

Foreword

This issue begins with seven articles that grapple with the issue of “Mennonites, Human Rights and State Power,” the title of the 18-20 October 2012 conference at the University of Winnipeg where these papers were presented. Numerous other papers were given at the conference, which, for a wide variety of reasons do not appear in this issue. Nevertheless these scholars and community leaders – Emma Alexander Mudaliar, Clint Curle, John Derksen, Leo Driedger, Ricardo Esquiva, Lowell Ewert, Doug Hostetter, Bonnie Klassen, Jeny Nemy, L. Daniel Pantoja, Dean Peachey, Eliakim Sibanda, Omar Siddiqui, Karen Soria, Werner Toews, Nataliya Venger, Adrienne Wiebe and Virgil O. Wiebe – gave richly to this unique international meeting with a diversity and depth of analysis.

The first paper in this issue is by César García, the General Secretary of Mennonite World Conference and one of two keynote speakers at the conference (the other was Virgil O. Wiebe). García’s inspirational essay calls for Mennonites to embrace a human rights approach that addresses issues of justice and grows out of Christian faith and Anabaptist values.

The next two papers debate the appropriateness of human rights language for Mennonites. Carl Friesen sets the theoretical and theological parameters of a debate that juxtaposes the use of individual rights-based language against a communitarian politics advocating healthy social relations. Paul Heidebrecht argues that such language is indeed consistent with MCC’s advocacy work in Ottawa, for, among other factors, it has been a more effective way of pressing government to seek justice than traditional Anabaptist language of love or charity.

The next three articles chronicle Mennonite history and its intersection with human rights issues in Europe. Andrew Klager argues that sixteenth century Anabaptist radicals who demanded religious toleration and addressed economic injustices provided a particular human rights advocacy, albeit one expressed in pre-enlightenment vocabulary. Mark Jantzen describes an ironic devolution of Mennonite rights in the context of nineteenth century German liberal reform: in this case Mennonites unsuccessfully requested an exchange of individual rights for continued military exemption. Christiana Epp Duschinsky considers an extreme case of an extended Mennonite family in West Prussia becoming bitterly divided on the issue of human rights under Nazism during the 1930s and '40s.

Finally, three papers deal with aspects of the topic in more recent decades and around the world. Jan Guenther Braun considers the very foundation of human rights discourse by raising the question of the recognition of and respect for same-sex marriage within the context of Mennonite Church Canada. Patricia Harms takes us to late twentieth century Guatemala where urban Mennonites evolved from supporting a regime guilty of gross human rights violations to advocating nonviolence between the warring sections. Finally, Alain Epp Weaver traces a similar evolution in Palestine where MCC moved from distributing relief in the 1940s, to advocacy after the 1967 war, a shift emphasizing close relationships with Palestinian organizations and a vocabulary of peace-making and human rights.

The "Regular Research Paper" section begins with two papers that take us to Russia and beyond. In a chapter from his award-winning thesis, Sean Patterson reconsiders the iconic event of Nestor Makhno inflicting terror on Mennonites following the Russian Revolution; by comparatively mining both Makhnovist and Mennonite texts, and revisiting the infamous Eichenfeld massacre, two starkly opposing interpretations are revealed. Then, in a pioneering study, James Urry and Victor G. Wiebe link Russia to Australia, analyzing the infatuation of the press and political elite of that country with the bizarre scheme of an imposter, 'Mennonite Bishop' Bugnion, to settle 40,000 Mennonites 'down under'.

The next articles analyze two cultural poles within Canadian Mennonite society. Rita Heath Dirks examines the place of ethnic language, *Plautdiestch*, in Miriam Toews's *A Complicated Kindness*, arguing that such a perspective illuminates the protagonist's desire to find a legitimate and life-giving place within a Mennonite community. T. D. Regehr's reflective piece on Mennonite Central Committee Canada and its historic challenges was presented at the 13-14 December 2013 history conference, "MCC in Canada," on the occasion of its 50th anniversary and the launch of Esther Epp-Tiessen's *MCC in Canada: A History* (see

review in this issue); Regehr considers how MCC's ministry of social justice helped transition a rural Mennonite culture into a wider, more socially engaged faith community.

The book review section begins with a review essay in which Di Brandt critically analyzes Robert Zacharias's path-breaking *Rewriting the Break Event*; Brandt sees in the book a "broader interdisciplinary cultural context" than has hitherto been offered, especially by writers focused on the Russländer migrant experience. As always, the *Journal* concludes with its "two dozen" reviews, in almost equal numbers critiquing the rich discourse of Mennonite literature and Mennonite history.

Finally, I would like to offer my gratitude to our editorial team: Robert Zacharias is not only Associate Editor, but, along with Andrea Dyck, a most valuable copy editor, while Rosmarin Heidenreich and Brian Froese have once again adeptly worked their multi-faceted roles as book review editors.

Royden Loewen, editor