

---

Samuel J. Steiner. *In Search of Promised Lands: A Religious History of Mennonites in Ontario*. Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2015.

Without a clear guidebook, the complexity and diversity of Mennonite groups can seem confusing. Samuel J. Steiner's *In Search of Promised Lands: A Religious History of Mennonites in Ontario* has answered the need for a clear history of Mennonites in the Canadian province. This volume is excellently written, extensively documented, solid in its research, and presented in an accessible style.

Steiner begins by mentioning his upbringing in "an eastern Ohio Mennonite home" (17), and traces his personal journey into the Ontario Mennonite community. He identifies himself as an "assimilated Mennonite" as distinct from those who are "separated Mennonites." Between these two poles exists a fascinating continuum of doctrine and practice. To help the reader understand this dense tapestry of Mennonite life in Ontario, Steiner draws on the story of Abraham, noting that "the startling diversity of Mennonites in Ontario in the twenty-first century can partly be explained through their search for the promised land" (24). He portrays the exodus of Mennonites from Russia to North America, settlement in Canada, and the intervening influence of movements, including Pietism, in rich detail.

Steiner's narrative follows Mennonites as they settle in what became Ontario during the 18th and 19th centuries, experience change and division through the influence of renewal movements, develop initiatives in missions and service, experience discrimination and conscription during two World Wars, encounter new arrivals from the Soviet Union, wrestle with preserving tradition and welcoming change from the broader society, welcome newcomers from Asia, South and Central America to the Mennonite world, develop distinctive Mennonite schools and universities, and continue to discern how best to be faithful in terms of cultural adaptation into the 21st century.

Each chapter begins with a biographical account of a Mennonite personality and situates the stories of Mennonite immigration, settlement and change within the broader narrative of national and international events. Readers encounter early Mennonite Brethren missionary Alexander W. Banfield, the leader of the first 20th-century Women's Missionary Society

Ella Mann, and Old Order bishop Jesse B. Bauman. At times the connection between the biography and the rest of the chapter could be clarified, but the biographies serve as reminders that Mennonite history is composed of people with rich and interesting lives.

Steiner describes the experiences of pioneer men and women, including the challenges faced by widows with young children. He gives due attention to the role of women in ministry, especially among the Mennonite Brethren in Christ, noting that women were “the backbone of city missions” for that denomination (173).

The author’s approach to Mennonite history is objective and at times sobering. For example, he writes that “alcohol addiction among the aboriginal population became a significant concern after white settlers, including Mennonites, introduced drink to them” (72). He also discusses the Poplar Hill Development School, a residential school for aboriginal children operated by Mennonites from 1962 to 1989. However, his account also includes moments of humor, whether noting the fate of Joseph E. Schneider’s barn as competing fire companies turned their hoses against each other, or telling stories of cross-cultural miscommunication between Mennonites and their neighbors.

While Steiner identifies himself as an archivist, “not a trained academic historian” (18), he demonstrates his knowledge of the academic literature by drawing on the studies of prominent scholars in sociology, anthropology, history, theology, and political science. The endnotes are impressive, demonstrating a firm grasp on a wide range of material. They also contain some surprises. For instance, I wasn’t aware that pop star Justin Bieber had attended Hidden Acres Camp in New Hamburg for four years (717, note 32), or that in 1944 the Mennonite Central Committee office in Kitchener was owned by Dr. J. Hett, a spiritualist who practiced séances in another room of the house (694, note 21).

Charts and tables provide excellent resources throughout the book, which also includes a glossary and an appendix on the future of Mennonite groups in Ontario. I did find that I needed to refer to GAMEO for further information on some phrases—for example, ‘Defenseless Mennonites’ (652, note 9)—as they didn’t seem to be explicated in the text. I was also hoping to read something about Mennonite Voluntary Service, a program which

operated at the Welcome Inn in Hamilton and in St. Catharines.

This book should be on the shelves of university and church libraries. It provides an excellent resource for researchers on Canada's history and culture.

*Timothy D. Epp*, Associate Professor of Sociology, Redeemer University College, Ancaster, Ontario

Trevor Bechtel. *The Gift of Ethics: A Story for Discovering Lasting Significance in Your Daily Work*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014.

It is not often that one considers storytelling as a medium for ethical reflection and learning. Yet, in *The Gift of Ethics*, Trevor Bechtel argues for just that. In the opening chapter he states that "stories are the most useful way for us to begin to learn about ethics in a biblical worldview" (1). He contends that stories offer an important and necessary component for ethical reflection, because they structure our worldview and actions. Stories can articulate the complexities and messiness of life while also captivating and inviting us into the narrative without coercion. In this manner, they are transformative and "more useful than goals or rules" for those striving to be ethical (2). It is within the framework of storytelling, both from scripture and his own life, that the author reimagines and constructs ethics within a biblical worldview.

The Beatitudes act as a foundation for the author's ethical imagination. Following Socrates, Bechtel argues that happiness is at "the heart of ethics" (2). Although at first glance the Beatitudes seem counterintuitively directed to this end, he argues that they are an essential source for understanding what it means to be happy and to live the good life. The Beatitudes "let Jesus define what happiness is" (9). Further, they are not merely descriptive; they also function ethically and performatively, inspiring action. Lastly, the "gift structure" of the Beatitudes strongly mirrors the moral structure seen throughout scripture, and thus they offer an understanding of ethics within a biblical worldview.