

IN THIS ISSUE

Like most of his friends, I can still vividly recall the first time I met Alan Kreider. I was an undergraduate at Goshen College, then majoring in natural science. In the winter of 1979, I had signed up for a history course on “Comparative Revolutions” with great trepidation, mostly on the recommendation of several friends who were thrilled that this young Harvard grad, then a mission worker in England, had agreed to also teach occasionally in the history department at Goshen College. On the first day of class Alan approached the lectern, gangly and awkward, and greeted us warmly. And then—head ducking, hands moving with the same animation of his voice—he launched into his lecture with an enthusiasm and urgency that I had never encountered before in the classroom.

In the course of that semester, I came to marvel at Alan’s infectious hunger for learning, his personal warmth, and especially the matter-of-fact way that he joined his incandescent intellectual brilliance with a deep and expressive piety. Along the way, I was also captured by his passion for history and his obvious love for the church. As so many others have testified following his death on May 8, 2017, an encounter with Alan could change your life.

In this issue of *Mennonite Quarterly Review* we pay tribute to the life and memory of Alan Kreider (1941-1917). Such a tribute, of course, cannot pretend to capture the full sweep of Alan’s professional, ecclesial, and personal impact. Alan was a missionary, a preacher, and a teacher; he was a peace evangelist, a scholar of the early church, an ecumenist, and liturgist. He was a husband, a father, an avid reader, a tireless networker, a lover of Bach chorales, and a mentor to dozens of new Christians, aspiring scholars, troubled youth, and weary church workers.

This issue is an effort to give readers a small glimpse into the capacious scope of Alan’s work, drawing on the insights of a small cloud of witnesses whose lives and scholarship were touched in some way by his influence. We begin, unusually perhaps, with a visual image. As artist and theologian **Andy Alexis-Baker** describes in the text that accompanies his etching, Alan was fascinated by the visual motif from Isaiah 11 of the lion lying down with the lamb—an image immortalized by the many variations of the “peaceable kingdom” by the artist Edward Hicks. As an homage to his teacher, mentor, and friend, Alexis-Baker created his own variation of the peaceable kingdom that he calls “An Enduring Peace.” We are happy to include a copy of the etching and Alexis-Baker’s accompanying text as a separate memento in this issue of *MQR*.

Alan exemplified the “peaceable kingdom” in all of his many relationships, but perhaps nowhere more tangibly than in the practice he

developed with his wife and fellow scholar, Eleanor Kreider, of teaching and preaching “bivocally.” **Stuart Murray**, a central figure in the renewal of the Anabaptist movement in the United Kingdom, describes in detail Alan and Eleanor’s unusual gift for preaching together. In the process they modeled a form of mutual discernment that included careful listening, thoughtful expansions, probing questions, and insights from multiple perspectives.

Wilbert R. Shenk, mission historian and administrator of Alan and Eleanor’s work in England, offers readers an insight into Alan’s theology of mission by comparing it with that of the Nigerian missiologist Kwame Bediako. Both Kreider and Bediako sought to reframe fundamental understandings of mission and conversion—Alan in the context of post-Christendom and Bediako in the context of the colonial encounter with African cultures. Both scholars reflected deeply on the crises faced in their settings; both turned to the history of the early church for insights on the way forward; and both viewed conversion as a decisive reorientation of allegiance in response to the call to become a disciple of Christ.

In the essay that follows, **Bernhard Ott** picks up the question of what happens after conversion—how are disciples who have committed themselves to follow Jesus formed in such a way that they actually practice the virtues that they espouse? What does a Christian pedagogy look like? In response to those questions, Ott draws heavily on the insights of Martin Buber, a mid-twentieth-century Jewish philosopher. In contrast to Western Christianity’s tendencies toward an individualized and interiorized approach to spirituality, Buber insisted vigorously that true character formation only happens in relationships—I/Thou relationships—rooted in dialogue, vulnerability, and an openness to encounter God in every aspect of ordinary life. Buber’s pedagogy, especially his “Hebrew humanism,” found a clear echo in Alan’s life, in his recognition of the centrality of catechism in the early Church, and in his writings on Christian formation and “social holiness.”

Rachel Miller Jacobs, a colleague of Alan at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, elaborates on these themes with a thoughtful summary of Alan’s practical theology, particularly his emphasis on character formation. Alan’s understanding of Christian formation, Miller Jacobs suggests, found expression in his work through the themes of holiness (*Journey Toward Holiness: A Way of Living for God’s People* [1987]), worship (*Worship and Mission After Christendom* [2011]), and transformation (*The Patient Ferment of the Early Church* [2016]). Her summaries of these texts provide a wonderful window into the creativity and continuity of Alan’s thought on the subject across three decades.

Although Alan was best known as a historian, missionary, and professor, he also left a profound legacy as an ecumenist. Throughout his adult life, Alan actively sought out relationships with followers of Jesus wherever he encountered them, and he was passionately curious about the Christian traditions that had shaped them. As **Andre Gingerich Stoner** recounts in his essay on “The Ecumenical Legacy of Alan Kreider,” Alan’s work was part of a larger transformation slowly unfolding within the Mennonite Church that has resulted in a series of formal ecumenical dialogues whose significance is only slowly being recognized. Alan cheered on all of these dialogues, and participated actively in formal conversations with Catholics and Pentecostals, particularly the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee).

As a scholar, Alan devoted a significant part of his professional energies to the history of the Early Church, noting especially shifts in the church’s liturgical practices such as catechism and baptism as a consequence of the so-called “Constantinian Shift” in the fourth century. **John Rempel**, a fellow ecumenist and colleague of Alan for many years at AMBS, pays homage to Alan’s scholarship in the form of a sustained reflection on shifting understandings of baptism throughout the history of the church. The context for Rempel’s reflection was the conclusion of a trilateral dialogue that brought together representatives from the Catholic, Lutheran, and Mennonite traditions into a five-year conversation on the theme of baptism. Rempel thoughtfully summarizes key findings from the dialogue and charts several hopeful points of convergence emerging among these erstwhile theological opponents.

Finally, Ted Koontz, professor emeritus of ethics and peace studies at AMBS, offers a kind of benediction to this special issue in a series of reflections on the gospel of peace, a theme absolutely central to Alan’s missionary vision and his personal character. In his concluding essay, Koontz distills a lifetime of his own thinking on the gospel of peace into fourteen aphorisms, offered humbly and confessionally in a style that Alan would have embraced. The reflections are a fitting conclusion to this tribute to Alan’s wisdom, his scholarship, and his passionate desire to follow Christ in daily life.

The essays here offer an incomplete picture of Alan Kreider and his legacy. But Alan would have been the first to acknowledge that nothing in this world is fully complete. Companions with Alan, we are, all of us, on a journey—imperfect refractions of the light of Christ, but inspired by those before us who have borne witness to that light with joy and clarity.

– John D. Roth, editor

[Alexis-Baker etching inserted here / landscape orientation with bottom of the image on the right margin]