

home” (230), says nothing about the maker, the context of production, its design, or its use.

Nevertheless, as a history of the Amish quilt as an art object and a study of the commercialism of products imbued with Amishness, this work is invaluable. Smucker’s exploration of how non-Amish collectors have been able to define and impose value on Amish products and how dealers, Amish and non-Amish, have appropriated the appeal of “Amishness” while trading on stereotypes sheds much light on how mainstream society constructs the identity of minority ethnic groups.

Karen M. Johnson-Weiner  
SUNY Potsdam

Esther Epp-Tiessen, *Mennonite Central Committee in Canada: A History*. Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2013. Pp. 328, softcover.

The history of any national organization is always a challenge to write, especially one with several constituencies. Esther Epp-Tiessen has written an important book in Canadian Mennonite studies bringing to light the history of the Mennonite Central Committee in Canada (MCC Canada) from its creation in 1963 to the near present. The flagship organization of Canadian Mennonites, alongside the longer running Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) founded in the United States in the 1920s, MCC Canada is not only significant for its service work in Canada and around the world, but also for its inter-Mennonite roots. Epp-Tiessen has taken a long view of MCC Canada and begins a generation before its official start, surveying the “gestation” period from the 1920s onward. In this thoroughly researched account is a work that brings significant contextualization to modern Canadian Mennonite service culture.

Epp-Tiessen grounded her book in archival sources, personal interviews and a broad scholarship, resulting in a spirited, informative, and well-presented study. After a personal reflection where she describes her social location and indebtedness to several interpretive perspectives, including, post-colonial theory and “settler mentality,” she explains that she brings “deep love” and “sharp critique” of the organization to her study. Moreover, she acknowledges “specific biases” as her life experience is primarily with Ontario and Manitoba and Mennonite Church Canada. (9-10) Epp-Tiessen further locates her study within the field of non-profit institutional history and thus adopts an organizational and interpretive grid for her book that follows time

decadally assuming a set of life-cycle phases (gestation, birth, maturity, decline and then the cross-roads of rebirth or death). (12) Thus, she has given us a straightforward account of MCC Canada that reveals much of not only the leading Mennonite non-profit organization, but of the modern Canadian Mennonite experience itself.

In the first three chapters, Epp-Tiessen sets the stage for the story of MCC Canada through the “gestation” period from 1920-1963. Here she introduces such main themes as inter-Mennonite cooperation, the slow but steady expansion of relief efforts from Russian-Mennonites in Russia outward to eventually non-Mennonites in many countries. In particular, the impact of World War II is significant as Mennonites developed close working relationships with the Canadian government drawing them more so into Canadian society and transforming their “peace witness” into a more activist position. (33-35, 54-55)

Over the next five chapters, covering the years 1963-2012, the second part of the book explores the “growth and maturation” of the organization. She presents an interesting and very readable account of how an organization once founded and given a mandate struggles to create an identity within a broadly diverse constituency. The good faith efforts of the actors were often met with criticism, to be sure, and she does an effective job of showing us how these choppy waters were navigated on several occasions. All the while, MCC Canada was expanding, pushing the edges of Mennonitism, and developing grass roots run thrift stores.

Arriving at the conclusion, with so much material behind us, Epp-Tiessen has convinced us of the importance of MCC Canada and its journey from church meetings on Portage Avenue in Winnipeg to a nationally respected non-profit. Her early mentions of post-colonial theory and “settler mentality” are threaded in the text primarily in the context of MCC Canada’s work with First Nations through the Native Concerns office. Then she introduces her conclusion with a brief description of MCC Saskatchewan and First Nations agreeing to work together for further understanding and respect. With her main interpretive themes threaded through the text and meeting in the conclusion she gives a brief accounting of the contradictions of MCC Canada as ideals and practices often diverge. However, the key observation by the end is that groups of Mennonites and Brethren in Christ, because of their common story, came to form MCC Canada, which half a century later became their common story. (265-267) This is an important book on a significant topic for not only Mennonites, but also anyone interested in the non-profit world and international development.

There are a few points where further comment would be useful. First, Epp-Tiessen frames the work of MCC in the often-quoted

(though significantly redacted) Menno Simons quote that defining “true evangelical faith” omits the significance of personal piety. Since MCC uses this edited quote to explain why it does what it does, shorn of half of Menno’s point, it could have used some comment, especially as she observes that MCC Canada’s mission evolved to being something beyond Anabaptism. (10, 264)

When working with constituency critique, Epp-Tiessen is even-handed, though in one instance detractors to 1960s MCC Canada’s involvement in Vietnam, who saw a service and relief organization becoming too political, are given short-shrift as being strongly anti-communist. She observes rightly that considering their experiences under communist tyranny before coming to Canada, such concern in the Cold War was understandable. However, the only response is given to MCCer Dan Zehr who saw their criticisms of MCC Canada as also being political, which they simply were unable to see. This is an important conflict warranting further unpacking beyond its single paragraph and Zehr’s brief response, as it brings together themes of immigration, Cold War, international development and an early identity conflict for the inter-Mennonite organization. Understanding that not everything can be covered in fine detail in a single monograph, however, only having an MCC insider reflect upon the critics could be balanced a bit more. (117) This is an exception. She does a fine service in outlining conservative and liberal criticisms of MCC Canada in chapter 8.

These two examples of exceptions aside, Epp-Tiessen has done us a critical service by describing the history of MCC Canada and locating it in its Canadian and international contexts. She has done so with care given to understanding its changes, challenges, and broad set of commitments. It is a fascinating story of balancing numerous forces in the creation and development of a non-profit organization whose roots are religious in nature and fifty years later finds itself integrated into the world of international development.

Brian Froese  
Canadian Mennonite University