and control, and the patterns of individualism, they have developed caring, supportive communities where people feel loved, accepted, and live fulfilling lives. What is their secret, and what can they teach us, the authors ask.

An introductory chapter describes the methodology, debunks some myths, and presents the authors' approach to the subject. They state that they are using a methodology of comparative cultural analysis: "We are interested in how groups construct meaning through symbolic objects and behaviors and how ritualized experiences transmit deep understandings about a group's social organization and worldview"(xiii).

The introduction is followed by four chapters, each dealing with one of the four groups. The chapters are well written, based on up-to-date information from numerous informants within the groups. The sections are sympathetically written to help the reader understand each of the group's beliefs and practices. Differences between the various sub-groups are noted.

The chapters dealing with the Hutterites and the Amish cover material about which much has been written. The authors note that the chapters about Old Order Mennonites and Brethren deal with subjects that are much less known and thus break new ground. All four chapters are sensitively written and express a profound, sympathetic understanding of the various groups.

These four chapters are followed by four chapters which deal with themes common to all of the groups. One chapter discusses common convictions, another the differences between the four groups in their perception of how "to get to heaven." A third chapter discusses "how each group constructs and sustains its distinctive identity as a Pilgrim people"(xiv). The final chapter "reflects on some of the ironies surrounding traditional communities in a postmodern world and considers some of the challenges they may face"(xiv).

The book is well documented with excellent footnotes and includes some fine photos. It is a very helpful book for those wishing to understand the Old Orders.

The one disappointing aspect of the book for Canadian readers is that the interpretation of exceptionalism is set so exclusively within a United States context. Even though the majority of Hutterites and sizeable numbers of Old Order Mennonites and Amish live in Canada, the interpretative setting of the book is American, and a somewhat triumphalist American understanding at that. A different framework that would have placed the Old Orders within a North American context would have been more helpful.

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Canadian Mennonite University

Alan Kreider and Stuart Murray, eds. *Coming Home: Stories of Anabaptists in Britain and Ireland*. Kitchener, ON and Scottsdale, PA: Pandora Press, 2000. Pp. 226. \$25.00.

Anabaptism has become a household term and is generally viewed positively in North American Mennonite communities. Elsewhere it can have many and quite mixed meanings. Some outsiders, however, who learn to understand Anabaptist views and meet adherents in real life, have now begun to feel like they are “coming home”.

When Eleanor and Alan Kreider left the USA to serve as missionaries in the British Isles, they came to a part of the world where “the A-word” had typically been connected with abuse and shame. It seemed that Anabaptism and the British Isles just did not go together.

Through short stories of sixty persons who began to “come home”, this slim volume makes it clear that, to a significant extent, this disjunction has changed. What has happened is not that a large number of new Mennonite congregations have sprung up, although several such as those in London and Wood Green, do exist. It is rather that many individuals (far more than those whose stories are included here) from many different Christian denominations and congregations have found something very right and basically biblical in the Anabaptist way, as they have learned to know it in the past three decades or so.

For Bob Allaway, pastor of the Eldon Road Baptist Church at Wood Green, London, it was the discovery of “Aa new way of doing church.” Trisha Dale of Farnborough and subscription secretary of the Anabaptist Network (which has become the gathering place of the “homecomers”), feels that “the metaphor of journey is more helpful than that of warfare.” Pippa Julings of Leeds discovered a “vision of wholeness of Life and Faith” among those who were seeking to walk the Anabaptist path of Christian faith. Derek and Margaret Faux of Birmingham found the experience of “living as Brothers and Sisters and sharing the whole of life” life-changing.

Reading these stories is thought-provoking and challenging. The fact is, of course, that similar discoveries are being made in other areas of the world. Is there something here that some of us “oldtimers” have never noticed ourselves?

Several excellent essays by the editors and others recall the difficult path of the Anabaptist idea in the British Isles. They also explain how the Anabaptist Network came into being ten years ago. A new journal, *Anabaptism Today*, is a key vehicle in seeking to extend the invitation to others to “try it”. It is creating unity in this dynamic and exciting new community.

Stories of various individuals may still leave an impression of some fragmentation. Some accounts are quite short; others are longer and range over many aspects of experience. The book succeeds in bringing greater clarity to a larger notion of Christian faithfulness for those encountering the Anabaptists for the first time.



Alan Kreider is Director of the Centre for the Study of Christianity and Culture at Regent Park College in Oxford, England. He and his wife Eleanor began their work in Great Britain and Ireland in 1974. Their ministry (they often speak together at events to which they are invited) is often mentioned appreciatively in the stories shared in this volume. Stuart Murray is Oasis Director of Church Planting and Evangelism at Spurgeon's College in London. He has been editor of *Anabaptism Today* since its inception nearly a decade ago.

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John S. Oyer, *They Harry the Good People Out of the Land: Essays on the Persecution, Survival and Flourishing of Anabaptists and Mennonites*. Goshen, IN.: Mennonite Historical Society, 2000. Pp. 321, Bibliography of Oyer's works, and index.

The title of this collection of essays by John S. Oyer, longtime editor of the *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, Director of Goshen College's Historical Library, and Professor of History at that college, reflects Oyer's later interest in the history of the persecution of the Anabaptists. The subtitle of the book points to the varied content that is divided into five sections of loosely related essays, moving from "Anabaptist Beginnings" to "Contemporary Themes" and "Personal Essays." The essays, though posthumously published as a fitting tribute to Oyer, are so varied that the reviewer is hard-pressed to find one, or even several, common threads that hold the disparate parts together, despite the valiant attempt by John Roth, the editor, to do so in his subtitle. This reviewer will therefore pick and choose as he wishes, having become fearless in light of his pending retirement.

The first essay in Part I, entitled "The Reformers Condemn the Anabaptists," delivered as a lecture in 1995, derives largely from Oyer's 1964 book on the same topic. The second essay, "Two Anti-Anabaptist Hymns", which was a paper delivered in 1985, presents Oyer to us as an astute music critic as well as historian. Especially the first hymn, written in the form of a Meistersong, probably for a competition in Nuremberg, is remarkable for its relatively irenic tone and fairly decent understanding of the movement. The third essay is entitled, "Responses of Sixteenth-Century Anabaptists to Persecution...." The very first sentence of this essay seems to underestimate how widespread thinking about religious liberty in the 16th century was, for Erasmus' 1524 "Inquisitio de Fide" gives classic expression to the former and is indicative of how Christian Humanists felt about the matter. And there were others, of course. But the point of the essay is to demonstrate how Anabaptists responded to persecution, and it does so under five subheadings: "They Protested" (often in the form of written complaints, at other times in

disputations): “They went underground”; “They fled the entire region”; “They suffered persecution (the true Church way)”; and “They forgave their persecutors.”

Part II deals with the transition from “Anabaptists to Mennonites.” Here the first essay examines the transition in terms of the following criteria: 1) the move away from early evangelizing; 2) an increasing focus on the Gospels of Matthew and Luke as emphasis on godly living rather than evangelization; 3) borrowing from other religions, especially later Pietism; 4) growing toleration and a changed attitude toward suffering; and 5) occupational change—from crafts and trades to farming. One major aspect that Oyer does not mention is the transition in the name itself, that is, the transition from “Anabaptist” to “Mennonite.” That transition derives from the distinction Dutch followers of Menno sought to make between themselves and the Muensterites, a distinction recommended to Countess Anna of East Friesland by the reformer John a’Lasko. This distinction came to be written into Danzig city law and became a commonplace of Prussian and Russian Mennonite historiography. According to Christian Neff, the term “Mennonite” became a “Schutzname” that protected Anabaptists from the consequences of being termed a “Wiedertaeufer”—a term synonymous with being a Muensterite. There is therefore perhaps more to this transition than Oyer thinks.

Two other essays in this section, the first on the differences between Swiss and Dutch Mennonite participation in the cultural activities of their respective countries, makes the point that Dutch Mennonites participated much more extensively than did the Swiss. The second deals with Jan Luyken, a Dutch Mennonite artist, to make the point in miniature. The last essay deals with “Bernese Anabaptism at the time of the Amish Division.” It does so by analyzing Georg Thormann’s “*Prober-Stein: oder schriftmaessige und aus dem wahren innerlichen Christentumb gewissenhafte Prueffung des Taeuffertums*” written in 1693. That book regarded Anabaptists, because of their lifestyle, as ideal Christians.

Part IV consists of three essays on contemporary themes. They are entitled, “Is there an Amish Theology?” “Menno Simons: Why Should We Revere Him?” and “Jan Luyken’s Copper Plate Etchings: Lost then Rediscovered.” Part IV consists of another three essays on personal matters, two of which deal with Oyer’s Civilian Public Service experience and the lessons one can derive from it, while the third is a reprint of Oyer’s essay in “Why I am a Mennonite.”

The last section contains one longer essay on the Anabaptists in Esslingen, nearly a minor monograph in its own right. It is a careful study of the Esslingen Anabaptists from the 1520s to the end of the century, though Oyer concentrates on the first 30 to 35 years of that period. In the essay Oyer shows himself to be a sensitive, non-judgmental historian in his treatment of stalwart defenders of the faith who remained true to the end, those who recanted, and those who — as Nicodemites — accommodated themselves to the persecution and other pressures of the age in one way or another. He castigates the dichotomy some scholars have drawn between South German and Swiss Anabaptists as false (193), rejects the argument that these Anabaptists at least — perhaps even Anabaptists as such — derived from the lower classes (212), limits, if not rejects, the polygenesis thesis by

arguing that Hans Hut — although he had baptized one of the Esslingen leaders — had no noticeable influence on the group (261), and ends with a general discussion of their theology which he regards as remarkably similar to that of the Swiss Brethren.

This is a careful and detailed analysis of the Esslingen Anabaptists which shows Oyer at his best, but it also leaves this reader somewhat displeased. For Oyer, while doing excellent micro-history, in general fails to present us with the larger picture. It would have been nice had he placed his Esslingen Anabaptists into the larger context of the Radical Reformation, perhaps even also of the Reformation itself. Perhaps, going from the Swiss branch of the movement with its emphasis on humility, the above approach was the one Oyer felt most comfortable with. But my preference would have been for him to take on a little more of the entrepreneurship of the Dutch brothers he himself described in his essay on the differences between the two branches of Mennonites. On the other hand, Oyer's brand of humility could well be used in historical circles!

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Delbert F. Plett, ed., *Old Colony Mennonites in Canada: 1875 to 2000*.  
Steinbach: Crossway Publications Inc., 2001. Pp. 196. \$20.00.

Despite the fact that the Old Colony Mennonite Church (first known as the Reinländer Mennoniten Gemeinde) was the largest Mennonite denomination in western Canada to emerge from the influx of Kanadier Mennonite immigrants during the 1870s, the historical literature on this group remains limited. To say, therefore, that a book featuring their experience in Canada is long overdue is an understatement. Editor Delbert Plett is to be commended for using his considerable energy and resourcefulness in finding and compiling the material in this volume as a response to this lacuna. My appreciation for this book moves beyond an academic interest in extending the borders of Mennonite history in Canada: the volume is helpful in understanding better my own Old Colony Mennonite ancestors who homesteaded in southern Manitoba and northern Saskatchewan.

Plett introduces the book as “an anthology only and not a systematic history.” As such it is a helpful collection of miscellaneous items, some of which have been published elsewhere, that is organized into five sections. The first section builds the historical backdrop for the more detailed material that follows. Particularly helpful is John J. Friesen's lengthy overview of the Reinländer Mennoniten Gemeinde, in which he identifies the factors that prompted a mass migration of Mennonites out of Russia during the 1870s, and the challenges facing the new immigrants during their first decades in western Canada. The second section features the life of Johann Wiebe, first *Aeltester* of the Reinländer in Manitoba. A short biographical sketch,

together with a valuable collection of letters by and about Wiebe, offer a fascinating glimpse into the mind of a key spiritual leader.

The third section contains a compilation of biographical material portraying a range of Mennonite community and church leaders including several individuals who served the Old Colony people either as delegates scouting and negotiating immigration options, or as leaders in the church. Excerpts from travelogues, letters, diaries, and autobiographical sketches offer first-hand accounts of the struggles faced by a religious community adjusting to a new region. The fourth section contains a series of congregational histories outlining the institutional development of the Old Colony Church in western Canada, Ontario and Texas. They provide a general chronology of major denominational events, and are helpful for understanding how the migrations out of Canada during the 1920s, and the migrations back into Canada after 1970, have repeatedly reshaped the Old Colony demographics in Canada. The volume concludes with a collection of short reports related to the celebrations commemorating the 125th anniversary of the founding of the Mennonite West Reserve. Although more attention could have been given to correcting spelling mistakes and stylistic inconsistencies, the inclusion of an index, along with numerous illustrations and photographs, enhance the value of this volume.

The criticism, made by several contributors, of a longstanding historiographical prejudice against the Old Colony Mennonites is certainly in order. The partiality offers an important explanation for why the story of these “conservative” Mennonites has languished in the shadows of the (ostensibly) more sophisticated, urbane and “progressive” Mennonite groups for so long. The description of Old Colony Mennonites as “culturally retarded” (see, for example, the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*) exemplifies how the denomination has sometimes been marginalized by Mennonite historians. The sympathetic treatment that the Old Colony Mennonites receive in this volume is a refreshing change.

The desire to present a sympathetic account of the Old Colony Mennonites is laudable, but, as is often the case in first-generation denominational histories, it is difficult to keep sympathy and appreciation from veering towards romanticized hagiography or apologia. One clearly gets the sense that the Old Colony Church is a house divided. But missing from the volume is a thorough analysis of the issues that precipitated the numerous relocations, scattering its members and leaving the Old Colony people a kind of diaspora. Estimates cited in the book indicate that descendants of the original 4,000 Reinländer immigrants today total approximately 150,000. Yet the baptized membership of the Old Colony Church in Canada today numbers less than 8,000. Where have all the people gone? And, more importantly, why?

Further, Plett’s frequent reference to the Old Colony’s “Gospel-centric” way of life begs for further theological scrutiny. The Old Colony are well known for their desire to preserve the religious traditions inherited from their forebears. But the religious practices and theological expressions of the Old Colony Mennonites in Canada are not, and have never been, an exact preservation of those left by their

sixteenth-century Anabaptist ancestors. The Old Colony Mennonites too, like every other religious group throughout history, made adjustments in response to changing cultural contexts. Largely unexamined in this volume are the questions of how, and more importantly why, Old Colony Mennonite religious practices and theological traditions evolved over time.

Several contributors level legitimate criticism against those whose superficial understanding of Old Colony theology and spirituality led to careless caricatures of all Old Colony Mennonites as unbelievers, and whose efforts to evangelize these Mennonites was often accompanied by a condescending paternalism. However, the relationship between evangelical Protestant theological influences and the Old Colony Mennonites in Canada is considerably more complex than editor Plett allows. His inflammatory language and frequent diatribes against those—to borrow a phrase from Judith Viorst—“terrible, horrible, no-good, very bad” “Separatist-Pietists,” a self-styled moniker used to denote especially the Mennonite Brethren and the Evangelical Free churches as “predators” and subversive minions of Satan, damage the credibility of what is otherwise a highly laudable initiative. His refusal (or inability?) to nuance his discussion about the Separatist-Pietists” more carefully leaves Plett’s ability to interpret the Old Colony story and to engage historiographical literature in a responsible and credible manner open to question.

The sad irony is that Plett’s harangues (however well intentioned) appear to embody a similar crusading zeal and patronizing prejudice he accuses the “Separatist-Pietists” of manifesting towards Old Colony Mennonites. While the Old Colony Church was, and is still, a place of spiritual nurture and sustenance for many, it is also true that some did not find the Old Colony Church and theology a congenial home, and not always because they were “brainlessly stampeding after alien religious cultures” as Plett suggests. Such a general pronouncement only reinforces the worn stereotypes of these people as ignorant by discounting their ability to make choices and veils the range of possible reasons for such choices. Regardless of whether one agrees with the critics of the Old Colony Church’s theology and actions, the failure to include a more even-handed analysis of the group’s internal conflicts, and its relationship to other Mennonite and Protestant groups, limits the usefulness of the volume in promoting genuine understanding and respectful dialogue. Despite the unfortunate presence of Plett’s editorial hobby-horse, the book marks an important contribution to the understanding Old Colony Mennonites in Canada.

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Christoph Ramstein, *Die Evangelische Predigerschule in Basel: Die treibenden Kraefte und die Entwicklung der Schule*. Basler und Berner Studien zur historischen und systematischen Theologie, Band 70. Bern: Peter Lang, 2000. Pb., 257 pp.

During the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, many Mennonites from Russia studied in various European universities and seminaries. These included schools such as the Hamburg Baptist Theological Seminary, Barmen Theological Seminary, Berlin Bible School (later Wiedenest), St. Chrischona, and the University of Basel. In Basel itself, in fact, four theological institutes need to be distinguished from each other: the Theological Faculty of the University of Basel, the Basler Mission, Pilgermission St. Chrischona, and the Evangelische Predigerschule (6). Some Mennonites, like the well-known Benjamin H. Unruh, attended several of these institutions.

The book gives a historical background of the school from its formal beginnings in 1876, the leading personalities that helped to shape the school, its general theological and cultural orientation, and the circumstances that led to its closing in 1915, although attempts to reopen it continued for a number of years.

There are a number of references to Mennonites in the book, although the lack of an index makes it difficult to locate these. Ramstein indicates that the first Mennonite to attend the school was Jakob Quiring, in the summer of 1894. Because of tuberculosis, however, he could not proceed beyond the first year (p. 169). There is a brief biography of Quiring by Cornelius Krahn in the Supplement to Vol. IV of the *Mennonite Encyclopedia* which indicates that Quiring attended from 1893-95, which is therefore probably not quite accurate. Others who attended the Predigerseminar and are mentioned include Salomon S. Ediger, A. B. Enns, and (Franz?) Froese, who left because of AKraenlichkeit und Glaubensschuetterung@ (177). More interesting are the references to Jakob Rempel (1883-1941?), who attended the University of Basel and the Predigerschule between 1906-1912, and Benjamin Unruh, who also attended both between 1900 and 1907. Ramstein states that Unruh and Rempel Aversuchten in dieser Zeit, in Russland eine Anstalt nach dem Vorbild der Predigerschule aufzubauen und dafuer Unterstuetzung aus Basel zu erhalten@ (p. 205. See further Harry Loewen, and my ). A lengthy note cites from extensive correspondence between Rempel and Eduard Riggerbach and the efforts to establish a school in Russia as well as to secure support for a library.

The notes, tables and extensive citation of archival sources suggest that there is further work to be done on the Mennonite students who attended the school and the impact the school had on the Mennonites in Russia.

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Henry D. Remple, *From Bolshevik Russia to America: A Mennonite Family Story*. Afton, MN: Pine Hill Press, Inc, 2001. Hardcover. Pp. 366. \$29.00 (US).

Memoirs of Mennonites from Russia and the Soviet Union have become a very special genre of research and writing in North America. Some will say the stories are really all more or less alike, and it can be conceded that many themes do reoccur. But each one is still an individual account of what has been experienced, and these are never identical. Remple's story, as told here, is a case in point.

Henry's parents, Dietrich and Aganetha (Fast) Remple, were part of a group of families who decided to leave the recently-formed Soviet Union and emigrate to the West if possible. They hoped to do this by traveling via the internationalized port of Batum on the Black Sea to Constantinople to ports in Western Europe and then on to the USA. Six families left their homes together on 6 April 1922. It turned out that about 300 people were in the total body attempting the same trip.

The story is the sketch of an odyssey undertaken under great stress, enormous uncertainties, unimaginable deprivations, and with much loss in every way. That loss would include the death of eight of the eleven-member Remple family before any of them could leave Batum. That would eventually leave only Henry with his two sisters, Agatha and Agnes, able to use the last coins sewed up in their clothes, to book passage and succeed in reaching their goal. By 20 October 1923, they had reached the homes of their Nebraska Mennonite sponsoring hosts in the town of York, where a very new chapter of life would open up immediately.

*From Bolshevik Russia to America* is based on a diary which Henry kept from about 1923 to 1928 and the memories of his sisters, along with other data which could be gathered by the writer. The book is remarkable for its detail and vivid rendering of first-hand reports of the three Remples into one account. A rich collection of photos, some excellent maps with other visuals, and an excellent foreword by Dr. Paul Toews of Fresno, California, augment the account.

The author, who recently celebrated his 93th birthday in Lawrence, Kansas where he lives after the passing of his wife, Mariana, is quite frank about some of the negative attitudes of Nebraska Mennonites toward these new Russian immigrants. But he also acknowledges with great warmth those who made their new experience a positive one, among them his own host parents, Cornelius (C.D.) and Bertha Epp.

Henry himself took an early interest in education, so his story is also about the making of a psychologist. His marriage to Mariana Lohrenz of Hillsboro, Kansas, and the raising of their children, is naturally woven into the story.

There is a touching poignancy in the words of the author's summary: "Agatha, Agnes and I have often looked back with gratitude at how it became possible for each of us to grow into a secure and mature adulthood as we made it through the years of adjustment to a new country with its unique societies, learned a new language, and became 'at home' with an extended family through the depression and WWII, establishing our families and enjoying church and community activities,

living lives of service to others...remaining true to the ideals of our mother and father, and their Mennonite tradition and teachings.”

One cannot begin to review details here. The volume is being distributed by the author’s son-in-law, Loring W. McAllister of Afton, Minnesota, and is well worth its price. The author has given us all something significant which is not just another immigrant story. It is a fresh testimony to courageous survival, enormous perseverance, energetic living, hard work and strong Christian faith which were all part of the lives of the Remples who “made it,” and thankfully have taken the time to tell us how it really was.

Lawrence Klippenstein,  
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Henry Schapansky, *The Old Colony (Chortitza) of Russia: Early History and First Settlers in the Context of the Mennonite Migrations*. New Westminster, BC: Henry Schapansky, 2001. Pp. 519. \$39.95.

Over the past decade, Henry Schapansky has earned a well-deserved reputation as the foremost Russian Mennonite genealogist. He has been a life-saver to hundreds of family historians with whom he has unselfishly shared his extensive knowledge and collection of primary sources. His village-by-village analysis of Old Colony pioneers was published in the 1980s in the journal, *Mennonite Family History*.

The publication of this book gathers all this material, plus updates and corrections, into one book, making it a state of the art resource for anyone originating from Chortitza Colony or its daughter colonies. The listing of colony leaders and their genealogical origins will be a valuable resource.

Schapansky has included a historical introduction (1-118), which provides the first integrated history of the Russian Mennonites from a Flemish as opposed to the pro-Czarist, pro-Pietist or Molotschna Colony triumphalist views characterizing previous histories, with the notable exception of James Urry’s *None but Saints*.

Schapansky’s account opens with a retrospective to the Reformation and a survey of the Flemish diaspora in the 1530s from Flanders and Brabant (the southern and Spanish Netherlands) to the northern Dutch provinces and the Drierfriesland (the Frisia-triplex) — East and West Friesland and Groningen (21). Other refugees fled along the trade routes to Danzig and the Vistula Delta in Royal Poland, finding there a degree of toleration.

Schapansky analyzes the emigration from Prussia to New Russia by contrasting the pre- and post- Napoleonic War periods (84). Those who immigrated earlier did so partly to preserve their traditional Anabaptist teachings and their *Ordnung* based on the principles of equality, “grass-roots” democracy, empowerment of women, etc. The majority of those Mennonites who emigrated later were influenced



by Pietism (mainly of the separatistic variety), and did a great deal to interfere with the peaceful functioning of the Delta-Flemish Gemeinden in the Black Sea region (97).

Schapansky's analytical thesis results in conclusions almost diametrically opposite to those of previous historical schools. For example, the matter of delegate Jakob Hoepfner (1746-1826) was used by historians P. M. Friesen, Peter Hildebrand, and D. H. Epp to bring the pioneer Flemish Gemeinde into disrepute, thereby laying the groundwork for their own interpretations.

From Schapansky's viewpoint, the Delta-Flemish wished to re-establish their Enlightenment-influenced, democratically-structured communities on the Russian steppe. Hoepfner and a small group, on the other hand, envisioned a greater role for the Russian government with benevolent autocratic rule and progressive economic leadership (111).

Schapansky points out that the charges against Hoepfner were not laid by the Flemish Gemeinde, as has usually been claimed, but came as a result of the report of Samuel Kontenius, sent by the Imperial Government in Petersburg to investigate complaints coming out of Chortitza as well as the Lutheran Colony of Josephthal. The Flemish tried to deal with the issue internally according to biblically-grounded traditions, and in fact did so successfully with Johann Bartsch, the other delegate (116). Bartsch submitted to the ban and was quickly restored to full fellowship in the Gemeinde and quietly played a continuing role in the development of the Colony.

Later historians, of course, added a pro-Molotschna and pro-Pietist bias to much of what was written about the Old Colony people, which makes Schapansky's work particularly helpful as a much needed corrective. Those who may be sceptical about all this revisionism may wish to compare the recently published 1801 Old Colony census (Reger and Plett, *Diese Steine*, Steinbach, 2001, 654-665), which shows the long-suffering Chortitzers to be rather well-off compared to the supposedly much wealthier 1803-1804 immigrants, as shown in the 1808 Molotschna census (Unruh, *Ostwanderungen*, Karlsruhe, 1955, 304-330).

As a reviewer of such an excellent work I am hesitant to quibble about a few errors in grammar or style. Certainly a second reading by a qualified editor would have eliminated some of these errors. Given the panoramic scope of the Schapansky thesis, critics will find the lack of footnotes a serious drawback. An index would have been helpful, but admittedly it is difficult to index a genealogical work consisting largely of names.

Little of what Schapansky has to say is totally new. What is new is the way he has extrapolated the material from primary and secondary sources integrating it into a coherent digestible account. Those who prefer to absorb their history from fiction will find an equally excellent parallel account to Schapansky's work in the recently published best-selling novel by Rudy Wiebe, *Sweeter than all the World*, (Toronto, 2001, 438). This is a book that all conservative Mennonites of Russian Mennonite background should read.

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Edna Schroeder Thiessen and Angela Showalter, *A Life Displaced: A Mennonite Woman's Flight from War-Torn Poland*. Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2000. Pp. 222. \$24.00.

The life story of an individual can often be an eloquent window through which to view and understand larger historical events and eras. In some cases, personal memoirs, whether written or oral, function mainly to confirm the master narratives of which they are part. In other cases, however, individual experiences nuance, or indeed sometimes contradict, the narrative accepted as a group's historical memory. The memoir of Edna Schroeder Thiessen contains both "harmony and dissonance" (22) with the larger Mennonite story. *A Life Displaced: A Mennonite Woman's Flight from War-Torn Poland*, illuminates the dramatic and tragic history of Polish Mennonites during the World War II, a story that has received lesser treatment than the exodus of Soviet Mennonites from Ukraine during the same years. At the same time, this book is a chronicle of one woman's experience of war-time survival, and thus has universal value well apart from Mennonite history.

Edna Schroeder Thiessen was born in Poland in 1926 and immigrated to Saskatchewan, Canada in 1949. Her memoir is based on interviews done in 1989 with Rachel Fisher, a former Mennonite Central Committee worker who met Edna in Europe, and in 1996 with Angela Showalter, a former history student at Goshen College in Indiana. The memoir is published as an edited first-person narrative, with an introduction by Showalter. The text is supplemented with photographs and primary documents.

Edna's memoir, focused on the years of World War II and immediately following, reveals a number of themes. The theme of wartime family fragmentation is painfully illustrated in Edna's life story. Like other families, Edna was separated from her family repeatedly throughout the war. Both of her older brothers were conscripted into the German army, one of whom died on the Russian front in 1941. When the Soviet army occupied their area in early 1945, Edna's father was arrested and never seen again. Edna herself was taken prisoner and separated from her mother and sister. Her three-month walk to freedom all alone as a young woman defies imagination.

The dilemma of national and ethnic identity faced by European Mennonites during the war is another theme acutely apparent in Edna's story as she sorts out the implications of being a German-speaking Polish national whose homeland becomes contested territory in the years preceding and during the war. As a young girl Edna always considered herself Polish, but as war approached her German ethnicity became a liability and like other *Volksdeutsche* and Jews, she felt animosity from formerly friendly neighbours. Under German occupation, she was forced to attend training camps where Polish-raised and educated young people were taught to be "real Germans."

In 1945, when the Soviets advanced from the east to occupy Poland, Edna found herself working for 'fellow' Poles as a slave labourer. The retribution enacted

against ethnic Germans by Polish soldiers and civilians was fierce. Edna remembers this as the "hardest time for me" though her memoir only briefly describes the torture and abuse she experienced. Even speaking a few German words resulted in beatings so severe she could not walk for several days. Despite over two years of hard labour and harsh treatment in Polish prison camps, in 1947 Edna considered obtaining Polish citizenship in the hope that greater rights would allow her to return to school and search for her family. It was while pursuing the process of citizenship that Edna met up with Mennonite Central Committee workers Bob and Rachel Fisher, who advised her instead to attempt an escape to the west. Her dramatic three-month walk to western Germany across dangerous borders and with little more than the clothes on her back is a profound testament to Edna's courage and will to survive.

Angela Showalter is to be commended not only for bringing this amazing memoir to publication, but also for including Edna's own reflections on the difficult path towards telling her story. Although published memoirs from this era in Mennonite history are becoming numerous, Edna Schroeder Thiessen's story, because of its candid insights, superior editing, and unique location in the Polish experience, is especially valuable as both historical document and a gripping read.

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John B. Toews, ed. and trans., *The Diaries of David Epp, 1837 - 1843*. Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 1999.

This is an extraordinary little book. John B. Toews warrants congratulations for bringing this diary out of the dark corners of the archives where very few people seem to have consulted it. By translating and editing it, Toews has made it accessible to the reading world. The diary's worth is readily apparent. Its very dates, 1837-1843, make it worth reading for it predates by a generation other published diaries of Mennonites in Russia, those by Jacob Epp and David Stoesz, and other detailed diaries by Dietrich Gaeddert and Abraham Reimer. It is a valuable document, too, because its author's personality and life are revealed with such richness. Little is known about this particular David Epp in the English literature: Harvey Dyck, who used the diary in his "The Judenplan Experiment" published in John Friesen's *Mennonites in Russia*, describes this David Epp as "the most influential Chortitza churchman of his day....well-read and deeply pious." Still he is overshadowed everywhere by his father, Elder David Epp (1750-1802), his brother Jacob Epp, and his nephews David H. and Dietrich H. Epp. The *Mennonite Encyclopedia* makes no mention of him and other important works, James Urry's *None But Saints* and P.M. Friesen's *Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia*, for example, mention Epp only in passing.

Yet as Toews notes in his introduction, here was an “influential leader.” (16) Epp was rigorous in establishing “cultural and intellectual links with Europe” (14) and “very active in the establishment of the [Chortitza secondary] school.” (15) Moreover he was “a deeply pious and utterly sincere Christian pilgrim,” (20) ready at every turn “to express his impatience with the stupidities...of his fellow Mennonites.” (9) He was firmly rooted in a communitarian understanding of Christianity, avoiding talk of “ecstasy of conversion,” but “work[ing] out his faith with ‘fear and trembling.’” (21) He was a family-oriented person, “an affectionate and caring father.” (26) He also lived at an important juncture in Russian Mennonite history: his contemporaries included reformer Johann Cornies and Rev. Jacob Warkentin; he lived during the founding of Bergthal Colony, experienced the transition from sheep to wheat production and witnessed the end of the difficult frontier times and the beginning of prosperity.

So, why has it taken so long to reproduce this rich document? It is easy to imagine that early readers of the diary concluded that its author simply was too honest. The diary by its very frankness will recast the history of Mennonites in Russia of the time, with its emphasis on the Cornies’ reforms, despair over ecclesiastical disputes, and recitations of Czarist admiration. Here is a depiction of an agrarian world that is a seething mixture of plaintive chiding, sexual license, naked greed, tearful forgiveness, crafty thefts, infant mortality, female assertion, daily quarrel, ceaseless motion and damning village gossip. It reveals a life filled with colour, smell, and sound. It features a litany of fear, impatience, jealousy, suspicion, hope and joy. This world contains astonishing events: a visit by an heir-apparent to the Russian throne, a case of child murder, a terrible fire, an earthquake, a woman physically assaulting a man. Bizarre events intersect the astonishing moments: vendors filling eggs with sand, youth burning straw effigies, and farmers doing penal work. As Toews explains, the nature of the diary entries come with the territory of being an elder of a church that demanded enforcement of biblical moral standards. As such, the elder became privy to the most morally decrepit events in the community. There is no reason, however, to believe that this community was any different than that of any other. Only its honest portrayal is unprecedented.

In the process of writing this diary Epp also reveals the complex array of social relationships in Chortitza Colony. Generations clash as elders confront youthful rowdiness and chicanery. Ethnicities interact when occasionally Lutherans are baptized as Mennonites and when Mennonites run off with Russian consorts and join the Orthodox church. Gendered relationships are created, women leave abusive husbands, husbands are chided by women, men meet to discuss female behaviour, and in the end, both women and men receive identically structured obituaries, no privileging of one sex above the other. Religious discourses converge, with Epp using a remarkably wide range of religious imagery that puts to question any simplistic dichotomy between Pietist and Conservative Mennonites. The boundary between church and state is crossed monthly, as church and village jostle for influence. And church leadership is proactive, a daily intervening force that leaves no challenge to its moral authority unheeded, even if laced with all-too-frequent

frustrating ineffectiveness.

This book sheds new light on the everyday life of early nineteenth century Russia. John B. Toews has served the reading public with courage. He has also offered a translation that is clear and eloquent. His introduction is a useful survey of Epp's world and Epp himself is given a heartfelt and sympathetic portrayal, an honest man holding a gospel of the everyday. A history of the document itself, the Epp diary, would have been an invaluable addition to the introduction. As it stands, this diary is an important tool in the quest to understand not only the early nineteenth century Mennonite mind, but the mindset of agrarian Mennonites and indeed rural Europeans and North Americans, in general.

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Jakob Warkentin. *Die deutschsprachigen in Paraguay im Spannungsfeld staatlicher Kultur- und Entwicklungspolitik*. Münster/ New York/München/ Berlin: Waxmann Verlag, 1998. Pp. 444. including bibliography.

This impressive, scholarly study of "German" education in Paraguay provides much more information and analysis than one might expect from a dissertation on pedagogy. Dr Warkentin here lays out in breadth and depth the history of schooling and culture in the various German and Mennonite colonies of Paraguay. His methodical and objective description of even the most tempestuous events of the so-called "völkische Zeit" is thorough and well-annotated. This is an important history book, carrying forward the work of the study conference held at the Institutio Biblico Asuncion in 1993, published as *Die Mennoniten in Paraguay. Vergangenheit, Gegenwart, Zukunft*, edited by Gerhard Ratzlaff (reviewed in *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 12 [1994], 241).

A first section deals with "developmental and cultural-political" contextual concerns, laying a careful foundation by describing the establishment of the German settlements. A second part, the main one, describes and analyses the several "histories" of the settlement schools, beginning with the German settlements of Alto Parana, Villarrica, and others, before moving to the Mennonite settlements, which are treated in detail. A final section considers the role and importance of the schools, especially with a view to their current cultural context and their future prospects.

For North American Mennonites the sections on the developments in the 1930s and 1940s will be of greatest interest for obvious reasons. But Warkentin, by his even-handed approach, succeeds in contextualizing those times and events, and his treatment of the Dr. Fritz Kliewer affair and expulsion is well-documented and

balanced. Although his approach is broad, he never loses sight of his topic—the development of education policy and practice in the colonies— something that those less interested in pedagogy per se may regret.

From a North American perspective it is instructive to follow the descriptions of the relationships of the colonies and their school structures to Paraguay, to Germany, and to North America (and the MCC in particular). Warkentin has to deal with issues which have changed over time and which have led to crises for the colonies as a whole, as well as for the educational establishment, as for example, between German language or Spanish, or, more critically, between allegiance to Germany or Paraguay, and the consequences of such adherence. Here the conservative colony of Menno appears to have done comparatively well by its independent stand. By contrast, the efforts of the American MCC do not come off so well, since they appear to follow a national, American agenda more than one might have hoped.

Jakob Warkentin has been director of the Pedagogical Seminar in Filadelfia/Chaco since 1985, a fact one would not glean from the otherwise informative text of this superb book. The reviewer, having known the author in student days in Germany, can vouch for both the modesty of the man, and the excellence and thoroughness (the word *gründlich* springs to mind) of his work. It is a book that makes a major contribution to the history of South American Mennonite life.

Victor Doerksen  
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Malcolm and Esther Wenger, *Healing the Wounds: One Family's Journey Among the Northern Cheyenne*. Poetry by Ann Wenger. Kitchener, Ont.: Pandora Press, 2001. Pp. 210. \$18.50 US/\$21.00 Canada.

This book is about the meeting of two different worlds, the brown world and the white world, the Northern Cheyenne culture and the German Mennonite culture. Connected with this meeting of cultures, Wenger parallels his daughter Ann's "eroding sense of identity" with that of the Cheyenne. Ann did not fit into the reservation school but when she was sent away to a white school for junior high, she did not fit into that school either since she had grown up on the reservation. Thus the book highlights the pain of missionary children who do not fit into the brown world or into the white world. It also highlights the pain of the Cheyenne who lost their native world but were not accepted in the white world. The Cheyenne suffered from identity loss when their resource base was depleted, when their elders lost their power, when their values were under attack, when their children were forced to speak English in schools, when they were called by white

peoples' strange names, when decisions concerning them were made by the government and the missionaries without consulting them, and when they were restricted geographically to a reservation. Wenger acknowledges all of these pains and seeks for a way to heal the wounds.

The General Conference Mennonites sent Malcolm and Esther Wenger to the Northern Cheyenne in Montana in 1944 as a newly married couple. They remained there until 1966. Their five children were born while they were missionaries on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation. Other GC Mennonite missionaries such as Rudolphe Petter and Alfred Habegger had preceded the Wengers on this reservation. Petter was an expert linguist but, although he approved of relating to the Cheyenne in their own language, he did not acknowledge the value of any other aspects of Cheyenne culture.

Wenger's tone in describing the relationship between missionaries and the Cheyenne is thoughtful and sensitive. He organizes his book thematically, rather than chronologically. The organization seems more native than western; the book is a conglomerate of stories. Each short chapter begins with one of Ann's poems about the theme of the prose in that chapter. Ann's poems highlight the problem of missionary children as well as the problems of the Cheyenne, both caught between two cultures.

Wenger acknowledges that the native perspective might be quite different from his own. Yet he takes an ethnohistorical approach, that is, he asks the same questions of the Cheyenne as he asks of the missionaries, attempting to see missions from the Cheyenne point of view. Wenger does not romanticize Cheyenne society. He freely acknowledges the problems of drunkenness, violence, and suicide among them but he also looks for the root causes of these problems. Dependency on welfare, television, even electricity have contributed to the problems of the Cheyenne. For example, electric light enables young people to stay up late and get up late, thus creating more opportunities to get into trouble.

Wenger states that the book relies on fallible memory. The Wengers had kept no journals. He writes in hindsight, fifty years after the Wengers began their work among the Cheyenne. When they came, they assumed they would be teachers. It took many years before they realized that they should be learners. Mennonite missionaries could learn generosity, patience, harmony with nature, and communitarianism from the Cheyenne. They could also learn that Christianity need not replace Cheyenne culture or customs. For example, western style weddings and funerals were no more Christian than Cheyenne style celebrations. Songs for worship could be traditional melodies, rather than merely translated lyrics sung to western style tunes. Wenger argues strongly for cultural relativity, that is, Cheyenne culture is different from western culture but not inferior to it. He believes that the Christian church has "retained a white face" but it will be effective in the task of missions among the Cheyenne only when it acquires a "Cheyenne face." Wenger believes that Christian Cheyenne leaders must become responsible for their churches and "experiment with Indian forms of worship."

In the past, the public perception of missionaries was either that of self-

sacrificing humanitarians or agents of colonialism and imperialism who robbed native peoples of their cultures. Wenger represents neither of these categories. He represents the new dialogical, interactional approach where missionaries do not only bring truth but are also willing to take direction from the peoples to whom they are sent. Nineteenth century missionaries to aboriginals and their sending agencies felt that Christianity must replace all native traditions. Christianity would be either accepted or rejected. There was no middle ground. Wenger looks for commonalities between native oral traditions and Christianity. For example, one of the Cheyenne myths is about a son of a star father and a human mother who came to minister to the people's needs, who healed wounds, who died, and yet is alive. Wenger wonders whether this story foreshadows Jesus. He believes that such stories can be used as stepping stones to explain to the Cheyennes what God has done for them through Jesus.

This book has many strengths. Its shortcoming is that the cover tells us that the prose is by Esther and Malcolm Wenger, but the book is written in the singular first person. Esther's voice is seldom heard. The three short testimonies credited to her are endnoted, thus highlighting the fact that Malcolm is the sole author of the prose. The book is largely about the perceptions of Malcolm and his daughter Ann. The other four Wenger children are hardly mentioned. The reader wonders why Ann was sometimes the only white child in the classroom when she had an older sister and three younger siblings.

What is the purpose of a missionary autobiography written in later life? Usually, the author wants to be remembered as a dedicated missionary. Missionaries could not control the outcome of their mission, but they tried to control how they were remembered. Wenger's book does not fall into this category. He is searching for his own inner healing. He seems to write from feelings of pain and regret, both for his children and for the Cheyenne. He seeks catharsis in writing. This book is an important alternative and corrective to the missionary as self-sacrificing hero genre of other missionary autobiographers.

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Keith Graber Miller, ed. *Teaching to Transform: Perspectives on Mennonite Higher Education*. Pinchpenny Press: Goshen, 2000. Pp. 102.

This book offers a collection of seven essays intended to present the Goshen College perspective to providing "incarnational education", similar in meaning to the term "incarnational church". In its scant 102 pages the reader is confronted with the importance of higher education within a Mennonite/Anabaptist context, a



project that has at its heart the love of the church and the building of God's Kingdom. Moreover, it presents a cogent defense of a liberal arts education in a Mennonite/Anabaptist environment in a language that is very accessible to the average reader.

Graber Miller presents the articles in an order that logically leads to the concluding article, one which outlines the challenges of the future. The failings of this volume are minor in nature. The second chapter, which deals largely with the history of Goshen College, might have been better placed as the book's first. A further difficulty is the volume's overtly self-promotional tone. However, it is always a precarious endeavor to write from an institutional perspective without erring in the eyes of an outsider. The most significant shortcoming of the collection is the repetitive allusion to Goshen's Study-Service Term (SST). In emphasizing the significance of this program within the Goshen experience, some of the other Goshen innovations may be masked.

The first chapter, by Graber Miller, addresses the issues of what parents and constituents expect from a Mennonite education. Graber Miller begins with the expressed desires of a parent for his child's education, a desire that at times appears to misinterpret current Mennonite thought on peace and justice. A central feature of the article is Graber Miller's stress on the blessing and curse of the lateness with which Mennonites have come to higher education. He stresses that this gives Mennonite higher education the ability to learn from the mistakes made by other Christian colleges and universities that have drifted from their ecclesiological roots.

Theron F. Schlabach's chapter reflects on the history of Goshen College's relations with its church. He calls for a counter-culture within the realm of higher education, questioning traditional academic manner simply because it is part of a long tradition. A Mennonite college or university has a call to the ideals of peace and justice that take precedence over financial pressures. He wonders why there should be a relationship between the church and its institutions of higher learning, if not for these ideals.

Arguably the strongest chapter is contributed by Shirley Hershey Showalter. The premise of her article is a single sentence from Annie Dillard's *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*: "I have been my whole life a bell and never knew it until at that moment I was lifted and struck..." Her presentation is literary in nature and employs the deconstructionist notion of listening to the silences. That is what happens in the narrative of a peculiarly Mennonite/Anabaptist education when nothing is said. The heart of being a professor for Hershey Showalter is to pray for one's students.

Chapters four and five offer a rationale for the most prominent, if most diametrically opposed, components of a typical Goshen education. Paul Keim presents a vigorous defense of the importance of the liberal arts within a Christian context. Keim picks up on Schlabach's view that a Mennonite/Anabaptist education should be structured to counter the social norms of society. Goshen's Study-Service Term is Wilbur Birky's focus and presents the basis for experiential learning as a cornerstone of a good education.

The sixth chapter is an innovative dialogue, although difficult for someone who

does not share a common experience with the authors, to engage in fully. The idea under girding the article is that the community of learners is a model for life-changing, life-long learning.

The final chapter by Albert Meyer offers a view to the future. He calls for an “incarnational higher education” that dissociates Mennonite/Anabaptist institutions from the educational patterns of other denominational colleges and universities. He carefully outlines how seemingly insignificant decisions can have long-term undesirable effects. He also suggests some very practical steps as faculty, board and students assist in anchoring the church and school to each other, while recognizing that a necessary tension will exist between the two.

*Teaching to Transform* is a “must read” for those interested in Christian higher education, especially for faculty, administration, and, most of all, those who serve as college and university board members.

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Calvin Redekop, *Creation and the Environment: An Anabaptist Perspective on a Sustainable World*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000. Pb. Pp. xix + 283.

In 1995, the “Environmental Task Force” of the Mennonite Church and General Conference Mennonite Church held a “creation Summit” to explore an Anabaptist perspective on the interrelated concerns of theology and the environment. Under the expert guidance of longtime Mennonite scholar and activist Calvin Redekop, the articles from that conference came to form the foundation for this text. As his introduction makes clear, Redekop was a perfect person for the task. Driven from his childhood home in Montana by the effects of the dust bowl during the Great Depression, Redekop later realized that this environmental catastrophe was not due — as his elders informed him then — to “God’s punishment for disobedience” (xiv), but rather to human misuse of the land. Over half a century later such experiences have born fruit in this book. Its central thesis reflects the intellectual journey and commitments of its editor: that the Anabaptist Mennonite tradition has developed a unique philosophical and ethical position on the environment, yet has not always been true to it, and must act now to save the earth.

In line with these commitments and purposes, the book proceeds along two tracks simultaneously. First of all, it offers a plainly prescriptive approach. Biblical scholar Theodore Hiebert, for example, argues that Mennonites need to develop a new appreciation for humans as the servants, rather than the masters, of creation, in a manner that “resonates strongly with the Anabaptist conception of the simple life” (121). Theologians chime in likewise. While shaping different arguments, both

Thomas Finger and Dorothy Jean Weaver describe the entire cosmos as the object of God's saving grace, with unmistakable implications. If God has paid the price to reconcile the cosmos to God's self, then as disciples of Christ we are commanded to act boldly on behalf of creation. Walter Klaassen calls people to begin changing environmental destruction by starting with themselves. We need to develop the necessary inner, spiritual resources with which to be God's caretakers of the earth. Finally, in his own inimitable style, David Kline sketches out something of an Old Order environmental ethic.

In contrast with these prescriptive pieces, the book also proceeds along a more sobering descriptive track. This is seen again in a number of different articles. Economists James and Karen Klassen Harder debunk the numerous rationalizations of the advocates of growth as an end in itself, instead calling for "an era of renewed cooperation within strengthened local communities" (26). Kenton Brubaker similarly dismisses the glittering promise that improved technology will release us from our environmental bind, while Redekop and Carl Keener arrive at an equally dire assessment in their survey of the environmental consequences of unrestrained global population growth.

Yet in many ways, the guts of Redekop's activist jeremiad is found not just in the distance between the Anabaptist ethic and global environmental realities, but especially in what many of the authors identify as the gap between Anabaptist ethic and *Mennonite* environmental realities. The sociologist Michael Yoder, for example, demonstrates how Mennonite farmers mostly work the land no differently than other farmers; all are faced with the economic pressure to "get big or get out" (74). In his exploration of Mennonite environmental activism, Mel Schmidt shows how, with a few notable exceptions, Mennonites have not been on the forefront of environmental change. They cannot even boast the minimalist record of environmentalist advocacy of other conservative protestant groups. Yoder's conclusion seems irrefutable, that "most of us have chosen to join the North American social and economic mainstream," and are not willing to "accept the cost" of more environmentally friendly lifestyles (90).

Given the rather large gap revealed by his book between the idealistic views of a nascent Mennonite green theology and the more sober assessments of the global environmental crisis, in his conclusions Redekop rather bravely offers a number of practical suggestions through which Mennonites might render themselves more faithful to their own environmental tradition. Yet the real value of this important book is found in the tone of concerned Christian environmental activism that both gave birth to it and pervades it. Given what Redekop has revealed as the shaky environmental record of Christianity in general and Anabaptism in particular, one can only hope that this book might in itself contribute to a "greening" of the Anabaptist world towards more faithful obedience to a Risen Lord, whose redemptive love encompasses not just the human world but all of creation.

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Craig Carter, *The Politics of the Cross: The Theology and Social Ethics of John Howard Yoder*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2001. Pp. 254.

In this fine new study of John Howard Yoder's theological ethics, Craig Carter offers a sustained argument for the thesis that Yoder's work is best read not as an apologia for Mennonite pacifism but as the powerful normative articulation of the social ethical implications of orthodox trinitarian and christological doctrine for the church's witness in the postliberal, post-Christendom era that is now upon us. At the heart of his argument is Carter's persuasive insight that Yoder's project unites important aspects of his Anabaptist heritage with the theological method of Karl Barth to provide the most coherent and cogent alternative to Christian realism, liberation theology and evangelicalism in current Christian social ethics. Carter thus makes a compelling case for the bold conviction he shares with Stanley Hauerwas that when the history of theology in the twentieth century is written, Yoder's work will be seen as marking a new beginning.

The book is a revision of Carter's doctoral dissertation completed at the Toronto School of Theology under the supervision of the leading Barth scholar, John Webster, and while some vestiges of the dissertation style remain (an occasionally plodding writing style and in places overly conscious sign-posting of the analysis that sometimes breaks up the rhetorical flow of the book), it offers the clearest systematic exposition and most impressive analysis of Yoder's work available and sets a high standard for future studies on Yoder. The structure of Carter's book is lucid and instructive, and he sets Yoder's work in illuminating dialogue with contrasting positions that bring out its distinctive features and constructive contributions. Part I lays out the historical context of Yoder's thought in its Anabaptist roots (particularly focusing on Yoder's role in recent debates about Mennonite identity) and his appropriation and "application" of Barth's theology, especially Barth's christocentric theological method. Scholars of Anabaptism will perhaps be disappointed in Carter's almost exclusive focus on twentieth century issues rather than Yoder's historical theological work. It is clear that Carter believes Yoder is more indebted to Barth in terms of theological substance than he is to his early Anabaptist forebears and while this may be true, it could fruitfully be put to the test in future research. On the other hand, Barth scholars will surely want to challenge Carter's claim that Yoder's pacifist vision and believers' church ecclesiology is the consistent implication of Barth's christological realism. Such a challenge, however, will have to contend with the impressively argued and systematically elaborated analysis Carter has provided.

Part II on Christology is the creative heart of Carter's book and develops the crucial claims that ground the argument. Especially important is chapter 4 on the classical orthodoxy of Yoder's social ethics, in which Carter challenges James Reimer's claim that Yoder's historicist approach is incompatible with the theological orthodoxy of early Christianity that grounds ethics in metaphysical-ontological affirmations about Christ. Carter's close reading of Yoder's relation to creedal orthodoxy advances the discussion, particularly with regard to what is at stake

theologically in current debates about historical narrative and natural theology. Yoder is historicist but not relativist when it comes to Christology (where he clearly affirms Nicene and Chalcedonian formulations), and Yoder rejects all appeals to natural theology in his consistent reference to biblical revelation as the basis of theological and ethical authority. In this regard, Carter argues, Yoder does not succumb to the charge that he reduces theology to ethics and spirituality to politics. The crux of the matter for Carter is that Yoder was not a systematic theologian (à la Barth) but rather was applying Barth's theology to social ethics in a necessarily occasional manner. I will return to this point below. The key assertion of Carter's analysis is that pacifism and the politics of servanthood are rooted in Nicene orthodoxy.

In Part III Carter develops the eschatological context of Yoder's social ethics, which illuminates Yoder's well-known critique of Constantinianism as an eschatological heresy. This is a very helpful analysis of an often-misunderstood historical heuristic in Yoder's thought. Carter shows that Yoder's critique is neither sectarian nor Marcionite, but is rooted in a responsible and coherent biblical theology of history and political action applied to the history of the church. The problem with Constantinianism (in all its forms, ancient and modern) is not simply a faulty politics but a faulty theological and moral epistemology as well. In seeking authorization for the exercise of institutional power over others, it must abandon the vulnerable particularity of the Incarnation and its authorizing posture of servant love for the universalizing aims of coercive regimes. This is to abandon the true catholicity and mission of the church obedient to Christ for the false and fallen universality of power politics. Part III thus nicely sets up the discussion of ecclesiology as the shape of Yoder's social ethics in Part IV of the book. The church is the eschatological community of disciples who follow Jesus in rejecting violence, the glorification of wealth and power, and who embody the politics of serving love. Carter provides a helpful discussion of the ecumenical implications of Yoder's believers' church ecclesiology, which is clearly and carefully defined over against other ecclesiologies and various misrepresentations of Yoder's ecclesiology, such as Oliver O'Donovan's. Here Carter is able to substantiate his claim that Yoder's retrieval of early Christian universalism rooted in Jesus' Jewish eschatological messianism effectively challenges a pagan provincialism — the sectarian narrowing of the church's social vision by various forms of Constantinianism.

In his conclusion Carter helpfully summarizes the main features of Yoder's theological ethics as Barthian, Anabaptist, postliberal, orthodox radical, nonfoundationalist yet nonrelativist, evangelical, Jewish-Christian, christocentric-trinitarian, and biblical-ecumenical. That he succeeds in showing not only the importance but also the logical relatedness and inner coherence of these features in Yoder's wide-ranging and unsystematic corpus of writings is a tribute to the quality of Carter's contribution. He also provides a helpful "Beginner's Guide to Reading John Howard Yoder" that offers an excellent concise orientation to Yoder's many scattered and diverse works.

With the aim, not of detracting from Carter's excellent book, but of entering into

the sort of respectful dialectical exchange it warrants, I conclude with a critical rejoinder. It could be argued that the very success of Carter's systematic portrayal of Yoder's thought is a betrayal of Yoder's diaspora vision of theological ethics — a vision that stands in contrast to Barth's systematic *Church Dogmatics* and therefore can hardly be depicted as an application of Barth's theology to social ethics (which, despite the qualification on page 89, is how Carter often describes Yoder's work — see pages 134, 208f., 236). Carter's criticism that Yoder, like Anabaptists in general, never wrote a systematics (235f.) and therefore left himself open to misunderstanding and caricature, is finally a Constantinian criticism. It seeks to establish intellectual control within the theological domain. Insofar as systematic theology can be depicted as a "blood sport" of sorts, Yoder (in contrast to Barth) preferred to suffer harm in occasional contextual dialogical exchange rather than to cause it precisely by not writing a systematics. Decisively in this regard Yoder is more of an Anabaptist than a Barthian, and it is a crucial point of contrast methodologically, ethically, theologically and politically. The theological enactment of the incarnation for Yoder is an ecclesial, dialogical, kenotic practice that lets go of the desire to control the reception and critical success of one's ideas. This is not to say that it is anti-intellectual. To the contrary, it proceeds on the conviction that understanding, like faith, hope and love, is a matter of non-coercive servanthood that is built up in the ongoing historical drama, not doctrine, of God's sovereign governance. It is a governance best displayed not in architectonic systems or "servanthood" but in the cross-bearing, fine-grained diaspora servanthood of the church.

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John W. Friesen, *Aboriginal Spirituality and Biblical Theology*. Calgary, AB: Detselig Enterprises Ltd., 2000. Pp. 183.

John Friesen's main intent in this book is to give credence to the idea that pre-European aboriginal belief is comparable to that of Old Testament Hebrew faith. In so doing Friesen dispels the early colonial-based and often erroneous scholarship which depicted aboriginal belief as animistic, primitive and uncivilized. Instead, the author portrays Native belief as a spiritual quest common to humanity as a whole.

As professor of education at the University of Calgary and as an ordained United Church pastor of an aboriginal congregation, Friesen writes from his direct interaction with First Nations Christians and from his academic attention to the subject of cross-cultural faith. Of special interest to the readers will be that Friesen grew up in the Mennonite community near Rosthern, Saskatchewan, although, regretfully, no mention is made of the extensive Mennonite mission and service encounter with aboriginal people across Canada.

In ten short chapters, augmented with 28 original photos, index and

bibliography, Friesen compares beliefs of North American indigenous peoples with those of the Christian tradition. In his search for parallels he posits selected Biblical writings alongside citations from aboriginal spokespersons. At times he presses aboriginal belief into schemas of conservative Christian dogma. Here, reliance on legends in verbatim, Native art, poetry, dance and music would have strengthened his resource base. The reader will detect attempts to harmonize belief systems and recognize undertones of assimilation, a stance that the author himself rejects. His attempts to verify the place of Christ in indigenous belief are not convincing.

Friesen's failure to address prevailing justice issues is disappointing. The church's silence on the continuing conquest of aboriginal habitat adds to Native suspicion of the church's compliance with mercenary exploits. Some reference to justice advocacy through concrete actions of interchurch efforts, notably in the Lubicon Cree community within the author's own province, would have lent substantial credibility to his case. Yet somehow economic justice seems not be within his theological scope. Disappointing also is the author's silence on the controversial residential school issue. Given the author's profession as a public educator and theologian this omission is troubling.

For a more balanced formula of comparison the title of the book might have read, "Aboriginal and European Spirituality." The cover design featuring an eclectic version of the corn ukopia presents the Puritan harvest basket overflowing, this time with mixed symbols of the cross, stone tablets, Hebrew candles and the Bible, along with the sacred pipe, sweet grass and feathered attachments. This arbitrary assortment of religious symbols assembled under one motif too easily suggests theological assimilation.

Otherwise this readable book serves as a needed response to a growing non-Native curiosity in aboriginal belief which, until recently, remained tucked under a heavy overlay of European theological dominance. Friesen's book still requires the concurrence of the very people portrayed, namely, the aboriginal community, which is increasingly and convincingly presenting its own theological portrait. Religious understanding between peoples of different cultures will, in the end, not occur by harmonizing their respective belief systems but in the harmonizing of the peoples themselves.

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John Howard Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World*. Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1992, 2001. Pp. 88.

This short book on 'body politics' is as compelling as it is rich. The purpose of the book is briefly to examine five practices of the Judaic Christian Community in their earliest setting, before doctrines were elaborated to explain their place in the

established church. The five text studies here, published originally in a Discipleship Resource Series, are ideally suited for Bible study groups and for personal growth reading. In five short chapters, Yoder explores the original setting for the early New Testament community practices of “Binding and Loosing: Teaching through Church Discipline,” “The Breaking of Bread: Economic Sharing,” “Baptism and the Identification with the New Humanity,” “Living the Fullness of Christ through the Gifts of the Spirit,” and practicing “the Rule of Paul: Open Communication in Meetings.” One of the common strands, evident in each practice, is open dialogue between members of the practice.

For each New Testament practice, Yoder shows that Jesus started the practice as an indicator that the “New World” had come to be with his arrival. In living out these practices, first the disciples and then the church implemented the New Ethic which can be observed by outsiders and shows the world “the pattern...that [is] the will of God for human socialness as a whole...”(ix). For example, in the chapter “Binding and Loosing,” the original purpose of “binding and loosing” is described as “discernment and reconciliation”(2). Yoder writes: “Conversation with reconciling intent is the most powerful way for a community to discover when the rules they have been applying are inadequate, so that they may be modified.”(6). Noting that to be human is to be different, reconciling dialogue processes those conflicting differences in a manner that respects both guilt and acceptance. This ‘Rule of Christ’ is both instructional for congregational decision-making and infusing the art of conflict resolution with renewed emphasis on ‘truth-finding’ and ‘community-building’(11-13).

In his brief introduction, Yoder argues persuasively that the New Testament writings never divide the world into the secular and the sacred, the public and the private, the political and the religious, as is currently accepted in much of western Christianity. In its original design, the church had the “character of a *polis*, namely a structured social body” that was to be a “light” on the hill for all to see and be attracted to(viii). The five practices of the early Christian community which Yoder describes involve both human and divine activity and are mandatory for the church: Jesus told people to do them.

Yoder accomplishes a great deal, challenging readers to study the New Testament further, to reflect further on how the Church should live through its practices, and why the ‘body politic’ should never become complacent about the call of Christ. We (the church body) are called to servanthood, not to lordship, and to serve others, not to rule over them. The power and attraction of the church body is that ordinary believers live among their neighbours performing ordinary practices differently. “They fraternize trans-ethnically; they share their bread; they forgive one another”(75). The reading of this book can only strengthen the church community if the five practices are examined in open conversation and applied in the spirit of “truth-seeking” and “community building.”

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A. James Reimer, *Mennonites and Classical Theology: Dogmatic Foundations for Christian Ethics*. Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2001. Pp. 647.

Mennonites have often described their theology in terms of particular distinctives, such as the importance of discipleship and ethics, an understanding of the church as a community separate from the world, and a faith rooted in a Christology that takes the life and teachings of Jesus with utmost seriousness. A somewhat different image of Mennonite theology emerges in this volume, which is a collection of previously published essays written over a twenty-year period that calls for a retrieval of the “classical imagination.” A. James Reimer, who teaches at Conrad Grebel University College and at the Toronto School of Theology, maintains in this book that Mennonites should not focus simply on developing an alternative theology with particular distinctives. Rather, they should situate themselves “at the centre of classical Trinitarian and Christological orthodoxy,” a theological perspective that calls “all Christians to greater faithfulness to the one creator of the universe, manifested in Jesus Christ, and present in the church and world as Spirit” (15).

The volume is the author’s magnum opus, with 37 chapters divided into three parts. Each chapter includes an introduction that places Reimer’s thought into historical context. The first part of the book is a critique of modernity, and to a lesser degree a critique of postmodernity. Part Two reflects Reimer’s engagement with Mennonite thought, and the third part attends to the author’s more constructive thinking on a broad range of issues such as ecclesiology, Christian anthropology, homosexuality, nationalism, war and peace, and Christians and the civil order.

As the title of the book suggests, one of Reimer’s primary concerns is to establish dogmatic foundations for Christian ethics. Reimer does not want to negate the importance of ethics, but rather is interested in taking the moral life with utmost seriousness. His concern is that Mennonites, especially with their emphasis on voluntarism and ethics-centredness, may easily fall prey to an ethical worldview that is human-centred. Reimer observes that Mennonites—“contrary to popular self-perception—are not so much the critics of modern culture as the anticipators and even bearers of modernity” (17). He believes that only an ethic that is grounded beyond itself has durability and theological integrity. Hence, for Mennonites and Christians generally, the Christian doctrine of God, and especially, a trinitarian God, must be the starting point for all theological and ethical reflection.

Reimer is adamant that theology and ethics have their basis in a trinitarian God, not simply in the “historical Jesus.” It is not that the normative claim of Jesus’ ethic of nonviolent love that Mennonites espouse is to be minimized. Reimer welcomes such a claim, but is not convinced “that the moral, ethical, social and political claims of Jesus of Nazareth, although intrinsic to the gospel, are in themselves an adequate basis or starting point from which to construct a whole systematic theology, one that comprehensively illumines all levels of human religious experience” (208). The

problem in contemporary theology (and Mennonites are not exempt here) is the tendency either “to push God deistically out of this world altogether (thus secularizing the world), or historically to bind God to a one-dimensional historical expression of himself (a form of idolatry), or pantheistically to reduce God to the life-forces and immanent processes of the natural world (thereby sacralizing the natural world)” (229). Reimer maintains that a “three-fold analogical way of speaking about God—transcendence, historicity, and immanence—that is reflected in the early doctrinal-creedal formulations” (229) is a much better conceptual framework for theological reflection since it affirms that God and the world are intimately and dynamically related to each other. At the same time such a construct protects the transcendence, hiddenness and freedom of God, which must not be held captive to human imaginations or finite interpretations (492, 495).

Reimer is aware that his proposal goes against historic and more recent Radical Protestant perspectives. Theologians in this tradition have often been critical of the theology that emerged in the Christian church in the fourth and fifth centuries, taking issue with its apparent dogmaticism as well as the metaphysical, sacramental and ontological language of the creeds that seems to be in contradiction to the language of the New Testament. Mennonites, and other thinkers within the Believers Church tradition, have often argued that the theology of this time period coincides with the “fall” of the church—the Constantinian synthesis of church and state—and should thus be rejected.

Reimer concedes that there are valid grounds for criticizing Constantinianism and believes also that the insights of radical Protestantism ought to be at the forefront of ecumenical conversations. Nevertheless, he believes that “the Constantinian period was much more differentiated than it is often made out to be, with numerous theologies of culture competing with each other” (125). Reimer notes that Christians during this time period were making a serious attempt to contextualize the gospel with the Greco-Roman world, and Mennonites ought to re-examine that era as they “attempt to address contemporary cultural questions” (126). Trinitarian orthodoxy is not to be equated with Constantianism, but may be the best theological defense against political theologies (whether of the left, right, or centre) that attempt to further a particular ideological agenda. Further, Reimer insists that trinitarian-orthodox language should not be equated with dogmaticism. Creedal-confessional-doctrinal thinking is a genre of literature that attempts to express the essentials of the faith, often in creative and dynamic fashion. Doctrines ought to be understood as “mediating principles” “that seek through analogical language to express the universal truths of the Christian faith” (228). Doctrinal language in this respect is univocal and literal only in a limited sense. While dogmatic thinking in the contemporary context is often identified with rigidity, classical dogmatic language should be understood as an imaginative way of preserving the faith and dealing with current issues. “To enter the classical imagination is to enter this dynamic, creative process of thinking ‘dogmatically’ in ever new and changing circumstances within the basic framework of a Christian doctrine of the triune God” (554).

Reimer also points out that this genre of theology is actually not far removed from Anabaptist-Mennonite approaches of the past. Reimer observes that Mennonites have produced a long list of confessions of faith, and many of these confessional documents bear remarkable similarities to the classical creeds. They are unique in that they display a heightened ethical consciousness that also shapes to some degree their theological content (261).

I find Reimer's arguments compelling. In my view his perspectives are by no means a rejection of Anabaptist-Mennonite theology, but an appropriation of a particular Anabaptist-Mennonite trajectory that has historical precedence (particularly Dutch-Prussian-Russian Mennonitism), and his views are clearly shaped by his Canadian and urban context. Reimer is not focused on fundamentalism, or some form of civil religion (a concern that has often preoccupied Mennonite theologians in the United States). Rather, he is trying to address the concern of modernity in a broad sense, which, since the period of the Enlightenment, has called into question the very existence and relevance of God. Reimer believes that this is one of the major concerns of his generation, and I think he is right, and sense that questions about the existence and relevance of God will be ongoing in the North American context for generations to come.

With 647 pages, the volume is long enough, but I would have been interested in Reimer discussing at greater length his oft-mentioned "Alexandrian" orientation, which brings together "Athens" and "Jerusalem" (Hellenistic and Hebraic thought). Prominent theologians such as Jürgen Moltmann and Douglas John Hall have advocated an ontology that is closer to "Jerusalem" than "Athens," and would argue that an "Alexandrian" orientation is in fact inconsistent with the Hebraic-biblical understandings of God that emphasize relationality. I appreciate Reimer's interest in emphasizing the transcendence of God, and I am also partially sympathetic with his concern in maintaining the classical distinction between the "immanent" and the "economic" trinity (392ff). This distinction, found throughout Christian history, safeguards the freedom of God and underscores the human limits of fully knowing God. But such a portrayal of the Divine also raises questions concerning the character of God as God is in Godself, and weakens the theology of the cross that tells us that God is intimately involved in the world and affected by human affairs.

Undoubtedly these various understandings of God must be held in creative tension and call for further reflection. Reimer's treatment does not detract from what is clearly a rich, thoughtful, wide-ranging and passionate conversation. The volume is one of the most important books on Mennonite theology of our time encouraging the reader to live imaginatively, and faithful to the one God, creator of the universe, historically present in Jesus Christ, and continually present as Spirit. I highly recommend the book.

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