History and Memoir

Alvin J. Esau, *The Courts and the Colonies: The Litigation of Hutterite Church Disputes.* Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004. Pp. 384. Hardbound.

The Courts and the Colonies is a discussion of the impact of legal issues on the communal Hutterites during the past half-century. In this regard it is a valuable addition to Hutterite studies specifically, providing valuable social analysis alongside a detailed discussion of legal matters. It is also a very good read. More generally the book has important things to say about the legal status of all communal religious societies in North America, and the unanticipated problems that emerge when these groups call upon the power of the state to support internal policies and procedures.

Alvin Esau focuses special attention on the increasing number of lawsuits engaged in by Hutterites – and especially beginning in the 1980s with the Lakeside Colony/Daniel Hofer case. Noting that throughout its history Hutterites have dealt with the courts from a defensive posture, primarily in response to legal action taken by others, Esau discusses the growing number of Hutterite-initiated lawsuits that are related to the operation of national and international agricultural and manufacturing enterprises. In the past individual Hutterites on occasion defended themselves in court against false accusations; the community as a whole appealed to various governments for special privileges. But small-scale agriculture did not necessitate many legal contacts nor did the Hutterite theological position of non-resistance emphasize the importance of "getting one's due" by seeking the help of the state.

What most concerns Esau, however, are those occasions when Hutterite colony leaders have gone to court to ask for the state's support (through its policing power) for internal decisions based on religious understandings. These cases often relate to church discipline issues. Esau describes this trend as a totally new phenomenon in the group's history and he is concerned that Canadian and American courts, while finding themselves deeply enmeshed in complicated church-state issues, are making decisions that have significant influence on Hutterite life and thought.

Esau recognizes the contemporary necessity of Hutterite involvement in legal contracts and the importance of close associations with attorneys as Hutterites increasingly engage in large-scale agri-business and stock market investments. He understands the need for increasing legal involvement in a modern global economy. What

is disconcerting to him, however, is the way that Hutterite "inside law" (communal religious policy) decisions are not being allowed to stand on their own, as was the case historically. When someone was excommunicated and refused to leave the colony in the past, the individual was asked to leave but if he or she did not, they were shunned and typically left alone.

Now the state is being asked to remove dissenters from colony premises, leading to a backlash of lawsuits from those under church discipline. Hutterites are increasingly appealing to the "outside law" (the courts) to enforce internal decisions, often related to colony personnel problems or grievances. The Lakeside Colony /Daniel Hofer case paved the way for the initiation of many lawsuits against individual members who have been excommunicated or are under discipline for one reason or another.

As a result of these cases the "outside law" is also increasingly raising questions about internal Hutterite practices, especially the practice of not giving members who leave financial compensation for the years that they spent in the colony – a longstanding historical practice that has traditionally been held inviolable by North American courts. North American courts have always backed the Hutterites (as defendants) in these cases but what happens when Hutterite leaders are the ones taking people to court?

In the Daniel Hofer case, the Schmiedeleut Hutterites, under the leadership of senior elder Jacob Kleinsasser, asked the courts to remove Mr. Hofer and his followers from the colonies after his excommunication. The Hutterites were thus drawing upon the police power of the state to take action, something Esau notes is contrary to historical Hutterite practice, though this is not the way things are viewed by the Rev. Kleinsasser. Since Hofer kept things tied up in court in response, the various trials also had the unanticipated result of bringing forward a variety of unsuccessful business practices entered into by the some Schmiedeleut leaders, often on behalf of the entire Hutterite community. This was a totally unexpected development but it had significant bearing, Esau suggests, on internal Hutterite politics.

An interesting aspect of this book is the in-depth sociological discussion of the relationship between the Hutterian Brethren and the Bruderhof Communities (groups that were fully merged in 1974) as well as an analysis of the historic division within the Schmiedeleut in 1992. Esau's contention is that it was the Daniel Hofer court case – and others – and the Bruderhof's support of Jacob Kleinsasser in these cases - that caused the already suspicious Dariusleut and Lehrerleut to cut off relationships with the Bruderhof in 1990 and led the majority of Schmiedeleut ministers to make the same decision in 1992 (leading to a still unhealed division within the Schmiedeleut).

This thesis is open to debate due to the highly complicated nature of Hutterite-Bruderhof relationships. The question of whether or not the Bruderhof is responsible for encouraging Jacob Kleinsasser and his supporters to make greater "offensive" use of the courts is also open to question - and is actively disputed by the Bruderhof communities, and would be most likely contested by the Rev. Kleinsasser as well. In any case the "Group 1" Schmiedeleut (the supporters of Jacob Kleinsasser) ended their own relationship with the Bruderhof in 1995.

Esau makes it quite clear that court proceedings can often lead to unexpected outcomes. This is an excellent book that discusses the dangers of legal proceedings for Hutterite theology and institutions. It is an invaluable resource for communal religious groups as they try to determine the best way to deal with church/state issues and it is specifically relevant to Anabaptist groups with their longstanding non-resistant traditions.

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Helmut T. Huebert, Mennonite Estates in Imperial Russia. Winnipeg: Springfield Publishers, 2005. Pp. xvi + 415.

Mennonite estate owners played a pivotal role in the history of Imperial Russia including the revolutionary tumult that swept through the empire after 1900. Even more than that, the very distinct ethos of these same Mennonite estate owners endured long after in Mennonite communities of the great Soviet diaspora. For these reasons alone a detailed study of Mennonite estates in Imperial Russia is long overdue. Although James Urry and David G. Rempel have provided valuable syntheses of these experiences, they were ultimately concerned with other matters.

Those looking for such a synthesis of Mennonite estates in Helmut Huebert's new publication will be most disappointed, even though the work itself is a wonderful resource. Huebert's only attempt at an historical overview is found in a section entitled "A Brief Overview". "Brief" is key here, as the overview is three pages, start to finish. Thankfully it provides a generally useful overview though there are errors here. On perhaps a modest note, the reference to Mennonite estates as located in south Russia is neither helpful or accurate, as the majority were situated in southern Ukraine. Though the region was known then as "New Russia", it was no more in south Russia than New England is situated in its namesake. On a more substantive

note, there is simply not enough here to indicate the true dynamic and multi-dimensional role played by Mennonite estate owners in this remarkable region, at this time. But Huebert's conclusion that Mennonites played a comparable role to the Russian aristocracy within the region is substantively incorrect. Most of the former did not work their lands, but happily gave them over to peasants (albeit at an increasing cost); whereas Mennonites worked the land themselves, often dispossessing peasants who had previously lived on and worked these lands for generations. There is an enormous difference in this, without which the peculiar role and fate of Mennonite estate owners after 1917 cannot be understood.

The second historical section is toward the end of Huebert's study and consists of eight biographies of Mennonite estate owners, largely drawn from published sources, though here Huebert has also mined personal correspondences and other primary documents.

Lest this review appear critical of Huebert's work, there are a host of ways in which it is actually a very valuable resource and a most worthy contribution to the literature. In this regard, however, Huebert serves more as compiler, or investigator, and the results are most impressive. The heart of his anthology consists of two sections worthy of special mention: the first is a detailed summary of every recorded Mennonite estate in Imperial Russia. At more than 230 pages, this comprises more than half of the book itself. A typical entry lists the estate's name, the Mennonite(s) who owned it, the size, land use, and what became of it. A second valuable section consists of detailed maps, created by Huebert, which present the shape and location of tens of Mennonite estates. Here we can see the sheer choreography of Mennonite estates, the distribution of buildings, the proximity of peasant villages, work houses, gardens, fields, and so on. In a sense this is the most evocative part of Huebert's study as it allows the estates to be brought together, and "seen", as never before. Photographs finish off the text, though not in a way that adds substantively to it.

In sum, then, we have clearly been rewarded for Huebert's considerable efforts at creating this important work, which should prove useful to students, scholars, and those interested in simply getting a sense of a world that once was, only to disappear in the fires of revolution.

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Jahrbuch für Geschichte und Kultur der Mennoniten in Paraguay. Politik, Priviligiertheit und Friedenszeugnis im mennonitischen Erbe. Herausgegeben vom *Verein für Geschichte und Kultur der Mennoniten in Paraguay.* 5. Jahrgang 2004. Paper. Pp. 167.

Like most Mennonites, Mennonites in Paraguay thought of themselves as being apolitical, that is till 1989 when the long-reigning dictator, President Alfredo Stroessner, was forced to step down and the country initiated a form of democracy it had not known before. The democratizing process drew also the Mennonites into active politics, with the result that they ceased to be the "quiet in the land." Instead they felt called as Christians to contribute to the advancement of values for the benefit of Mennonites as well as for the well-being of their fellow citizens. Jakob Warkentin, one of the editors of the Yearbook, writes in the Foreword: "... Mennonite participation in government today is almost taken for granted."

With this new attitude toward the "powers that be," the Mennonite historical society in Filadelfia, Paraguay, thought it appropriate to organize a symposium in May 21-22, 2004, on the theme: "Politik, Privilegiertheit und Friedenszeugnis im mennonitischen Erbe," (Politics, Privileges and the Peace Witness Within the Mennonite Heritage). The papers given at this symposium form the bulk of the Yearbook for 2004.

The first two papers, given by Abraham Friesen of Santa Barbara, California, deal with the issue of politics in early Anabaptism and with political activism among the 19th- and early 20th-century Russian Mennonites. (9-34) According to Friesen, since 16th-century governments were hostile to Anabaptism, Anabaptists viewed politics negatively and consequently withdrew from political involvement. In Russia under the Tsars Mennonites were welcomed for economic and social reasons, and Mennonites themselves felt they needed to contribute to the welfare of their new homeland. Hence they viewed the imperial government positively and soon participated in the political process. They even founded a political party, the "Friesen Party," named after the Mennonite historian P. M. Friesen. Some Mennonites gave up their pacifism when Nestor Makhno's bands threatened their lives and property after World War I.

Gerhard Ratzlaff in his two papers deals with Mennonites and politics in Prussia and probes the involvement of Paraguayan Mennonites in national politics. (35-91) Ratzlaff provides a valuable and detailed account about Mennonites in Prussia, and his paper on Mennonites' political involvement in Paraguay includes information few Mennonites outside of Paraguay know. He wonders whether

Mennonites in politics can do some good, perhaps even influence Paraguayan society along Mennonite-Christian values? But he also sees dangers, namely, that Mennonite congregations may become "politicized." (88) Ratzlaff's papers include copious footnotes and provide useful bibliographies.

For this reviewer, the paper by Jakob Warkentin is of special interest, as it deals with pedagogical and political issues between the 1930s and 1940s. (93-116) Not only does Warkentin deal objectively with the *voelkische Zeit*, the time when a number of Paraguayan Mennonites were influenced by some of their teachers who sympathized with, and promoted, the ideology of the Third Reich and caused tensions and disunity in the community, he also shows how that dark period in history continues to affect the discussion and policy-setting in schools and congregations. "It seems," he writes, "that for the sake of unity in the community, there are attempts by church and colonial administrators [today] to control cultural expressions." (6)

Gundolf Niebuhr's paper, a tribute to John Howard Yoder's peace position, is a most welcome contribution to the *Yearbook*. (117-134) Yoder, perhaps one of the most original Mennonite ethicists and theologians of the 20th century, had a profound influence on North American Mennonites, on Mennonites throughout the world, and indeed on religious thinkers beyond the Mennonite community. After a thorough analysis of Yoder's peace position, Niebuhr applies this teaching to Mennonites in Paraguay. Like Yoder, Niebuhr believes that Mennonites today need to begin their thinking about peace issues with the life and teaching of Jesus.

The podium discussion at the end of the symposium, ably summarized by Beate Penner (135-140), concluded that many Paraguayan Mennonites believe that their positive influence and the respect they enjoy can do politically much good for their country. There were, however, also those who warned against too much euphoria and optimism about Mennonites' participation in politics. "Let us not forget," some cautioned, "that until recently very few talked about Mennonites, but now they often appear in the headlines." (138)

The *Yearbook* concludes with a cultural part that includes short stories by several authors and a review of a collection of stories entitled *So geschehen in Kronsweide* (Thus it happened in Kronsweide), by the well-known historian and writer of stories, Peter P. Klassen.

The Society and its editors are to be commended for producing an excellent academic yearbook. North American Mennonites who know German will find the Yearbook worthwhile and rewarding reading.

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Hans Kasdorf, *Design of My Journey.* Fresno, CA: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies; and Nuernburg, Germany: VTR Publications, 2004. Pp. xix, 360. Paper. $18.95 US

This autobiography may be one of a kind. It is unlikely that another person will rise to such prominence from the *Krauel* in Brazil. When Hans Kasdorf left there in 1949 he had no significant education to speak of, and had had a real jungle experience for 19 years borne along by a Low German culture. Yet when he retired in 1993 from studies in Manitoba, teaching, preaching, and publishing in Fresno, had been honored with two *Festschriften*, and decided to share his life's story, he gave more than twice as much written space to those years of growing up in the *Krauel* than to any other two parts of his career. God first called him there and he was sure of nothing else: leave, go to Winkler Bible School in Manitoba, learn English, and trust God to show you every next step. He eventually earned two doctoral degrees, focusing particularly on missiology.

Kasdorf divides his story into five sections. The first eight chapters tell of his birth area in the Altai, Siberia, where his parents felt 'at home.' But once Stalin enforced his collectivization program, one motive dominated: we must leave. Their story of the "escape" in 1929 of about 5,000 via Moscow to holding areas like Moelln, Germany, brought his family, not to Canada, but to this jungle area of Brazil, considered then and since one of the most difficult areas for Mennonite immigrants, anywhere.

The third section focuses on his preparation for his calling – clearly understood and enunciated - in three Mennonite Brethren (MB) schools: Winkler, Winnipeg, and Hillsboro, as well as the University of Oregon. In turn he taught at a fourth MB institution, Fresno Pacific College, and then a fifth, MB Biblical Seminary, where he became the mission specialist. While in Fresno, guided by several steps in God's design, he became convinced he should become not only a specialist in missiology, but qualify himself to become a missiologist to mission concerns. That was a tall order because he "understand missiology as a discipline different from any other; I began to see it … as a multifaceted field of study in its own right. By its very design it crosses curricular frontiers and boundaries while at the same time embracing academic disciplines within the social and human sciences as well as the classics." (285)

This enhanced view of the science of missions for Kasdorf came as a result of doing one doctorate at Pasadena's School of World Missions in 1976, and the other in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 1984. In Pasadena he was asked to write a dissertation on Gustav

Warnack, a formidable name in German *Misssionswissenschaft*, and to do that in German. This masterful work running in print to over 400 pages showed Kasdorf's mastery of the discipline as well as the language. Eight years later, under the guidance of Dr. David Bosch, the leading missiologist of the 1990s, Kasdorf did a very long dissertation on "MB Mission Thinking."

Historians knowledgeable about missiology from Rufus Anderson to Gustav Warneck (c. 1850 to 1910) will eventually judge whether this enhanced view espoused also by Kasdorf will achieve its desired end, that is, of helping the church do mission in this pluralistic world and also receiving recognition as an academic discipline.

While there is much in this book for a wide variety of readers, what is most disappointing for historians is that everything from 1973 is packed into the last section of forty pages. Did God design the hurried pace or is this a reflection of the church's restlessness? Kasdorf gave himself to almost unceasing service: teaching, publishing, on call constantly to deliver more lectures, sermons, and series of talks on mission, on three continents, in three languages. Readers may find it hard to cope with so much in such short form. This section also includes his foray into Germany as professor at *Freie theologische Akademie* at Giessen and as preacher to Aussiedler.

If this were biography, critics would be inclined to call it hagiography. But those who know Kasdorf intimately know him to be a man, like Enoch of old, 'who walked with God.' His language, repeatedly, sometimes expressed in poetry, reflects his deep conviction that God designed his journey and allowed him a reprieve, twice, from heart surgery. Along the way, at appropriate intervals, Kasdorf shared information about his most talented and supportive family and provided a series of interesting black and white photos.

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Wally Kroeker. An Introduction to the Russian Mennonites. Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2005. Pp. 122. Paper, $7.95 U.S. $10.99 Cdn.

Good Books, based in Lancaster County, PA, has published many popular, introductory books on the Amish, Old Order and Conservative groups primarily found in the Eastern United States and Ontario. The series style is sympathetic and non-academic, directed toward "outsiders" such as tourists or school students. These titles are most frequently found in geographical areas with Mennonite or Amish communities that attract a tourist trade. Because of their high quality, they have also served Mennonite insiders as good, brief, description of nuanced differences between small Mennonite denominational groups. Wally Kroeker's *Introduction to the Russian Mennonites* follows this presentation style formula well, although a "Russian Mennonite" title is a new departure for Good Books.

Kroeker has a justified reputation as good communicator, and this brief book confirms that status. He uses a chronological approach to his subject, briefly setting stage for the Mennonite migration from Holland to Polish-Prussia to Russia, and then spending more time on the maturation and "Golden Age" of the Mennonite experience in Russia and Ukraine. He follows with the 1870s and later migrations, primarily to North America, and the settlement experiences in the new culture. The final section of the book covers urbanization, brief descriptions of the various denominational groups rooted in the Russian Mennonite experience, and geographically locating Russian Mennonites in the world today.

The book is nicely illustrated, and two basic maps are helpful at the outset. A limited, though somewhat oddly selective, annotated bibliography concludes the book. For example, the bibliography cites the 1967 first edition of C.J. Dyck's *Introduction to Mennonite History*, not the later, and more much more complete third edition of 1993. Only one biography (J.B. Toews) is included, and the selection of fiction is narrow. No web resources are listed, and a listing of Mennonite information centers that present the Russian Mennonite story would have enhanced the concluding section.

As a "Swiss Mennonite" reader, I wished for a little more recognition of the mutual assistance between Swiss Mennonites and Russian Mennonites during the 1870s migration and the famine after the Russian Revolution. It felt like a lost opportunity to place the Russian Mennonites within the larger Mennonite world

These quibbles aside, Wally Kroeker's book does well what was intended for its target audience. It is not intended to be the backbone of an undergraduate essay. But it is the kind of book I will hand a

visitor to my library who wonders, "What's a Russian Mennonite, anyway!"

Sam Steiner
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Katherine Martens, translator and editor, *They Came From Wiesenfeld Ukraine to Canada: Family Stories.* Winnipeg, 2005. Pp. 213.

This manuscript subtitled Family Stories, rather than a family history narrative, is a bound, unpublished collection of primary documents related to five interconnected Mennonite families who were from the same village in Ukraine. Some of the families immigrated to Canada in the 1920s or 1940s while others went to South America or were relocated within the former Soviet Union. Included in the book are various accounts of the settlement and life at Wiesenfeld, a Mennonite village just west of the city of Pavlograd and east of present-day Dnepropetrovsk, a village that was unique because of its distance from other Mennonite settlements. The village was founded in the 1880s by Mennonite Brethren individuals who left Gnadenfeld, Molotschna, reportedly because of the unrest following the emergence of the Brethren movement there. Part I of the book contains 'Family Memoirs' drawn from a variety of documents such as letters, village histories, diary excerpts, and personal reminiscences. Parts II and III are descriptive genealogies of two of the families – the Reimers and the Poetkers.

The documents, which date from the 1920s through to 2005, were likely gathered because of their potential interest to family members, however lacking a narrative that ties the individual pieces together, the volume can leave the 'outside' (non-related) reader struggling to understand where particular individuals fit into the overall scheme of family connections. Sometimes one has to search for information to give individual documents a context within the overall Wiesenfeld narrative. For instance, a letter written in 1935 by Nicolai Martens to his wife Tina has the place-name Reesor, Ontario in the title, but it isn't obvious initially whether the letter is written to or from Reesor, nor is there explanation as to how and why Nicolai came to be in Reesor (a short-lived Mennonite settlement in northern Ontario) nor why Tina wasn't there with him (nor do we know where she is located at that time). If one wants to know this detail, one must page back and forth in the book to find those facts.

The collection will be useful to researchers of Russian Mennonite

history mainly as something to peruse and to pick and choose the information that is relevant to an investigator's interests. Because many of the memoirs of the village focus on the same events, there is a fair bit of repetition, albeit with some variance in tone and detail, throughout the family stories. One might wish for some overall reflective analysis of the primary sources themselves, that might ask questions related to accuracy, bias, and historicity. Yet within the collection are some moving and unusual glimpses into the very private lives of Russian Mennonites of the early 20th century. For instance, the 1934 death in childbirth of 30 year-old Maria Poetker is described with factual detail and emotional depth in a letter of her husband to his siblings (52-3). Another family anecdote describes the rare return migration in 1928 to Kuban (Soviet Union) of one couple who had immigrated to Canada two years earlier, the woman having decided she didn't like the cold Manitoba climate (184). Also of curiosity is the reproduction of an unlikely photo (possibly a marriage portrait?) of a Mennonite couple in full Ukrainian garb (151). Furthermore, since Wiesenfeld was a centre of early Mennonite Brethren religious activity, many of the family stories offer a glimpse into the religious demeanor of that group and its particular doctrines and congregational practices. Such first person recollections can only enrich our understanding of both collective and individual experience during this era in history. Given the significant extent to which Russian Mennonites have recorded their stories in such historical documents, one wishes for more of these translated collections so as to increase their accessibility to a wider audience of interested researchers.

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Doreen Reimer Peters, *One Who Dared: Life Story of Ben D. Reimer,* 1909-1994. Steinbach, MB: Self Published, 2005. Pp. 307.

This is a nicely crafted book by the daughter of Rev. Ben D. Reimer, long time influential minister in the Evangelical Mennonite Conference (EMC). Stationed first in Landmark and then in Steinbach, Manitoba, Reimer, a strong-willed and gifted maverick helped reshape the old order Manitoba Kleine Gemeinde into the mission-oriented western Canada-based EMC. Indeed Reimer played a crucial role in several features of the modern EMC. He became a strong defender of musical instruments, extemporaneous preaching, and fashionable dress (including ties for men), and other features

of modernity shunned by the Kleine Gemeinde. He helped end the bishop-centered church polity, arguing that each church district should choose its own leaders. In this vein he also played a crucial role in drafting key leaders of the EMC during the 1960s, 70s and 80s. He strongly promoted a revival culture, including something the book labels "confrontational evangelism" (106). He was at the helm of the unique regional-based Western Gospel Mission founded in 1946 with support of several of the Manitoba EMC churches. The mission dissolved in the 1960s, but not before producing numerous EMC churches in western Canada. Reimer moved easily among non-Mennonite communities and he pragmatically embraced national mission initiatives and new technologies including Christian movies. He served as teacher and then president of Steinbach Bible Institute, chair of EMC's mission farm among natives in Paraguay, and interim pastor of the Emmanuel Mennonite Church (once a Kleine Gemeinde church) in Meade, Kansas, and in Peardonville, southern British Columbia.

If Ben D. Reimer is the personification of the modern EMC, he was nevertheless an unusual Mennonite leader. He was a charismatic, strong-willed, self-appointed evangelist and church planter. The cover of the book depicts a strong, young face, a man of intention; the back side features an older, relaxed and happy man, physically powerful, bare back, fishing with native Paraguayans. Both images defy the old Kleine Gemeinde values of humility, sobriety and modesty. They signal a man ready to confront and face conflict. And, face conflict he did. True, the book depicts a harmonious and affectionate domestic circle: Tina Penner Reimer is always the supportive wife, and brother-in-law Archie Penner and other friends within the Reimer clan are his loyal inner circle. But Reimer, a "rebellious and selfish" teenager (37), turns into the confident and brazen young preacher. As a young married farmer he attends a "Calvinist" Bible School; later he hosts emotion-laden revival meetings in old order Mennonite communities. He baptizes by immersion and accepts female missionaries - most often without the approval of the elders. But then as readily, he is the bane of other evangelicals or progressives: he insists on free will at Winnipeg Bible Institute, damns the Mennonite Brethren's exclusive thinking on immersion baptism; trumpets conscientious objection; subverts Victor Peters' raucous comedy nights. If he moved the EMC into missions and evangelicalism, he also did his part in keeping it squarely Mennonite.

The book is a first rate, forthright and colourful biography, but it is also significant in what it does not do. Evangelicalism is accepted uncritically, and opposing old order Mennonites such as the Kleine Gemeinde, Sommerfelder and other groups is rendered without sympathy. The idea posited by Delbert Plett and others that the Kleine

Gemeinde represented a faithful remnant that stood up to the world of consumer culture, individualistic endeavor, dispensationalist fantasies, emotional religiosity, and cheap grace is not considered. This book shows the Kleine Gemeinde as a spirit-less, tradition-bound church body, one that "clung to...traditional customs of church practice," (19) "did not understand what receiving 'Christ as Saviour' meant" (55) and was trapped by a "heavy-handed dour legalistic element," (71) The book seems to embrace the overtly emotional and even manipulative revival meetings; it enthuses about Reimer's confident infiltration of Catholic, Doukhobor and Orthodox communities. It is a champion of Reimer's stance that new converts can "be spiritually transformed the moment Christ is invited into one's life." (67)

This point of view suggests, of course, the power that evangelicalism has had in transforming old order Mennonite communities. Historians of evangelicalism are polarized on the benefits of the movement, some championing it as Peters does, others seeing in it the very antipathy of Anabaptist discipleship. The book does not offer a historical perspective on the reasons evangelicalism has worked so powerfully in first generation adherents. But then, this attempt at objectivity was not the book's intention. Its aim to present a sympathetic portrait of a giant in the EMC has certainly been achieved.

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David M. Quring, *The Mennonite Old Colony Vision: Under Siege in Mexico and the Canadian Connection*. Steinbach, MB: Crossway Publications, 2003. Paperback.

David Quiring's *The Mennonite Old Colony Vision* is a long overdue addition to the body of work on the Old Colony Mennonites of Mexico. The book, which is based on Quiring's 1997 Master's thesis, is a meticulously researched, thoughtful presentation of the complexities of Old Colony life. By Quiring's own admission the text is revisionist in that the author seeks to incorporate the voices of Old Colonists, something that has not generally been done in other works on the subject (11). The focus of the book is effectively expressed in its subtitle, "Under Siege in Mexico and the Canadian connection." Quiring addresses the impact that an ongoing connection to Canada has had on the Mexican Old Colonies and argues that the Canadian connection – through missionary work among the Old Colonists

as well as through movement back and forth between Mexico and Canada on the part of the Old Colonists themselves - has contributed in no small way to the breakdown of the traditional lifestyle of the Old Colonists.

According to Quiring, North American Mennonites have been quick to condemn the Old Colonists and have largely failed to recognize their own complicity in the dissolution of the traditional colonies in Mexico and instead have placed the blame almost entirely on the shoulders of the Old Colony leaders, whom they regard as despotic. On the one hand, Quiring paints a picture of Old Colony Mennonites desperately trying to escape the modernizing and liberalizing effects that interaction with other Mennonites has inevitably entailed. The way this has been achieved has been by abandoning the colonies to those who have corrupted it and by fleeing to ever more remote locations in South America. On the other hand he depicts the North American Mennonites as genuinely concerned with the spiritual and physical welfare of their more conservative brethren, whom they perceive to be in desperate need of both spiritual and material assistance. It is this tension that has dominated virtually all interaction between the various groups since the 1920s.

Quiring argues that part of the reason for the tension between Canadian Mennonites and the Old Colonists is because to a large extent the former group has adopted the twentieth century western values of the right to self-determination and the "preoccupation with a culture of youth" (7, 8, 50). He points out that evangelism among the Old Colonists has often been as focused on revolutionizing their socio-economic system as it has been on redeeming their souls (74, 75). Instead of dismissing the Old Colony system as spiritually bankrupt, as many Mennonites have done, Quiring highlights many of its venerable aspects, such as the respect for tradition, and its emphasis on humility and simplicity (50, 74).

The book is clearly and concisely written, is interesting and accessible, though certainly not without flaws. While it is unquestionably well-documented, I couldn't help but wish that Quiring had provided more documentation when attempting to defend the Old Colonists against allegations commonly voiced by Canadian Mennonites. For example, his response to the allegation of a high instance of abuse among the Mexican Old Colonists is that "these and other social problems also occur in practically all segments of society"(100). While that is most certainly true, it is hardly an adequate refutation. Delbert Plett's description of the book as "objective" in the "Publisher's Foreword" is a bit of a stretch; in many ways Quiring seems to act as a spokesperson for the Old Colonists, which is perhaps indicated by the fact that it was published by Plett, who was known as a staunch defender of the most

conservative Mennonites.

For someone who is not familiar with the Mennonite Old Colonists *The Mexican Old Colony Vision* provides one of the best introductions to the topic. The general Mennonite history and the maps of the colonies help the reader to contextualize the Old Colonists within the broader historical and geographical framework and the main text leaves the reader with a clear sense of what the debate is all about. For those who are already familiar with the Old Colonists and the controversy surrounding them, this book offers a timely analysis of Old Colony life, with updated statistics and information on the status of various colonies. The fact that so many of Quiring's sources are previously unpublished, and were gathered from the Mennonite, provincial, and federal archives as well as from personal interviews conducted in both Canada and Mexico among the Old Colonists and those who worked with them, also makes this book a valuable contribution to the topic.

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James Urry, Nur Heilige. *Mennoniten in Russland, 1789-1889*. Trans. Elisabeth L. Wiens. Steinbach, MB: Crossway Publications, 2005. Paperback.

Als der nichtmennonitische, englische Anthropologe James Urry 1989 *None But Saints: The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia 1789-1889* veröffentlichte, wurde er über Nacht zum enfant terrible und bekehrenden Freidenker der mennonitischen Geschichtsschreibung. Noch immer pilgern Mennoniten zu seinen Lesungen, um sich an seiner mit ironischem Witz und skeptischem Wohlwollen vorgetragenen Kritik an ihren Eigenarten und Traditionen zu laben. Siebenundzwanzig Jahre nach Abschluß seiner Dissertation und sechzehn Jahre nach Erscheinen des darauf basierenden Buchs, None But Saints, erscheint nun eine deutsche Übersetzung.

In den hundert Jahren nach der ersten mennonitischen Wanderung von Westpreußen nach Rußland 1789 veränderte sich, so Urry, das materielle und geistige Leben der Mennoniten im Zarenreich grundlegend. In ihren relativ autarken Kolonien Chortitza und Molotschna am Schwarzen Meer fanden sie zurück zu einem Gemeinschaftssinn, den sie in der zerstreuten Besiedlung in Westpreußen zunehmend verloren hatten; zugleich führte das enge Aufeinanderleben jedoch zu einer Nabelschau, die zu Streit und Zwist führte. Trotz, aber zum Teil auch wegen ihrer Abschottung,

blieben Rußlands Mennoniten nicht unbeeinflußt von den rasanten industriellen und gesellschaftlichen Veränderungen in Europa.

Besonders in der Anfangszeit der Kolonien bemühten sich die geistlichen Leiter und konservativen Kräfte darum, die geistigen Werte und kulturellen Lebensweisen ihrer Vorfahren zu erhalten bzw. dorthin zurückzukehren. Von Begin an wirkten dagegen weltliche Reformer, die seit 1820, insbesondere unter der Führung von Johann Cornies und gefördert von der russischen Regierung und Verwaltung, landwirtschaftliche Reformen und Neuerungen vorantrieben. Die sekuläre Gestaltung der mennonitischen Gemeinden breitete sich in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts auf gesellschaftliche Bereiche wie das Schulwesen und das interne Regierungswesen aus. Bildung gewann an Ansehen und Bedeutung, wodurch sich auch der Kontakt vieler Mennoniten mit der Welt außerhalb der Kolonien verstärkte. Zugleich gewann die sekuläre Verwaltung zunehmend Kontrolle über die moralische Zucht und Ordnung der Gemeinden-eine Macht, die vormals die geistlichen Führer für sich allein beansprucht hatten. Obwohl der Tod Cornies' 1848 ein Rückschlag für die Reformer war, setzten sie sich gegen die Konservativen durch. Dies wurde zementiert, als in den 1870er Jahren vorwiegend Traditionalisten nach Nordamerika auswanderten, darunter die sogenannte Kleine Gemeinde, die sich seit etwa 1816 als alleinige Hüterin der moralischen Ordnung unter Mennoniten verstanden hatte.

Die Kluft zwischen Konservativen und Fortschrittlichen führte im größeren Kontext der industriellen Veränderungen in Europa aber auch zu einer Kluft zwischen Arm und Reich. Die technologischen und verwaltungstechnischen Neuerungen im zweiten Viertel des 19. Jahrhunderts machten die mennonitischen Kolonien zu überaus erfolgreichen Landwirtschaften. Über den Odessaer Hafen und die Eisenbahn als neuestes Verkehrsmittel verkauften sie ihre landwirtschaftlichen Produkte zunehmend auf internationalen Märkten. Einige Rußlandmennoniten wurden zu erfolgreichen Großbauern während ihre Vettern, die in ihren wachsenden Fabriken immer mehr landwirtschaftliche Maschinen bauten, zu Industriellen wurden.

Um die Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts gehörte aber mindestens die Hälfte der russischen Mennoniten zum Stand der Landlosen. Dies war ebenfalls eine Folge der landwirtschaftlichen und anderen Reformen, die die Landverteilung neu und ungleicher gestalteten. Ihre reichen Brüder verschlimmerten die Lage der Armen, weil sie ihnen die Schuld an ihrer Armut gaben und sie zudem gerne als billige Hilfskräfte ausbeuteten. Einige mennonitische Kaufleute sowie die russische Regierung setzten sich in den 1860er und 1870er Jahren allerdings für sie ein, wodurch sie nicht nur Land zugesprochen bekamen, sondern auch politische Rechte wie das Stimmrecht

innerhalb der Gemeinden. Inwiefern sich die Lage der Landlosen dadurch veränderte, wird von Urry leider nicht ausgeführt. Es zeigt sich aber, daß mennonitsches Leben nicht nur aus der inneren Gemeinschaft und von den eigenen religiösen und weltlichen Leitern bestimmt wurde, sondern zunehmen auch von der russischen Regierung und der weiteren Welt, von der sich Mennoniten aus religiösen Gründen prinzipiell eigentlich abschotten wollten.

Bis Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts veränderten sich aber nicht nur die geistlichen, gesellschaftlichen und wirtschaftlichen Lebensbedingungen und Ideale der Mennoniten (oder zumindest ihrer Eliten), sondern auch ihre „Weltanschauung". Sie hatten nicht nur „eine ganz andere Vorstellung von einer Person als ihre Vorväter" (175), sondern bewerteten auch die Beziehung zwischen Gemeinschaft und Glauben ganz anders. Urry sieht insbesondere die Einwanderung zahlreicher gebildeter Evangelisten (Mennoniten und Nichtmennoniten) sowie Cornies' Schulreform als Gründe für die Veränderung in der rußlandmennonitschen mentalité an. Die verbesserten Bildungschancen führten zu größerer sozialer Mobilität, was die Bildungselite stärker in Kontakt mit den Gedanken der Aufklärung brachte. Wichtiger noch war allerdings der durch den schulischen Konkurrenzkampf geförderte Individualismus sowie der der Einfluß evangelistischer Ideen, nach denen Glaube eine individuelle Entdeckung und Erfahrung war. Immer mehr Mennoniten wollten ihren Glauben nicht still in ihrem Kämmerlein ausüben, sondern offen zur Schau tragen. Gleichzeitig allerdings wollten sie sich in ihrer Glaubensauslegung immer weniger von der Gemeinschaft hineinreden lassen. Urrys Diskussion dieser grundlegend strukturellen Veränderung im mennonitischen Glauben ist der wichtigste Teil seiner Arbeit.

In dieser spannenden Diskussion zeigen sich allerdings auch Schwächen. Urry erklärt, daß es ihm besonders „um die Reaktion der Mennoniten auf den Wandel und ihre Wahrnehmung der Veränderung" (39) geht. Da seine Forschung vorwiegend auf (den sehr umfangreichen) Publikationen der mennonitischen Bildungselite basiert, ist allerdings nicht klar, inwieweit die intellektuellen Veränderungen nach ‚unten' durchgesickert sind. Änderten auch die Landlosen, die ja keine schriftlichen Quellen hinterlassen haben, ihre „Ansicht darüber, was es heißt, ein Mennonit zu sein und zur mennonitischen Welt zu gehören" (37)?

Zudem ist diese Diskussion schwer verständlich, weil zum einen Begriffe wie ‚Person', ‚Gemeinschaft' und ‚Gemeinde' nicht definiert und erklärt werden, zum anderen, weil, zumindest in der deutschen Übersetzung, die doppelte Bedeutung von ‚persönlich' (einerseits im Sinne von ‚individuell' und andererseits im Sinne von ‚privat') nicht beachtet wird und deshalb verwirrend ist. Überhaupt hätte man

dem Werk eine kompetentere Übersetzung und eine sorgfältigere Lektoratsarbeit gewünscht. Weil sich Fehler in Rechtschreibung und Grammatik auf fast jeder Seite finden (und manchmal häufen) und sich der Stil zu sehr am englischen Original orientiert (was bereits im verquert übersetzten Titel und besonders im katastrophalen Index deutlich wird), ist das Lesen leider kein Vergnügen.

Trotz der fundamentalen Veränderungen gab es auch grundlegende Kontinuitäten im Leben der russischen Mennoniten. Anders als mennonitische Gemeinden in Westeuropa schafften sie es, eine ihnen eigene Lebensweise und Identität zu bewahren, unter anderem, indem sie sich mit neuen Institutionen und Ideen den äußeren und inneren Veränderungen anpaßten und somit, so Urry, einen „mennonitischen Staat im Staate" (eine unglückliche Übersetzung von ‚commonwealth') aufbauten. Dieses „Gemeinwesen, das alle Mennoniten miteinander verband" (39) entstand besonders unter dem Druck russischer Reformen in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts, wobei sich die Mennoniten allerdings gleichzeitig dem russischen Staat stärker annäherten.

Obwohl *Nur Heilige*, mit Ausnahme von Urrys Vorwort zur deutschen Ausgabe, nicht aktualisiert worden ist, ist dieses bedeutende Werk immer noch aktuell und lesenswert. Es ist erfreulich, daß es nun auch denjenigen zugänglich ist, die Deutsch, aber kein Englisch lesen.

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