

mented. The organization of biblical texts into categories in chapter three seems to reflect his own theological perspective more than the documented commitments of Mennonite leaders.

Generally, it is not clear that the trends and emphases Stoesz identifies arise from changes in lectionary use. It could be argued as convincingly that Mennonite engagement with North American evangelical Christianity exerted the effects noted in the book.

As one might expect from a self-published work, the book seems to suffer from the lack of a thorough editorial review. An abundance of material seems unrelated to the book's main topic, and it is often difficult to discern a consistent line of argumentation. Another glaring omission is an index, making searches difficult. Nevertheless, there may be kernels of information that could benefit a patient researcher.

Brian Cooper

Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, Langley, BC

Bruce Guenther, *The Ältester: Herman D.W. Friesen, A Mennonite Leader in Changing Times*. Regina: University of Regina Press, 2018. Pp. xii + 308. Softcover, \$34.95.

Bruce Guenther holds a PhD from McGill University, teaches church history at Trinity Western University, and for six years was president of the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary. As an historian he has expertise in Canadian Mennonite studies, theological education, and the history of evangelicalism and fundamentalism in western Canada. How would this highly educated leader write the story of a people who have been wary of formal higher education and been described as “deluded and foolish,” “culturally retarded” (10), and in need of salvation? In fact, the first Mennonite Brethren Church in Canada began after Mennonite Brethren missionaries from the United States converted Old Colony members and re-baptized them in 1888.

The book provides a wonderfully rich contextual basis for the story of the Old Colony people starting with the migration to Manitoba in the 1870s and the migration to Saskatchewan two decades later. For decades the Old Colony was the largest Mennonite group in Western Canada, but in Canada today they are usually treated as a fringe group. There was a drastic reduction in the number of Old Colony people because of the Manitoba and Saskatchewan gov-

ernments' harsh program to force Mennonites to give up their private schools and have their children educated by the state. As a result, in 1922 the majority of Old Colony members emigrated to Mexico. However, some, like Friesen's parents, remained and carried on to form new Old Colony communities on the prairies. Even among those who stayed in Canada there was an appetite to isolate the church through migration and thus remain faithful to God. However, that changed with Herman D.W. Friesen.

Guenther's book presents the basic outline of the life of Herman Friesen, born in 1908 to David and Anna Friesen. In 1928 Herman married Margaretha Banman, born in 1908 and daughter to Heinrich and Anna Banman. Herman experienced farm mechanization, as well as the difficult economic and agricultural conditions of the 1930s. He was the father to a growing family, and a community leader, serving as school trustee and municipal councillor. In 1962 Friesen accepted the burden of responsibility to become the *Ältester* (bishop) for the Old Colony congregations in Saskatchewan. Friesen saw his task as to "moderate the pace of change" (130) in order to keep the flock together. *Ältester* Friesen understood that while he was chosen for this leadership position for life, it was the community that gave him that authority. When addressing difficult situations, Friesen consulted with the community before making decisions.

Guenther uses a mixture of sources, including the work of professional historians and also community, congregational, and personal narratives by lay historians. Another major source are the memories of Guenther's own family. As the grandson of Herman Friesen, Guenther uses these sources to weave a personal narrative of his grandfather throughout the book. Because Friesen left few written materials that reveal his inner thoughts, the large family left behind after his untimely death in 1969 is the most intimate set of sources available, and Guenther makes use of family interviews that at times are quite critical.

Guenther portrays Friesen as a devout husband, father, and church and community leader who had his shortcomings. But Friesen also strove to provide honest and credible leadership to his family and community all the while having to negotiate social pressures on whether to retreat and look for isolation or to assimilate. On this issue, Guenther observes that Friesen provided leadership, not in favor of migrating, but rather in selective accommodation.

The single biggest cache of materials created by *Ältester* Friesen are sixty-five sermons, a selection of which Guenther makes available here thanks to dedicated translators who not only knew German but could read the old handwritten Gothic script. Many

people today make assumptions about what Old Colony religious instruction is like and about. The sermons reveal Friesen's emphasis on a Christo-centric faith, one in which believers' lives exhibited both inward and outward signs of transformation.

Guenther's narrative is insightful, nuanced, and adds significant understanding to the field. He challenges readers from outside of the more tradition-minded groups to understand Old Colony Mennonites to be dynamic, that is, always adjusting (changing) to the pressures from host societies and from forces within the church (124). Leaders of the tradition-minded Mennonite groups have not had many biographies written about them. A few examples exist of autobiographies by leaders like Gerhard Wiebe and Isaak M. Dyck who wrote their own texts explaining the reasons for moving to a new country. There are also a few shorter articles or chapters written about leaders such as Johann Wiebe, Isaak Mueller, Jacob Wiens, and Johann Loepky. However, *The Ältest-er* is the first academic monograph about an Old Colony leader, and it rightfully stands beside biographies of other Canadian Mennonite leaders such as David Toews, J.J. Thiessen, and Johannes Harder. Through Guenther's empathetic narrative, readers can catch a glimpse of the very relatable and human character of the Old Colony people.

Conrad Stoesz
Mennonite Heritage Archives

Douglas J. Heidebrecht, *Women in Ministry Leadership: The Journey of the Mennonite Brethren, 1954-2010*. Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2019.
Pp. x + 326. Softcover, \$22.95.

The role of women in the North American Mennonite Brethren Church has been studied, debated, and subjected to denominational conversations more than any other topic since the mid-1950s. As Douglas Heidebrecht demonstrates in his book *Women in Ministry Leadership*, it was a set of conversations vexed by a number of perspectives and concerns. Derived from the author's doctoral dissertation, Heidebrecht stitches together a very detailed and compelling account of how Mennonite Brethren (MB) in North America grappled with the issue of women in ministry leadership. He uses extensive archival research, systematically mining Mennonite Brethren periodicals, including editorials, articles, and letters to