

Foreword

In 2000, Lester Bechtel, a Waterloo county Mennonite businessman, made a generous offer to Conrad Grebel University College to sponsor an annual lectureship in honor of his late wife Alma. The intent of the lectureship is to nurture interest and understanding in the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith and tradition as explored in a range of disciplines, such as history, theology, literature, and peace studies. The inaugural event of three public lectures was presented in March 2001 by Dr. Terry Martin on the topic, “The Russian Mennonite Encounter with the Soviet State, 1917-1955.”

We are pleased to publish Martin’s lectures as the main offering in this issue of *The Conrad Grebel Review*. Martin approaches his subject matter with both professional and personal interest. As an historian of Russia and the Soviet Union, Martin has expertise on the state policy – in particular policy towards nationalities – that so shaped and controlled the Mennonites during the decades following the Revolution of 1917. His research has also given him personal glimpses into the story of his grandmother, who immigrated to Canada in 1924, before the worst years of Stalinist repression began.

Much of what Martin said was familiar to those of us who experienced or have studied the era of Mennonite life during the early Soviet period. Yet Martin’s in-depth scrutiny of Russian archives allows him to offer insights gleaned from his reading of Soviet state documents. The perspective he offers is thus multi-dimensional – not only what Mennonites thought about the state, but what the state said about Mennonites. While the debates continue on ‘why did Mennonites suffer so much’ during this period of history, Martin concludes that their identity as a “diaspora nationality” and as ethnic Germans, more than their confessional nature, resulted in a disproportionate amount of terror and repression leveled against them.

The 2002 Bechtel Lectures by Stanley Hauerwas, theologian at Duke Divinity School, on the theme “Bonhoeffer, Yoder, and Political Ethics” will be published in the Fall 2002 issue of *CGR*.

The following two articles in this issue are of a genre that one might call ‘theological autobiography’ or perhaps ‘autobiographical theology’. Gordon D. Kaufman and C. Norman Kraus are contemporaries, both now professors emeriti of theology at Harvard University and Goshen College respectively. In

a somewhat parallel manner, each reflects here on his theological evolution in the context of a life journey. There are both interesting commonalities and intriguing differences in their intellectual pilgrimages. Both were raised in Mennonite churches and communities, were ordained as Mennonite ministers, yet developed disparate relationships with that denomination. Both men were undoubtedly shaped by and responded to similar theological trends and influences, and we get glimpses of this in their retrospectives. Kaufman and Kraus both exhibit an evolving concept of God, Kaufman arriving at the notion of God as “serendipitous creativity” while Kraus’s language – “we are . . . held in the palm of God’s hand” – seems to maintain a more personalized relationship. Colleagues, students, friends, and followers of Kaufman and Kraus will undoubtedly enjoy these autobiographical reflections.

As a fitting complement to Terry Martin’s lectures, our Literary Refractions features a poem sequence by David Waltner-Toews from the “Tante Tina – Little Haenschen Dialogues.” These poems are introduced by our Literary Editor, Hildi Froese Tiessen. A series of book reviews completes this issue.

This Winter 2002 issue begins the *CGR*’s twentieth year of publication. If your subscription is up for renewal, please renew it in anticipation of our forthcoming special Spring issue on the theme, “Responding to Terrorism: Does Nonviolence Work?” Featured in this issue will be articles, reflections, literary refractions, and book reviews that all address in some manner the questions of nonviolent theory and action in light of the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001.

Marlene Epp, *Editor*