
Gesangbuch, Ziffern, and Deutschum: A Study of the Life and Work of J. P. Claszen, Mennonite Hymnologist

Wesley Berg *University of Alberta*

Mennonite musicians have been making their mark in Canada. The quality of Mennonite choral singing is well-known across the country, and Mennonite vocal soloists have sung from concert and operatic stages in North America and Europe. In the last few years young Mennonite instrumentalists have begun to emerge as potential national and international figures as well. These achievements are the result of more than one hundred years of development both here and in Russia, yet when a symposium was organized recently to consider the state of research into various aspects of Mennonite affairs, musical research was not represented, although almost every other academic discipline was.¹ The fact is that until the last few years not many Mennonites have been interested in musical research, although a few dissertations dealing with Mennonite hymnody have been produced. The emphasis has been on doing rather than researching, on performing rather than writing.

This was certainly true of the previous generation of Mennonite musical leaders in Canada. Almost without exception they were Russiaender, products of the Mennonite colonies in Russia. Aron Sawatzky, Franz Thiessen, K. H. Neufeld, John Konrad, and David Paetkau were all born in Russia. Except for Konrad, who was a violinist, they were choral conductors, receiving their training at week-long workshops and glean-ing what information they could from the few books on music available to them. In the jargon of the modern businessman, they were self-starters, driven by a love of music and a vision of the needs of their people. Often without institutional support, they started choirs where none had existed, they wrote or published music at their own expense, they intro-

duced their audiences to the world of oratorio, and always they were concerned about educating the young people who would follow them.

At least part of the story of these musical pioneers has been told, but the emphasis has been on the men whose work was done in public, the choral conductors whose efforts touched thousands of young Mennonite lives.² They were not scholars. Their literary activities seldom went beyond writing letters to newspapers informing readers about coming events, or preparing books for the use of their students or choirs. While these well-known men were making headlines, however, another Russian Mennonite immigrant, this one with the instincts of a professional scholar, was at work in his study in Winnipeg embarking on a hymnological pilgrimage that would span forty-five years.

Johann Peter Claszén was born 4 August, 1891 in southern Russia.³ His education included the study of the *Gesangbuch* that was common practice in the schools of the colonies, but there is no evidence of special musical training. He attended the Zentralschule in Nikolaipol and initially expected to be a teacher. He then entered the forestry service, becoming one of the "Kjiedels von de Forstei." He served in the *Sanitätsdienst* during the First World War,⁴ and took part in the *Selbstschutz*, that controversial episode in the history of the Russian Mennonites when some of them took up arms to defend themselves against bands of marauders in the post-war period. He survived the chaos and suffering of the civil war and emigrated to Canada in 1923, bringing with him a Russian wife.

Two of Claszén's most striking characteristics in later life were his almost brutal candour and his abhorrence of all sentimentality, weakness, and dishonesty. These are characteristics that Al Reimer suggests were at the heart of the Forstei society: "What the Forstei offered was a tightly-knit, stripped down, all-male 'survival' society which tolerated no dishonesty or hypocrisy in its members, and which frowned on and punished social pretensions and the jockeying for position prevalent in society."⁵ It may very well be that this and similar experiences helped to make him the somewhat prickly, combative person one encounters in his letters. He wrote very little about his early years, but the conclusion of a series of articles on church affairs in 1938 contains this revealing statement:

In Bezug auf meine derbe Ausdrucksweise muss ich darauf hinweisen, dass Erziehung (ich war schon seit meinem 13. Lebensjahre runde Waise), Umgebung und Staatsdienst (ich habe den russischen Regierungen acht lange Jahre gedient) haben aus mir gemacht und geformt was ich bin: Soldat! Daher will mir der graue schlichte Feldrock auch besser stehen als der schwarze elegante Frack, der nicht selten Hochstapler und dergleichen Gesindel zierte. Ich fürchte keinen Angriff, auch erwarte ich keine schmeichelnde Zuredede.⁶

(As for the blunt manner in which I express myself, I can only say that

my upbringing (I was an orphan at the age of thirteen), surroundings, and service to government (I served Russian governments for eight long years) have made me what I am: a soldier! Consequently the simple gray coat of the battle field stands me in better stead than the elegant black tailcoat that often adorns the swindler and similar riff-raff. I fear no attack nor do I expect flattering words.)

Mennonite immigrants coming to Canada in the 1920's were expected to become farmers.⁷ The Claszens arrived in Flowing Well, Saskatchewan, in the spring of 1924 to find that the prospects for making a living on the land in Saskatchewan were not very promising.⁸ A year later they were in Brunkild, Manitoba, where they had bought a 960-acre farm together with three other families.⁹ It is possible to keep track of the Claszens' moves through a succession of letters Claszen wrote to *Der Bote* and, less frequently, *Die Mennonitische Rundschau*. As soon as the *Immigranten Bote* was established he began to write letters that sometimes described the life and circumstances of the immigrants in his area and sometimes dealt with cultural and ethical issues. In spite of the determination of the settlers to succeed in their new home, however, it was difficult to forget the horrors and hardships they had left behind. Again and again their thoughts turned to Russia. In passionate words Claszen captures the anguish of famine and starvation.

Wem stünde nicht jene Zeit in Erinnerung, wo es zum toll werden war, weil man seine Zeit in Nichtstun verplempern und verquackeln musste! Hast du den Abschnitt deines Lebens vergessen, wo Schmalhans bei dir Küchenmeister war, fortwährend arme Ritterbuck? Denkst du nicht mehr daran, wie du gedrungen warst den Schmachtriemen umzuschnallen und deinen Mund eine böse Stiefmutter zu sein, und auf diese Art allmählich zu einem Staketenflicker wurdest? Liegt jene Zeit bei dir in Vergessenheit da du mit dem Storch im Streite lagst, nichts im Stau hattest, und um dich nur mit Sauglocken geläutet wurde? Erinnerst du dich nicht daran, wie die Lebenslage aus dem gebührenden Geleise gerissen wurde, weil alles, was dich umgab, worin du lebstest verflucht, verdammt war? Steht dir das unsägliche Leiden, Dulden, Tragen jener Zeit nicht mehr vor Augen?¹⁰

(Who does not remember the time when madness threatened because one's life was wasted in doing nothing. Have you forgotten the feeling of starvation, of how you had to deny your stomach to the point where you began to resemble a fence post? Have you forgotten the misery of those days, when your life seemed to have been torn from its normal course because everything that surrounded you and in which you and your being had been cursed? Have you forgotten the unspeakable suffering and enduring of those days already?)

The grim memories of times past are swept away by thoughts of a new homeland.

Nun ist dir die Wonne vergönnt worden, aus der kalten, finstern Aussenwelt, die dein Leben verbittert, mühsam und leidvoll gestattet, zum

Sonnenschein des eigenen, friedlichen Heims in einer neuen Heimat himzukehren, wo du Brot, Zufriedenheit und Ruhe finden kannst.

Wenn die majestätische Sonne hinter dem Vorhang heraufkommt und das Firmament in eine wogende See von Farben und Feuer verwandelt, — kannst du da nicht mit Begeisterung, mit dankbarem Herzen ausrufen: Wie gross ist, Vater, Deine Gnade, Barmherzigkeit und Liebe!¹¹

(Now you have been granted the bliss of arriving from a cold, dark world in which your life had become hard and bitter, into a peaceful homeland where you will find food, contentment and peace. When the majestic sun rises and transforms the sky into a sea of fiery colours, can you not then call out enthusiastically and thankfully, "How great, Father, is your grace, mercy, and love?)

These two passages could easily be reworked into blank verse and in at least one instance Claszen turned to poetry in an attempt to come to terms with one of the most violent episodes in the post-war period.¹²

Machno

Der Schlund der Hölle hat sich aufgetan
 Und speit den Auswurf auf die Erde,
 Der richtet grauenvolles Elend an,
 Als ob die Erde selbst zur Hölle werde.
 Vom Staub umringt, so sprengen diese Horden
 Mit ihrer schwarzen Fahne durch das Land,
 Besä'n den Weg mit blut'gem Morden,
 Vernichten die Kultur mit Unverstand.
 Was jahrelang mit saurem Schweisse
 Die Menschenhand hervorgebracht
 Was hier geschaffen wird zum Ruhm und Preise,
 Was jedem edlen Menschen Freud' gemacht,
 Das wird durch jene wüsten Sündenknechte
 Rasch in den Grund gebohrt, zerstört
 Mit Hohn zertreten sie der Menschen Rechte,
 Wie es der Fürst der Unterwelt sie lehrt.

By the fall of 1927 Claszen's dreams of becoming a farmer had been shattered. His partners had abandoned the farm at Brunkild, and he now brought his wife and son, Alex, to Winnipeg. He left nothing to chance, obtaining a letter from The Walch Land Co. on 3 January, 1927, recommending him as a faithful and capable farmer, but his days as a farmer were over. Not much is known about the first few years in Winnipeg. Jobs were difficult to come by and there were long periods of unemployment. He tried to feed his family by becoming a carpenter and cabinet maker, but it would not be until the prosperity brought on by the coming of the war in 1939 that he would finally be able to buy a lot and build a house.

Just when or how he became interested in hymnology is unclear. The letters of the 1920's give no indication that he had any special interest in musical matters. Not until 1930 is it possible to find a reference to music, and this in a fairly general article on the *Jugendverein*.¹³ In May, 1930, however, the first of a number of articles and announcements about a new collection of choral music began to appear,¹⁴ and in 1932 Claszen published a volume of choral music entitled *Liederborn*.¹⁵ It was designed to serve the needs of choirs and choir directors who had been raised on Ziffern in Russia and who now found themselves in a country where notes rather than numbers were already well-established among Mennonite singers. Many choir directors had to turn to the choir books they had brought along from Russia and made hand-written copies for the use of their choirs. Claszen's collection was intended to make their work easier.

Liederborn was the first of what was hoped would be a series. In the foreword Claszen called for suggestions and contributions from the people using the book to help him in preparing the next two volumes but because of the Depression it was not possible to proceed. Nevertheless, *Liederborn* did fill a need in the immigrant churches. According to Ernest Enns, choir director at First Mennonite Church in Winnipeg for many years, the collection served their choir for several decades, until the older singers were replaced by a generation of young people able to read notes.¹⁶ This was no doubt true of many other choirs as well. Claszen did try to continue, though on a smaller scale, by publishing a periodical entitled *Polyhymnia*.¹⁷ In it he planned to supplement the easier anthems of *Liederborn* with more ambitious compositions by composers like Schubert, Mendelssohn and Bach, but it too appeared only once.

The publication of his first book brought with it many of the controversies and difficulties that were to characterize his entire career. An article announcing the completion of the manuscript touches on a number of these issues.¹⁸ Claszen and two others had been asked by the Ministers' Conference of Manitoba to assemble a songbook in Ziffern, but after several meetings the other two members had agreed that it should be in notes instead. A staunch, untiring supporter of Ziffern, Claszen promptly withdrew and began to work on his own collection. His uncompromising and critical attitude also manifests itself in his comments about the Mennonite hymnals he studied as he prepared his own manuscript; he made scathing remarks about the lack of respect shown for copyright laws in assembling earlier books. This criticism is linked to a basic distrust of the musical taste of his Mennonite compatriots that was to deepen over the years: "Zudem war ich mir der Unbeständigkeit des allgemeinen Geschmacks unseres Volkes inbezug auf Gesang und des Mangels an geistiger Vertiefung eines Teiles unserer Masse wohl bewusst¹⁹ (Moreover, I was well aware of the inconstancy of musical taste and the lack of

spiritual depth in a certain portion of our people.) His concern for the preservation of the German cultural heritage also becomes apparent: "Auch ist es an der Zeit, dass wir als 'deutscher Span vom deutschen Stamm' zu der dem deutschen Wesen ureigenen Tiefe zurückkehren."²⁰ (It is also time that we, as Germans born and bred, return to the depths of our German being.)

Each of these issues will be referred to again in connection with other hymnals and other controversies, but the question of Ziffern deserves to be singled out for special attention. It is a system of notation employing numbers rather than notes, with the numbers from 1 to 7 representing the notes of the scale in a manner similar to the syllables of the sol-fa system familiar in the Anglo-Saxon world.²¹ Developed and employed in various European countries in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a way of teaching singing to people unfamiliar with conventional musical notation, it had been brought to Mennonite Russia by Heinrich Franz when he came to teach in Gnadenfeld. In 1837 Franz produced a *Choralbuch in Ziffern* to accompany the *Gesangbuch* the Mennonites had brought with them from Prussia, hoping to eliminate the melodic corruption that had crept in as the melodies passed from generation to generation by oral tradition. The Franz *Choralbuch* was used in the Mennonite schools — Johann Cornies made its use a part of his 1846 curriculum²² — and from there slowly found its way into the congregations. By 1910 there were collections of choral music in Ziffern — the most important was *Liederperlen* — available for the use of Mennonite choirs and some choirs had begun to sing large choral works that had been transcribed into Ziffern by their conductors.²³ Although the use of conventional musical notation was slowly becoming more common as the use of musical instruments became more widespread, for most of the Mennonite immigrants of the 1920's the only kind of notation they knew was Ziffern.

A few copies of *Liederperlen* and other collections were brought along to North America, but the shortage of music in Ziffern soon became urgent. A number of men in various parts of Canada attempted to solve the problem by copying out and mimeographing collections of songs for their choirs: J. H. Janzen produced a choir book in 1930 in Waterloo, Ontario; Nicolai Fehderau and his Mennonite Brethren colleagues assembled a collection of choral music for their congregation in Waterloo; K. H. Neufeld of Winkler, Manitoba, published a collection entitled *Singet dem Herrn* in Ziffern in 1932; and Claszen was working on *Liederborn* during the same time. Notation soon became a controversial issue. Where churches consisted mainly of recent Russian Mennonite immigrants, the use of and need for Ziffern was fairly clear; it was what they were accustomed to. Problems arose when these immigrants were forced to mingle with Mennonites who had been in North America for some time

and had already accepted notes. Children were now more likely to learn notes at school as well, producing difficulties as they began to move into the choirs alongside the older singers.

One of the most interesting exchanges on the subject took place in late 1931 and early 1932 between Claszen and Aron G. Sawatzky, a Mennonite musician who had spent the first years of his life as a choral conductor in Russia and the years from 1903 to 1920 in Saskatchewan, after which he moved to California.²⁴ Sawatzky was thus quite familiar with Russian Mennonite practices, but also had the experience of thirty years of working with Mennonite choirs in North America. In his view the issue was quite simple.

This was America and in America one sang according to notes. Ziffern also had some serious defects. They were of no use to the instrumentalist, the system was not capable of being developed to include more complex phenomena like harmonies and modulation, and in any case, North American singers reached the same goals by using the sol-fa system when necessary. According to Sawatzky, "Die Ziffern werden sehr bald verblättert sein und bleiben höchstens noch ein Andenken."²⁵ (Ziffern will soon be gone and will at best be a pleasant memory.)

Claszen took strong exception to this attitude. He argued that while notes might be essential for the instrumentalist, the system of Ziffern offered a much easier method of learning hymns and folk songs for the singer, especially the untutored singer likely to be found in a Mennonite church. It was simpler, with only two scales rather than twenty-four, no key signatures, and only one staff line rather than ten. This allowed the singer to concentrate completely on aural relationships within an unchanging framework instead of having to think about those relationships within a highly complex and constantly changing system of scales and key signatures. It should be said that Sawatzky did not disagree with him on this point, except to say that there were other systems using syllables instead of numbers that could attain the same goal. Claszen also argued that the Ziffern were uniquely identified with the Mennonite people, part of their cultural heritage for more than 100 years. He regarded its abandonment with the same feelings of regret and despair that he viewed the erosion of the German language among Mennonites. These two arguments came together in his statement that notes were for art music and Ziffern were for folk music.²⁶

As in so many other things, it turned out that Claszen was fighting a losing battle against the inroads of a new culture. Sawatzky was right: a grandfather's *Zifferliederbuch* is now no more than a precious memento, a treasured curiosity. Mennonite hymnals have notes and congregations seem to be able to sing from them without too much difficulty. But Claszen's fears would probably be justified if the ubiquitous organ or piano were suddenly silent. How many congregations would be able to

sing well or learn new hymns without the support of an instrument? The fact is that Ziffern have not generally been replaced by another solmization method, and musical literacy has suffered as a result.

Whatever the eventual fate of Ziffern was to be, there was no question that in the early 1930's there was still a need for them. At the conference of ministers in Manitoba held in Winnipeg in January, 1934, Claszen raised the question of congregational singing and was asked to take leadership in dealing with the matter. A meeting of Mennonite Vorsaenger and choir directors in February chaired by Claszen decided to put together a *Choralbuch in Ziffern* that made its appearance the next year.²⁷ Assembled by a committee, it was based on the *Choralbuch* of 1914 published in Russia, the *Gesangbuch mit Noten* of the North American Mennonites, *Reichslieder*, and a manuscript prepared by Claszen. It is difficult to know just how widely the hymnal was used, but some indication of where it was used and what problems it created can be seen in a letter Claszen wrote to a choir director in Superb, Saskatchewan.²⁸ P. J. Klassen used both the *Choralbuch* and *Polyhymnia* in his congregation and wrote to J. P. Claszen asking about "his" *Choralbuch*. Claszen responded indignantly that the *Choralbuch* was not his. It had been produced by a committee that had discarded 100 of the melodies he had suggested and added 125 melodies that he would not have included.²⁹ In any case, the *Choralbuch* marked the end of an era. At its annual meeting, held in Altona in July, 1935, the year the *Choralbuch* was published, the Conference of Mennonites in Canada decided to produce a *Gesangbuch* using notes rather than Ziffern.³⁰

The original members of the hymnal committee were J. P. Claszen, J. H. Janzen, Benjamin Ewert, David Schulz, and D. D. Friesen. D. H. Epp, editor of *Der Bote* in Rosthern, was subsequently added to the committee to give it a representative from Saskatchewan. Later that summer J. H. Janzen resigned from the committee because he was moving from Waterloo to Vancouver, but such was his stature and influence that he continued to be consulted as if he were still a member. The group began its work by calling for suggestions from each member as to the form and content of the proposed hymnal. A survey of the individual submissions gives a clear indication of why problems arose later on.³¹ Benjamin Ewert called for a unified hymnal to replace all the books presently being used in Mennonite churches. David Schulz wanted a hymnal containing both chorales and gospel songs in a four-part setting. J. H. Janzen thought that the book should contain only the melodies, with a separate four-voice book for the use of choirs, and insisted that it should contain no more than 300 hymns. J. P. Claszen presented the members of the committee with a detailed proposal containing 806 hymns from which to choose. Now the difficult process of negotiation and compromise began.

For most of the committee members the task was superimposed on

already arduous workloads as elders, editors, or farmers; for Claszen it seemed to be the opportunity of a lifetime. Several years later in 1939 he had this to say about his dreams for Mennonite hymnody: "Da die Gesang- und Melodienbücher der Mennoniten nicht nur voll von Ungenauigkeiten, sondern auch voll von Verunstaltungen der Singweisen und Lieder der deutschen evangelischen Kirche wimmeln, bin ich schon seit vielen Jahren mit 'revolutionärer' Beherztheit für eine Neuformung unseres mennonitischen Gemeindegesanges in die Bresche gesprungen und habe mit meinen vielen Aufsätzen und Vorträgen die Mennonitische Stil- und Anschauungsrichtung in dieser Hinsicht zu beeinflussen versucht."³² (Because Mennonite hymnals swarm not only with inaccuracies but also with distortions of the melodies and texts of the German Protestant church, I have struggled for years with revolutionary courage to bring about a reform of Mennonite congregational singing, and have attempted to influence the musical taste and outlook of Mennonites with my many articles and presentations.)

By 1937 he had a library of 123 volumes of hymnals and books on German hymnody that had expanded to 143 volumes by January, 1939. It was his chance to place Mennonite hymnody on a sound "German-evangelical" footing, and he threw himself into the work with great energy. He began corresponding with a number of pastors and hymnologists in Germany, among them Christian Neff, the editor of the *Mennonitisches Lexikon*, Johannes Kulp, Otto Michaelis, and Martin Bertheau. Each of them received a long list of questions about reference sources and the origins, publications details, and value of various hymns. Although they might apologize for a tardy answer, they almost always did respond, and in the case of Michaelis a warm friendship developed between the two men.³³

His relationship with these continental scholars and churchmen was important to Claszen. In most cases they agreed with his attempt to maintain high standards in the choice of hymns for the *Gesangbuch*. Most of them had been involved in such endeavours themselves and were able to share some of their frustrations with him. They were surprised to find someone in North America who was interested and knowledgeable in the field of German hymnody, and their words of encouragement seemed to give Claszen renewed energy. Christian Neff wrote, "Ich verfolge Ihre Gesangbucharbeit mit grossem Interesse und drücke Ihnen warm die Hand in dankbarer Anerkennung. Der Widerspruch, den Sie finden, möge Sie stärken zu unermüdlicher treuer Weiterarbeit." (I follow your hymnal work with great interest and thank you warmly for your efforts. May the opposition that you are experiencing strengthen you for continued untiring work.) After reporting this comment to Otto Michaelis, Claszen went on to say, "Das alles gibt wieder frischen Mut und macht glaubend, dass ich mich als Laie mit

meinen Bestrebungen doch nicht so auf dem 'Irrwege' befinde, wie man mir hier vorwirft." ³⁴ (All this gives me new courage, and makes me think that my amateur efforts are not so far wrong as people here tell me.)

The fact was that Claszen faced increasing opposition and criticism within the Conference of Mennonites in Canada. A paper critical of Mennonite musical taste that he read to the annual conference in Drake, Saskatchewan, in 1936, led to his being called a fanatic, and his abrasive approach to opponents in the pages of the Mennonite press caused more than one person to admonish him publicly for his lack of tolerance and charity. ³⁵

Initially, at least, his work was appreciated within the committee. Benjamin Ewert, chairman, wrote in 1936, "Zum allerwenigsten gebührt Bruder Claszen volle Anerkennung und herzlicher Dank für diese grosse Arbeit. Hat ihm sicherlich viel Zeit und anstrengende Arbeit gekostet." ³⁶ (At the very least we need to recognize the time and effort Brother Claszen has given and thank him for his work.) J. H. Janzen, using Claszen's list of hymns as the basis for his own submission, concluded with the statement, "Bruder Claszen hat uns ein Sprungbrett geschaffen, von dem aus sich etwas anfangen lässt, und auch ich möchte ihm hiermit meine Anerkennung und meinen Dank aussprechen." ³⁷ (Brother Claszen has given us a stepping stone from which we should be able to accomplish something, and I too would like to acknowledge his work and express my appreciation.) Claszen served as secretary of the committee until the spring of 1938, and together with Ewert did most of the work in preparing the list of hymns that was to be sent to the congregations for their scrutiny. ³⁸

But from the very beginning there were tensions. Claszen had a clear vision of what a German hymnal should be like and he found it impossible to compromise. The proposals of committee members like David Schulz, who wanted a generous representation of gospel hymns from *Evangeliums-Lieder*, were promptly and vigorously criticized. Claszen abhorred sentimentality and emotionalism, and would have banned all gospel songs from the hymnal. "Bei dieser Gelegenheit möchte ich darauf hinweisen, dass wir an einem Gesangbuch arbeiten für eine gewordene, bekenntnisfähige Gemeinde und nicht für eine bekenntnislose, erst noch für den Herrn zu gewinnende Versammlung." ³⁹ (I would like to take this opportunity to point out that we are working on a hymnal for a mature congregation, not for an unsaved group that must still be won for the Lord.) He distinguished between a *Gemeinschaftsliederbuch* and a *Gesangbuch*, maintaining that while songs of lower quality might be permitted in the former, only the best could be considered for inclusion in the latter. It was a distinction that not many Mennonites were prepared to accept in the 1930's. Both the *Gesangbuch mit Noten* and the Russian hymnals contained many senti-

mental hymns from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and the gospel songs of *Evangeliums-Lieder* had long ago made deep inroads into the musical psyches of most congregations.

Even when there was basic agreement with his standards he was not prepared to give an inch. J. H. Janzen was a cultivated man, a lover of music and aware of its importance, and he agreed with Claszen that gospel songs probably did more harm than good. As a church leader concerned about every member of his flock, however, he argued persuasively that a hymnal was not just for connoisseurs but also for the servant who needed to be able to understand and appreciate the music in the service as well. Such pragmatic arguments failed to impress the idealistic Claszen. In putting together his own list of hymns, Janzen selected 295 from Claszen's list and added only five new numbers. Instead of accepting the proposal as a reasonable and generous compromise on Janzen's part, Claszen proceeded to show in great detail why each of Janzen's additions were unfit for inclusion in a *Gesangbuch*.⁴⁰

It is no wonder that even as he worked on the list of hymns that was to be sent to the congregations, Claszen was increasingly unhappy. When the work was finally done in the spring of 1938, he expressed his dissatisfaction to D. H. Epp, saying "die Liste ist kümmerlich und wahllos zusammengestellt."⁴¹ (The list has been assembled in a miserable, indiscriminate manner.) He was also profoundly distrustful of what would happen once the congregational responses began to come in. "Die Gemeinden werden nach der Herausgabe der Liederliste auch noch ihr Süppchen hinzutun wollen. Wer wird da die Spreue vom Weizen entfernen?"⁴² (After the lists of songs have been distributed the congregations will also want to put in their two cents worth. Who will separate the wheat from the chaff then?) By June, 1938, he had decided that he no longer wished to be identified with the new *Gesangbuch* and sent a letter of resignation to the annual CMC meeting in July, 1938.

His departure created serious problems for the committee. He had done much of the work and had taken care of most of the correspondence with committee members and publishers. He had also withdrawn his lists of hymns and other materials and sent them to his advisers in Europe for what he obviously hoped would be a more perceptive and sympathetic assessment. This left a large gap in both the personnel and resources of the committee that took some time to fill. A new committee was elected at the conference, including David Paetkau and J. G. Rempel, and the work began again. The new hymnal was finally published in 1942.

While it may have satisfied the needs of most CMC congregations for several decades and continues to be used in some to this day, Claszen was justified in many of his subsequent criticisms of the book. To cite only one problem, the hymnal contains numerous hymn texts to be sung to the tunes of other hymns. The melody of "Liebster Jesu, wir sind hier" is

used for seven hymns in addition to the original, for example. This practice had become much less common by the middle of the previous century in most European hymnals and Claszen's frustration at the perpetuation of an anachronistic, outmoded method of assembling a hymnal is easy to understand. His view was shared by others. In a letter dated 15 March, 1956, Samuel Geiser responded to Claszen's analysis of a Swiss Mennonite hymnal that Geiser had helped publish. Geiser acknowledged the defects in their own book, although he added that the many translations of English hymns had been added in spite of his protests. But, he added, "noch bedenklicher erscheint mir das neue Gesangbuch der Mennoniten Nordamerikas vom Jahre 1942."⁴³ (But the *Gesangbuch* of the Mennonites of North America of 1942 seems to me to be still more questionable.)

Claszen was disappointed and disillusioned. To one correspondent he expressed regret, not about being a Christian but about being a Mennonite. Never one to crawl into a corner to nurse his wounds in silence, he proceeded to write a long series of articles detailing the shortcomings of the Mennonite Church and its leaders.⁴⁴ He called for Mennonite unity, for a competent, trained leadership, for a removal of practices and beliefs foreign to the Mennonite tradition, and for "straffe Disziplin und ernste Zucht." He asked that those holding different opinions from the majority not be called rebels and revolutionaries, and suggested that sentimentality and emotionalism be replaced by a Christianity characterized by austere, resolute piety.

Needless to say, the reaction was vigorous and often unfriendly. J. H. Janzen, Claszen's colleague and supporter on the *Gesangbuch* committee just a few months before, responded to the articles in his usual sardonic manner. After the dialogue had continued for some time in the Mennonite papers, Claszen wrote Janzen privately, addressing the letter to "Mein Gegner und Feind."⁴⁵ The last two paragraphs are fairly representative of the tenor of the debate.

Sie geben sich die grösste Mühe, die von mir gesammelten und zusammengetragenen Gedanken über Gemeindebau nicht nur als "Schmähungen und Verunglimpfungen" öffentlich abzustempeln, sondern um auf diesem 'missionierendem' Wege unser Volk gegen mich in Harnisch zu bringen, nicht aber das eigentliche Übel in den Kampf zu führen. Dass diese Ihre Taktik nicht nur bei mir, sondern auch bei anderen die Erinnerung an die Aufwiegelei der jüdischen Schriftgelehrten und Pharisäer wachruft, braucht Sie nicht wunder nehmen; "denn eine Liebe ist doch schliesslich der anderen wert."

"Mit Steinwerfen kann nicht reformiert werden," aber auch durchaus nicht Seelsorge im Sinne des Evangeliums getrieben werden.

(You go to great lengths not only to characterize my thoughts on congregational polity as abuse and slander, but also in this zealous way to turn our people against me without coming to grips with the actual evil.

That your tactics are seen by me and others as reminiscent of the agitations of the Scribes and the Pharisees should not surprise you. "Reforms are not brought about by throwing stones" but neither is pastoral care in the spirit of the Gospel.)

There was many another *Federkrieg* during this period, too many to be able to describe them all. Claszen made one more attempt to have his proposals for reform accepted when he offered a manuscript entitled "Der Weg Zum Kirchenlied" to the conference. Comprising a Gesangbuch, a Choralbuch, and volumes devoted to the lives of the poets and composers, it represented his version of an ideal Gesangbuch. Needless to say, it did not receive serious consideration. J. G. Rempel said that a hymnal assembled by J. P. Claszen would undoubtedly be an exemplary hymnal, except that no one would want to sing from it. He was unable to forsake his ideals long enough to make the compromises necessary to satisfy a large and varied community. It must also be said that the Mennonite community was simply not ready for the kinds of reforms he was proposing; it would take at least two decades before his way of thinking became more acceptable.

What is really astonishing is the fact that all this activity took place during ten very difficult years.⁴⁶ He had become a carpenter and cabinet-maker, and had eked out a living with odd jobs and occasionally welfare. Only with the coming of the war was he finally able to find steady work and build the house on Gallagher Avenue in which he spent the rest of his life. From 1943 to 1947 he underwent four operations, the last of which prevented him from doing work of any kind for four months.⁴⁷ In spite of his illness he had already turned to the research work that would occupy most of his time until 1960.

From the mid-1940's until 1960 Claszen devoted much of his time and energy to the study of Anabaptist hymnody. By 1953 articles describing his quest for information and sources in the libraries of Europe began to appear in *Der Bote*. In an article entitled "Ausbund" he discussed the theories about the publication of the *Ausbund*, the hymnal of the Swiss Anabaptists published after the middle of the sixteenth century.⁴⁸ One of the problems he points out is the fact that there were two parts to the *Ausbund*. The solution to at least some of the inconsistencies could be solved if "Ein schoen Gesangbuechlein Geistlicher Lieder," another hymnal of the Anabaptists, could be found, but this hymnal, rare to begin with, had disappeared from the few libraries that had possessed it during the war.

He now began a search for the hymnal that lasted for the next two years. Finally, in January, 1955, he announced that he had found it.⁴⁹ He tells a story of disappointment and frustration at finding the collections of once great libraries like the one in Berlin reduced to rubble by the war. He wrote 139 letters to 130 libraries in Europe and the United States, all in

vain, until he got word from the German State Archives that they had a copy. "De Aunhola jewennt!," he wrote triumphantly. He ordered a microfilm copy and turned his attention to Anabaptist hymns that were not contained in the three main collections now in his possession: *Ausbund*, "Ein schoen Gesangbuechlein," and *Die Lieder der Hutterischen Brüder*.

His work resulted in a number of book length manuscripts. These included "Dichter und Lieder der Taeufer und Taufgesinnten," "Lieder der Taeufer und Taufgesinnten" (dealing with songs not found in the three main collections), "So sangen die Taeufer und Taufgesinnten: Tonangaben und Melodien," "Melodien zu den Liedern der Hutterischen Brüder," "Melodieforschung" (collection of individual articles on hymns of the *Ausbund*), "Handbuch zum Ausbund der Taufgesinnten mit den dazu gehoerenden Melodien (1944-1956)," and "Etliche Bemerkungen zur Dissertation der Frau Reimer Duerksen." The last of these is particularly impressive. Rosella Reimer Duerksen had consulted Claszen as she worked on her dissertation on Anabaptist hymnody. Once it was completed she sent a copy to the CMBC library. Claszen was able to borrow it for a short time and proceeded to write a thorough and penetrating critique of the second and third chapters, the kind of review that would not have been out of place in any of the important musicological journals of the time.

Although he was often apologetic in his letters to European professors, always insisting that he was only an amateur trying to get the "Kleinarbeit" out of the way so that professional scholars could get down to the really important work, more than one scholar told him that he had nothing to be ashamed of when it came to scholarly methods. Certainly his work is characterized by an attention to detail and a passion for uncovering the whole picture that one associates with the born scholar. Why, then, were so few of his writings published in the European journals of hymnology to which he sent them?⁵⁰

Part of the answer can be found in a letter to Claszen from the editor of *Jahrbuch für Liturgik und Hymnologie*.⁵¹ In spite of their thorough professionalism, he told Claszen, the perspective from which the articles were written was rather narrow. Claszen wanted to recover the songs of the Anabaptists for use in today's congregations, but that could only be of interest to Mennonites. He also wanted to awaken interest in the hymns outside the Mennonite community, but for most German hymnologists they were only of cultural-historical or ethnomusicological interest and would have to be screened very carefully to find the ones interesting from those points of view. A sentence from the concluding section of Claszen's "Handbuch" illustrates the polemical, subjective tone of much of his writing that led the editor to make these comments. "Es ist zu erwarten, dass, wenn einst die deutsche reformationsgeschichtliche Forschung das

zum Himmel schreiende Unrecht, das den Täufern in Leben und Forschung widerfahren ist, wieder einigermassen gut gemacht haben wird, auch allen diesen, vom Staube der Vergessenheit verschütteten Stiefkindern der Reformation ihr unabstreitbares Recht werden wird."⁵² (One can expect that when German research into reformation history has redeemed some of the appalling injustices done to the Anabaptists in the past, these long-forgotten stepchildren of the Reformation will regain their rightful place.)

By the mid-1950's Claszen was beginning to receive requests for help from many people. Letters came from fellow amateur hymnologists in Germany or Paraguay,⁵³ and he also was approached by people like Charles Burkhart, working on Old Colony Mennonite singing, and Helen Martens, working on the songs of the Hutterites, each of whom was interested in seeing what he had done.⁵⁴ The librarians at Goshen College and Bethel College wanted to know what he was doing and occasionally asked to see his manuscripts. The editor of *Der Bote* sometimes complained that his articles were both too long and too learned for his newspaper, but a significant number of articles did get published for Mennonite readers to absorb if they wished.

Even though Claszen was immersed in the study of Anabaptist hymnody during the 1940's and 1950's, he still found time to work on more recent developments. In 1953 he completed "Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Gemeindegesanges der Mennoniten," a 600-page manuscript in which he discussed the contents of all the Mennonite hymnals available to him. The hymns are listed, compared, and analyzed in complete and meticulous detail. Especially interesting is the passage outlining his views on "Kernlieder." Needless to say, the term meant something very different for him than it does for many people now.⁵⁵ For Claszen, Kernlieder were the classics of the German chorale repertoire that had to be included in any Gesangbuch worthy of the name. More recently the term has been applied to spiritual songs like "Harre meine Seele" and "So lange Jesus bleibt der Herr" that are much-loved by Mennonite traditionalists but that Claszen would have declared completely unacceptable.

In 1957 Claszen was beginning to assemble materials dealing with the Anabaptist hymnody of the Netherlands.⁵⁶ His attention was drawn back to the twentieth century, however, by the decision in 1961 of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada to publish a new German hymnal. This time it was different. He was respectfully consulted as an authority on hymnology by several members of the committee, Peter B. Wiens, and George and Henry Wiebe. They were not necessarily prepared to accept all his recommendations, but they did listen to what he had to suggest, and began to institute some of the reforms he had struggled in vain to introduce several decades before. Wiens had been assigned the task of

checking the poetry of the hymns and wrote to Claszen asking for help.⁵⁷ Claszen's letters are not preserved, but Wien's replies indicate that the seventy-year-old hymnologist was as prompt, thorough, and critical as always. "Doch, mein lieber Herr Classen, mit dem Ansetzen des 'eisernen Besen', wie Sie sich ausdrückten, hat es eine sehr grosse, eigentlich unüberwindliche Schwierigkeit." (But my dear Brother Classen, there are serious, almost insurmountable problems associated with your suggestion that we clean house with an iron broom.)

There was not a chorale that he had not known for half a lifetime, not a melody or its variants he had not studied and read about, not a verse whose appropriateness or worth he had not pondered. According to George Wiebe, Claszen influenced the *Gesangbuch* in a number of important ways.⁵⁸ Perhaps the most exciting discovery that the young men made was that the chorales, known to them only in staid and measured quarter note versions, had originally been sprightly, rhythmically varied melodies in the sixteenth century. The committee took great pleasure in changing "Allein Gott in der Hoeh sei Ehr," for example, squared off and homogenized over the years, from the placid four-four metre of the 1942 *Gesangbuch* to the lively triple metre that had characterized it in the early sixteenth century.⁵⁹ Similar changes took place in "Wachet auf" (513 in the 1942 *Gesangbuch* and 116–118 in the new one), "Aus tiefer Not" (178 and 269), "'Mir nach' spricht Christus" (251 and 350–351), "Wenn wir in hoechster Not" (302 and 411), "O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort!" (520 and 466), and others. In some cases the committee included more than one version, allowing congregations to sing the familiar version if they wished, while at the same time providing the young and adventurous with more lively and challenging variants. This, incidentally, was a compromise that Claszen found distasteful and unnecessary. Wiebe was subsequently asked to serve on the committee preparing the *Mennonite Hymnal* published in 1969 and the rhythmic innovations of the 1965 *Gesangbuch* found their way into that hymnal as well.⁶⁰

There were other ways in which Claszen influenced the *Gesangbuch*. One example that can be documented is the change in the last two lines of "Muede bin ich, geh zur Ruh" (534). Wiens shared Claszen's dissatisfaction with the words, "Lass, die noch im Finstern gehn, bald den Stern der Weisen sehn!" and gladly accepted his alternative, "hab auf alle gnaedig acht, schenk uns eine gute Nacht."⁶¹ No doubt there were other such instances, and it is likely that he was also able to tell them about new hymns that would be good additions to the *Gesangbuch*. The committee acknowledged their debt to Claszen several times, thanking him especially for the use of his large library. Claszen benefitted from the relationship too. The tangible result was an outpouring of writing related to the new *Gesangbuch*, including a manuscript of

some 1400 pages. Just as important were the friendships Claszen established with the young men on the committee. According to Wiebe, he appeared to be rejuvenated by the contacts.

Just because some of the reforms he had been advocating for decades had been incorporated in the *Gesangbuch* did not mean that he approved of the book. His initial reaction was recorded in "Ein Gang durch das neue deutschsprachige Gesangbuch der Allgemeinen Konferenz der Mennoniten Nordamerikas aus dem Jahre 1965," a manuscript completed in 1966. His basic assessment is contained in the following sentence: "Die Mitglieder unserer GB-Kommission befanden sich gewissermassen im Sog einer in Deutschland erhärteten Neuorientierung in Bezug auf Lieder- und Melodienwahl für gottesdienstlichen Gebrauch, blieben aber trotzdem nur staunend und bewundernd dennoch leider am Anfang des schmalen Weges unschlüssig stehen, um wieder in die breite Strasse des Massengeschmacks einzubiegen."⁶² (To a certain extent the members of the hymnal committee found themselves under the influence of a new attitude towards the choice of hymns and melodies for use in worship services that had developed in Germany. Nevertheless, they were only willing to observe the beginning of the straight and narrow way, standing there awestruck and irresolute before slipping back onto the broad road of mass appeal.)

Congregational singing was the most important act of corporate worship, he maintained, and as such deserved only the very best music. There were several areas in which he found the new *Gesangbuch* wanting. All his life he felt that to be Mennonite was to be German, and partly because there was such an abundance of German hymns that he saw no need to import any others. Of the 586 hymns in the new hymnal, only 236 deserved to be called "Kernlieder" in the first place. Of the rest, eighteen translations from English hymnody had been taken over from the 1942 *Gesangbuch* and fifty-eight more added, an action that he deplored.⁶³ To make matters worse, the translated hymns were mainly gospel songs that, when combined with the German spiritual folk songs that already cluttered the book, made it into something that did not merit the title "Gesangbuch."

The deviations from proper hymnological practice in other matters became insignificant in light of the overwhelming evidence that the committee had pandered to the lowest common denominator in allowing such hymns as "Harre meine Seele," "Wo findet die Seele die Heimat, die Ruh," "Stille Nacht," "Licht nach dem Dunkel," and "O du froehliche" to be included. "Sentimentaler Singsang, der es weniger mit der Wirklichkeit als mit Illusion und Phantasie zu tun hat, verwässerte Limonade, religiöses Zuckerwerk gehört nicht in einen deutsch-evangelischen Gottesdienst."⁶⁴ (Sentimental singsong, having less to do with reality than with illusion and fantasy, diluted lemonade, religious sugar

water, do not belong in a German Protestant worship service.) Several times one finds the expression, "Himmel, hast du keine Blitze?!" (Heaven, have you no lightning bolts?!) His advice to the congregations was characteristic. "Ich bin der Überzeugung, dass, wenn die Gemeinde diese angesagte Dutzendware resolut nicht mitsingen, sondern das Singen solcher Lieder den verantwortlichen Männern überlassen würde, dann würde man vorsichtiger in der Wahl der zu singenden Lieder vorgehen."⁶⁵ (I am convinced that if the congregation firmly refuses to sing when these tawdry hymns are announced, leaving the singing to the men responsible, greater care would be exercised in the choice of hymns.) When such hymns were announced in his own church, it was well known that he would fold his arms and refuse to sing.

In a series of articles submitted to the German newspaper, *Die Post*, beginning in 1967, he made these views known to the Mennonite constituency. Readers occasionally took exception to his condemnation of their favourite hymns. In the issue of 5 March, 1968 he denounced the inclusion of "Licht nach dem Dunkel," a Sankey gospel song that he described as a "kümmerliches Gereimsel" (a wretched doggerel). An anonymous lady in Alberta responded.⁶⁶ Had Claszen experienced the kind of peace after turmoil that the hymn described, she wrote, he would not say such terrible things about a song that had given her much comfort. By this time Claszen tried to avoid newspaper debates — "habe viel vor dem Kriege polemisiert," he told one correspondent — but there were some insults that demanded a response.⁶⁷ Citing his experiences in Russia from 1913 to 1923 as quite adequate for the purposes of the discussion, he suggested to "die hier in Frage stehenden 'Leserin', die sich ihres Namens schämt," that she had no business attacking his person. He also drew the attention of "des in Betracht kommenden namenloses Menschenkindes" to a different hymn that made much more sense than "Licht nach dem Dunkel."

A formidably well-informed and tenacious opponent in a debate, his only weakness was an inability to step back and see the humour in what was happening. He was a very serious, sometimes prickly man who was so convinced of the rightness of his cause that he was unable to accept the fact that other human beings were not as resolute and uncompromising in their faith and personal life as he was. He abhorred weakness and dishonesty of any kind, and was unable to accept the weakness and unable to overlook the dishonesty that he inevitably encountered in his dealings with other people. Only a more active sense of humour would have permitted him to let slights and misunderstandings slide by. As it was, he expended enormous amounts of energy writing justifications for his points of view to editors and readers of the Mennonite newspapers. Editors learned to treat him with great care. Requests to shorten his long articles were inevitably met with outrage and more than one editor wrote

him a hasty note apologizing for offending him. At other times D. H. Epp, Walter Quiring, Victor Peters or Hermann Neufeld would explain the facts of putting out a newspaper to him as bluntly as they could, but the explanations never seemed to make much difference. He was a man incapable of compromise in those matters that concerned him deeply.

It should be pointed out that those who knew him in the last few years of his life say that he became a bit less combative, a bit more serene. His research and writing continued unabated into 1973, the year before his death at the age of eighty-two in June, 1974. In 1972 he received a hymnal published by the South German Mennonites and he promptly prepared a large manuscript dealing with every hymn in the book. In 1973 he was still corresponding with libraries in Germany and Switzerland in a twenty-year-old quest for the source of the Russian Mennonite version of "So nimm denn meine Hände," in which the opening line had been transformed into "Nimm Jesu meine Hände." His hand was not quite so steady, perhaps, but his mind remained as clear as it had ever been in matters dealing with hymnology.

Although hymnology was his passion, his "Steckenpferd," any discussion of J. P. Claszen's writings would be incomplete without mentioning at least a few of his other concerns. He was interested in a wide range of social and theological issues, especially those that concerned Mennonites. As early as 1939 he informed the readers of *Der Bote* that for many years he had been collecting materials reflecting the issues of the day with the intention of sending them to archives in Germany where scholars of the future would be able to draw their own conclusions.⁶⁸ In addition to writing letters and articles on literary and theological themes, he also clipped and gathered articles on topics like the *Reiseschuld*. No doubt much of this was done with the hope that readers of the future would see the justice of his cause, but he had a sense of the value of archival collections that was quite exceptional. In the end he did not send his collection to Germany but donated it to the archives of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, due in large part to the efforts of George Wiebe of CMBC.⁶⁹

He followed the debate on the *Selbstschutz* that arose in the pages of *Der Bote* after the publication of Frank Epp's *Mennonite Exodus* in 1963 with great interest. As a former member of the *Selbstschutz* he vigorously put forward his own interpretation of pacifism. He used quotations from the Old Testament, especially I Samuel 15:3, to support his view that killing was a necessary evil in wartime. "Hiernach darf man nicht nur, sondern soll im Kriege (sogar unbarmherzig!) töten. Die Lehre von der Wehrlosigkeit bezieht sich nur gegen die Aussübung der Rache und gegen die Aufrichtung des Reiches Christi mit dem Schwert."⁷⁰ (According to this passage one is not only permitted but enjoined to kill in wartime (sometimes without mercy!). The doctrine of nonresistance

applies only to killing in revenge and to the establishment of Christianity by force.)

One of his greatest concerns was the fate of German culture among the Mennonites in Canada. The issue had obvious implications for hymnody, but he took an active part in the wider debate on the issue as well. Feelings ran high among the Mennonites who had just escaped what they regarded as the most evil regime in the world. Like the Mennonites who were taken from Russia to Germany by the German army during World War II, the Mennonites who had left Russia in the 1920's regarded the Germans as liberators and friends, and saw Hitler as a saviour of civilization rather than an evil dictator.⁷¹

Claszen was a staunch defender of the Nazi regime. Writing to P. H. Enns, he said, "Soviel sollten Sie von der Weltwirtschaftspolitik wissen, dass der Arbeitslosenstand künstlich von der jüdisch-demokratischen Welt überall ins Leben gerufen ist, um mit ihm und durch ihn eine alles verheerende Weltrevolution in hellen Flammen auflodern zu lassen. Und wenn Sie dann noch in Hitlers '[Mein] Kampf', über dieses Problem nachlesen und zur klaren und richtigen Ansicht durchdrungen sein werden, dann werden Sie, Herr Aeltester, von Ihrer Hochburg aus nicht mehr mit entwürdigender Verachtung auf Ihre vom Unglück betroffenen Geschwister herabsehen."⁷² (This much at least you should know about world politics, that massive unemployment has been orchestrated by Jewish-democratic forces in order to incite world revolution. And then when you read Hitler's "[Mein] Kampf" and get a clear insight into the causes of the problem, perhaps, Herr Aeltester, you will not look down on your less fortunate brethren with such disdain.)

Occasionally he even allowed these opinions to cloud his judgement in hymnological matters. In a paper written around 1962 he condemned the melody of "Es kennt der Herr die Seinen" by saying that it was unfortunate that it was supposed to be sung to a Jewish melody.⁷³ The Jewish composer in question is Felix Mendelssohn. Though from a Jewish family, he was a Christian who wrote choral music and oratorios on Biblical themes that have inspired Mennonite choirs and audiences for several generations. Claszen did not normally allow such extra-musical considerations to affect his analysis, in spite of his effort to promote German hymns, and it is a clear indication of the depth of feeling aroused by the German issue.

Perhaps the most startling manifestation of these feelings occurred in a letter to *Die Mennonitische Rundschau* in 1938 when he informed its readers of his resignation from the Gesangbuch committee and told them also that he had prepared a list of hymns of his own for consideration.⁷⁴ In preparing the list he felt he needed reference sources by Zahn and Kuemmerle that were too expensive for him to buy. "Ich wandte mich direkt an den Fuehrer Adolf Hitler mit der Bitte, mir die erwähnten Werke

zur Verfügung zu stellen. Und er hat sie mir zukommen lassen. Wieder ein schlagender Beweis, dass der von der Welt angepöbelter Fuehrer sich auch des Geringsten unter den Auslanddeutschen annimmt und ein durchaus wohlwollendes Verständnis für ihre Nöte hat: Heil Hitler!" (I addressed myself directly to the Fuehrer, Adolf Hitler, with the request to place these works at my disposal, and he made this possible. Another striking illustration that this much-maligned leader understands and cares for the needs of even the lowliest German in other lands. Heil Hitler!)

It is easy after half a century to see the mote in other men's eyes, especially when they leave behind such a complete record of their thoughts. There is no doubt that J. P. Claszen had blind spots that are difficult to understand even when we try to see things through the perspective of his time and culture. It is also clear that in spite of his prodigious efforts to communicate and preserve his opinions, the extent to which he was able to influence people and events was severely limited by his somewhat narrow yet firmly, even obstinately, held views. Nevertheless, his is a remarkable human story. Suffering most of his life from financial insecurity and health problems that made the feeding and housing of a family extremely difficult, he was still able to achieve more as a scholar than many professional scholars leading sheltered lives in a university. With no training beyond that given by a Russian Mennonite high school, he was able to develop research techniques that any candidate for a doctoral degree could be proud of. He corresponded with some of the greatest authorities in hymnology in Europe and, while his views were never fully accepted, was acknowledged by his fellow Mennonites to be their foremost authority on hymnody in Canada.

And there can be no argument about the nobility of his cause. All his life he fought to place Mennonite hymnody on a sound musical and theological footing, fighting for what he believed to be the best music and texts possible and trying to persuade fellow committee members to discard hymns of poor quality. The standards he upheld may not be the ones we would choose to apply today, but as a new Mennonite hymnal begins to take shape there can be no doubt that some of the same battles will be waged again. Let us hope that, with standards appropriate for our time, J. P. Claszen's cause will remain alive.

Notes

¹The proceedings were published in *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, 1(1983).

²Wesley Berg, *From Russia With Music: A Study of the Mennonite Choral Singing Tradition in Canada* (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1985).

³J. P. Claszen's papers are housed in the Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba. His large library of books on hymnology can be found in the library of Canadian Mennonite Bible College and the rare book collection of the Heritage Centre.

⁴Interview with Alex Classen, 30 April 1985.

⁵Al Reimer, "Derche Blom Raede: Arnold Dyck and the Comic Irony of the Forstei," *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, 2(1984), 62.

⁶J. P. Claszen, "Gedanken über Gemeindebau (Schluss)," *Die Mennonitische Rundschau* (12 October 1938), 9. The translations are mine, and are paraphrases rather than literal renderings.

⁷Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada 1920-1940: A People's Struggle For Survival* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1982), 187-236. See Henry Paetkau, "Russian Mennonite Immigrants of the 1920's: A Reappraisal," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 2(1984), 72-85, for a discussion of settlement patterns in Ontario.

⁸Claszen, "Wie wird uns sein," *Der Bote*, (5 March 1925), 1, 4.

⁹Claszen, "Brunkild, Man. den 9. Juni," *Der Bote* (24 June 1925), 3.

¹⁰Claszen, "Adam, wo bist du?," *Die Mennonitische Rundschau* (9 September 1925), 2.

¹¹Ibid. 4.

¹²Claszen, "Machno," *Die Mennonitische Rundschau* (9 September 1925), 1. See also "Der Immigrant Kauft Land", *ibid.* (1 April 1925), 12; and "Feuer", *ibid.* 15 July 1925, 1, for poems by Claszen on less traumatic topics.

¹³Claszen, "Grundfrage der Jugendvereinarbeit," *Der Bote* (19 March 1930), 1; concluded next issue.

¹⁴Claszen, "Bekanntmachung," *Der Bote* (21 May 1930), 3.

¹⁵*Liederborn*, im Auftrage der Mennonitischen Prediger Konferenz in Manitoba gesammelt und herausgegeben von J. P. Claszen, 1932, Conference of Mennonites in Canada (CMC) Archives.

¹⁶Conversation with Ernest Enns, 12 March 1985.

¹⁷*Polyhymnia*, unter Mitwirkung von Dirigenten, Ex-Dirigenten und Sachkundigen redigiert von J. P. Claszen, 1. Heft, May 1933.

¹⁸Claszen, "Bericht über die Zusammenstellung eines Ziffernotenliederbuch." The article is undated and I have been unable to find its source.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Claszen, "Ziffersystem," *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, IV, 102.

²²David H. Epp, *Johann Cornies: Zuege aus seinem Leben und Wirken* (Historische Schriftenreihe, Vol. 3, Echo-Verlag, 1946), 75.

²³Mrs. H. F. Klassen, "Franz Thiessen," *Die Mennonitische Rundschau* CII (4 July 1979), 10, contains a description of a performance of St. Paul by Mendelssohn by a community choir in Davlekanovo around 1912, from a score transcribed into Ziffern by its director, Franz Thiessen.

²⁴See, for example, Aron G. Sawatzky, "Die Vereinfachung der Musikzeichen," CMC Archives (XX-10-7); and Claszen, "Zum Aufsatz 'Die Vereinfachung der Musikzeichen'," *Die Mennonitische Rundschau* (23 December 1931), 8.

²⁵Sawatzky, "Zur Vereinfachung der Musikzeichen," *Die Mennonitische Rundschau* (17 February 1932), 3.

²⁶See Claszen, "Ehrenrettung des Ziffersystem," *Die Mennonitische Rundschau* (13 September 1933), 2-4, for the most detailed statement of the arguments for and against the use of Ziffern.

²⁷*Choralbuch*, in vierstimmiger Tonsatz zum Gebrauch in Kirche Schule und Haus der Mennoniten-Gemeinden zusammengestellt im Auftrage der Predigerkonferenz, Ziffernausgabe, 1935.

²⁸J. P. Claszen to P. J. Klassen, 3 October 1937, CMC Archives XXXI-10 (5-1-9).

²⁹See also Claszen, "Zurechtstellung," *Die Mennonitische Rundschau*, (22 July 1926), 2-3. Claszen wrote several articles under the pseudonym of Hildburg Heimkirchen during this time.

³⁰CMC Yearbook, 1938, 27.

³¹CMC Archives XXXI-10 (5-1-2).

³²Claszen, "Gesangbuch," *Die Mennonitische Rundschau* (7 June 1939), 6.

³³After the war Claszen sent packages of food and other goods to the elderly Michaelis family, gifts that were received very gratefully by these people who had lost everything during the war.

³⁴J. P. Claszen to Otto Michaelis, 9 April 1937.

³⁵Claszen, "Vom Segen des Gemeindegesanges," CMC Yearbook (1936), 62-67. See, for example, J. H. Janzen, "Nje smejl," *Der Bote* (6 May 1936), 4.

³⁶B. Ewert to Gesangbuch committee, 18 March 1936.

³⁷J. H. Janzen to B. Ewert, 1 April 1936, CMC Archives, XXXI-10 (5-1-6).

³⁸B. Ewert to J. H. Janzen, 16 April 1938, *ibid.*

³⁹Claszen, "Notiz zu der von Br. D. Schulz gemachten Bemerkung," *ibid.*

⁴⁰Claszen, "Bemerkungen zu der Liederauswahl von Aeltester J. H. Janzen, *ibid.*

⁴¹J. P. Claszen to D. H. Epp, 20 May 1938, CMC Archives XXXI-10 (5-1-10).

⁴²J. P. Claszen to D. H. Epp, 6 February 1937, CMC Archives XXXI-10 (5-1-8).

⁴³Samuel Geiser to J. P. Claszen, 15 March 1956, *ibid.* (1-1-36).

⁴⁴Claszen, "Gedanken über Gemeindebau," *Die Mennonitische Rundschau*, (21 September 1938), 3-4; and the next three issues.

⁴⁵J. P. Claszen to J. H. Janzen, 25 February 1939, CMC Archives, XXXI-10 (1-1-15).

⁴⁶J. P. Claszen to Otto Michaelis, 18 March 1947, CMC Archives, *ibid.* (1-1-29).

⁴⁷*Ibid.*

⁴⁸Claszen, "Ausbund," *Der Bote* (23 September 1953), 7-8.

⁴⁹Claszen, "Lieder unserer Glaubensvorfahren," *Der Bote* (19 January 1955), 7-8.

⁵⁰Three articles appeared in *Monatschrift für Gottesdienst und Kirchliche Kunst* in 1938 and 1939, but these seem to be the only articles to have been published in European journals.

⁵¹19 June 1958, CMC Archives, XXXI-10 (1-2-25).

⁵²Claszen, "Handbuch zum Ausbund der Taufgesinnten mit den dazu gehörenden Melodien," 339.

⁵³See also the letter from Professor Will Goeters, former Professor of Church History at the University of Bonn, who had seen Claszen's article on Anabaptist songs in *Mennonite Life*. The seventy-three year old man greets Claszen as a kindred soul. 16 May 1951 (1-1-31).

⁵⁴Charles Burkhardt, "Music of the Old Colony Mennonites," *Mennonite Life*, VII (January 1952), 20-21, 47; and Helen Martens, "Hutterite Songs: The Origins and Aural Transmission of Their Melodies From the Sixteenth Century," Ph. D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1968.

⁵⁵"Ein Beitrag," 544.

⁵⁶J. P. Claszen to Dr. Arnold Schmitz, 1957 (1-2-22).

⁵⁷P. B. Wiens to J. P. Claszen, November and December 1961 (1-1-41).

⁵⁸Interview, 27 May 1985.

⁵⁹See *Gesangbuch* 1942, No. 1; *Gesangbuch* 1965 No. 2.

⁶⁰See, for example, the alternate version of "Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott," the famous Reformation hymn by Martin Luther, *Mennonite Hymnal*, No. 597.

⁶¹P. B. Wiens to J. P. Claszen, 20 November 1961.

⁶²"Ein Gang," 255.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 90. See also "Uebersetzungen im neuen deutschsprachigen Gesangbuch," XX-10 (9), for a complete discussion of the translations in the *Gesangbuch*.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 91.

⁶⁵Claszen, "Kirchenlieder, die uns fehlen," XXXI-10 (2-7).

⁶⁶Eine Leserin in Alberta, "Des Lesers Meinung," *Die Post* (23 April 1968), 4.

⁶⁷Claszen, "Licht nach dem Dunkel (Schlussbemerkung)," *Die Post* (21 May 1968), 5.

⁶⁸Claszen, "Erwiderung," *Der Bote* (1 February 1939), 3.

⁶⁹Heinz Epp to J. P. Claszen, 15 February 1973 (1-1-60).

⁷⁰Claszen, "Selbstschutz, Selbstschützer, Wehrlosigkeit," *Die Post* (24 September 1963) 3, 6.

⁷¹Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada 1920-1940*, 548-56.

⁷²J. P. Claszen to P. H. Enns, 8 February 1939 (1-1-25).

⁷³Claszen, "Kirchenlieder, die uns fehlen," XXXI-10 (2-7).

⁷⁴Claszen, "Gesangbuchangelegenheit," *Die Mennonitische Rundschau*, (17 August 1938).