

## Book Reviews

Sandra Birdsell, *The Two-Headed Calf* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1997). Paperback, 269 pp. \$19.99.

A new work of fiction by the talented Sandra Birdsell is always a welcome gift. When the book is as good as this one, her readers can enjoy an added bonus. Birdsell began as a writer of short fiction back in the eighties with two highly promising collections—*Night Travellers* (1982) and *Ladies of the House* (1984)—followed by two novels which further enhanced her reputation. Now she is back with an even stronger collection of short stories, her first in a dozen years, and one that richly demonstrates what an accomplished short story writer she has become. In Mavis Gallant and Alice Monroe, Canada boasts two of the finest writers of short fiction in English, and with this volume Sandra Birdsell proves she is not far behind. She may not yet display quite the wise cosmopolitanism and subtlety of form displayed by Gallant, or quite match the startling depths of insight of Monroe, but she is getting closer to both in all these qualities.

Each of these nine stories is a polished gem, but then not all gems are of equal quality or value. And although Mennonite readers like to think of Birdsell as one of their own, only three of these stories draw explicitly on Mennonite backgrounds and contain identifiable Mennonite characters. But those three—“A Necessary Treason,” “The Man from Mars” and the title story “The Two-Headed Calf”—are among the strongest in the book in their vivid authenticity, relevant themes and searing emotions. In “The Two-Headed Calf” she explores with wonderful complexity a theme close to her heart, the theme of trying to find self-identity in the cultural and familial confusion of growing up partly Mennonite and partly French-Metis. Sylvia, born out of wedlock to Betty, her rebel

lions, teen-aged Mennonite mother, grows up not knowing who her father is. Her wise old Mennonite grandfather keeps urging her to "Just be you," but for Sylvia it's not that simple. Her grandmother Malvina spurns her as illegitimate and holds up as a paragon the memory of Neta, her beautiful daughter who was raped and killed by anarchists in Russia. By the time Sylvia intuits that her father was the brother of Lucille, her mother's adolescent French pal, the revelation comes too late. Sylvia knows she will always remain the "two-headed calf," an apparition she once saw at the fair, a freakish image that still haunts her. Its two brains, she realizes, would always cancel each other out and "the calf's heart had stopped beauty."

In "A Necessary Treason," Janice, the middle-aged daughter of Sadie, finally comprehends that her ageing mother, still harboring illusions of cultural superiority bred by her early years in Mennonite Russia, had to commit "a necessary treason" against her family in order to free herself from rigid Mennonite restraints. Sadie was only thirteen when she left Russia in the twenties, and remembers the times of terror very clearly. Her aunts and older sisters she suspects, had "come to know desperate things she doesn't." Now, remaining as head-strong as ever in her old age, Sadie has developed "an apocalyptic eye" and sees symbols, portents and omens everywhere as she awaits "the return of Christ." It takes Neil, the Mennonite friend Janice brings home, to place her mother in a dubious Mennonite context. He tells her that Mennonites are probably pacifists because "They're fixated by death and dying." Janice can only watch helplessly as her mother remains trapped in the past.

"The Man from Mars" is a moving story about an impoverished Mennonite family returning to Canada from Mexico in a battered old truck and with no specific destination. Birdsell gets everything achingly right in this story as she depicts Willie, the coarse, shiftless, sex-obsessed father bringing his put-upon wife and two young daughters to Manitoba, the province he had left with his parents as a child. Suffering from culture shock, unable to adapt himself to new conditions get anything but the most menial of jobs, Willie finally defects, slinking away from his family only to get killed by a car outside Minot, North Dakota. Released from her brutally oppressive husband, Eva, the sex-abused wife, takes out a new lease on life, works happily as a cook in a hotel, and eventually marries a retired Mennonite farmer. The crude events of the story are sensitively filtered through the mind and sensibility of Sara, one of the two daughters. Both prove to be "whiz kids" who grow up getting an education and later look back at their father as a "man from Mars" who "is overcome by air too heavy to breathe or to speak the deserts and fires he carries inside."

Most of the other (non-Mennonite) stories are equally accomplished, several utilizing unusual techniques and narrative strategies. In "Disappearances" an elderly couple, Frances and Donald, are on their way to Saskatoon to attend the trial of their errant granddaughter, who has been charged with manslaughter. The focus of the story is not on the trial, however, but on the complex feelings the

grandparents have about the unimaginably horrible experience that awaits them in Saskatoon. As respectable and responsible members of an older generation, they can only go helplessly over the incriminating evidence as they know it, reflect on their daughter's need for money to pay for their granddaughter's trial, and to dread what is to come. The story ends before they even get to their destination. Having resigned herself to the inevitable, Frances, at the end of the story, watches in helpless fascination as Donald "marches towards the dug-out pond" where they have stopped, and disappears. Does he actually drown himself, or is it a trick of the eye experienced by the suffering Frances? It's a trick ending that may only work for readers who do not demand explicit realism.

The first two stories, "I Used to Play Brass in a Band" and "The Midnight Hour" explore the delicate, manifold play of forces between Lorraine and her daughter Christine. The first story is narrated by Lorraine, who as a middle-aged mother returns to her home in Winnipeg after living in Vancouver and remembers the time Christine, now living in Japan, had brought home three strange brothers because they had nowhere else to go. Lorraine had herself become involved in the lives of the brothers after Christine left for Japan. The mother learns to cope with her daughter's generation through these contacts in ways she was unable to do directly with her daughter. In "The Midnight Hour" it is Christine who narrates the tangled story of her fifteenth birthday. Birdsell skilfully captures the conflicting feelings and aspirations of the teen-aged girl, who is bright but increasingly bored living with her mother. The experience of being picked up, along with her two girl friends, by an older man in Assiniboine Park who takes them to his apartment with the aim of seducing them, in the end brings her closer to her mother as she realizes the danger she has barely escaped. The clever reversal of generational point of view tellingly reveals the nuances of a mother-daughter relationship.

Sandra Birdsell is not afraid to tackle off-beat themes or venture into scenes of the macabre that mix grim humor with sinister effects. "The Ballad of the Sargent Brothers" is a country gothic tale about a pair of confirmed bachelor twins living in isolation on a farm in southern Manitoba. Their stagnant lives are suddenly disrupted and tragically turned by a well-meaning young woman from a neighboring farm who invades the brothers's lives with devastating effect. It is a haunting story with a beautifully written ending, and Birdsell demonstrates that she can manage the difficult combination of gothic mood and thwarted romance with impressive style.

With this collection Sandra Birdsell shows that she has it all as a writer of fiction: she can be wryly funny, she can provide finely judged insights, create memorable characters and command moods that shade from sunny to dark to disturbingly ominous. Above all, she shows that she has the command of style and form we expect from the top echelon of Canadian writers.

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Helene Dueck, *Durch Trübsal und Not* (Winnipeg: Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Winnipeg, 1995).

Whenever a group of post World War II Mennonite immigrants above the age of 65-70 gets together, a part of the conversation inevitably turns to the so-called "Great Trek" of 1943 to 1945, when 35000 Mennonites were evacuated from Ukraine (of whom about 22000 were later "repatriated" by the Soviet Union). The mode of transportation of these evacuees ranged from freight trains (in the Old Colony and Sagraadowka), a relatively fast and safe mode, to caravans of covered wagons of motley description (in the Molochnaia) over frequently soggy roads. Old men and young boys were among the few males in this exodus; the able bodied men were either in the Gulag or else had been recruited by the German occupation forces. As the proverbial saying goes, this trek "beggars all description." It is the subject of the above mentioned book.

Almost any number of descriptions, poems and reflections, some good, some mediocre and maudlin, have surfaced from this unprecedented collective experience. This book is one of the latest of this genre. Its author is Helene Dueck whose family was torn apart in three violent stages. Her father was a victim of the purges of the 1930's; her brothers were part of the 1941 evacuation of the Molochnaia (half of the Molochnaia was evacuated to the East by the Soviets before the arrival of the German troops) and her mother and her sisters were "repatriated" by the Soviets in 1945.

The author has divided her book into two parts: the story of her mother and sisters, and the story of her own odyssey. She did not share the fate of her family because she was a student of the Prischib LBA (teacher training institute) operated by the occupying German forces for the ethnic German (Volksdeutsche) of Ukraine. These schools, including one in Kiev, were evacuated by the retreating Germans to some extent separately from the other ethnic Germans and Mennonites. While the author was together with her mother and sisters for part of the evacuation, she was not there when they were "repatriated". She was far enough west to escape the Soviets and to be an early beneficiary of the Allied efforts to resettle the refugees as early as possible. Through the help of Benjamin Unruh and the *Mennonitsche Rundschau* she established contact with an uncle in Canada and moved there in early 1948.

By and large the account is fascinating reading. In places it is a veritable "page turner". On the other hand, the reader frequently catches himself wishing for a little more coherence and clarity. The march of times and places becomes a bit blurred after a while (as no doubt it was experienced at the time). While the foreword states that the text has been capably edited, this reviewer too often found himself wishing for more stringent editorial incisions. He was surprised (if not dismayed) at the kind and number of orthographical and grammatical errors, not to speak of stylistic infractions which the editors must have overlooked. A good revision of the text would make a good book into one

approaching excellence.

But another building block has been added to an edifice of epic proportions. The story of the "Great Trek" in its entirety has yet to be written. Historians will be grateful for every piece of information. Here is a sizable brick.

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George K. Epp, *Geschichte der Mennoniten in Russland: Deutsche Täufer in Russland Band I* (Lage, Germany: Logos Verlag, 1997). 247 pp., \$38.00 Can.

Some years ago George Epp promised a two-volume work on Mennonites in Russia. Then it appeared that three volumes would be needed to cover the Mennonite experience in Russia. This is the first volume. Epp always had the *Aussiedler* in Germany in mind as his primary reader target, hence the use of the German language and the smaller volume size. It was probably a wise decision both ways. The price may be a factor, of course, which could discourage access by readers somewhat, in Germany, North America or elsewhere.

People familiar with the Russian Mennonite story may have hoped for more new data in a new history. For German-language readers (and indeed for others) a lot of material will in fact be new. Did you know that Jacob Hoepfner's expulsion from his congregation led to his becoming the first registered Mennonite resident of Alexandrovsk, and that his Ukrainian neighbours sought to alleviate his financial distress in numerous ways? For those who really do not know the story at all, as is the case with many *Aussiedler*, it will be an excellent introduction to the subject.

Several things are noticeable at once. The broad contextual approach is laudable. There is a discussion of European and especially Prussian history of the eighteenth century. There is reference to the Hutterites who helped to set some patterns for Mennonite emigration. And socio-political factors, such as the phenomenon of the larger German emigration of the time, and the ramifications of the ongoing threat of further conflict with the Turks, are told here, but are not always included in other works.

As an historian able to read Russian well, Epp was able to incorporate the works of earlier Russian historians like Piserevskii and Stach to good advantage, along with other Russian language sources (such as the P. J. Braun archives from Odessa) which few western scholars have really brought into the picture until now.

Some readers will be interested to see the significant role attributed to

Samuel Kontenius in getting the new Mennonite colonists on a sound financial footing. His contacts with the Senate are illuminated more clearly than in other works. These same readers may wonder why the works of Johann Cornies are not stressed more (the book includes the period up to 1850), while those of Claas Wiens are given more prominence, although even Wiens' contribution could have seen greater elaboration. The assessment of the relative contributions of the non-Mennonite directors appointed by the Russian government is viewed as a crucial factor in sizing up the achievements of the first settlers. The implication is that here is another theme that merits even more research than has been attempted in this survey.

Statistical data related to the founding of the first villages helps to sketch the settlement situation clearly, and specific attention to the development of religious life, especially the selection of church leaders provides the larger view of community development often missed by earlier accounts.

The Klaas Reimer-related schism gets its rightful place, and the hostilities between leaders like Jacob Enns and Claas Wiens receive an objective treatment. There is probably still room to write a focused monograph on the Russian Mennonites as a church community throughout the entire period of Russian settlement.

There are some typos, as in most publications (reference to 1919 on pp. 163 and 212 are both in fact to 1819), and the bibliographical omission of James Urry's work on Russian Mennonites will presumably be rectified in the next volume. The reference to the Berdiansk region (p. 88, line 4) is no doubt to Berislav. The type font of the appendices and indexes seems needlessly large, detracting somewhat from the otherwise pleasant format and actually very readable quality of the text (even for seniors).

Volume II is projected for publication this spring, while the third volume (closing with the Revolution of 1917) will require some time to complete. It will be a welcome close to the trilogy which is now well underway; and a fitting tribute to the strong interest Dr. Epp always had in the Russian Mennonite story.

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David Ewert, *Honour Such People* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1997). Paperback, 140 pp., \$14.95 Cdn.

In this book, New Testament scholar and churchman David Ewert, pursues his interest in Mennonite Brethren biography. Having written a biography of A. H. Unruh (*Stalwart for the Truth*, 1975) and his own autobiography (*Journey of Faith*, 1993), Ewert now offers a series of eight biographical sketches in the spirit of Paul's admonition that the Philippians should honour their leaders (Philippians 2:29). The eight men Ewert has singled out for attention are chosen for reasons personal to himself, giving the reader a further glimpse into Ewert's own place among the array of Mennonite Brethren leadership at mid-century. All were Bible teachers and colleagues of Ewert in various Mennonite Brethren schools during his own scholarly and teaching ministry. Representing as they do the period from 1920 to 1970, all but one are Russian-born, placing them in the generation of leaders that served the Mennonite Brethren Church and beyond in the aftermath of the 1920s migration of Mennonites to Canada and its attendant assimilation into Canadian society.

In offering these sketches as candid personal tributes to his teachers, colleagues and friends, it is obvious that for Ewert this book is a respectful, well-researched, journey into his own reminiscences. Still, Ewert has an eye on the future as well, hoping his book will also serve to introduce these leaders to the youth of today. In this, Ewert's hopes are well-placed. Abraham H. Unruh (1961), Cornelius Wall (1985), Henry H. Janzen (1975), Bernhard W. Sawatsky (1974), John A. Toews (1979), Jacob H. Franz (1978), Jacob H. Quiring, and Frank C. Peters (1987) will be remembered by many Mennonites in Canada as household names at mid-century, but Ewert's younger readers will find this book to be a winsome introduction to a generation of leaders they never knew.

Employing a readily accessible narrative style, Ewert uses just under twenty pages as he places each subject within the Mennonite family, traces their story amid numerous anecdotes and, in many instances, offers appreciative, but not altogether uncritical, perspectives on their accomplishments and contributions. The portraits drawn in this book exhibit the shades of nuance and telling detail available only through the eye of a fellow sojourner. The appeal of Ewert's book for those who knew and appreciated these leaders and teachers as Ewert does is obvious. These portraits, however, also offer the more detached reader a ready store of information and potential insight into the circumstances, challenges, opportunities and attitudes that shaped a generation of Mennonite Brethren leadership. Generally unencumbered by analysis, but ably presented in the natural stream of experience, one encounters dimensions of the Canadian Mennonite story such as the Russian Mennonite experience, the realities of immigrant life, the sensitive interplay of family relationships, and the stresses and challenges of ministry in congregational and conference-related contexts. At the appropriate time, it will be interesting to use Ewert's sketches as a basis

for comparing Mennonite Brethren Church leaders of his generation with those of today.

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John Friesen, *Field of Broken Dreams: Mennonite Settlement in Seminole, West Texas* (Winnipeg: self published, 1996).

This 48 page account, 20 pages of which comprise the main text, is a worthwhile contribution to the documentation of the dynamics of the social and economic driving forces operating within the framework of Mexican Mennonite colonization ventures.

In many ways, to appropriate a frequently repeated redundancy attribute, I believe, to baseball player Yogi Berra, it's "a case of déjà vu all over again." Like other Mennonite colonization attempts, the West Texas venture was rooted in the rigidity of institutions and traditions which, in the face of increasingly severe shortages of land, failed to legitimize and promote intellectual, social and economic outreach and expansion into an otherwise beckoning range of non-agrarian endeavors. The Seminole story therefore recapitulates a recurring reality: people thwarted by arbitrary institutional curtailments on lifestyle and opportunity and desperate to improve on conditions for which they perceive no remedy at home, collectively embark on ventures pre-programmed for misadventure.

Lacking education and experience, they readily accept the leadership of persuasive, ambitious persons equally lacking in education and experience. They altogether too readily accept the offhand assurances of promoters, lawyers and politicians in respect to real estate transactions and the particulars of admissibility to, and future civil status in, another country. Contracts are entered into, based upon unrealistic projections of committed participation by "interested" individuals "back home." Doctrinal differences, however minor, are assiduously maintained between and among the intending migrants. The venture therefore dissolves into a number of separate thrusts. The potential financing is thus diluted, as are the prospects for satisfying the conditions for legal immigration. As successive difficulties are encountered, intending migrants increasingly withhold their capital commitment, and the venture implodes or has to be drastically revised. Its authors/leaders forsake it themselves or are set aside. The leaderless and largely destitute group of those already irrevocably committed then readily accepts other "leadership," and further misadventures ensue. Ultimately pity and compassion on the part of higher authority (state and federal government) and outside agencies (M.C.C.) achieve a narrow rescue for



the survivors, who gradually accommodate and adopt to realities over whose structuring they never had any significant control.

The Seminole experience deserves comparison with comparable Mennonite colonization efforts in the twentieth century, in which the urge to escape “intolerable” conditions at home led to incompetently-led, badly-researched international/intercontinental colonization ventures. Some were total fiascoes. Those which survived, not infrequently after having been abandoned by those whose means permitted retreat, and sometimes by their religious leaders, are testaments to the resilience and adaptability of the desperate and the destitute for whom no option remained except to “stick it out.” John Friesen’s *Field of Broken Dreams* renders a tangible contribution to the documentation of Mennonite colonization history and geography. It is to be hoped that others who, as he did, encounter the opportunity in the context of voluntary service, will be stimulated to follow his example.

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Rudy P. Friesen, with Sergey Shamakin, *Into the Past, Buildings of the Mennonite Commonwealth* (Winnipeg: Raduga Publications, 1996). Soft cover, 352 pp., index. \$34.99.

Recently Mennonite historiography has taken a number of interesting twists and turns. Originally much history was documented by ministers, of course emphasizing theological developments. But particularly after the recovery of the Anabaptist vision, historians participated from their well padded office chairs. Now a new breed is demonstrating that what really happened may be much more complex, and perhaps better understood by those who have expertise in a wide range of specific fields.

James Urry has brought not only the viewpoint of an outsider (a very well informed outsider), but also his anthropological training. John Friesen has looked at some regions through the eyes of a land-use specialist—not inappropriate, considering that the predominant occupation of Mennonites was farming. Now an architect has joined the fray on the supposition that “Buildings are an expression of the people who built them. They can tell us a great deal about the society that was responsible for their creation.”

Rudy Friesen, an architect living and practicing his profession in Winnipeg, has photographed, obtained the plans of and studied many of the buildings of the

Mennonite colonies of the former Soviet Union. The essence of, and probably the unique contribution to Mennonite historiography of this book is best summed up in his own introduction: "Today little is left of the Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia, but many buildings still remain. They tell us about a people that went from modest agrarian beginnings, relatively isolated from the society around them, to considerable wealth, pride and significant involvement in society."

The book begins with a brief outline of Anabaptist/Mennonite history, followed by a general analysis of buildings and their meaning as relating to this history. In collaboration with Sergey Shamakin of Zaporozhye (Ukraine), local photographer P. Reitsin and architect P. Turkovsky, Friesen surveys a number of former Mennonite colonies—Chortitza, Yazykovo, Baratow and Schlachtin, Molotschna, Zagradovka and the Crimea.

Each village survey begins with a brief history, often with an excellent map, and then continues with photographs and descriptions of the various buildings in the area. Architectural plans are often included, and so too are advertisements from publications of the time. A number of cemeteries have been studied; the names and dates gathered from the gravestones should help people find the final resting places of some of their ancestors. Finally, the appendices include a useful list of information sources and a good index.

Rudy Friesen has added much valuable information to the knowledge base of those who wish to study the "Mennonite Commonwealth" of Russia. This is, of course, of great interest to those who travel to find their roots or those of their parents or grandparents. In the broader scope the documentation and analysis is also an important for Russian Mennonite history in general.

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Rachel Waltner Goossen, *Women Against the Good War* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997). Paper, 180 pp.

American women who held pacifist convictions during World War II experienced the war differently, both from the men who claimed religious exemption from it and from non-pacifist women who maintained "the home front." In *Women Against the Good War* Rachel Waltner Goossen, history professor at Goshen College, examines the experiences of those women who during World War II were associated with Civilian Public Service, a program designed by the American government to offer alternatives to war service. From

1941 to 1947, approximately 2000 women's lives intersected with this program, and their contribution to it was considerable.

Some of their stories appeared in the *Women's Concerns Report* (#116, Sept./Oct. 1994). This issue centred around the theme "Women and Civilian Public Service," and was compiled by Rachel Waltner Goossen. As a Canadian who had heard only Canadian men's CO stories, I read the issue with interest.

In the first two chapters of *Women Against the Good War*, the author provides the background for her study by outlining the federal government's conscription policies and its launching of the CPS, administered jointly by Mennonites, Brethren and Friends, the historic peace churches with which most CPS workers were affiliated. She illustrates the cultural attitudes in the 1940s and what it meant to be pacifist at a time when patriotism, and the law, demanded support of a war that was popular. Ironically, the war-rejecting young people she writes about generally conformed to the patriarchal communities they came from, but in the larger, war-dominated context they became radical non-conformists.

Chapters 4 and 5 deal with the roles played by wives and friends of CPSers as well as by professional women who were pacifist during the war. For them, as for their non-pacifist sisters, the war meant new sacrifices, but also opportunities to travel (though CPSers did not travel abroad), to earn money outside the home, to be financially autonomous, and to experience something of the world. Goossen describes the life of camp followers, those women who left home to be with husbands or friends in, or near, CPS camps; who shared in the harassment meted out to COs; who raised children in hostile settings without the public and government support given to wives of servicemen. Professional women were recruited to work as matrons, dieticians and nurses—all traditional women's roles—in camps established by CPS.

Chapter 5 details the experience of college age pacifist women who wanted to do more than simply discuss post-war relief and reconstruction. They looked for direct involvement in CPS. Such involvement became available in 1943 when coeducational relief training schools were launched at Mennonite, Brethren and Friends colleges, and when women were accepted for service in state mental institutions, sometimes in all-women's CPS units, often with hostile staff. In these settings young women could test their convictions and gain self-knowledge.

In the introduction, Goossen quotes Elise Boulding, sociologist and peace scholar: "I remember feeling [during World War II] like many women did, that I wished I were a man so that my conscientious objection could be recorded." In chapter 6, the author quotes a former CPS dietician who, fifty years after the war, said: "I had never been asked about my experience." With this book, Goossen acknowledges and analyzes the participation and contribution of these women. However, she is interested not only in how they experienced the war, but also in how that experience influenced their thinking about gender and conscientious objection, and subsequently affected their post war choices and actions.

Conclusions are not startling, but significant nevertheless. CO women's experience of war was determined not—as was the case for WWI suffragettes and feminists during the Vietnam war—by gender concerns or political activism, but by pacifist convictions and by a willingness to serve their country through significant, humanitarian work. Both motives were nurtured in the patriarchal communities they came from. These women did not intentionally challenge gender roles. Nevertheless, their experience in the work force, and as partners with the men, pushed sufficiently at patriarchal structures to alter their expectations with respect to gender roles and marital equality. When the war ended, many remained in the labour force. Some, along with the men, found service opportunities abroad in the work of post-war reconstruction. Of those who slipped quietly into traditional roles many became, as a result of their experiences, promoters of non-resistance and humanitarian endeavors. Their influence helped nurture non-resistance in the next generation. Although many of these women criticized the CPS for its shortcomings, continued attachment to it is evidenced in reunions and letters.

The material in this book is presented in a coherent, well-organized fashion and illustrated with brief personal stories or comments, and photos. Goossen's sources include archival material and an impressive range of post-war literature on topics of war and war resistance. In addition, she has conducted oral interviews with 27 former CPS women and sent questionnaires to 229 more, of whom 153 responded. These primary sources, capably employed by the author, lend freshness to the text. *Women Against the Good War*, researched fortunately while there are still CPSers able to respond to questionnaires, comes at a time when few of us feel obliged to think seriously about conscription. I found this book engaging and highly informative. It will prove a valuable resource for students, provide enrichment for laypersons, old or young, and perhaps it will also stimulate readers, male or female, to examine their convictions with regard to war and gender.

I can't help wondering if sufficient stories, uncovered in the author's research, are somewhere waiting to be collected, with more personal details than this book allows, into another volume?

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Marvin E. Kroeker, *Comanches and Mennonites on the Oklahoma Plains* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1997).

Releasing this paperback is a venture as courageous as it is precarious. Marvin Kroeker and Kindred Press deserve credit for bringing forward the

findings of a century of Mennonite missions amidst the Comanche peoples of southwestern Oklahoma.

By documenting and distributing the well researched findings of this mission history the author has made his analysis available for open scrutiny. The book should be of keen interest to the sponsoring mission body, to students of missions theology, to archivists and especially to the host peoples, the Comanches. It is the response of the Comanche peoples that will in the end validate or invalidate this century of missions.

Herein lies the precariousness of a missionary self-portrait since ours is an era of growing aboriginal self-assertion which includes talk-back to the church's missionary work. George Tinker's "Missionary Conquest" serves as an example. It is on this theme that Kroeker might have included Comanche feedback both from within and from outside the mission circle. Responses in the form of Comanche poetry, artwork, legends and oratory pertaining to the ruthless frontier history of forced relocation would have convinced the reader of a broader representation of Comanche perspectives.

The book of 15 short chapters describes the search for a Mennonite mission in Oklahoma during the last decade of the nineteenth century. Precipitated by contacts with Cheyenne people from an already established Mennonite mission just north of the Comanches, the Mennonite Brethren launched a mission at Post Oak. Here in the midst of the relocated Comanche the mission had its crisis-centred beginning, its growth and its eventual own relocation prompted by a military expropriation of Comanche and Mennonite land holdings.

Figuring prominently in Kroeker's account is the legendary Quanah Parker, "last chief of the Comanches." Parker's significant role lies in the missionary's acknowledgment of Comanche leadership for local decision making and his liasonship with government pertaining to detribalization, land negotiation and his adherence to traditional Comanche belief.

Reference to Parker's role in the Mennonite mission offers valuable insight to the relationship. Parker, whose chieftaincy was designated not by his fellow Comanche but by the U.S. government and who received financial benefits from surrounding white ranchers, represents a type of culture broker. In this liasonship of conflict it is not always clear, from the author's stance, on which side the Mennonite mission lent its support. On the matter of their own identity Kroeker notes the paradox of Mennonite resistance to assimilation while seemingly endorsing Comanche assimilation into mainstream society.

The book's title reflects a refreshing alternative to prevailing missionary styles. Cast into a "people to people", rather than into an individually delegated relationship, the title connotes an important cultural self-awareness both with reference to the sending as well as the "sent to" peoples. This two way alertness is prompted, in part, by Kroeker's notation of four languages forging the many faceted *Weltanschauung* in this cross cultural encounter. Coming into play at one point or the other are realities variantly cast into Low German, High German, English and Comanche languages. The language of mission theology,

however, and of spiritual convergence is the language of assimilation, English. With language as an index of thought one is left to wonder which domains of either Mennonite or Comanche thought are circumvented in the process.

Kroeker's alertness to community building as an ingredient of mission seems especially significant in light of cultural resurgence among aboriginal peoples. In effect, a peoples' corporate rebirth is acknowledged against the substantial odds of dispersion, forced relocation and decimation. Thus, a wholesome alternative to the church as a competitive community divider is presented. Thus also, the actual mission reflects achievements beyond the stated goals of soul winning and church planting. Word and deed flow together especially in the hands of Magdalena Becker and the day to day participation of her husband in Comanche life. The immense awards of friendship accorded to the entire Becker family by the Comanche people reflects not only their durable tenure as long term missionaries but to a mutual discovery of one another as children of ONE God.

Is the reader left with perplexities after reading the book? The answer is yes. One is left to wonder about the church as an agent of assimilation especially at a time when Mennonites are deliberately seeking to abandon any semblance of cultural heritage in favor of the American mainstream. This, while aboriginal people are experiencing cultural rebirth.

A second perplexity has to do with a Christian response to the ugly history of Indian land displacement and deliberate cultural decimation. Whether a Christian gospel of justice must reach beyond an internal spiritual domain in order to be credible is a question worthy of addressing and left to the reader.

Because Kroeker's book documents an entire century of a Mennonite-Comanche encounter and because it alludes to issues requiring theological reply it deserves serious thought.

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Katherine Martens and Heidi Harms, *In Her Own Voice: Childbirth Stories from Mennonite Women* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1997).

To begin, some autobiographical disclosure is in order, since I'm about to review a book co-written by one of my aunts. Not only is Katherine Martens my mother's sister, but several of the narratives from *In Her Own Voice* come from the women in my family (including my mother). Reviewing a book that describes one's own birth is an odd position to be in. Despite these close

connections, I chose to review the book because of my own scholarly and personal interests in both childbirth and Mennonite women.

*In Her Own Voice* is a compelling and artfully presented collection of Mennonite women's childbirth narratives. Providing generous, though edited, portions of women's conversations with Martens, the book records much of the joy, sorrow, and anger that has accompanied twentieth-century women's childbearing.

As a collection of narratives with only a small degree of analysis, *In Her Own Voice* seems to be directed towards a general reader. The introduction—part history and part autobiography—situates Martens as the interviewer within her project of documenting Mennonite childbirth. The short introductions to each narrative also place Martens in relation to the women she is interviewing, so over the course of the book the stories emerge as conversations between two women, not disembodied transcriptions.

The strengths of the book lie in its presentation of a range of Mennonite women's stories, in terms of age, piety, and methods and philosophies of childbirth. By interviewing three generations of childbearing women (from women who gave birth in the 1920s to the 1990s), Martens and Harms capture a peculiarly twentieth-century shift in childbirth practices that saw birth move from home to the hospital and, in a small minority of cases, back home again. Their inclusion of stories from adoptive mothers extends the notion of what a "childbirth story" is: one does not necessarily have to give birth to be able to tell such a story.

Though I consider this book a success in terms of its goals to "preserve a part of Mennonite culture" (xiv) and to pass on "*Mutterwitz*" (xxiii), it left me with several questions and some criticisms. The overall question this collection evoked for me concerns the ambiguities of Mennonite identity. The women categorized as "Mennonite" who tell their stories in this collection include women born into Mennonite homes who stayed in the church and those who left it, as well as women who married Mennonite men and joined the Mennonite church, and others who did not. While my interest is not in separating the sheep from the goats, I found myself asking what it is that ties all these women together as "Mennonite women." Furthermore, did they experience childbirth differently because they were Mennonite, or would the childbirth stories of Ukrainian Orthodox women on the prairies be remarkably similar? Certainly, the authors did not need to engage in the misleading debate over whether Mennonite is an ethnic or a religious category, but they could have offered more reflection on just why Mennonite women's childbirth stories were interesting as a group.

Without critical reflection on their terms, books on Mennonite subjects can draw on the category "Mennonite" in a way that risks fetishizing a nostalgic vision of the "quiet of the land." *In Her Own Voice* avoids this kind of nostalgia because it brings together the stories of so many different women: single mothers by choice, divorced women, married women, academics, nurses, homemakers, prairie-born women and immigrants from Russia and Mexico.

But, in presenting such diversity, it again begs questions about what binds these women together not only as mothers, but also as Mennonites.

Questions about Mennonite identity lead me to another query, that, perhaps ironically, is based on a more stable notion of the term “Mennonite.” What effect did Mennonite notions of separation from the world have on the transformation of traditional childbirth practices? Did a wariness about the city and the English keep Mennonite childbearing women at home longer than their non-Mennonite counterparts? Or was the medical model of childbirth not included within this distrust of the world? How did Mennonite women interact with medical figures of authority, English or Mennonite?

Given its genre as a collection of stories it makes sense that *In Her Own Voice* does not answer all these questions. Indeed, part of its success lies in raising these wider questions about Mennonite identity and history. Its most lasting success, however, is in presenting the words of the women themselves, in engrossing and readable transcriptions. Reading their stories makes plain again and again that childbirth is a rich site of memory and meaning in women’s lives.

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Keith Graber Miller, *Wise as Serpents, Innocent as Doves: American Mennonites Engage Washington* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1996).

Graber Miller has undertaken an engaging study of how a historically “quiet” people—Mennonites—have become embroiled in matters public—superpower politics. He inquires into the dynamics of the inevitable “Christian world meet public policy” clash resulting from such a shift. He asks particularly how traditional Mennonite notions like pacifism, humility and service have informed both the style and content of their national-political involvement. Through this inquiry he offers “an inside view of how a set of theological and ethical precepts—precepts bound within particular institutional contexts which both give them power and constrain them—are working themselves out in the pragmatic world of politics. It is intended to provide a thick description of what an attempt at faithful, Mennonite political praxis looks like in one key location” (9). This location: Washington, DC. More particularly, this book narrates the account of how the Mennonite Central Committee Washington Office has presented itself in the “corridors of power.”

The author draws upon documents, correspondence and experiences of the MCC Washington Office staff, the MCC Peace Office Secretaries responsible



for the Washington Office, as well as MCC field secretaries. Most interesting, however, is the information and the theological perspective gleaned from on-site workers, especially Delton Franz, long-time (1968-1994) MCC Washington director. The account of Franz's encounters with Washington's Whose Who is fascinating and invaluable. Graber Miller suggests that Franz embodies a unique "Mennonite style" of theological engagement with public policy-makers which may have been more significant than his theological theory, or absence thereof. I suspect he is right.

The theological analysis represented in this book casts a much wider net than merely that of the Washington Office staff. After all, they themselves are products of and participants in the bigger debate taking place within the Mennonite theological world. And that debate itself has a still broader intellectual backdrop. So the author examines the language of H.S. Bender and Guy F. Hershberger on the question of pacifism and non-resistance, the debate between John H. Yoder and Reinhold Niebuhr, as well as the nuances of the "younger" US Mennonite ethicists, Ted Koontz, H.R. Burkholder and Duane Friesen. From beyond the Mennonite fold he invokes especially the likes of Max Weber, Michael Walzer, John Rawls, and Jürgen Habermas as dialogue partners in sorting out how to translate Christian faithfulness into national-political practice. Not that he simply accepts either the latter's analyses or models for how the dialogue should take place, but his implicitly advocated Mennonite approach gets positioned in relation to that debate. This forces him to draw upon what at the beginning of his book he admits is an oversimplified dichotomy between a "pacifism as strategy" and a "pacifism as obedient witness" (58). In spite of its limitations, he suggests, towards the end of his book, that as Mennonites get more and more involved in the dialogue in Washington, we will be ever more deeply drawn into strategic pacifism.

In the maze of Mennonite diversity Graber Miller explores many important questions: What does it mean for an Office to *represent* a Mennonite perspective when Mennonites are all over the political map (106ff)? What kinds of statements/letters produced by other organizations, who are not officially pacifist, or who do not share our theological convictions about such things as service and discipleship, can we *sign-on* without compromising the integrity of our Mennonite witness (62ff)? How do we decide our "strategies" when the larger questions remain unanswered concerning whether we aim at *effectiveness or faithfulness* (84ff), or whether we are to be *prophetic or priestly* (92ff) in our presence there, or whether our witness is based on a two kingdom or a one kingdom theology (*passim*)?

The book suggests that the impact that Mennonites have had in Washington is rooted in our good reputation in the "field." Several high profile and fascinating "success" stories get told, such as Murray and Linda Hiebert's work in Laos in the mid-1970s, leading to the "first humanitarian aid to Laos" (145), the Patricia Erb abduction story in Argentina in 1977, leading to the end of

military aid to Argentina (146), and the story involving Anglican Bishop Festo Kivengere of Uganda and the coffee boycott in 1976, leading to the fall of dictator Idi Amin one year later (147). Throughout the book the impact of John Paul Lederach's international conciliation work in several places in the world is cited as evidence that politicians accept practical alternatives to violence and injustice when they are presented in a credible manner.

For this reviewer the most interesting part of the book comes in the last fifty pages. Here the author embarks on a more systematic reflection on a Mennonite theory of social engagement. He puts the matter thus: "One of the problems Mennonites face is that they have never fully worked out how they may draw on sources outside the faith when speaking in public discourse. Mennonite ethicist Duane Friesen has long argued that Mennonites need to develop an adequate theology to affirm the use of human reason in ethical thinking. How does one relate a Christological norm to the insights of human reason and wisdom?" (186). It seems to me that this way of putting the matter begs some important questions. Why the implied tension between the Christological norm and human reason and especially human wisdom? Why would the use of human reason need to be affirmed in ethical thinking? Who doesn't use human reason in the ethical enterprise? What sources outside the faith are we talking about? What does it mean to "draw on" them.

A further concern stems from the way Graber Miller addresses the matter of the two kingdoms. "A traditional two-kingdom perspective does not explain how Mennonites on Capitol Hill could be *both* faithful *and* effective, encouraging and bringing about positive change without expecting pacifism from the state" (193). He may well be right here. However, is the implied corrective a non-traditional two-kingdom perspective, or a single kingdom perspective? The overall impact of the argument tends to suggest the latter. And if so, is there then not the danger of loss of identity for Christians? Must not the Word of God be "made strange" (John Milbank) in order for it to become good news? There can be no question of the need to debate public policy loudly and clearly but the question is from where do we do the speaking. To speak only "as one of them" overly commits us to an agenda that is not ours. Did not God in Christ call a counter community into existence to be an alternative witness, a school out of which to speak? The challenge of the Christian community is not to dilute our witness in such a way that the public can accept it without needing to believe; our challenge is rather to make our claim of Christ's lordship so persuasive that it will be seen as good news, even to those who do not yet believe.

The notion of translating ethical precepts into practice is a particularly blunt metaphor for followers of Jesus. The implied ideal-real dichotomy is exactly the way Enlightenment rationality has insisted on putting it. Yet that is not the only form moral reasoning can take. I have become convinced that Christian ethics must be more imaginative. To see our own actions in "sign" and "wonder" imagery may help us to understand that at most our involvement as church with state politics should be ad hoc. This is precisely how I see Franz's "low key"

Washington presence, even though it may not have resulted from a well articulated theology. The naive discipleship approach and experiences from the field have compelled us to speak. And the value of a less than fully formalized methodology lies in that it legitimates refusal to accept choices that commit us to practices we believe Christians cannot participate in.

I believe that Graber Miller's choice of dialogue partners prejudices his way of stating the matter. Had he chosen Alasdair MacIntyre or John Milbank instead of Jürgen Habermas, John Rawls and Max Weber I believe he would have been pushed far more deeply into John Howard Yoder's recent work on engaging the public realm. And therein I believe lies the hope for a proper perspective. Habermas may well be right that "science and technology are sources of 'systematically distorted communication' . . . since they are rooted in a form of rational-purposive action that excludes values from the discussion" (157). But the implication in saying it this way is that if only values were allowed into the discussion then Mennonites would be at home in the dialogue. I must confess scepticism here. The injection of Mennonite "values" into the public realm will create as much miscommunication, conflict, and rejection as the apparent current state of affairs. The issue is not whether one can speak values language in Washington; the issue is how to ensure that they are Christian.

Also, I want to urge caution on how one says that the language of the church is "inappropriate parlance for public discourse" because if one does not say this right, we as Christians will soon be speaking only the language of public discourse (164). And how can that be good news for anyone?

My critical comments should not be seen as my reluctance to endorse this book. I consider it a must read for all who think about such matters. My comments are rather a testimony to the profound attention that has been given to the arguments. Views less clearly stated would deserve less comment. A significant value of this book is that it does not hesitate to identify the difficult issues Mennonites must deal with. In this way it clarifies the agenda of contemporary Mennonite theologians. The challenge is to renarrate the Christian story in order to find new theological nuances which can make of our "signs" a practical message.

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Paul Robert Magosci, *A History of Ukraine* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996). Hardback, xxvi + 784 pp., \$75; Paper, \$35.

This is not the first large book on the history of Ukraine published by the University of Toronto Press; only three years have passed since the second edition of Orest Subtelny's *Ukraine: A History* appeared. There are also numerous other single and multi-volumed histories claiming to "cover" the history of Ukraine and its peoples. So what is new about Magosci's book?

The book is obviously intended for a general readership and is based on introductory courses given to students on the history of Ukraine. The book is divided into ten chronological parts and fifty chapters. The language used is simple but elegant, and references are kept to a minimum, relegated to endnotes. For those who want to extend their knowledge, recommendations for further reading based upon the ten major parts are provided. Separate one or two-page discussions, often with long extracts from documents and contemporary accounts of analytical statements, illustrate points made in the chapters. A large number of excellent maps complement the text and there is an extensive, detailed index.

For Mennonite readers, even those who think they have some knowledge of the region's history, there is much to learn from the book. The extensive and complex history of the lower Dnieper and the surrounding steppe region is particularly fascinating. Those who thought this was a relatively uninhabited region before Mennonite settlement will be surprised to read of its long, complex past. The role of the Cossacks and the power struggles of different states and peoples is especially interesting. Magosci provides a broad overview, giving an account of the region's political history, and devoting chapters to its different inhabitants, their religious beliefs and social customs. Any reader who wishes to get an overview of the region Mennonites settled in, its peoples and its history, will find this an excellent book with which to begin any study.

An additional reward for Mennonite readers is that Mennonites appear in the text, not perhaps in the detail some readers might like, but certainly proportionate to their relative importance in a work covering such a vast area, such diverse peoples and such an extensive period of time. If anything, Magosci has been generous with space allotted to Mennonites. One of the sections in the chapter on the Civil War includes an excerpt from Neufeld's *Russian Dance of Death* (Al Reimer's translation). Magosci is also aware of much current scholarship on Mennonites. There are a few problems and errors, however (references are to pp. 344-46 unless otherwise indicated). While he seems willing to accept that the Mennonites do not fit comfortably into a "German" category, Magosci seems unaware that the category "German" itself hides a complex set of identities among the non-Mennonite, but Germanic language-speaking colonists. This may stem from his readiness to assign distinct, ethnic categories to peoples, including the all-important "Ukrainians" (see comments below). The withdrawal of colonist privileges in the Reform era was not a response to public

criticisms, but was consistent with the removal of privilege in Russian society in an attempt to mobilise all the empire's peoples. "*Schultz*" means "mayor" not a "self-governing body." The term "*Schwarzmeerdeutschen*" was not used by Russian officials or the colonists themselves (cf. p.271); it was a term which became common in Germany during the 1920s and 30s, particularly in Nazi writings. The majority of Mennonites did not emigrate from the "city-state" of Danzig, but from surrounding areas, and the term "West Prussia" was the administrative unit of the Prussian government given after partition. While some Mennonite teachers in Russia may have taught in Low German before 1840, High German was intended as the primary language of instruction long before that date. Private secondary schools were founded much earlier than the author indicates (Khortitsa 1895; Molochna 1907) and not as German-language schools. By law, instruction in all courses except religion had been in Russian since the late 1880s. By 1914 there were over 100,000 Mennonites in the entire Russian empire, not in the area the author refers to as Ukraine where the population was closer to 70,000. Mennonites had a small, but significant urban population by 1914 and the decline in numbers of all colonists by 1926 was as much a result of internal and especially external migration than deaths in the war, revolution, civil war or deportations (p.508). Deportations of Germans during World War I were minimal except in Volhynia.

These criticisms may seem small, but are significant. Magosci generalises in order to cover a large field, but attention to detail is important. He fails to note that Mennonites before and after 1914 considered themselves "Russian," as Russian Mennonites or at times as part of a larger category of German-Russians, although he does mention a similar sub-identification among many Jews even after emigration to escape persecution (p.431). It is not that Mennonites rejected the term "Ukrainian," but it is an indication of its limitations in southern Russia before World War I. After the establishment of Soviet power and the Soviet Ukraine, Mennonites undoubtedly had difficulty identifying as Ukrainian rather than as Russian Mennonites. Peasants were Little Russians, both to themselves and Mennonites, but the term does not sit easily with Magosci. Ukrainians who fail to identify with a singular identity or seek independence must have become "russified" and therefore "lost" their true identity (p.489 and passim). Where nationalism is concerned there are only dominant peoples, and then there are traitors or minorities.

In this sense the book is unashamedly a "national" history, clearly written by a nationalist. Ideas such as nation, identity and territoriality are seen through the lenses of twentieth century nationalism, a teleological approach which restricts, rather than enhances, understanding. It is obvious that in pre-modern times religion and estate instead of ethnic identity and nationalism marked the primary dividing lines between peoples in the region. Christians were opposed to Tatars and hence Christendom to Islam; Catholicism was opposed Orthodoxy; noble elites ruled merchants and peasants; there were free men and the enserfed; the exploiters and the exploited. All these factors were hopelessly muddled by

shifting alliances, wars and ecological disasters to produce a complex networks of allegiances, identities and groupings. Magosci discusses aspects of these complexities, but in the final instance they are subordinated to the dominant theme of emergent national identity and the "need" and "right" of people to realise their identity in an independent territorial state.

Magosci states at the outset of the book that his focus of analysis is territorial, defined in two ways. First there is the territory "delimited by the boundaries of the Ukrainian state that evolved in the twentieth century" and secondly, what he calls "Ukrainian ethnolinguistic territory" inhabited by a "group" who speak the same language or dialects of a language and who have "common ethnographic characteristics" (p.3). But are these criteria sufficient to justify a "history" of a land without natural borders of numerous peoples who come and go and whose identities are plastic, multiple and often unclear?

Emerging like a ghost behind almost every map in the book is the line of the border of the present Ukrainian state, itself ironically a product of Soviet imperialism and covering one of largest areas of territory ever conceived of by any nationalist dreamer since the idea of a Ukrainian nation-state first emerged. There is that hint that somehow there exists a "natural" territory in which a specific people have an inalienable right to exist: a place and time where primordial ethnicity meets primordial territorialism. Land and people await their destiny; the legitimate ethnolinguistic group only needs to be awakened from their slumber by the kiss of nationalism to seize their rightful patrimony. In the text of the book, Ukrainians, long before the term had currency especially among the "people," mysteriously appear almost fully formed, identifying those people with prime rights in a territory of a future nation still to be clearly defined. History truly belongs to the victors and all roads lead to Kiev.

The crucial questions to ask of all such studies of modern nation states and their people is: "When were the X?" and "when was the land of Y, Y? To put it in this particular context: "When were the Ukrainians?" and "When was Ukraine?" The difficulties such questions pose are not ones for historians of "Ukraine" alone. Eric Hobsbawm has recently reminded us "not to confuse politics, history and geography" especially where they relate to "shapes on the pages of atlases, which are not natural geographical units, but merely human names for parts of the global land-mass." He was referring to histories of "continents," but his comments are just as appropriate to historical accounts of modern nation states which begin in the darkness and silence of prehistory and proceed to the present in a triumphant march. Once placed in a broader context of time and space, with an awareness of the complexity of cultural categories, all "national" histories are fatally flawed from the outset. It is the genre which is at fault as much as the historian. But where the historian is a nationalist, writing a national history of the lands and people they identify with, critical faculties are usually at risk before the venture has begun.

Lest I be accused of being unfair, Magosci's book is not a nationalist rant.

His approach is informed, balanced and nuanced, although as the story approaches and enters the twentieth century it becomes more passionate and his views more polarised. He is aware of many of the issues I have noted above. In the end though, if you believe in nationalism as something “essential,” necessary and noble you have only one option in constructing an account. The alternative is to remain cynical of all such ventures. Then you do not write books on “nations”; you merely write critical reviews of them.

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Peter Penner, *Russians, North Americans and Tulugas: the Mennonite Brethren Mission in India*. (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1997). 412 pp.

This substantial work by Peter Penner will, I believe, serve the church well. It is a must for the libraries of all post-secondary Mennonite Brethren schools. It will serve a useful purpose in any Christian educational institution that wants to work seriously at preparing people for cross cultural and international Christian ministry. Given the current trend in North America in which local congregations seek increasingly to have a direct involvement in international missions, it should also be read by pastors, particularly those involved in preparing people/teams for such ministry.

In this book Penner seeks to write “history from below.” With a heavy reliance on primary sources including letters and reports written by missionaries he has sought to “let the missionaries tell the story in their own words.” What emerges is a story that is significantly different from the public story, i.e. the story that normally gets to the church membership via conference and mission board reports or missionary prayer letters.

The book documents the human frailties of the people involved in mission. It might have served a better purpose a couple of decades ago when there was still an unrealistic aura surrounding missionaries and missions. Today it merely documents what most of us already know—that missionaries, mission administrators and mission board members are human. They struggle with egos, make mistakes, sin, and need to be held accountable. On the flip side, they are also capable of making great sacrifices for the sake of the Kingdom and occasionally rise to great heights for the benefit of others. It is helpful to see Penner confess that “I am convinced that I would not have handled myself any better...”

Penner states “I am more interested in the persons than in the institutions

they developed.” The result is a book with a focus on individuals. That is not to say, however, that the value of the book is limited to detailed information about individuals. In the process the reader may gain insight into significant issues which are, in many cases, as relevant today as they were in the years that Penner seeks to describe. Perhaps a few illustrations are useful here.

The early 1960’s struggle between mission administration [personified in J.B. Toews] and the missionary leadership on the field [personified in A. A. Unruh] is an excellent illustration of how difficult it is to bring one era to a close and to launch another. It is much more than a struggle for power between a few strong willed individuals. It illustrates differing perspectives on how decisions are to be made in the church. It displays a genuine fear that the lifetime investment on the part of many could be jeopardized by apparently uninformed decisions on the part of a few with much less of an investment. It is not unlike some of the challenges facing missions today.

The stories of the individuals and families also illustrate eloquently the demands that cross cultural missions places on the children of missionaries. Penner summarizes this point in his introduction as follows. “This question of the children...was in actual fact the most serious one faced by missionary parents. The problem and its solution are discussed in family terms because each generation, despite similarities, faced this question differently.” This challenge for missionaries and their children is as real today as ever.

Lastly, concerning the place of single women in mission, Penner states: “Of the missionaries, if any group is to be singled out for a dedication, I choose the single women, whose remarkable story appears in these pages.” The “double whammy” experienced by single women in missions, i.e. local cultures as well as theological positions and mission agencies which limit their role, is well documented. Nevertheless those of us critical of the Mennonite Brethren stance vis-a-vis women in ministry may draw at least a little encouragement from Penner’s conclusion that in this Mennonite Brethren story there was greater equity between single men and single women than was the case for many others.

Peter Penner’s work does not make for easy reading—the kind of book one reads in a few pleasant evenings. It is, however, an excellent source of information for people who wish to be informed.

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G. A. Rawlyk, ed., *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997). Hard-cover., xxv + 542 pp.

This volume brings together a collection of 26 essays by various contributors and an introduction by George A. Rawlyk, a well-known Canadian Baptist scholar who passed away in 1995 before the book was fully prepared for publication. The papers were first presented at a conference on the theme organized by Rawlyk which convened at Queen's University in Kingston in May, 1995 and was sponsored by the Pew Charitable Trusts. It was well attended by Canadian scholars and signalled the arrival of a degree of maturity in the academic study of Canadian evangelicals.

The book is divided into six parts: I) Views from Outside and Inside, II) Evangelical Impulse in the Methodist, Presbyterian, Anglican, and United Churches, III) Baptists, Mennonites, and Lutherans, IV) Holiness, Christian and Missionary Alliance, and Pentecostalism, V) Evangelical Networks, Leaders, and Revivals, and VI) Women, Spirituality, and the Evangelical Impulse. The authors include such well-known scholars as Mark A. Noll, John G. Stackhouse, David W. Bebbington and Edith L. Blumhofer. Others are not well known, including some graduate students who had worked closely with Rawlyk on various aspects of his "evangelical project."

As might be expected from such a diverse collection, the quality of the essays varies considerably. Most, however, are of high academic quality.

The one paper which focuses specifically on Mennonites is entitled "Living with a Virus: The Enigma of Evangelicalism among Mennonites in Canada." It is written by Bruce L. Guenther, a Mennonite Brethren graduate student at McGill who lives in Hepburn, Saskatchewan. Guenther notes quite accurately that Mennonites have often been quite critical of evangelicalism because of the lack of emphasis on discipleship, its dogmatism and its individualism. Others have been much more sympathetic and have appreciated evangelicalism's emphasis on personal faith, missions and biblical authority. Mennonite Brethren have often viewed themselves as both evangelical and Anabaptist.

In addition to the one paper focusing specifically on Mennonite, there are many other references to Mennonite, especially Mennonite Brethren, in the book. In fact, Mark Noll cites the disproportionate contribution of Mennonite Brethren, in relation their numbers, to the evangelical scene in Canada. Mennonites made a significant contribution to the Bible school movement (see essay by Robert K. Burkinshaw) as well as to various transdenominational or non-denominational organizations.

Most of the papers are quite sympathetic to evangelicalism, even though the writers do not all represent evangelical denominations or institutions. A volume of this nature should have included some essays that might have assessed

evangelicalism more critically and issued more of a prophetic call. Mennonite scholarship also needs more representation at such conferences.

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Joanne Hess Siegrist, *Mennonite Women of Lancaster County: A Story in Photographs from 1855-1935* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 1996). \$14.95.

Joanne Hess Siegrist has performed a valuable service for historians of North American Mennonite life and for anyone curious about the lives of Mennonite women. Her collection of photographs of Lancaster County women documents the lives of plain women and worldly women (often in the same photo), as they played, worked, travelled, and wed. Aimed largely at a popular audience, and with an occasionally devotional cast, the book is also a resource for those with more scholarly interests.

Siegrist gathered these photos from Lancaster area families and, where she could, sought out stories to accompany the images. Stories and photos are organized in sections that follow the cycle of a woman's life in a somewhat idiosyncratic way: for example, "Motherhood and Children" precedes "School and Studies." Many of the photos were taken by amateur photographers and in several cases both the photographers and their subjects are unidentified.

The ability of many of these photos to capture how these women were very much "in the world" while striving, through dress or demeanor, to remain separate is one of the most intriguing aspects of the collection. For example, a 1936 photo of Alta (Barge) Shenk and her newly-wed husband, J. Clyde Shenk, depicts them lounging on deck chairs in wool coats and caps on a boat bound for East Africa. On their way to mission work, both Alta and Clyde are reading inspirational books about missionary life, and both are smiling. Alta's smile drew my attention, because she looks so young and so delighted to be sailing—whether away from Lancaster County or to Tanganyika is not clear. I'm left wondering whether and how she was transformed by Africa and marriage.

The promise and the disadvantage of this book rest in its simultaneous ability to excite a desire to know more about these women's lives and to frustrate that desire. Siegrist typically supplies only short captions. In part, this brevity is an aspect of the genre of a photography book itself, but it stems here, as well, from a wish to keep the sources of some of the photographs anonymous and from the relative paucity of documentation of these women's lives (5). In the face of this lack of written evidence, the pictures themselves are even more valuable sources, provoking both answers and more questions.

One of the main themes they point to is the *differences* among Mennonite women's lives. For example, pictures of crowds of girls, a wedding shower, and an Ascension Day party show that the uniformity of plain dress existed within a diversity of friendships. Women who had already made their choice to join the church and become plain continued to socialize with their friends in worldly garb. Did these women talk about the significance of their sartorial differences, or were they silently assumed?

The significance of the shift to plain dress is tangibly presented in the two pictures of Bertha (Stauffer) Widders, before and after her baptism in 1918 at 26 years old (26). Beside each other, the photos evoke a striking difference between the confident, sophisticated Bertha in an elaborate flowered hat and the more demure, slightly smiling Bertha, albeit with a large, silk bow from her black bonnet tied beneath her chin. Herein lies the limitation of photographs, however: we can read what we will into them and they will not contradict us. Perhaps the worldly Bertha was not so confident as she appears; perhaps the plain Bertha was not so demure. We must remember that taking a picture is itself a social act, and the photographer affects both what the viewer sees and how the subject acts.

In addition to these evocations of difference, Siegrist's book shows that Mennonite women, like most women, were playful and hard-working, joyous and sorrowful. An 1898 photo of young women and men engaged in the gender-bending play of exchanging flowery hats for dark, felt ones shows that an ironic sense of humour was at home in these people's lives (38). The haunting photograph from around 1900 of Anna (Haverstick) Rohrer, interrupted in her work of pulling bread from a Dutch oven, displays the rigours of a Mennonite woman's life. Anna was about 47 in the picture, but looks much older (122). The 1904 photo of Nannie Lizzie (Engle) Miller cuddling with her toddler Annie (who is the subject of some of the most beautiful pictures in the book) tangibly summons up the joys of motherhood (86). Conversely, the photo of Mary (Good) tragically reminds us of its sorrows (80).

As these brief examples show, Siegrist's book richly portrays the diversity of Mennonite women's lives as they moved through the life cycle, encountering new responsibilities, emotions, and relationships. My primary complaint about the book is related to Siegrist's choices of text. Some photos beg for more information, such as the 1904 picture of the sixteen young women who took the trolley from Lancaster to Strasburg, many bedecked in what seems like military garb and fancy hats. Why did they embark on this trolley outing, and where did they get those coats? Similarly, her choice of the term "social impurities" to describe the behavior of Lancaster youth evokes a different age, without communicating much in particular (43). A more forthright discussion of sexuality in Mennonite women's lives would be welcome.

Siegrist assiduously reminds the reader that these women's lives could be both paradisiacal and arduous (28), and the photos corroborate her claim. Most compellingly for me, these photos convey the spirit of adventure that these early-twentieth-century Mennonite women shared with the wider culture around

them, as they travelled to the Jersey shore, California, Rome, and Tanganyika. Many of those who stayed home tending the children, quilting the quilts, and cultivating the fields brought that spirit of adventure into their home communities, whether flying over a river on a pulley swing, flying in a plane, or bringing new technologies, like photography, into their communities. That these photographs even exist today is a sign of the pervasiveness of that spirit of adventure—and indeed, of resistance to church authority—since many of these women and the members of their families would have taken baptismal vows to burn their photographs and renounce further picture-taking. Siegrist's work is an achievement in and of itself, but is also a call for scholars to take photographs more seriously as a source for the work of piecing together the stories of women's lives.

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Dale R. Stoffer, editor, *The Lord's Supper: Believers Church Perspectives* (Scottsdale PA/Waterloo ON: Herald Press, 1997).

This book dealing with believers church perspectives on the Lord's Supper provides a welcome complement to John Rempel's 1993 publication, *The Lord's Supper in Anabaptism*. This new volume, the product of the eleventh Believers Church Conference, gives "voice to a significant tradition in the church that generally has been silent." (P. 12). Through the thoughtful editorial work of Dale R. Stoffer, readers of *The Lord's Supper: Believers Church Perspectives* have a comprehensive and penetrating analysis of the background and the current practice of the Lord's Supper in the various branches of the believers church tradition.

Twenty-six writers in all contributed to the book, as also to the eleventh believers church conference. At least two contributors, Jeffrey Gros, a brother (F.S.C.) in the Roman Catholic Church, and Vladimir Berzonsky, an archpriest of the Orthodox Church in America, were observers at the conference. Their brief chapters are highly respectful of the believers church perspectives on the Lord's Supper, and are written out of a thoroughly ecumenical conviction. One wonders, though, why their observations were included in a book that set forth believers church perspectives. Perhaps an equally puzzling contribution comes from Seventh Day Adventist minister, Peter M. Van Bemmelen. Presumably the Seventh Day Adventist Church is considered part of the historic believers churches along with Brethren, Methodist, Free Methodist, Baptist, Brethren in

Christ, Moravian, Friends, Church of Christ, Church of God, Mennonite and Mennonite Brethren, all of which are represented in the twenty-seven chapters.

The various chapters are grouped under six headings thus: "Historical Perspectives on the Lord's Supper," "Biblical Interpretation of the Lord's Supper," "Theological Proposals for the Lord's Supper," "Denominational Perspectives on the Lord's Supper," "Special Presentations on the Lord's Supper," and "Reflections, Ecumenical Dialogue, and Findings." What strikes me as rather odd about the six sections is that of the six, the second section has only one chapter. All of the other sections have at least three chapters. Is there only one "Biblical Interpretation of the Lord's Supper," that of Ben Witherington III who treats the meal "in its first century social setting" (pp. 81-113)? Or is the focus of the book intended to be particularly the "Denominational Perspectives on the Lord's Supper," a large section containing some eleven chapters? If the latter is the case, then why the need to create Part Two on "Biblical Interpretation of the Lord's Supper" and then limit such a crucial facet of the discussion to a single chapter on the social setting? For me the book would have carried far greater appeal if a half dozen disciplined biblical scholars from the various denominations had engaged significantly with the primary texts of Scripture from which the doctrine and practice of the Lord's Supper come.

Particularly helpful were the first three chapters that provided the historical setting for the believers church ideas about the Lord's Supper. These three chapters span the period of at least fourteen hundred years, second century to the sixteenth, with the focus finally falling on the vision of the Anabaptists. The Anabaptists were part of the movement of reform that questioned some of the beliefs and practices of the Roman Catholic Church, and as such departed from the super-sacramental notion of Trans-substantiation. The Anabaptists adopted much of Zwingli's and Luther's views, which emphasized the symbolic character of the bread and wine. But for them "the Lord's Supper, discipleship, and church discipline were all integrally connected. If unity were not present, then communion could not follow" (p. 73). And true communion of the body of Christ meant for Anabaptists the practice of love towards neighbour. Right relationship to fellow members and to neighbours became the condition of members' participation in communion (pp. 96f).

David Ewert's chapter about the changes in the celebration of Lord's Supper in my own denomination, the Mennonite Brethren Church, is faithful and frank, but in the end disturbing. My concern with the changes that Ewert cites is not that the celebration "is no longer as solemn an occasion as it used to be," nor that Communion is "no longer closely tied together with discipline." The problem arises from the decision of the conference in 1996 to have un-baptized believers participate fully at the Lord's Table. If New Testament baptism was the ordinance of initiation into the community of Christ, and the Lord's Supper the repeated ordinance in the experience of the baptized community, then imagine what this decision of the Mennonite Brethren Church does not only to the meaning of baptism, but also to the sacred celebration of the Lord's Supper. I

appreciate the forthright presentation of the trend in this chapter, but grieve the loss of significance from the ordinances in the life of this denomination.

The many facets bound together in this volume are both illuminating and provocative. The book calls for a wide readership among people of the many believers church traditions and beyond. A consistent and meaningful understanding of the Lord's Supper is vital for congregational experience, but somewhat lacking in believers churches, according to the report of the findings committee of the conference recorded in the last chapter of book. Some of the stated findings call for attention here.

The committee finds "great diversity both in the practice and the understanding of the Lord's Supper in churches standing in the believers church tradition." These churches "represent reactions to the church traditions with (*sic*) which they broke" (p. 285). The committee found only five "items on which believers churches generally agreed" as compared to a total of nineteen areas in which different practices and different meanings were observed. The committee issues a challenge to all believers churches to make the Lord's Supper meaningful to the people, to know well the significance of the ritual for the church, to exercise an inclusive attitude at the Lord's table, to relate to traditions other than the believers church, and to "clarify our position on the place of children and guests from other church traditions at the table of the Lord in our congregations" (pp. 287-88).

Every pastor of a believers church, or of any other church tradition for that matter, should read this book carefully, and keep it near the pastoral desk for ready reference.

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Paul Toews, *Mennonites in American Society, 1930-1970: Modernity and the Persistence of Religious Community* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1996). Softcover, 441 pp.

This book is the fourth and final volume in *The Mennonite Experience in America*, a series treating the history of Mennonites and related groups in the U.S. It differs from the first three volumes, not only in its prosaic title, but in its historiography. Toews offers what is essentially an intellectual history, and that is the study's greatest strength and its greatest weakness.

Deciding how to tell the story of Mennonite experience in the mid-twentieth century is no simple matter. These decades saw a tremendous expansion in church institutions and programs, a dramatic increase in Mennonites' racial, ethnic and geographic diversity, the opening of opportunities for women, the

influence of three major wars, increasing acculturation for some Mennonites and increasing sectarianism for others, significant upward social mobility, the transfer of religious authority to congregations, and the list could go on.

As a way of bringing some clarity and coherence to such complexity, Toews chooses to focus on Mennonites' changing ideologies (and the institutions and cultural practices that derive from them) as the organizing principle of his story. He begins with the fundamentalist-modernist controversy and ends with the reformulation of "nonconformity" and "nonresistance" as politically activist and prophetic principles. In between, he stresses the importance of H. S. Bender's version of the Anabaptist vision as the apex of Mennonites' intellectual endeavors during this period. He calls it "the crowning achievement of twentieth-century ideological reconstruction of Mennonite identity" (p. 341). This is probably one of the more contentious claims in the book; but it provides Toews with a useful framework for discussing the many institutional and cultural developments of the period, and Mennonites' continuous negotiation and renegotiation of their opposition to and engagement with "the world."

Toews does a masterful job of reconstructing the intellectual history and connecting it to Mennonite institutions and practices. Because this volume is different from the first three volumes in its historiographic approach, it is a useful complement to the others in the series. Toews' methodological choice, however, does not come without its costs.

As an intellectual history, the book is necessarily the story of Mennonite elites — intellectuals and church leaders who had the power to set the parameters of Mennonite discourse. The story tends to revolve around the interests and ideas of a relatively few prominent individuals, and we learn most about what went on in places where colleges, seminaries, and church agencies were located. Toews does make some attempt to remedy this problem. One example is an oddly-placed chapter that presents an excursus on Old Order groups. But there are still a number of important lacunae.

Chief among the absent voices are those of women. The only significant treatment of women's experience is found in the chapter on World War II, where Toews devotes several pages to a discussion of CPS wives, nurses, and matrons. But women are not the only ones who go unheard. Vincent Harding is the sole representative of African-American Mennonites, even though there were significant numbers of black congregants and congregations in the U.S. dating back to well before the civil rights movement. We hear virtually nothing from Native American or Hispanic congregations. Important geographic areas are also ignored. The significant Mennonite populations in the southeastern and southwestern U.S. are entirely unmentioned. Urban congregations in New York City, Chicago, and Los Angeles appear but infrequently. The absence of such voices makes the U.S. Mennonite experience from 1930-1970 appear more unilinear than it was.

Despite these gaps, however, Toews is to be commended for taking a very complicated story and making it coherent. For those who may wish to explore

the experience of Mennonites absent from this account, Toews' work will provide a useful framework and foil for future research.

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Paul Toews, *Mennonites in American Society, 1930-1970: Modernity and the Persistence of Religious Community* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1996). Softcover, 441 pp.

The last in a four-part series of the story of Mennonites in the United States, this final volume provides a helpful framework for understanding Mennonite people, congregations, conferences, and related organizations in the middle-half of the twentieth century.

Highly interpretive, Paul Toews ably builds on the previous three volumes in this series and presents the story of Mennonites struggling to keep their people, theology and institutions from the pressing influence of modernity as exemplified within the larger American society. He selects and describes a number of ideas which have shaped Mennonite thought and action between 1930 to 1970.

The initial chapters on tradition, change and fundamentalism are crucial to understanding what Mennonites thought of themselves and their role within society at the beginning of the twentieth century. Reviewing the passionate arguments between traditionalists and progressives within the major church groups, Toews provides a glimpse of the dynamics within Mennonite congregational and organizational life. He depicts Mennonites as many different bodies struggling on the one hand with ideas of consolidation and conservatism and on the other hand facing the pressing need for adaptation and change to the dominant society.

Within this struggle to understand the church in the modern age, Toews examines the work of a number of significant leaders who, he maintains, were able to shift the thinking of a large portion of Mennonites from a preservation mindset to that of a distinctive Christian order which no longer focused on a call for radical withdrawal from the world. These leaders, who most often were scholars, worked not from *without* the history and theology of the Mennonite church, but rather from *within*. As Toews aptly phrases it, they searched for, and found, a "usable past."

Chief among these new leaders was Harold S. Bender. Historian, teacher and tireless worker on various inter-Mennonite committees, Bender was to redirect



the thoughts and actions of the larger body of Mennonite churches. While he is perhaps best known for his historical interpretation of the Anabaptist-Mennonite past, as exemplified in his landmark address "The Anabaptist Vision," Toews argues that the work of Bender and others represented much more.

This group of educated leaders and thinkers included such people as Guy F. Hersberger and Orié O. Miller. These men, Toews says, proposed a paradoxical strategy for both separation from and integration with the world. This included withdrawal and engagement as well as consolidation and dispersion. Their contribution to Mennonites in America (in fact, one would argue Mennonites world-wide) was a new ideological self-consciousness. Without rejecting Mennonite tradition they forcefully pushed their ideas that distinct communities such as Mennonites could embody a witness to the world. They could show the world that corporate ethical discernment and reconciliation were indeed possible. They argued for an integration of Mennonites into the world while preserving a rhetoric for difference and dissent. As Toews states it, "it provided Mennonites with an identity rooted in a particularistic past and a global present."

This theological reinterpretation now fit admirably with past as well as future Mennonite corporate organizations such as Mennonite Disaster Service, various Christian service organizations and, of course, Alternative Service beginning with WWII through the Vietnam war. Chief among these organizations was Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). Under the capable leadership of Orié O. Miller, this organization moved from its earlier mandate of a relief organization assisting Mennonites in the Soviet Union, to a vibrant organization that dialogued with issues such as war, the modern industrial order and the popularity of pacifism within the larger American Society. The activities of MCC raised questions of how Mennonite pacifism, reconciliation, or as Toews describes it "servant activism" related to the larger world.

This rethinking of the church and its mission profoundly affected a large portion of the Mennonite community for decades. Nevertheless, American evangelicalism, urbanization and the dominant American culture kept pushing the thinking of Mennonites as to how they were to respond to each new situation.

The consensus built around the "Anabaptist Vision" at mid-century began disintegrating during the Vietnam war. A new unease developed wherein Mennonites found themselves polarizing along lines such as age, law-abider versus protester, establishment versus counterculture and quietist versus activist. This polarization was evident in congregations, conferences, church institutions and denominational periodicals. Toews argues that it stimulated Mennonites to rethink their relationships to government and even to revisit the meaning of Jesus and his incarnation.

This book is well-written and easily read. In many ways it is a history of institutions and institutional thinking. While it is interpretive, it is still reasonably anecdotal. Throughout the narrative the writer places the story of Mennonite people, congregations, conferences, organizations and church schools within the historical context of twentieth century America.

That this book captures the most significant Mennonite issues, and their context, in the middle of this century is evident. It certainly is an important work in that it ably identifies and describes the ideas and actions of Mennonites in America during this century. Every American Mennonite church leader and student of American Mennonite history should read this volume.

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Sjouke Voolstra, *Menno Simons: His Image and Message* (North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 1997). Paperback, 109 pp., illustrations, index.

This book comprises the published lectures of Professor Sjouke Voolstra given at Bethel College on October 29-31, 1995, on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of Menno Simons' (1496-1561) birth. The book is volume 10 in the *Cornelius H. Wedel Historical Series*, edited by John D. Thiesen.

Chapter 1, titled "The Art of Oblivion: Menno Simons in Dutch Mennonite Historiography," surveys the unease with which Dutch Mennonites have viewed the life and writings of their reformer who sought to establish a church "without spot or wrinkle". A.M. Cramer, the first biographer of Menno Simons in the nineteenth century, was, according to Voolstra, "sufficiently honest to admit that Menno would not have recognized the nineteenth-century Doopsgezind as kindred spirits." (p.27) In the Epilogue to this chapter the author concludes: "The memory of the messenger is kept alive, while the message is scarcely listened to." (p.34)

Chapter 2, "The Anticlerical Priest: From Father Confessor to Lay Preacher of True Penitence," deals with the importance of the sacrament of penance in Menno's life before and after his conversion to Anabaptism. "Penitence" seems to be the one word which, according to this study, characterized Menno's life and teaching and led to a rather somber Christianity among Menno's followers, one of the reasons why the Waterlanders and subsequent liberal groups never felt close to their reformer and elder.

Chapter 3, "The Real Presence of Christ: The Congregation of True Penitents," shows as no other study of Menno Simons, how the former priest wrestled with the "real presence" understanding of holy communion until he experienced the "real spiritual presence" of Christ in the heart of the penitent believer and in the faithful community of loving brothers and sisters. "In the eyes of Menno Simons," the author summarizes, "the true Lord's Supper was a spiritual communion with Christ in the assembly of true penitents, served by true penitents." (p.76)

In Chapter 4, "The Longing for Perfection: The Separation of the Latter-Day Saints," we have Menno's anguished progress toward believer's baptism and the influence that Melchiorite apocalypticism exerted on Menno's theology. Woolstra shows masterfully the fine line Menno Simons had to walk between the militant Muensterites (many of whom had been close to Menno) and the more pacifistic followers of Hoffinan. Both believed in the imminent return of Christ and the establishment of his kingdom; they only differed in the methods to be used for its realization.

End-time thinking, according to the author, motivated Anabaptist reforms in general and Menno's work in particular. Woolstra credits Walter Klaassen for drawing "our attention to apocalypticism as one of the constituting elements of the Anabaptist reformation and as an indispensable key to its interpretation." (p.92) While the author believes that the "socio-historical approach provides a valuable addition to a purely theological approach to the history of the Reformation," he cautions that the socio-historical method, with its anticlericalism as key to understanding the radical nature of Anabaptism, cannot adequately explain Menno's Christology, his doctrine of justification, and his church discipline. (p.55).

The Menno Simons that emerges in this book is one who worked zealously at bringing the Word of God, both law and gospel, to his people with the view of establishing not only a pure church but a moral society as well, preparing both for the kingdom of God. To this end he did not separate church and state as the southern Anabaptists seemed to do, but acknowledged that rulers also could and must govern according to God's principles. Woolstra goes so far as to state that had Menno "succeeded in finding a local or regional authority which could have implemented a reformation in the Anabaptist style... then this would not have been in conflict with his theology." (p. 95) Menno failed to achieve his goal for two reasons: the local authorities who sympathized with the Anabaptists were repressed by the Hapsburgs; and "the severe demands made on the moral standard of the purified church by the Anabaptists with their strict discipline made it impossible for the government to enfold all its subjects within such a church without spot or wrinkle."(p. 95)

Several questions arise after reading this interesting and important study. Did Menno sink into oblivion among his countrymen and the Dutch Mennonites because of the high demands he placed upon them? Did Menno's ideals of a pure church survive at least in part among the Frisian and Flemish Mennonites who left their homeland for Poland, Prussia, Russia, and ultimately North and South America? Is Menno's message of penitence what Mennonites and society need today? Or is Menno's message too severe to allow for substantial numerical growth amongst the one million Mennonites worldwide? Should Mennonites be concerned about the "little flock" they have remained after half a millennium?

Dallas Wiebe, *Our Asian Journey. A Novel* (Waterloo, ON: Mir Editions Canada, 1997). Soft cover, 449 pp.

This is a remarkable novel about one of the stranger chapters of Mennonite history, the trek that followed Klaas Epp to central Asia in search of the "place of refuge." It is an imaginative reconstruction of an episode which was in itself an imaginative *tour de force* in religious history. The nineteenth-century religious imagination was attuned to the eschatological messages of Scripture, which were given authority by the theologian Albrecht Bengel and figurative shape by the writings of Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling. Dallas Wiebe has captured this drastic adventure in the form of a diary kept by a participant in the futile venture, Joseph Toeys, a moderate Mennonite minister who survived the whole experience.

The greatest strengths of the novel are its historical depth and its concreteness. The reader is drenched in the details of Russian Mennonite life and introduced to a cast of believable characters. Joseph's wife Sarah, for example, is described by her husband in the crude, bumbling manner of a loving but Mennonite peasant. The more he dwells on her overly abundant chins and ankles the more the reader perceives the strength of his attachment to his wise mate, who always has a fitting riddle ready to hand.

Wiebe has a good feel for the presentation of a setting in which the decision is taken to sell everything and move off to a destination defined only by biblical incantations. One may well ask how otherwise pragmatic Mennonite farmers would let themselves in for such an adventure, but Wiebe demonstrates how such matters take over a situation and its cast of characters. Not all the pilgrims are "true believers"; there are many reasons for staying with one's people, and so the trek itself remains caught up in the ongoing discussion of what this is all about. Joseph, every inch the Mennonite preacher, goes about his sermonizing regardless of the "outer" circumstances, always finding the perfect text for every situation. When he finally arrives at the train station in Bethel, Kansas, he is disappointed that no one seems interested in hearing the sermon which he had prepared for this occasion.

Dallas Wiebe deals with the suffering of the trekkers by means of the kind of understatement which one might expect from the diary of a minister, to whom funerals are part of the job description. The trek is "dogged" by, what else, vicious dogs, a motif which runs through the narrative and takes on a symbolic character. The limited joys and multitudinous sorrows of the pilgrims are expressed in language moving dialectically between Zion and Zwieback, never leaving the ground level of ordinary speech, with one notable exception.

Dreams recur in the novel, although the significance of the dreams is not clear. Joseph, like his biblical model, is a dreamer, and the stuff of his dreams is furnished by the books of Daniel and Revelation. It can be argued that these dreams are necessary to provide a motivation for such a drastic adventure, but Joseph is not "the leader" (as Klaas Epp is called throughout), and the nightly visions do not motivate even him in any radical way.

But that cannot distract from the remarkable achievement of this novel, which represents an attempt almost as daring as the trek itself. As Joseph emphasizes in his explanation of why he wrote his diary in the first place, this is not so much a bizarre tale about a lot of foolish, misled individuals as it is about ordinary, God-fearing folk who take faith seriously (according to their lights). We know from the number of whole communities in Germany who also relocated from the proximity of anti-christian revolutionary France to supposedly safer ground in Asia or America in the mid-nineteenth century, that this was a common expectation; it was in the air. The novel is not about the reasons for this trek, but rather about this extraordinary experience, which affected several Mennonite communities profoundly.

Above all, *Our Asian Journey* is a very readable and engrossing novel. Annoying particulars are rare, as in the early chapter in which expressions like "O heck" and "Jiminy Cricket" obtrude, and the author himself intrudes in a self-conscious and awkward manner. But in the main the detailed narration is fascinating (at times functioning almost as a primer to Russian Mennonite cooking). It is a book I wished would not end, even in the arid plains of Kansas and Idaho.

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Katie Funk Wiebe, *The Storekeeper's Daughter: A Memoir* (Scottsdale, Pa: Herald Press, 1997).

After her recent writings on aging, Katie Funk Wiebe has given attention to her growing-up years and found in them raw material for her latest work. *The Storekeeper's Daughter* centres around her memories from early childhood through high school.

Wiebe was born to Russian Mennonite immigrants of the 1920s and her growing up in Blaine Lake, Saskatchewan happened largely during the depression years. These circumstances offer classic Canadian themes of immigration, depression and small town life in the west for the author to exploit in expanding and enriching the central thread of growing up. She announces in her preface: "The essential elements are true... To convey this truth I have used the fictional mode."

Although Blaine Lake provides the backdrop for Wiebe's account of childhood and adolescence, six out of the seventeen chapters (and snatches in others) are set mainly in the southern Ukraine, in the Old Colony, from 1917 to 1922, the years of revolution, typhus epidemic and famine. Of those events,

which tend to upstage her own experiences, Wiebe cannot, of course, have personal memories, but like many of us, she has received, filtered through her parents' memories, details of the foundation myth on which life in a new country is grounded.

In the segments set in Ukraine, it is the author's father, Jacob Funk, who takes centre stage. Risking his life he rescues, heroically, his wife's starving family. His deeds are remembered and highlighted in this book, which is as I see it, not only a personal memoir of Katie Funk Wiebe, but also (and perhaps mainly) a daughter's tribute to her father. His sharing of the book's stage with the memoiree is signalled in the title, where his identity and work are named: it is clinched in the final chapter where the author addresses him directly and personally, in gratitude.

Jacob Funk was often the one who initiated the storytelling sessions where the family history was recalled over and over again and passed on to the children. "Dad never had patience for long stories," Wiebe remembers. "He preferred the short, funny ones." It fell to his wife to play a supporting role, providing the details he had no patience for. Wiebe sympathizes with her father's disappointments and struggles. As she is the daughter of a struggling, small-town storekeeper in a new country, so her father was the son of a landless operator of a small mill in a community of more prosperous Mennonites. He suffered humiliation from teachers who treated his left-handedness as a case of stubborn insubordination and eventually he dropped out of school. A near-death experience due to typhus contracted while serving as Red Cross orderly in the Russian army triggered a spiritual struggle that drove him to seek help, but he largely failed to get the sympathetic counsel he needed. It was a Russian Baptist who helped him find inner peace. He was eventually baptized in the Mennonite Brethren church and ordained in the Alliance Church in Rosental, Old Colony.

His daughter was shattered to discover that "he was still figuring things out for himself as an adult. And a lot of pieces still did not fit neatly into a pattern." She watched him work at fitting the pieces together, as he worked at pyramidology, an interest to which a local British Israelite had introduced him. He drew, diligently, diagrams of burial places of Pharaohs in an effort to unlock the mystery of end times.

Wiebe not only absorbed her father's stories, but also observed his positive example and this outweighed, in the end, her embarrassment at the way he "sauced his tea" and spoke in immigrant English.

The father's coming-of-age acts as an effective foil to the author's own initiation into life and its various mysteries. The memoir begins with the mystery of death, introduced by a black-edged letter from Sagraadowka bringing news of the recent dying of Wiebe's maternal grandmother. Wiebe was a young girl at the time. Years later, deaths in the Blaine Lake community enlarge her understanding of this mystery and when a sick neighbour does not succumb to death but recovers she is assured that life, too, is strong.

Her journey into the mystery of sin and salvation is set in the United Church

and Salvation Army meetings in Blaine Lake, in the “across-the-river” Mennonite Church, and in her own reflections. She is puzzled by sin: “To be saved I had to be sinful and feel sinful. I didn’t. I felt good.” The emphasis on personal guilt in the across-the-river church is reflected in songs like “Are you saved”; in the Blaine Lake United Church they sing, “Jesus loves me.”

The whole matter of being Mennonite presents another mystery: is it a “final and fatal” condition, “something terrible and catching...something that you didn’t talk about?” The entire book speaks to this question, in narration and reflection.

This kind of memoir wouldn’t be complete without delving into the mystery of sexuality, and the author accomplishes this with circumspection and humour, offering lively details of a young girl’s growing interest in the human body, both female and male, the initiation into menstruation, the first girdle, the violent agony of giving birth as observed in farm animals. It is all both momentous and quite innocent.

In this memoir of one who is a writer, I looked for evidence of a young girl’s longing to write and accounts of her first efforts. Though Wiebe passes rather lightly over this, traces of early influence are there, in the family stories, in her mother’s participation as Wiebe’s older sisters read English poems aloud, in Wiebe’s memorizing of “nearly every poem in the English literature course, from Shelley’s ‘Ode to the West Wind’ to Wordsworth’s sonnet and the main speeches in Shakespeare’s plays.” This labour earned her full points on her final literature exam and the Governor General’s Award. When she leaves Blaine Lake to take the stenographer’s course that will equip her to earn a living, she allows herself to wonder: “Would I be a writer like Jo...in *Little Women*?”

Many of the chapters in this book have appeared earlier in various publications as independent stories or articles. Put together they form a satisfying whole, blending the father’s (and mother’s) earlier experience with the family’s Blaine Lake years in a form that’s not simply a linear account. The North Saskatchewan river, a natural barrier that divides the land and prevents the family from attending the “across-the-river” Mennonite church in winter, becomes, it seems to me, a metaphor for the various binaries that play a role in Wiebe’s growing awareness of who she is: Russian past/Canadian present; Mennonite heritage/Canadian reality; saved/not-saved; death/life; innocence/experience.

Wiebe’s book adds one more important telling of the Mennonite story of escape and starting over in the early decades of this century. Readers may agree, sadly, with Wiebe, who found in the Mennonite church in Canada the same “Loveless power and powerless love” that her father experienced in Russia. “Life is not fair,” Wiebe heard her father say. In spite of the unfairness, Jacob Funk kept “that kind of faith that suffered courageously and endured to the end.”

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