Book Reviews

The Swiss Brethren: A Story in Fragments. Source Evidence for the Trans-Territorial Expansion of a Clandestine Anabaptist Church in Early Modern Europe, 1538-1618. By Martin Rothkegel. Baden-Baden, Germany: Valentin Koerner. 2021. €48.

In this extensive collection of primary source annotations framed by interpretive syntheses, Martin Rothkegel furthers an argument he first articulated in 2013: The Swiss Brethren were a well-organized, underground church that emerged in the mid-sixteenth century, analogous in structure to Calvinist *églises plantées* and spread across the Holy Roman Empire. This group had minimal antecedence in early Swiss Anabaptist figures, texts, and theological positions and maintained only tenuous links to the Anabaptist communities that survived in the Swiss Confederation. This thesis has been subject to significant scholarly criticism (2-3). In direct response, Rothkegel persists in what leads him to an alternative periodization of Swiss Brethren origins and endings, namely, a strict method of identifying relevant source material (any document that contains the term "Swiss Brethren" or equivalents) and a distinctive understanding of the carriers of confessional identity (ministers, not beliefs and practices). The result is a provocative reinterpretation of the history of a group that has held pride of place in understandings of the early Anabaptist-Mennonite past.

If this book prompts fresh explorations of the history of the Swiss Brethren, as Rothkegel intends, they will surely draw on the author's 141 annotations of primary sources produced between 1533-1627. Entries, ordered chronologically, consist of the source's title, a summary of its content (with some direct quotations), and an interpretive note. The underlying source material exhibits remarkable range in documentary type, language, and site of production. Rothkegel ably reconstructs the often-convoluted transmission histories of these records, points out interconnections between documents, and relates sources to relevant secondary literature, which he brings together in a large bibliography. The compilation of this body of material, much of which remains unpublished or little known, is a significant scholarly achievement and service. This work fills gaps in knowledge about the Swiss Brethren between 1540-1620. It represents a rich research resource for an English-speaking readership.

Throughout, arguments about the significance of the source material frames its presentation. Interpretation reflects Rothkegel's interest in the genesis and spread of an institutionalized structure for communication and decision-making. Documents that bear on this history, he contends, are those that identify a corps of ministers explicitly associated with the Swiss Brethren group name—he has identified 113 (159-161). In a subsequent work, he intends to associate texts, practices, and doctrinal positions with these men. For now, these sources already provide sufficient grounds to retell the story of the Swiss Brethren in three

narrative segments that cover, roughly, the rise (1538-1555), height (1555-1590), and decline (1591-1618) of the Swiss Brethren.

In Rothkegel's account, the context for the origins of this church was a competition, driven primarily by groups based in Moravia, for the allegiance of remnants of early Anabaptist communities dispersed throughout southern territories of the Empire. In the wake of several setbacks—specifically, the fallout from Anabaptists' 1538 disputation with the Reformed authorities in Bern and the failure of concurrent negotiations with Hutterites—a number of prominent Anabaptist leaders initiated an effective unifying project that created a new ecclesiastical organization. The resulting group was first labeled "Swiss Brethren" by Hutterites in 1538—"Brethren" because of Moravian naming practices and "Swiss" because of the geographical origin of an early leader who "came down" to Moravia, a man whom Rothkegel proposes was Hans Brötli (12). A second phase of Swiss Brethren history was marked by regular "general synods" (37), convened mostly in Strasbourg, where leaders came to shared decisions and doctrinal understandings. Expansion during this period was driven by the incorporation of congregations of Melchiorite-Mennonite background, who sought new associations with Swiss Brethren because of their less stringent approach to the matter of the avoidance of spouses under church discipline. This event moved the group's center of gravity northwards, gave the church a more urban character, and, concurrently, spurred the production of printed devotional material. An unintended consequence of the intensified interactions of Swiss Brethren ministers with other Anabaptist groups along the Lower Rhine was their involvement in inter- and inner-church realignments, negotiations, and divisions, which marked a third phase of Swiss Brethren history. The fallout from these disputes, the rapid decline of congregations in cities like Strasbourg, Esslingen, and Cologne, and the devastating impact of the Thirty Years' War on remaining Swiss Brethren congregations in Moravia brought the trans-territorial history of this church to an end.

This synthesis is new and wide-ranging. It centers processes of Swiss Brethren identity formation in Moravia and the group's later development in Rhenish regions of the Empire, thereby reorienting the geography of Swiss Brethren history. This account looks west from Moravia and south from Cologne, Aachen, and Haarlem. The author posits the existence of firmer and more extensive Swiss Brethren authority structures, suggesting that the group successfully integrated "regional subconferences" (117) into a general deliberative body. He expands the context for debates among Anabaptist communities along the Lower Rhine, situating documents such as the Concept of Cologne (1591) in a longer history of conciliation and schism.

Rothkegel's interpretation, admittedly "tentative" (4), touches on histories of Dutch, German, Moravian, and Swiss Anabaptism and should prompt testing and response from specialists in these areas. The exact parameters that the author sets out for the study of the Swiss Brethren are unlikely to hold. The author's conflation of the "Swiss Brethren" with those named in the sources as "the Swiss," the "Brethren from Switzerland," "the ministers from Switzerland," and, significantly, the "Oberländer" and "High Germans" (8) implies a recognition that labels and

their use were imprecise and contextual. Nevertheless, Rothkegel considers the absence of the specific term "Swiss Brethren" in documentation prior to 1538 sufficient grounds to relegate historical events preceding this date—including the activity of those who called themselves "brothers in Christ" in Switzerland—to the category of "prehistory" (12). By winnowing so narrowly, Rothkegel remains out of step with existing historiography in his understanding of early source evidence.

This method has, at the same time, yielded invaluable new evidence that, if connected to the findings of existing scholarship, will provide deeper insight into later periods of Swiss Brethren activity. Several monographs have recently examined the social experience of Anabaptist commoners who inhabited specific regions where the ministers Rothkegel has identified operated. How did the trans-territorial authority structures that the author describes relate to everyday congregational life? In this vein, the relative paucity of governmental sources in this book obscures the degree to which Swiss Brethren identity developed locally through interactions with authorities and non-Anabaptist villagers (who were rarely interested in group names with largely internal significance). Here, it would be useful to reconsider the experience of the Swiss Brethren in Switzerland who, while inconsequential throughout Rothkegel's narrative, reappear after 1618 as "the only group which preserved [this] tradition for future centuries" (108). The social marginalization of these communities, an effect of repression, likely constrained participation in broader church structures. Evaluation of how these "sisters and brothers in Christ" responded to such circumstances, alongside analysis of ministerial activity and meetings, will provide a fuller picture of what it meant to be Swiss Brethren in early modern Europe.

Conrad Grebel University College David Y. Neufeld

Advent Then and Now: People, Poems, and Portraits. By Joseph Gascho. Lulu, 2020. 70 pp. $. 11.00

Lent Then and Now: People, Poems, and Portraits. By Joseph Gascho. ImagoPoetica, 2021. 104 pp. $14.00

Advent and Lent are periods of the liturgical Christian calendar that honor the process of waiting for a glorious event. During the four weeks of Advent, we await the Christ Child in anticipation of his second coming. During the almost seven weeks of Lent, we await the resurrection of Jesus and a renewed sense of his presence in our lives. In the northern hemisphere, these liturgical periods are accompanied by some of the year's most arduous and discouraging weather—the coming of winter and the waning of the light in the case of Advent, the dregs of winter that drag before the coming of spring in the case of Lent. Anabaptists, traditionally iconoclastic, have only recently adopted practices from the lectionary and the liturgical calendar. Mennonites have emphasized the presence of Christ in

our everyday interactions over symbols of belief and piety. Yet the need for ritual in our fragmented postmodern times is intense.

These two books of photographs and poems by Joseph Gascho are designed for use by pilgrims on the liturgical journeys of Advent and Lent, but they also invoke the Anabaptist commitment to serve as Christ served in everyday practical ways. For each day of the devotional period, Gascho offers a contemporary photographic portrait and a short poem titled with the name of a biblical character. The juxtaposition of poem and image on facing pages encourages the reader to engage a biblical text or teaching in the face of a contemporary person portrayed in a moment of reflection or engagement with the viewer.

For instance, in *Lent Then and Now*, "Lazarus" muses:
There must have been a terrible traffic jam
or he'd have gotten here in time to say
goodbye. I'd lost my sense of taste and smell.
The ventilator did no good. My time had come.
Next thing I heard, "Rise up!" I wakened
to the stench of death, changed my clothes,
said to myself, "Can anything top this?"

The companion image for "Lazarus" is the face of an aging man, his asymmetrical eyes prominent in the closely cropped photograph. His gaze seems to look both outward and inward at once. Gascho notes that he asked the persons posing for his camera to think about a biblical character.

The tension created between the poem and the image almost begs for group discussion. Either of these books would work well in an adult Sunday School class in which participants could share their interpretations of word and image, as well as their own experiences of the liturgical season. These books also provide prompts for brief individual daily meditations. The poems are accessible, sometimes deceptively so. Each of the poems in *Advent Then and Now* is in the form of what Gascho terms a "hemisonnet," or half an unrhymed sonnet, "looking forward to the advent of the traditional 14-line sonnet" (69). *Lent Then and Now*, which is a longer book due to the greater number of days in Lent, is comprised of forty hemisonnets and seven sonnets, one for each of the Sundays of Lent. The sonnets in this volume give the poet a greater range, and thus the volume has more heft.

Overall, the pairing of a short poem with a photographic portrait creates a pleasing repetition conducive to reader participation, and the discipline of the form emphasized the fresh approach and material presented in each verbal/visual pair. Sometimes the brevity enhances the focus, sometimes it allows for little more than the evocation of the mundane. Which is where group discussion could enhance the reading experience, the photographs and poems serving as a vehicle through which readers can share their own unique responses, enlarging the conversation.

In these devotional books, Gascho has brought together his love of photography and poetry with a strong ethic of service to the great variety of humanity expressed through his vocation as a cardiologist and medical school professor. Each photograph makes us pause and contemplate our own flawed and

beautiful uniqueness, removing the social barriers that often prohibit us from examining the countenance of another at length. By contemplating these faces and their expressions, we are drawn into connecting with them. And in *Advent*, as if to address the problem of "othering" implicit in photography, Gascho joins the gallery of faces in two photographs of himself taken by his wife, Barbara Brunk Gascho. Gascho has also been honing his skill as a poet for decades, often drawing on his experiences in medicine to publish work in both medical and non-medical journals. In 2014, he won the Annals of Internal Medicine poetry competition, and in 2017 he published a full-length book of poems in Cascadia's poetry series, *Cornfields, Cottonwoods, Seagulls, and Sermons*: *Growing Up in Nebraska.* He has an eye for the salient human detail, and an ear for what we need to hear.

Goshen College ANN HOSTETLER

Minority Report: Mennonite Identities in Imperial Russia and Soviet Ukraine Reconsidered, 1789-1945. Edited by Leonard G. Friesen. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 2018. Pp. 338. $79 Cdn.

Minority Report addresses the multiple changing identities of Mennonites in Imperial Russia and Soviet Ukraine. Identities "reconsidered" refers to a deliberate intent to update understandings and to undercut flawed stereotypes. How well does the book succeed? It offers new information in each of nine chapters, six of them originally written in Russian, and delivered as a smooth reading in English. *Minority Report* relies heavily on newly available archives (state and private) and to some extent on conversation with recent secondary literature in English and German. Given the recent new round of debates on Mennonite complicity in racism, antisemitism, and white supremacy, this book is essential reading not only for Mennonites, but for all persons seeking to understand the tangled stories of religious-ethnic histories.

"Minority" fits because of the heavy focus on the southeastern Ukrainian territory, now that Ukrainians are more aware of their own multiethnic and religious diversity, true also within the Russian Federation and Central Asian countries, but not readily acknowledged. The authors are both historians and students of culture and ethnography for whom the importance of examining minority groups is self-evident as a source of alternative social and political formations. The shift toward greater openness to data on cultural and religious minorities started transforming the USSR during the millennium celebrations in 1988, followed soon after by the dissolution of the USSR when fifteen national entities emerged. Already in 1997, the Russian Federation's renewal of restrictions on religion also increased limits to archival access, whereas in Ukraine even state universities began cooperating with theological colleges to accept doctoral students on religion and culture. The central focus of *Minority Report* is on southeastern Ukraine, long called New Russia, where the foreign colonists had

established thriving communities of religious diversity, leading a major agricultural development process.

In Western Mennonite circles, the history of the "Mennonite Commonwealth" as told by David Rempel in a lengthy *Mennonite Quarterly Review* essay nearly fifty years ago—reflecting his rare access to Soviet archives that was not easily followed up by others due to detente problems—has shaped the normative Russian Mennonite story. Of the Mennonite identities re-considered during both Imperial and Soviet eras, Friesen's introduction highlights three: 1) Mennonites as "perpetrators of economic injustice and cultural insensitivity"; 2) Mennonites as "hapless victims of a totalitarian regime"; 3) and Mennonites as "international refugees" (5). A few Western researchers, following Rempel's scholarly approach, though relying mainly on insider memoirs and letters in German and English, were already engaged in rethinking those "identities" and fostering discussion. Scholars like James Urry, Terry Martin, and Lawrence Klippenstein, as well as Harvey Dyck and his students Len Friesen and John Staples, were setting Mennonite history in a broader context and gaining access to state archives, at least by 1990, a few through official academic exchanges during earlier detente phases.

What makes *Minority Report* so rich are the carefully drawn research findings from the six scholars based in Dnepropetrovsk University. The first chapter by Svetlana Bobyleva, now the head of the research program, may appear to offer a minor contribution about the Borozenko settlements near the Black Sea, but she provides a studied comparison of data from the early Mennonite settlers during the 1860s, who were able to purchase land from a nobleman who preferred to sell to the foreign settlers, rather than to the newly-emancipated serfs already living there. Fifty years later, these even more deeply impoverished peasants joined the Makhno band in 1919, attacking some of those settlers. Yet, as Bobyleva points out, Mennonite settlers in Borozenko had worked alongside the hired peasants for years. A more plausible reason for the violent attacks, she argues, was the emerging Soviet power fostering seizure of land from the Kulaks. By then, many other factors, ranging from modernization to shifting state policies, also account for the attacks (37). Bobyleva's weighing of these factors includes Sean Paterson's recent reconsideration of the perspectives of the Makhnovtsy.

Two features of Bobyleva's opening chapter need to be highlighted. In her words, "Ukrainian scholars did not always have access to western specialists and their research." Then in 1999, they met "a group of Canadian, American and German Mennonites" (26), scholarly contacts that "allowed our Ukrainian scholars to break out of its decades-long Soviet isolation" (27). The initial contacts also connected them with German scholars from the Göttingen Research Center. For the Ukrainian scholars, the significance of "that remarkable first encounter . . . cannot be overstated" (27). The same is true of "the crucial initiatory role played by Harvey Dyck" (27). Western readers may not have noticed this Khortitsa '99 conference, since the proceedings were never published. A decade later a similar conference at the State University of Omsk (Siberia) brought together Russian scholars from Siberian and Central Asian regions, signaling a broader comparative spectrum, with Canadian and a few American scholars present. The papers from the Omsk conference were published in *Journal of Mennonite Studies* (2012),

although the many Russian papers presented appeared only as translated abstracts.

Second, Bobyleva's chapter draws attention to the relevance of the other contributors, highlighting similarities and differences. That becomes the pattern for the other contributors to this book, essentially conducting a discussion with each other, ensuring that Western specialists will find much worth probing in further depth.

Although this volume is a Festschrift honoring Professor Harvey Dyck, its strength emerges through the diverse approaches of the other five Russian/Ukrainian scholars. Part 1 serves as overview to the new approaches to Mennonite history. Editor Friesen's crucial introduction and appendix situate those approaches highlighting the changes over nearly 150 years. Part 2 speaks to the stereotype of Mennonite isolationism; its three chapters address: a) the transformation of education in Mennonite schools during the imperial period of policy change (Irena Cherkazianova); b) the long independent "foreign faiths" needing to adapt to the gradual increase of state officials attempting to "oversee" colonists' religious practices (Oksana Beznosova); and c) the considerable intertwining of Mennonite entrepreneurs and Russian nationalists between 1830-1917 (Nataliya Venger).

Part 4 offers three chapters on changing Mennonite identities during the "Soviet Cauldron." Colin Neufeldt (Alberta) provides a detailed differentiation of Mennonite participation in the collectivizing process from 1929 to the early 1930s. His analysis, however, is restricted to the two mother colonies' territories; the newer colonies in the Asian regions were collectivized later and lacked the structural cohesion to resist Soviet personnel appointments in running collective farms.

The other chapters in part 4 also present extensive archival detail on two separate events: the Ukrainian famine of 1932-1935 (also known as Holodymer), by Alexander Beznosov, and the trauma of World War II, meaning the identity testing among the Russian German population and neighboring Jews between siding with Soviet power or collaborating with the Nazi occupiers of Ukraine (Viktor Kletz). A key reality of the devastating famine was that Ukrainians lacked contacts with foreign relief agencies like those enjoyed by Russian Germans (and Mennonites). In his survey of documents related to the complicity of Russian Mennonites in the Holocaust, Kletz concludes with the phrase "caught between two poles" (287). The German invaders expected Mennonites as "Germans" to cooperate, including in the killing of Jews. Mennonites had to face the eventual reality of the Nazi retreat, in which Russian Germans still in the Ukrainian region were forced to join the trek as refugees to Poland and then German regions, before a majority of the survivors were forcibly repatriated. Kletz concludes that Mennonite self-identity during the war matched neither German nor Soviet perspectives—whether as Germans or as "fifth column traitors" (in Soviet eyes). Mennonite participants in killing Jews were a small minority, some of them true believers in the Hitler vision.

Part 3 in the book focuses on identities in diaspora (John B Toews on A. A. Friesen), but its singularity underlines the fact that the large out-migration of

Mennonites as an Exodus/Red Sea salvation story was never a majority story until 1987-1993. Friesen's sensitive and generous telling of how Russian and Ukrainian scholars "became passionately engaged with Mennonite history . . . needs to be told if this volume is to make any sense" (319). It started when a young scholar, Serhii Plokhy, now a Harvard professor, suggested to graduate student Nataliya Venger (then Ostasheva) that she investigate a Mennonite subject. Venger is now a recognized and established scholar, having presented several papers in the West. Friesen himself was the first Western scholar in Dnepropetrovsk after its closed city status ended in 1989, and was deeply impressed by Plokhy's goal "to liquidate the 'blank pages' in the region's history" (321)—namely, the story of the foreign and religious settlers. Harvey Dyck worked with Paul Toews and Lawrence Klippenstein, then archivists in Fresno and Winnipeg, to equip the university libraries in Zaporizhzhia and Dnepropetrovsk, allowing the scholars there to explore the Western literature. Several other factors, such as the established Mennonite travel tours to the old colonies, further cemented the relationships. Missing in this appendix was the celebration of the 200th anniversary in the summer of 1989, organized by Mennonites from Karaganda, Kazakhstan, including a mass rally in the stadium in then Zaporozhia, which also gave new visibility to a forgotten Mennonite story.

Friesen ends the appendix by reporting on the anxiety of the group of scholars of Mennonites in eastern Ukraine, worried that the scholarly contacts with the West might die off. Hence, his hope that "the future of Mennonite studies" would be bright and that *Minority Report* would contribute to "that worthy aspiration." There is at least some hope that a new Transnational Mennonite Studies Program in Winnipeg may result in more active contacts. Thankfully, Len Friesen's own forthcoming history of Russian Mennonites, reaching into the twenty-first century, will inspire more relational ties for readers, including the still unknown corps of experts among Russian Germans in Germany.

Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary WALTER SAWATSKY

Das Emder Religionsgespräch von 1578. Zur Genese des gedruckten Protokolls sowie Beobachtungen zum theologischen Profil der flämischen Mennoniten. By Klaas-Dieter Voß. Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt. 2018. EUR 98.00. 704 pp.[1]

This published dissertation by Klaas-Dieter Voß, originally presented in the winter of 2017 at the Carl-von Ossietzky-University Oldenburg, remains true to its title. The dissertation considers, in large part, the genesis of the printed protocol of the "Emder Religionsgespräch" (Emden colloquy) of 1578; and, somewhat in

1. This review was also published in German: *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter 78* (2021), 219-222.

passing, addresses the theology of the Flemish Mennonites. The title of the book already makes it clear that this work is primarily concerned with the fourteen articles of the religious discussion, but even more with the question of the authenticity of the minutes and its authors. Therefore, it is not surprising that any statements concerning the Flemish theology are presented in a bundled form toward the end of the dissertation, beginning on page 651. Apart from repeated references to the theology of Menno Simons, considerations about the theological context of Emden rarely extend beyond the protocols themselves. Further sources such as reports of martyrs or observations from other cities and regions would have helped to assess and locate the findings from Emden. But this would have meant shifting the rather narrow focus of the "observations" (651-667). Therefore, they appear almost as an appendix to the study of the colloquy's sources.

This study therefore focuses on the minutes of the conversation that took place in Emden between February 27 and May 17, 1578. Originally, the meeting was not intended to settle disputes between Anabaptists and the Reformed party. Rather, it was intended to bring about a rapprochement between Flemish and Frisian Mennonites in Emden; therefore, their separation is integrated into the prehistory of the conversation (54-63). But a look at the names and biographies of the meeting's protagonists strongly suggests, in the end, the theological prominence of East Frisia (with Menso Alting at its head) over the Flemish Mennonites. Among them, Carel of Ghent receives special attention in the study, since some ambiguity surrounds his person: The question is whether Carel of Ghent was both the Mennonite minute-taker of the "Emder Religionsgespräch" as well as the author of an essential writing of Mennonite historiography, written in 1615, but not published until 1658. Probably for lack of alternatives the latter has been attributed—for a long time—to the Reformed preacher Carel of Ghent. Voß's study, however, takes the time and effort (136-148) to raise questions about the biographical match as well as the mention of Ghent in other sources (for example, in the church council minutes of the Emden congregation) in order to search for an "absolutely certain result" (145). On this basis, Voß concludes that there is "no doubt" (145) that Carel of Ghent was indeed both the minute-taker as well as the author of the 1615 document.

The bulk of the study focuses on an annotated reproduction of the conversation in Emden in 1578. Voß does this with great meticulousness (and extensive footnotes, which sometimes take up the entire page, for example on 188f.) and by comparing different extant manuscripts with the printed version of the conversation. This meticulousness merits special appreciation, for only then does it become clear that a total of six versions of the minutes exist, which went into print in 1579: the minutes of the meeting, which were prepared by two or three authors; the edited version of the Reformed ministers; a copy of this text; further edits by the Reformed ministers; then the first edition produced by the Mennonite side; and finally the editing of the printed version. The presence of so many versions has consequences for judging the manuscript, which sits in the city archives of Emden (apparently not the original that the printed version is based on), as it does for the statements about the theology of the Flemish Mennonites. Their statements can no longer be regarded as authentic since they have gone through various stages of editing.

These points of controversy are addressed in detail, their disputed aspects named, and commented upon with varying intensity: the fall of man, the incarnation of Christ, the doctrine of justification, good works, the church of God, the calling of preachers, issues of baptism, the Lord's Supper, the ban and church discipline, the authorities, oath swearing, and the doctrine of "last things." Here, Voß gives the most space to the controversy regarding the incarnation of Christ. This is sensible, because in East Frisia, the struggle for an appropriate understanding of the incarnation of Christ went far beyond the "Emder Religionsgespräch." In fact, it had been the subject of disputes since 1537, the most prominent occurring between the East Frisian superintendent Johannes à Lasco and Menno Simons, for whom Menno Simons found harsh words in his polemic of 1544. Therefore, it is highly understandable that the study also looks at both the Melchiorite legacy and these debates. Here, too, as with the other theological topics, Voß closely examined the sources and reproduced the statements of the protagonists in great detail. This underlines the dramatic stages of the discussions prior to the colloquy of 1578. However, such passages would have benefited from a stronger bundling in order to be able to better evaluate the content and range of the statements.

Also noteworthy is the reflection on church discipline (491-531). Here, too, by addressing excommunication and divorce as well as the question of marriage avoidance, Voß constructs a larger framework, which—just as on the issue of incarnation—extends to the conversation of John à Lasco with Menno Simons. Moreover, it also briefly discusses research on the question of "spiritual marriage" (494-497). In such passages in particular, it becomes clear how important it would have been to locate the "Emder Religionsgespräch" not only in the East Frisian-Dutch context, but also in the empire-wide view of the Anabaptists and Mennonites, for only then a larger perspective emerges. This would not only have been a gain for research as such, but at the same time it would have highlighted the meticulously gained insights from Emden even more.

All in all, the study is a milestone for understanding the colloquy of Emden. We may wish for comparable regional and in-depth studies that would widen our perspective on the theology of the Flemish Mennonites as well as on the nature of religious conversations and disputes between Mennonites and Reformed or Lutherans.

Friedrich Alexander Universität Nürnberg/Erlangen Nicole Grochowina

---

Mennonite Brethren Bible College: A History of Competing Visions. By Abe J. Dueck. Winnipeg, Man.: Kindred Productions. 2021. $22.95.

This carefully focused, thoughtfully written, insider's history of Mennonite Brethren Bible College (1944-1992) in Winnipeg, Manitoba, provides a summary

overview of each of the ten MBBC presidents, along with the conflicting visions that pulled the school in different directions, from its founding until its closure. MBBC's legacy includes influencing its successors, first Concord College (1992-2000), then, to a lesser extent, Canadian Mennonite University (1999-), and sending remarkable alumni into the world. While not a full, well-rounded institutional history, it is still a superb gift of scholarship from a longtime faculty member and dean at MBBC, Abe Dueck.

The bulk of the book is given over to describing the ten presidents and the challenges they faced, with a separate chapter for each administration, interwoven with board decisions. The ten portraits provide a solid foundation for the final three chapters, especially the penultimate one, where the "competing visions" finally get their due and the story comes to life. The author was so scrupulous in his attempt at evenhanded fairness to each president that I sometimes longed for more vivid details about their individual personalities, leadership styles, and reactions during controversies, so that their characters would have been fleshed out further. The descriptions tend to be so understated that it is sometimes hard to sort out exactly what the ultimate impact of each man was. To what extent, for example, did egos fuel controversies? Narcissists sometimes work their way into control. Did that ever happen at MBBC? I was struck by the relative brevity of most tenures, often not a good sign for a school: Abraham H. Unruh (1944-1945), J. B. Toews (1945-1948), Henry H. Janzen (1948-1956), John A. Toews (1956-1963), Jacob H. Quiring (1963-1967), Victor Adrian (1967-1972), John Regehr (1972-1974), Henry Krahn (1974-1982), David Ewart (1982-1988), and James Pankratz (1988-1992).

The generous sprinkling of telling photos offers a clear sub-text—white males dominated MBBC for most of its history, contrary, for example, to some radically conservative Wesleyan-holiness or Pentecostal Bible schools that were founded, led, and mostly staffed by women. Even Moody Bible began under a female dean, Emma Dryer, though it later embraced patriarchy.

There were fourteen or more sets of competing visions at MBBC, at least by my count (it is sometimes hard for an outsider to follow all the nuances and identify points of conflict—words I gloss over might be explosive to those in the know).

1) The Bible school ethos within the Mennonite Brethren resulted in at least eighteen Mennonite Brethren Bible schools, which gave rise to the desire for a "higher" Bible school that led in turn to the formation of MBBC; but the very fact that MBBC was founded to be more than a lower-level Bible school soon proved challenging to the MB. What did it mean to be a full-blown Bible college?

2) The deeply rooted German-language identity of the MB and MBBC, which helped preserve Mennonite culture through sojourns in Russia, Latin America, and elsewhere, was threatened by increasing assimilation into the English-language mainstream of the Canadian West. Mennonite Brethren members were nervous as curricular offerings turned toward English.

3) The rich Mennonite tradition of vocal and piano music drew so many students that music rivaled the core biblical curriculum in numbers. At the same time, the music faculty pushed toward classical German modes that seemed rather distant from popular hymnody, alienating some congregational constituents.

4) There soon developed a three-way tension within MBBC as it tried to fulfill different, if overlapping, educational missions: an advanced Bible college; a liberal arts college; and a seminary. While the Bible college thrust generally prevailed, the other two educational philosophies remained in play to the end.

5) Were the Mennonite Brethren and MBBC more Anabaptist or evangelical? What did each movement entail? Could the two impulses be reconciled?

6) Initial accreditation through what was formerly known as the American Association of Bible Colleges brought contacts with more fundamentalist wings of evangelicalism. If the Mennonite Brethren and MBBC embraced some evangelical emphases, were they also fundamentalist?

7) Attempts to gain further academic recognition led to ties with Canadian universities with different educational philosophies—first Waterloo Lutheran, then Winnipeg. Did those ties diminish a Biblio-centric faith?

8) Is there a place for women in ministry? MBBC attracted female students. What roles could they have in the MB?

9) Would MBBC remain insular in its denominational outlook, drawing students almost exclusively from the Mennonite Brethren and smaller Russian Mennonite bodies, or would it become more ecumenical in scope and outreach?

10) Winnipeg and its environs boasted a bewildering array of Mennonite and Anabaptist bodies and institutions with complicated relations to each other that are not always evident to outsiders. How close to more socially (and politically) "mainstream" Anabaptists would the Mennonite Brethren and MBBC become?

11) Would MBBC primarily train local pastors and workers for Mennonite Brethren congregations, or would it tilt toward educating scholars and other professionals?

12) How should the Mennonite Brethren conferences in other provinces relate to MBBC, especially if British Columbia had a large enough constituency to go its own way in higher education?

13) How should MBBC relate to the Mennonite Brethren in the United States, given the existence of Tabor in Kansas and Fresno Pacific in California, especially when Fresno developed a seminary?

14) How should MBBC respond when an influential chair of Mennonites studies was founded at the nearby, but secular, University of Winnipeg?

It isn't fair, perhaps, to ask questions the author never intended to answer. Nevertheless, the book did spark many questions in my mind. Here are a few of them. Were the battles fiercest between the school and its constituencies, between the administration and the faculty, or within the faculty? Did leaders at MBBC ever turn to the writings of S. A. Witmer ("Mr. Bible College," Ph.D. from Chicago) for an articulation of a Bible college philosophy of education, or of his son-in-law, Timothy M. Warner, for a defense of liberal arts within a Bible college setting? For better or worse, missionary work was often presented as the blue ribbon of Christian service at many schools within the Bible college movement, including Biola, Columbia (SC), Fort Wayne, Moody, Nyack, Prairie, and Toccoa. Dueck notes that 257 MBBC alumni became teachers, 68 pastors, and 55 missionaries during the first twenty-five years of MBBC (199). Otherwise, there is almost

nothing about cross-cultural mission. How global was the perspective at MBBC? How many international students did it have? Did the school ever reach out effectively to Indigenous peoples or to persons from other ethnicities? Student life is barely mentioned. When, for example, did intercollegiate athletic competition begin (see photos of teams, 119, 148), and how important did athletics become on campus?

These unanswered questions notwithstanding, this is a superb, if narrowly delineated, history of MBBC.

Bethel (Ind.) University TIMOTHY PAUL ERDEL

Where the Truth Lies: Selected Essays. Rudy Wiebe. Writer as Critic Series XIV. Edmonton: NeWest Press. 2016. $24.95.

Writers are notorious liars when it comes to their own lives, processes, and art. As soon as an author tell us "what he really means," the magic of language takes over, weaving an illusionary fabric, frustrating the desire of an impatient interpreter to "get to the bottom of things." Yet Rudy Wiebe, in this, his fourth collection of nonfiction essays, dwells comfortably in this contradiction. He constructs a believable voice, which comes to us from the first ironic essay, "Terminal Disease," through a lie. "I suffer from a terminal mental disease called writing," he asserts, and already the reader is smiling (3). It's both a humble and a bold claim from a writer whose sixty-year career still enthralls a sizeable audience.

Wiebe's fiction can be daunting for readers. Take, for example, the opening section of his second Governor General's Award-winning novel, *A Discovery of Strangers* (1994), written entirely from the point of view of a wolf. His nonfiction, on the other hand, is reader-friendly. Perhaps it's his years as a teacher; perhaps it's the venues in which many of these pieces first appeared as published articles or talks. In any case, sitting down with *Where the Truth Lies* is as inviting as a long, casual chat with a witty, engaging professor, filling you in on "what he really means" when you really want to know. In other words, it's an invaluable resource to Wiebe scholars as well as a brilliant introduction to his work for newcomers to his fiction. But just as soon as you're enjoying his amusing anecdotes, he ramps up the challenge, as if daring readers to come along for the ride.

The essays in this book, here collected for the first time, are drawn from published essays or public lectures. Three quarters of them have appeared since his last nonfiction collection, *River of Stone* (1995), was assembled. They both complement and expand on what is found there. A handful of essays from the 1970s through the early 1990s offer some context and depth to the mix, allowing the reader to appreciate the author's multifarious first-person voice. A skillful thematic arrangement mixes short and long, old and new, creating an inviting rhythm for the reader. The book is divided into three sections: 1) Writing a

Lifetime; 2) Place is a Story; and 3) Where I Live. Each section includes seven essays of varying lengths, artfully arranged around the larger theme.

"Writing a Lifetime" begins playfully and concludes with the title essay of this collection, an in-depth *ars poetica* which will be of interest to all scholars and readers of Wiebe's work. This essay begins etymologically, a familiar move from Wiebe's longer essays, to note the six pages of definitions of lie contained in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (76). He offers to discuss two of them—lie in the sense of physical placement and lie in the sense of moral untruth—meanings that make possible the moral pun at the heart of this essay. Naming the physical world has always fascinated Wiebe, as has the complexity of truth. "A writer has nothing but language with which to explore the truth," Wiebe asserts, and proceeds to reveal the complexity of rendering what we hold as true in an abstract symbol system, such as language. Wiebe's childhood was trilingual—including the low German dialect his family spoke, the high German of Sunday sermons, and the English of his Canadian public school education. "As by instinct, I learned how different languages express different shades of thoughts, images, ideas in their own distinctive and evocative way to particular people: marvelous training for a writer," he notes (80). But telling the stories of these people compelled him to become a fiction writer, because to Wiebe, narrative creates meaning that exists "beyond the grasp of our physical senses" (81) and is thus symbolic. In the heart of the essay Wiebe delves into the definitions of fact, fiction, and narrative as a prelude to a deep theological discussion of the kinds of narratives we make in search of truth and the distortions inherent in language itself.

The focus of the book's middle section, "Place is a Story," is summed up in the title of the essay "Land, Law and Language." Here Wiebe is concerned with the social and political implications of the ways in which language constructs our relationship to land and its inhabitants. Wiebe's perspective on Canada embraces diversity, but also unity. Two short essays express his strong disapproval of Quebec's move to secede from Canada; two extended essays take readers deep into the Northwest Territories—one on a trip with Dene Elders that blends traditional practices with modern technology in the hunt for Caribou, and another on a geological survey. Wiebe's short acceptance speech for the 1994 Governor General's Award for fiction, which recognized his *A Discovery of Strangers,* concludes that there are far more stories in Canada than have yet to be voiced or recognized, a possibility his work continually asks readers to ponder.

The book's final section, "Where I Live," explores the intertwining of geographical and spiritual place. As embodied beings we are emplaced—that is, we develop in relationship to our surroundings and geography, much as we do to the ideas, values, and stories of that place. Wiebe's Christian, Mennonite theology is no secret; it is both specific and wide open, broad and encompassing, integrated with the themes of place, personhood, law, and language he develops in the essays throughout this collection. Sounding the religious dimensions of life, Wiebe returns to salient themes of Mennonite theology in this section: the body, war and peace, martyrdom, and pilgrimage. Readers invested in the "Mennonite/s Writing" project of the past three decades will find much of interest here.

One of the epigraphs to this book, chosen from Wiebe's essay "Passage by Land," states: "To touch this land with words . . . you must lay great black steel lines of fiction . . . build giant artifact over and over into space." The elegant design of the book uses the image of steel rafters on both its cover and on the first page of every essay, reinforcing the concept of language as a creative, constructive, and generative medium.

Where the Truth Lies belongs in every library collection that features Rudy Wiebe's work. It is both accessible and challenging, thoroughly permeated with the artist's voice and continuing challenge to consider the constructed nature of the monuments we build, and both the shaping power and flexibility of the language we use to encase them. Paradoxically, as the latest of Wiebe's collections of nonfiction, it is perhaps the best introduction to new readers of his work, as it covers the preoccupations of his long and distinguished career, but also brings them firmly into the challenging context of the twenty-first century.

Goshen College, Professor Emerita Ann Hostetler

Author Addresses

Prof. David Cramer, Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, 3003 Benham Ave, Elkhart, IN 46517. E-mail: dcramer@ambs.edu

Leonard Gross, 405 Gra-Roy Dr, Goshen, IN 46526. E-mail: leonardg@goshen.edu

Prof. Janna Hunter-Bowman, Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, 3003 Benham Ave, Elkhart, IN 46517. E-mail: jhunterbowman@ambs.edu

Prof. Rachel Miller Jacobs, Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, 3003 Benham Ave, Elkhart, IN 46517. E-mail: rmjacobs@ambs.edu

Prof. Jamie Pitts, Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, 3003 Benham Ave, Elkhart, IN 46517. E-mail: jpitts@ambs.edu

Prof. Drew Strait, Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, 3003 Benham Ave, Elkhart, IN 46517. E-mail: dstrait@ambs.edu

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION

(Act of October 23, 1962; Section 4369, Title 39, United States Code)

THE MENNONITE QUARTERLY REVIEW is owned and published four times annually by the Mennonite Quarterly Review Publication Committee for the Mennonite Historical Society, Goshen College and the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary. The Society, Goshen College and the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary are all non-profit church organizations without stock or security holders. The **REVIEW** is published at Goshen College, Goshen, Indiana 46526. Editor: John D. Roth, Goshen College; Circulation Manager: Elizabeth Bontrager.

CIRCULATION

	Ave. No. Copies each issue during preceding 12 months	Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
Total No. Copies Printed	731	729
Paid Circulation		
1. Through Dealers, Carriers, etc	0	0
2. Mail Subscriptions	502	498
Free Distribution	39	39
Total Distribution	541	541
Office Use, Left-Over	190	192
Total distributed and left over	731	729

Research Grant: The Mennonite Historical Society announces an "Open Research Grant" of $2,500 to promote research and publication in Anabaptist-Mennonite studies. To apply, send the following materials by March 1, 2022, to Carrie Philipps (phillipsc@bluffton.edu), Secretary, Mennonite Historical Society, Goshen College, Goshen, IN 46526: a two- or three-page summary of the project stating its significance to the field of Anabaptist-Mennonite history, a budget of anticipated expenses, a vitae, and one letter of recommendation. All applicants must be members of the Mennonite Historical Society. Recipients of the award will be announced at the May meeting of the MHS Board of Directors. Disbursements will be made by June 1. The Prize Selection Committee may choose not to award the grant if none of the applications is deemed acceptable. The Mennonite Quarterly Review has the "right of first refusal" for scholarly articles that result from research funded by the grant.

The **Schafer-Friesen Research Fellowship** is awarded annually by the Mennonite Historical Library (MHL) at Goshen College to support scholarship in Reformation and Anabaptist History. First priority for the award is to individuals doing advanced research using the resources of the Mennonite Historical Library. The award will support travel costs to the Mennonite Historical Library, and up to three weeks of room and board. The Fellowship may also be used, secondarily, to support publications on Reformation and Anabaptist topics. To apply, please send a letter of interest, along with a one-page research plan and budget, by March 1, 2022, to John D. Roth at johndr@goshen.edu.


Coming Soon!
Registration for the
19th Believer's Church Conference
20 – 22 January 2022
Shaw University, Raleigh, North Carolina, USA
Inspired by the theme, Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Global Witness of Believers' Churches, theological and pastoral thought leaders will explore the impact of Believers' Churches globally with a focus on their public witness.
Confirmed Presenters include:
William H. Brackney, Acadia Divinity School, Wolfville, Nova Scotia, Canada
Mikael Broadway, Shaw University, Raleigh, North Carolina, USA
Dudley A. Brown, Ryerson University Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada
Rubí Elizabeth Barocio Castells, Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico City, Mexico
Fernando Enns, University of Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany
Scott Holland, Bethany Theological Seminary, Richmond, Indiana, USA
Xavier L. Johnson, Earlham School of Religion, Richmond, Indiana, USA
Lesley Francisco McClendon, Duke Divinity School, Durham, North Carolina, USA
John D. Roth, Goshen College, Goshen, Indiana, USA
Keynote Speaker for the Friday evening public worship experience
John Guns, Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology, Richmond, Virginia, USA
DUKE DIVINITY SCHOOL
BLACK CHURCH STUDIES
SAMUEL DEWITT PROCTOR SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
SHAW UNIVERSITY Divinity School
Black Church Leadership Academy