

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

the editor. Over the course of seven chapters, Heidebrecht traces the ebbs and flows of the denominational debate from 1954 to 2010, though most of the book is concerned with the 1980s–2000s, and the final two chapters almost exclusively with the Canadian experience. He comes at the subject as a “participant observer, or ‘critical insider,’” as a member of the Mennonite Brethren community in which he currently works, and as a direct participant in the events described.

Heidebrecht sets up his account by locating the Mennonite Brethren church in its larger history and experience in working through issues with the ideal of a biblicism governed by community consensus. Here too, he introduces the reader to the key interpretive lenses, complementarian and egalitarian readings of biblical texts, that bedeviled the Mennonite Brethren for a half-century. Heidebrecht also locates the Mennonite Brethren in the context of North American evangelicalism, the emergence of second wave feminism, and the MB church’s own acculturation. Mennonite Brethren leaders and laity found themselves in this cauldron of societal change and the challenges to biblical interpretation it brought. What Heidebrecht demonstrates is how over the second half of the twentieth century these stresses were concentrated on the issue of women in church leadership—even as that question was increasingly narrowed over the twentieth century to that of senior pastor as determined by local congregational choice.

Though he keeps to his stated focus on the conversations Mennonite Brethren held on the issue, Heidebrecht is less precise in his methodological use of “thick description.” While the model popularized by Clifford Geertz is fine for this study, it is not explained nor clearly used. Heidebrecht is to be congratulated for not only setting up the Mennonite Brethren as a “textbook” case of acculturation to North American society, culminating in an identity crisis as theological diversity, congregational autonomy, and a weakening of denominational structures took place by the 1980s, but also for showing how the issue of women in church leadership became paramount in this process. After all, there have been numerous issues that revealed diverse readings of scripture. Why did this issue, with its own biblical ambiguity, enflame the passions that it did? By the end of the book we find that the resolution settled upon was one of congregational autonomy, an allowance of diverse practices, as had been practiced since the nineteenth century.

Although the level of detailed reporting of what was being said in correspondence, denominational periodicals, and letters to editors is quite fine, at times significant developments are mentioned

without explanation. For example, when River East MB in Winnipeg decided in 1990 that their next pastor could be male or female (194), was there any discussion in the record? Considering River East's move forced the hand of the denomination in several ways, how they processed the decision had significant consequences. Another aspect in the book that could be expanded on is the human drama, especially of ways in which women experienced these decades. To broaden this out, it may have been helpful to engage in interviews with some of the participants, now decades removed, women pastors, and others who were present.

Heidebrecht provides a helpful portrayal of a decision-making process, spanning generations, on fundamentally existential issues for the denomination. What this book does achieve is that it provides insight into how the Mennonite Brethren might want to go forward as newer issues that polarize churches emerge in the context of new processes in the future.

Brian Froese
Canadian Mennonite University

David L. McConnell and Marilyn D. Loveless, *Nature and the Environment in Amish Life*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018. Pp. 312. Softcover, \$49.95 USD.

This accessible and well-researched book on the Amish and the environment counters any lingering romanticization of the Amish derived from John Hostetler's heyday as Amish expert in the 1960s or reinforced from bestsellers by David Kline in the 1990s. These works highlighted the Amish contestation of the modern world, their close-knit communities countering the ennui and atomization of modernity, and, with Kline's work in particular, presented the Amish as intricately tied to and in tune with nature. McConnell and Loveless's anthropological questioning of Hostetler and Kline's filiopiety, however, does not translate into overt criticism of the Amish; indeed, it cuts a path between two sharply contrasting views. On the one hand the authors present the Amish as small, highly self-sufficient, householder farmers enmeshed in nature, working with animals, and tending their gardens. And yet, they contest the idea that the Amish are environmentalists or even ecologically minded. The Amish, as presented to us by McConnell and Loveless, distrust both the science that illuminates climate change,