The Conrad Grebel Review

The 2001 Bechtel Lectures in Anabaptist Mennonite Studies

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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 manner 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 indepth 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*

The 2001 Bechtel Lectures in Anabaptist Mennonite Studies

**THE RUSSIAN MENNONITE ENCOUNTER
WITH THE SOVIET STATE, 1917-1955**

by
Terry Martin

LECTURE ONE
Revolution and the Search for Accommodation, 1917-1926

LECTURE TWO
Collectivization, Famine, and Terror, 1926-1934

LECTURE THREE
Terror, Forced Labor, and Internal Exile, 1935-1955

Terry Martin is associate professor of history at Harvard University and author of The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939 *(Cornell University Press, 2001). The Bechtel Lectures in Anabaptist Mennonite Studies were established at Conrad Grebel University College to nurture understanding in the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith and tradition through an annual lectureship on Anabaptist-Mennonite history, theology, peace and life. The inaugural lectures were given in 2001, and* The Conrad Grebel Review *is pleased to publish them here.*

Revolution and the Search for Accommodation, 1917-1926

Let me begin by sharing with you two anecdotes that helped define my overall approach to these lectures. A few months ago, I was reading broadly in preparation for a course I am teaching at Harvard this year on the modern police state, while at the same time beginning to think seriously about the content of these lectures. The goal of the course was to study the origins of the police practices typical of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Reading a book on the police in nineteenth-century Prussia, I came across instructions on the duties of the local police in 1817. There were twelve duties listed. These included criminal policing, censorship, the prevention of riots, and other unexceptional police matters; but I was drawn immediately to point seven: "Jewish and *Mennonite* matters."[1] Seeing "Mennonite" there on the page next to "Jewish" in a German police document, especially given that I was then focused on understanding the origins of Nazi German police practices, made me snap to attention. I was suddenly being reminded in a visceral way that a century before the Holocaust, alongside "Jewish," "Mennonite" was also a surveillance category for the German political police. It reminded me of a fact we here perhaps all know but typically forget, namely that the Mennonites were also once one of those populations that certain states have labeled as undesirable, threatening, and alien. And I knew very well from my own work what happened to such population categories in east-central Europe in the first half of the twentieth century.

  This made clear to me that one of the main goals of this lecture series should be to introduce my audience to a state, the Soviet Union, that approached its population in exactly this manner, that saw its subjects not as individuals but as members of various population categories, whether defined according to class, ethnicity, religion, past occupation, family membership, or citizenship; a state that asked not what individuals had done but who they were, that is, to what population category did they belong; a state that then divided its population into friendly and hostile elements. The former received preferential access to

education, employment, and, in general, what we today call upward mobility. The latter were to be watched, registered, and controlled; at certain times they might also be fired, stigmatized, denied housing and food, arrested, exiled, or even executed. What I will try to do in these lectures, then, is to explain how the Soviet state *saw* the Mennonites, how it interpreted and categorized them, how the Bolsheviks understood and responded to Mennonite action, how their vision of the Mennonites changed over time, and how this vision affected, and in the end probably determined, the Mennonites' fate in the Soviet Union.

Now for my second anecdote. I was reading, in direct preparation for these lectures, an essay by the distinguished Mennonite historian John B. Toews on the history of the Russian Mennonites in the 1920s.[2] Toews was describing the lobbying efforts of the Mennonite leader, B. B. Janz, in 1921-22. Janz had traveled from the remote Mennonite colonies of southern Ukraine to Moscow. His major goal was to secure for the Mennonites the right to alternative military service. He first made contact with Petr Smidovich, a middle-ranking figure in the Soviet government who was unusually sympathetic to religion and religious minorities. Smidovich put Janz in touch with Petr Krasikov, who headed the Justice Ministry's department on church-state relations. Through Krasikov, Janz secured an interview with the Red Army's Chief of Mobilization, a man by the name of Specter. Specter proposed that the Mennonites serve in the Red Army medical service, just as they had served in the Tsarist army during World War I. Janz worried that this would put the Mennonites in too close contact with an aggressive army, and countered with a proposal for service in noncombatant medical and forestry units, the form of service Mennonites had rendered from 1880 to 1914. After a year of negotiations, the Mennonite right to alternative service was recognized in principle in 1923. In 1925 a law was passed allowing individuals to petition to local courts for the right to alternative service.[3]

This story put the Russian Mennonite experience in a completely different light. I knew from my own research into religious affairs that in Smidovich and Krasikov, Janz had rapidly located the two central officials most likely to sympathize with his mission and to help him in achieving it. I was amazed that Janz had so quickly managed to contact a major figure in the Soviet army, an institution about as hostile to pacifism as one is likely to find, and got him to make major concessions on military service. Janz, after all, represented

approximately sixty to seventy thousand Ukrainian Mennonites, the population of about three average-sized Ukrainian rural townships. I knew very well that it would never, in a million years, occur to the population of any other three Ukrainian townships that they could send their representative to Moscow to negotiate an issue of this magnitude. They might send an emissary with a petition, but if he met an important leader, he would certainly not *negotiate* with him; he would beg humbly; he would emphasize their weakness and wretchedness, and the strength and magnanimity of the leader; and he would ask for merciful treatment. But he would simply lack the skills, personal connections, and imagination to undertake a mission of the type that Janz had undertaken almost as a matter of course.

This story reminded me that, despite their self-image as the Quiet in the Land, the Russian Mennonites were not ordinary Russian rural citizens. They were an exceptionally savvy and politically sophisticated group with over a century's experience in negotiating their social, economic, and religious privileges with high Russian officials. This is not to say that their self-image as the Quiet in the Land was a complete myth. Rather, it is simply to state that in a modern state, in order to be the Quiet in the Land – to be left alone to mind one's own affairs, to run one's own economy, one's own schools, in one's own language, according to one's own beliefs – a community requires a political elite that can defend it from the insistent claims of the modern state. The Mennonites had such a political elite.

My first anecdote, then, paints the Mennonites as quintessential victims, a group seen as categorically unacceptable to the modern state due to their tenacious insistence on their pacifism and particular way of life. The second anecdote paints them as an active and formidable political force, quite capable of managing their destiny and political fate. Neither of these images is false. And the topic of tonight's opening lecture is the initial confrontation between these two forces. On the one hand, one of the most radical revolutionary regimes in world history; on the other, one of the most savvy and united subcultures within that state: the force of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the Mennonites' search for a political accommodation with the new rulers that revolution produced.

The Tsarist Government and World War I

Before turning directly to that confrontation, I will devote the first half of this lecture to a brief overview of the Russian Mennonites' relationship with the Tsarist state prior to the 1917 revolution.

The Mennonites have been, historically, a paradigmatic example of what social scientists call a *mobilized diaspora*, and this was particularly true of the Russian Mennonites.[4] What does this term mean? That the Mennonites were and are a diaspora is clear enough. From their origins in central Europe, they rapidly spread out eastward to Prussia, Poland, Ukraine, and central Russia until they finally reached Siberia and Central Asia in the late nineteenth century. At the same time, other Mennonites spread eastward across the Atlantic Ocean to Pennsylvania, then to the American Midwest and to Ontario, until they eventually reached California and British Columbia; other Mennonites migrated southward to Mexico, Costa Rica, Belize and the jungles of Paraguay. One of the most striking traits of the Mennonites has been their willingness to uproot themselves entirely, move long distances, and enter new states in order to preserve their way of life.

The meaning of the term "mobilized" is less clear. It does not simply mean 'mobile', which the Mennonites surely were, but typically involves two further qualities as well: first, the group must have a strong corporate identity, with a legitimate leadership that can and does represent their interests; in short, they must function like a group, not isolated individuals or families. Religion often provides such a common identity and recognized leadership, as it did with such well-known ethno-religious diasporas as the Jews, the Armenians, and the Mennonites. Second, the group must have some skills to offer their host governments or monarch. The Russian Mennonites were an unusual mobilized diaspora in that they were predominantly rural, whereas most such mobilized diasporas have been urban; the Mennonites' skills were agricultural, rather than mercantile or industrial.

Leaders of a mobilized diaspora behave the way B. B. Janz did in the early 1920s. They negotiate the conditions of their entry, or of their continued residence, in a given state with the major advisers of the monarch, or in Janz's case, the newly-established revolutionaries; and they negotiate, if not from a position of great strength, then certainly not from a position of complete weakness and isolation either. The origins of the Mennonites in Russia

exemplified the traits of the mobilized diaspora.[5] In the mid-eighteenth century, the enlightened Russian monarch Catherine the Great invited foreigners to settle her newly conquered lands in the Volga region and southern Ukraine. She offered a standard set of legal and economic privileges to any foreigners who would agree to immigrate, since clearly no one would come if they were to be placed in the same position as Russia's enserfed rural population. In almost all instances, foreigners would accept Catherine's privileges as offered, and settled where they were assigned with no negotiation. The Mennonites behaved differently. The Mennonites of Poland were ready to move, for they were in the process of being absorbed into the rapidly expanding Prussian state which, as we have seen in my introductory anecdote, categorized them as an undesirable and suspect population. The Mennonites, therefore, sent two representatives to Catherine's court where they negotiated with her powerful favorite, Potemkin. They surveyed and chose the land they wished to settle on; and they negotiated a special deal, which gave the Mennonites greater economic and political privileges than other foreign settlers had received. Obviously, such negotiations implied that the Mennonites had something to offer the Russian state, which they did. They were well known as excellent agriculturists who had drained and successfully farmed the swampy land of the Vistula river basin in northern Poland.

The Mennonites' status as a mobilized diaspora helps explain what might otherwise seem to us modern Mennonites a curious and somewhat baffling aspect of traditional Mennonite politics, namely their strong preference for the pre-modern monarchical state and their considerable distrust of modernizing and democratizing governments. This seems especially mysterious to us, given that the modern, democratic states of Canada and the United States provided almost the sole safe haven for the Mennonites in the twentieth century. Why did the Mennonites not see that this would be the case? They had good reasons for their prejudice. Traditional states, such as the Russian empire, were organized according to the principle of estate or status groups, what the Russians called *soslovie* groups, such as the nobility, clergy, townspeople, and peasants. Russia also had ethno-military estate groups like the Cossacks and the Turkic Bashkir host. In such a society there was no expectation of equality before the law. Each group owed the state, and ultimately the Tsar himself, particular service obligations and in turn received specific

privileges in exchange. The Tsarist government, therefore, did not find it strange or insulting that the Mennonites should try to negotiate for themselves a particular set of legal and economic privileges in exchange for the economic services they had to offer. This was normal. The Russian Mennonites fit into this *soslovie* order quite naturally and quickly adopted the service mentality typical of it. The *soslovie* principle suited the Mennonites' sense that they were a people apart. The last thing they wanted was to be treated like all the others.

The modernizing state threatened this situation. It demanded equality before the law and conformity to the culture of the majority nationality. It was the threat of the modernizing Prussian nation-state that led the Mennonites to move to the pre-modern Russian empire in the first place. The modernizing authoritarian state has been particularly harsh on diaspora nationalities that possess a strong and inassimilable religious identity. The two great cases of twentieth-century genocide, the Turkish murder of the Armenians in World War I and the Nazi annihilation of the Jews in World War II, both involved such diaspora nationalities. The first great shock to the Russian Mennonites, likewise, involved the liberalizing and democratizing Great Reforms of the 1860s in Russia. For Russians, these reforms were a great step forward. Serfdom was abolished; a modern legal system was established; primary education was standardized and expanded; censorship was reduced; local self-government was introduced; and military service was now demanded of all Russian citizens, whether noble or serf, or, and here was the rub, Mennonite. To the Mennonites, who already had their own form of local self-government and local education, these reforms were a major threat and a violation of their contract with the Tsarist government. The Mennonites responded in two ways, both of which would be repeated in the 1920s. About one-third of the entire Mennonite population emigrated to the United States and Canada. The leaders of the remaining population found a patron in the high-ranking ethnic German General, Todleben, who helped them negotiate alternative military service in special forestry brigades that would be paid for and run by the entire Russian Mennonite community.[6]

This new, special deal allowed the Mennonite community in Russia to thrive for another forty years. If we look at the period between the Great Reforms and the outbreak of World War I in 1914, however, we find three

emerging threats to the Russian Mennonites' way of life, all of which would manifest themselves again under Soviet rule in a much more intense form. The first threat was a national one. With the growth of a military threat to Russia from the newly united German empire, Russian nationalists began to identify the German colonists, including the Mennonites, with the German state and stigmatize them as potentially disloyal.[7]

The second threat was religious. Mennonites had always been recognized by the Russian state as an official foreign confession – along with Islam, Catholicism, Lutheranism, Buddhism, and others – which guaranteed them religious freedom and autonomy so long as they did not attempt to proselytize Orthodox believers. Other religious groups, such as the indigenous Russian Dukhobors and Molokans, or the rapidly expanding Baptist and Evangelical movements, were labeled sects and not given legal recognition. They were, in fact, subject to numerous legal disabilities and repression, including internal exile and the occasional removal of children from their parents. Because the Mennonites lacked a regular clergy and shared the pacifism of many of the Russian sects, and because the Mennonite Brethren movement did proselytize among Russians, there was a strong movement to re-categorize the Mennonites as a sect in the years leading up to World War I.[8]

The final threat was economic. This came in two forms. Nationalists wanted to limit German landholdings, in particular in regions close to the Russian border with Germany, on the argument that the Russian Germans were a potential security threat. In 1913 they even formally proposed a law to the state Duma limiting German landholdings, but the Mennonites and their powerful political allies managed to squelch it.[9] The economic threat from the strong Russian socialist movement was more hypothetical for the time being, since its members were far removed from power. That would soon change. The socialists defended the Russian Germans from the charge of treason, but nevertheless viewed their great economic wealth and massive landholdings as the unjust consequence of past privilege, rather than the just reward of a hard-working and special people, and so favored a radical land re-distribution to remedy this historic injustice.

Prior to 1914, the Mennonites had with some effort successfully fought off these three threats. The outbreak of World War I greatly exacerbated the danger. Although the Mennonites and Russian Germans demonstrably supported

the war effort, anti-German sentiment was suddenly all-powerful and, within a few months of the outbreak of the war, it was forbidden to use the German language in schools, in the press, or in any other public gatherings. Then in February and December 1915, laws were passed calling for the expropriation of German landholdings and businesses in a wide swath of territory running along the Russian state's western and southern borders, a territory which included the major Mennonite settlements of southern Ukraine. Individuals whose land was confiscated could be, and often were, deported to eastern territories such as Siberia.[10] Finally, Mennonites were increasingly labeled as a sect and threatened with the extreme war-time measures being directed against the sectarians.

The Mennonites responded with characteristic energy to these new threats. They were well-connected in the Russian capital, Saint-Petersburg, with two deputies to the Russian parliament – eight times their representation in the population as a whole – who had ties to powerful patrons. The Mennonites put forward the argument, backed by several published brochures, that they were not Germans but rather of Dutch descent and that they spoke a Dutch dialect, the "low German" or *plattdeutsch*. Intellectually, this was a silly dispute. Neither the Netherlands nor Germany existed in the sixteenth century when the Mennonites emerged in the Dutch-German border regions, and the Mennonites certainly would not have identified with either state in any case. However, at a time when Russia was at war with Germany, and Germany had invaded and violated Dutch neutrality, and was accused of committing horrific atrocities against the Dutch, it was a clever tactical move. After two years of intense lobbying and, according to Mennonite historian David Rempel, the mobilization of a certain amount of well-targeted bribes, this strategy succeeded. In January 1917 the Mennonites were formally re-categorized as Dutch and exempted from the land expropriation laws.[11]

It turned out to be a waste of effort, as a month later the Tsarist state collapsed, and the newly formed Provisional Government ceased to enforce the anti-German legislation. Despite their reputation for political conservatism, their identification with the Tsarist *soslovie* state, their fear of the modernizing, democratizing and, in this case, revolutionary state, the anti-German legislation had so soured the Mennonites' relationship to the Tsarist state that they welcomed the February revolution. However, revolutions can rarely be

contained at their initial stages. In October 1917 a second revolution occurred which brought the radical socialists, the Bolsheviks led by Vladimir Lenin, into power. Initially, this change in power had surprisingly minor consequences for the Mennonites. They lived on the periphery of the Russian empire. Of the approximately 120,000 Russian Mennonites, about sixty percent lived in south Ukraine and another forty percent lived in Russia, most of these in Siberia. They experienced the change in power not as a revolution but as a descent into anarchy and civil war. In my grandmother's narrative of the revolutionary years in the Turkic regions of the North Caucasus, I was always struck by the absence of the October revolution. By that point, local anarchic conditions were much more salient.[12]

The years from 1917 to 1921, then, were experienced by the Mennonites primarily as a period of war and anarchy rather than a period of Bolshevik terror, although the latter was not absent. In my grandmother's settlement in the North Caucasus, there were few Russians and no Bolsheviks to be found; there the Mennonites were driven from their settlement by the local Turkic peoples who, with considerable justice, viewed the Mennonites as foreign interlopers who had settled on their land. In south Ukraine, where my grandmother's family fled in 1918, by far the greatest terror was associated with the so-called *Makhnovtsy*, the local peasant anarchist bands under the leadership of Nestor Makhno, who greatly resented the wealth and prosperity of the Mennonite settlements and took advantage of the collapse in order to rob and terrorize them.[13] It was the threat of the Makhno bands, rather than the Bolsheviks, that led the south Ukrainian Mennonites to abandon their pacifism and form a so-called *Selbstschutz*, a self-defense army that was armed and trained by German officers, and that fought several bloody battles with the anarchists and, on one occasion, with the Bolshevik Red army as well.[14] Although the Mennonites very much favored the anti-Bolshevik White side in the Civil War, the experience taught them, above all, that any government was superior to no government. The final triumph of the Red Army was therefore greeted with nervous relief by many Mennonites.

In the period from 1917 to 1921 Mennonites by and large suffered the same fate as the rest of the Russian population: war, anarchy, and a terrible famine in 1921 that resulted in the death of five to six million people. There were, however, two important differences. First, as an unusually prosperous

group, the Mennonites had much more to lose. If the majority of ordinary Russians experienced these revolutionary years as terrible but nevertheless containing the promise of a better future, for the Mennonites the experience was terrible and suggested a much worse future with the loss of their privileged economic, political, and legal status. Second, the Mennonites were objects rather than subjects of class warfare. The Makhno movement made crystal clear to them, for the first time, the degree of class hatred felt towards them by the neighboring impoverished peasantry. And they were well aware that the new Bolshevik government supported exactly those social forces that had made up the Makhno movement in the Civil War period. Our story of the confrontation between the Mennonites and the Soviet state, then, really begins in the year 1921, when the Bolsheviks had finally won the Civil War and when they introduced what they called their New Economic Policy or NEP. Faced with a series of peasant rebellions, with strikes in several major cities, revolts in the non-Russian regions of the Soviet Union, and a dangerous military mutiny in the naval fort of Kronstadt, the Bolsheviks abandoned their attempt to create a socialist state immediately. The NEP legalized individual, rather than collective, agricultural production. It allowed the peasantry to pay a tax-in-kind and then sell their surplus grain on the open market. This in turn meant the legalization of market trade and the merchant profession. While all large industrial enterprises remained nationalized, private small enterprise was now allowed. Censorship was significantly scaled back and the assault on the church likewise reduced. The NEP provided an opening for the Mennonites to negotiate an accommodation with Bolshevik rule.

The Bolshevik View of the Mennonites

Before we consider the Mennonite survival strategy, let us first look in more detail at how Mennonites were viewed by the new Soviet leadership. In the Bolsheviks' Marxist ideology, class divisions were paramount, and society was divided into so-called class-friendly and class-hostile elements as well as certain wavering or neutral classes.[15] A large set of class-hostile elements were grouped together under the label of "former people" (in Russian, *byvshie*); that is, individuals who were associated intimately with the old regime: industrialists, landlords, clergy, Tsarist officials, policemen, army officers, White Army volunteers. These "former people" were deprived of their civil rights.

They could not vote; they were denied ration cards, housing, access to education; and they were subject to a variety of formal and informal harassment. For the Mennonites, the most important of these categories was the clergy, who formed a crucial part of their leadership elite.

The part of Bolshevik class ideology of most direct relevance to the Mennonites was a three-fold division of the rural population into rich peasants (or kulaks), middle peasants, and poor peasants. The kulaks, who were estimated to make up between three and five percent of the rural population, were portrayed as terrible exploiters of their fellow villagers. It is difficult to convey how strongly the Bolsheviks stigmatized the kulaks, but the following quotation from Lenin in 1918 perhaps gives a good sense:[16]

> Comrades! The uprising of the five kulak districts should be **mercilessly** suppressed. The interests of the **entire** revolution requires this, because now "the last decisive battle" with the kulaks is under way **everywhere**. One must give an example.
> 1. Hang (hang without fail, so **the people see**) **no fewer than one hundred** known kulaks, rich men, bloodsuckers.
> 2. Publish their names.
> 3. Take from them **all** the grain.
> 4. Designate hostages - as per yesterday's telegram.
> Do it in such a way that for hundreds of [kilometers] around, the people will see, tremble, know, shout: **they are strangling** and will strangle to death the bloodsucker kulaks.
> Telegraph receipt and **implementation**.
>   Yours, Lenin. [*All emphasis in original*]

Who exactly were these kulaks? Like most metaphysical enemies, they could not be clearly identified. Their most typical trait was the use of hired labor. There were no clear economic criteria for defining the kulak, but the possession of several horses, eight to ten head of cattle, and twenty to thirty acres would almost always be sufficient to qualify.

In other words, a substantial part of the Mennonite rural community before 1914 could have been characterized as kulak. In fact, among the local peasantry and local Bolsheviks in south Ukraine (and elsewhere) – many of whom came from the local peasantry and had supported or even participated

in the Makhno movement – the Mennonites were seen as a *kulak community*. This prejudice was strengthened by the fact that the Mennonites had clearly tilted towards the White side in the Civil War and their Selbstschutz had fought the Makhno bands and, on one occasion, the Red Army as well. Here, oddly, Bolshevik class ideology had a positive consequence for the Mennonites. For the Bolsheviks, there could be no kulak community as a whole. All communities were divided by the same class categories. Poor Mennonite peasants, therefore, just like poor Russian and Ukrainian peasants, were the Bolsheviks' natural supporters; if they did not realize this immediately, they would eventually be convinced of it. The middle peasants were the wavering class. They would begin under the influence of the kulaks but could, with time and effort, be recruited to the Bolshevik side. These made up the vast majority of the peasantry. The kulaks alone were to be eliminated. As a result, the higher Bolshevik leadership often intervened in support of the Mennonites against local officials. This, naturally, reminded the Mennonites of their pre-revolutionary experience.

     In addition to this class perspective, the Bolsheviks also viewed the Mennonites in economic terms. Here the outlook was quite positive. The Bolsheviks desperately wanted to re-build agricultural production after the devastation of the Civil War and the great famine of 1921-22. Like the Tsarist government before them, they admired the Mennonites' farming ability, or what they called their "economic culture," and were willing, as we shall see, to make substantial concessions to support its re-establishment. They were also well aware of the financial and technical support that foreign Mennonite organizations – the newly formed Mennonite Central Committee in particular – would provide if the Mennonites were treated sufficiently well. This was an opening for negotiations. A third prism through which the Bolshevik regime viewed the Mennonites was religion. Here one would have expected that the Mennonites' intense religiosity, which the Bolsheviks did observe and lament, might have made them a special target for persecution. But due to a quirk of Bolshevik religious policy, it did not. The Bolsheviks were atheists and hostile to religion on principle. However, their extreme religious hatred is better understood as resentment of the Russian Orthodox Church's close alliance with the Tsarist state rather than a hatred of religion *per se*. The Bolsheviks were, for this reason, most hostile to state churches: the Orthodox church

above all, but also Islam, Catholicism, Lutheranism. They had much more sympathy for the sectarians – Dukhobors, Molokans, Baptists, Evangelicals, Tolstoyans – who had been brutally repressed by the Tsarist regime and its state church. These sectarians were viewed by the Bolsheviks as potential allies, especially since many of the sects practiced some form of communal property. Thus in the 1920s, these religious groups were given state land to form agricultural communes; Dukhobors were encouraged to return from Canada and, grudgingly, sectarians were allowed to apply for alternative military service.[17] Ironically, given their successful pre-revolutionary efforts to avoid being labeled a sect, the Mennonites stood to benefit from that same status under the Soviets.

A still more important factor than religion was nationality.[18] Bolshevik policy explicitly defined the Soviet Union as a multiethnic state. It condemned Russian chauvinism as a greater danger than non-Russian nationalism. It called for granting all nationalities, regardless of their size, their own national territories, the use of their national language, and the staffing of administrative and educational institutes with members of their own nationality. It did not allow for ethno-religious nationalities, so the Mennonites had to accept a German national identity. There could be no official Mennonite national regions. This policy most certainly did not mean self-determination or even minimal political autonomy. Schools and newspapers could be in German, but they must propagate Communist ideas. Germans could run the local soviets, but they must be Communists or at least loyal to Communism. Nevertheless, Soviet nationalities policy did allow traditional Mennonite settlements, from Slavgorod and Orenburg in Siberia to Khortitsa and the Molochnaia in Ukraine, to re-establish themselves as German national regions.[19]

A fifth and final prism through which the Bolsheviks viewed the Mennonites was their foreign ties, the fact that they were a diaspora community. In the long term, this would prove fatal for the Mennonites. Even in the 1920s it was a cause of great suspicion. Foreign ties were viewed as *ipso facto* suspect.[20] Individuals who corresponded with relatives abroad or who visited a foreign consul – both extremely common among Mennonites – were as a matter of course registered with the political police as a suspect element. Internal Soviet documentation again and again accused the Mennonites of espionage due to their ties with the MCC and other foreign organizations.[21]

However, in the short term, foreign ties surely helped the Mennonites. The Soviets were eager for foreign financial help and concerned about potential foreign embarrassments. Mennonite famine relief efforts demonstrated their ability to direct financial assistance to the Soviet Union. Likewise, the Mennonites had foreign political connections who could publicize any persecution undertaken against them.

The Mennonites Develop a Strategy

As we can clearly see, the Bolshevik vision of the Mennonites was quite complex and did seem to offer some possibility of accommodation. Mennonite leadership could recognize in the Bolsheviks much that was new and terribly threatening but also some reassuring old qualities. In particular, like the Tsarist regime, the Soviet government divided up its population into different categories and offered each of them different privileges and different disabilities, though of course the categories were quite new and the punishments unusually severe. Like the Tsarist regime, the Soviet government admired the Mennonite economic contribution. Perhaps there was, after all, room for a deal.

From the Mennonite leadership's perspective, the deal would ideally include the following items: first, the preservation of the Mennonite economic base – their land, the practice of private agriculture, perhaps their milling industry as well; second, the right to alternative military service; third, permission for a sizable number of Mennonites who had been ruined during the years 1917 to 1921, such as my grandmother's family, to emigrate; fourth, the preservation of as much of their traditional autonomy as possible, in particular control over their churches, schools, economic institutions, charitable institutions and, if possible, local self-government. They were well aware that the last point might be a deal-breaker. In exchange, the Mennonites could offer little more than their traditional economic skills, plus the prospect of foreign investment in the form of much coveted tractors and other technology.

The Mennonite strategy involved the formation of an organization that could, on the one hand, represent the Mennonite community in negotiations with the Bolshevik government and, on the other hand, serve as a kind of extra-territorial Mennonite government that would by-pass the class-based local soviets under the control of local Communists. The south Ukrainian Mennonites formed such an organization, the Union of South Russian

Mennonites, in February 1921 under the leadership of B.B. Janz. Remarkably, a year later, it gained official recognition from the Bolshevik government under a new name, the Union of Citizens of Dutch Descent, a remnant of the war-time "Dutch" strategy and a name that omitted any religious referent. From the Bolshevik perspective, the Union was a purely economic organization, but one given quite broad rights: "Commercially it had the right to deal in any raw materials or manufactured goods essential to its program. It could participate in any financial and credit operation and even draw on foreign capital if necessary. Agriculturally it could initiate cooperatives, maintain storage facilities, utilize existing transportation systems and exploit certain lands for experimental purposes. Industrially, it could bring the production of items as needed for the success of its program. In the social sphere it was given a free hand in the operation of benevolent and cultural institutions."[22] In May 1923 a similar organization, the all-Russian Mennonite Agricultural Union, was formed to service the Mennonites living in Russia.

The establishment of these unions was an extraordinary achievement. The Bolsheviks opposed religiously-based organizations of any kind, but in Ukraine under the fig leaf of "citizens of Dutch descent" and in Russia with no fig leaf at all, they allowed the formation of a purely religious organization. The Bolsheviks opposed all extra-territorial national organizations, that is, organizations that served members of a given nationality spread out throughout the country, but in this case allowed two such organizations. (The All-Russian Mennonite union included in its agricultural cooperatives 80 percent of all Mennonites spread out across Russia, while only 2.5 percent of its membership was non-Mennonite.)[23] The Bolsheviks opposed all autonomous organizations, but in this case allowed the formation of a powerful economic organization with freely elected officers. The Ukrainian Mennonite Union, for instance, used its profits to support Mennonite charitable institutions such as the school for the deaf and the hospital for the mentally ill. I have been researching this time period in Soviet archives for a decade now and I have never encountered any organizations remotely comparable.

The second major Mennonite accomplishment came in the land question. Bolshevik land policy called for the re-distribution of agricultural land. In the Mennonite communities of south Ukraine, this meant that in the period up through 1923, large quantities of agricultural land were taken from Mennonite

farmers and redistributed both to landless Mennonites and to local Russian and Ukrainian peasants. The latter policy was viewed as a particular threat by the Mennonites, because it meant that outsiders were being settled in "their" villages – from the Bolshevik perspective, of course, the villages were no longer "theirs" – which endangered their autonomy. Here the Bolshevik nationalities policy came to the Mennonites' rescue. In 1924 the previous policy was denounced as Russian chauvinism, as was the policy of attaching German villages to nearby Russian districts. Instead, beginning in 1924, nine German national districts – with populations of around ten thousand – were formed in Ukraine, including two in the traditional Mennonite regions of Molochnaia and Khortitsa. Equally important, a policy was established that all land taken from rich Mennonites was not to be given to local Russians and Ukrainians, but was to be held in reserve for the in-migration of landless Mennonites from outside the new German districts. Moreover, because of their valuable "cultured" agriculture, Mennonites were allowed farms as large as 80 acres. By Mennonite standards this was still considered inadequate – traditionally this would be called a half-farm – but considering many Russian regions had average farm sizes of 8 to 10 acres, it was again a major concession.[24]

The third, more limited, victory came in the struggle for alternative military service. As already noted, the Bolsheviks' positive attitude toward sectarian organizations allowed the Mennonites to pursue this path successfully. After a four-year period of negotiations in pursuit of a special deal, the Mennonites finally had to settle for a September 18, 1925 law on alternative military service that allowed individuals to appeal to local courts for the right to alternative service on the grounds of conscientious pacifism. Unlike in the Tsarist period, this law gave no guarantee of alternative service for Mennonites, but given the militant nature of the Bolshevik state, it was an important concession.[25] Sectarian ministers were also granted concessions not given to Orthodox clergy, on the grounds that their clerical work was part-time and unpaid. They were allowed, for instance, to own land and were often not formally disenfranchised as Orthodox clergy invariably were. Still, religion remained a major problem. Not only did the Bolsheviks not allow any religion to be taught in school, they also actively promoted anti-religious rhetoric and forbade formal religious instruction for minors outside school.

The fourth and final Mennonite triumph came in the field of emigration. Between 1923 and 1926, approximately 19,000 Mennonites were allowed to emigrate legally, most to Canada, including my grandmother's family in 1924.[26] Another five thousand left legally in 1929, so that in total about one-fifth of the entire Mennonite community was allowed to leave the country legally. Again, I am not aware of a remotely comparable legal emigration movement in this period.

If we take a snapshot of Mennonite-Soviet relations at the height of the New Economic Policy in 1925-26, then, we could make a strong case that the Mennonites had once again come to an accommodation, made a special deal, with a potentially very hostile authoritarian state. It was a very shaky deal indeed, but its existence was in itself remarkable. Why did the Bolsheviks allow such concessions to the Mennonites? Note that I have not yet detailed how grudging these concessions were and how short-lived they would be. With that caveat in place, we can point to the following factors. First, the Bolshevik religious and nationalities policy overlapped with important Mennonite objectives in the sphere of alternative military service and control of agricultural land. Second, the Mennonites' agricultural skills and their foreign connections were, for the time being, of considerable value to the economically weak Soviet state. Again and again, it was the Soviet agricultural ministry that defended the Mennonites from attacks by Party loyalists. Third, the Soviet state was still highly divided and fragmented. The Party and security organs were focused on more serious concerns than the Mennonites. The Ukrainian secret police, for instance, only singled Mennonites out for surveillance in the fall of 1924. Fourth and most fundamental, the Mennonites used their centuries-old skills as a mobilized diaspora in dealing with authoritarian states. They cultivated friendly officials, sold their agricultural skills, and mobilized their foreign contacts, and in this manner they extracted more concessions than the Bolsheviks desired.

As we shall see, however, it was the Mennonites' status as a mobilized diaspora that would lead both to the complete annihilation of their hundred-year-old autonomous community in less than a decade and to their being singled out for disproportionate suffering and punishment.

Collectivization, Famine, and Terror, 1926-1934

Let me begin, as in my last lecture, with two illustrative episodes. On March 6, 1925 the Ukrainian National Minorities Commission directed a letter to the highest authority in Ukraine, the Central Committee of the Ukrainian Communist Party. Their letter was a response to the results of a secret investigation of the Union of Citizens of Dutch Descent – which as we have seen was a euphemism for the Union of Ukrainian Mennonites – an investigation carried out in early 1925 by the Ekaterinoslav regional government. The letter did not object to the investigation's conclusions: namely "that the union was a national-religious organization under the leadership of socially harmful elements, carrying out a policy of playing down class contradictions, preventing the emergence of class divisions, and also preventing the Sovietization of the German Mennonite colonies and preventing the development of Soviet cooperatives and so forth." If one removes the abusive language, this was not an inaccurate description of the Union's mission. The letter went on, however, to dispute the conclusion of the investigators, namely that the Union should be immediately liquidated, and instead proposed an alternative course: "The materials of the secret investigation should serve as the basis for an official well-rounded investigation of the political and economic activities of the Union and their relations with the appropriate government agencies. If the conclusions of the commission are confirmed, a show trial [of the Union leadership] should be organized involving the broad mass of Mennonite toilers, concluding with an appropriate judicial conviction."[27] For the time being, the Party Central Committee accepted neither of these proposals.

The second episode occurred a little over a year later, in May 1926, and at a still higher level of authority. The head of the all-Union Communist Party's Agitation and Propaganda Department, Abolin, wrote a memorandum to the all-Union Central Committee of the Communist Party, which in turn served as the basis for a discussion of the all-Russian Mennonite Agricultural Union at a June 4, 1926 meeting of the Secretariat of the Communist Party

Central Committee, the second highest decision-making body in the Soviet Union after the Politburo. Abolin began his memorandum with a discussion of the sins of the Ukrainian Union of Citizens of Dutch Descent. They had done little to restore the economic level of the Mennonite communities although this was their official function. Instead, they had engaged in "the legal defense of individual Mennonites, by-passing the local soviets" (this was indeed one of the Union's intended functions); they had assisted Mennonite emigration and even helped finance it; they had "organized collective demands in the name of the population for more privileges for the Mennonites, up to and including the demand that several government decrees be repealed"; they were a phony cooperative organization and had, in fact, erected a wall between the Mennonite masses and the local soviet organs; they had "held back normal economic development" ["normal" meaning normal *socialist* economic development]; they had "played down and stalled the process of class divisions [in the Mennonite community]; and finally and most seriously, they had "engaged in economic espionage." Abolin went on to note that the All-Russian Mennonite Union had concentrated on more legitimate economic operations, but that it too had "engaged in the same activities as in Ukraine, only to a lesser degree and in a more masked form." Abolin concluded his letter not with a demand for the liquidation of the union but for a more thorough investigation of its activities.[28]

I ended the previous lecture with a snapshot of Mennonite-Soviet relations at the height of the New Economic Policy in 1925-26, and I argued that a good case could be made that the Mennonites had, remarkably, managed to come to an accommodation with the new Soviet state. But I also noted that I was not yet presenting the entire picture of Mennonite-Soviet relations. As the two episodes that began this lecture illustrate, there was also a great deal of discontent within the Communist Party over concessions granted to the Mennonites and over how the Mennonites had exploited those concessions to pursue what the government quite plausibly interpreted as an anti-Soviet agenda. I presented the material in this manner to emphasize the extraordinary accomplishments of the traditional Mennonite strategy of using their economic abilities and political skills to negotiate a special deal from authoritarian states, the classic political behavior of a "mobilized diaspora." More important, I wanted to stress the external, public picture available to ordinary Mennonites

when they had to decide in 1925-26 whether to stay or to go, whether to re-build their households in Russia or depart for Canada. It was not an easy decision, and no one had a crystal ball. The Mennonites were receiving mixed signals from the Soviet government, some enormously threatening and others quite reassuring. (My grandmother told me that when her family emigrated in 1924, she did not want to go. It was probably only because her family had been driven out of their North Caucasus settlement and economically ruined that they chose the hard path of emigration.) Things would only became clear five to six years later. At that point, it was too late for most, though as we shall see, not all, Mennonites to depart. This lecture, then, is devoted to the collapse of Mennonite attempts to reach an accommodation with the Soviet regime.

The Soviet Government Discusses the Mennonites, 1925-1928

When I was researching my book on the Soviet nationalities policy, I worked through the entire files of the highest Communist Party leadership in Moscow – the Politburo and the Orgburo/Secretariat – for the years from 1923 to 1938. I was not specifically looking for Mennonite materials – indeed, I did not expect there to be any – but was astonished to discover how often the higher Party leadership discussed the fate of this small community of a hundred thousand, slightly less than one-tenth of one percent of their total population. Between November 1925 and June 1928, the Central Committee's Secretariat discussed the Mennonites no fewer than six times, and the Mennonites were also touched upon in two further discussions of religious sects.[29] To put this discovery in context, I did not find a single discussion of the much larger population – about four times as large – of non-Mennonite Germans living outside the Volga German republic. In 1929 to 1930, in response to the massive Mennonite emigration movement, Mennonite affairs were again discussed another half dozen times, including at least one discussion in the Politburo itself. So, if prior to 1925, the Party and security police had more important things to deal with than the Mennonites – that was very much to the Mennonites' advantage – this quite dramatically ceased to be the case in late 1925 and was very much to their disadvantage.

    In the first lecture I discussed how the Soviet government saw the Mennonites in the most general terms, how their way of categorizing the population – by class, religion, nationality, economic capacity, and foreign ties

– informed their initial attitudes toward the Mennonites and helped explain their surprising willingness to make substantial concessions to particular Mennonite desires. Central Committee archival files now allow us a glimpse at how the higher Party leadership interpreted actual Mennonite behavior, in particular that of the two Mennonite Unions.

The primary critique directed at the Mennonite Unions by the Communist Party was a charge of insincerity, that the Mennonite organizations had been authorized exclusively for economic purposes but had nevertheless pursued primarily political and religious goals. This was the central charge made by Abolin in June 1926, quoted at the beginning of the lecture. A March 1928 Central Committee memorandum repeated the charge even more succinctly: "The data we have gathered convincingly demonstrates that the Central Council [of the All-Russian Mennonite Agricultural Union] is needed by the Mennonite elite as a political organization to defend the interests of the wealthy stratum [of the Mennonite villages], and as a religious center, but not at all as an economic center."[30] Given the dominance of class in the Bolshevik's world view, it was not surprising that both unions were always accused of serving the interests of the rich Mennonites at the expense of the poor. "As a result [of this approach]," Abolin noted, "the domination of the social elite over the masses is not only being preserved [in the Mennonite communities], but strengthened, and the social elite, as a matter of fact, dictates popular opinion."[31] Although the language here is pejorative – *dictates*, not influences, popular opinion – nevertheless most Mennonite historians agree that the traditional Mennonite religious and social elite did indeed maintain mass popular support through to the end of the New Economic Policy in 1928. For the Bolsheviks, of course, this signified a major policy failure.

The Party leadership initially drew a quite strong contrast in this matter between the aggressive political behavior of the Ukrainian Union of Citizens of Dutch Descent, under the leadership of B. B. Janz, and the more moderate all-Russian Mennonite Agricultural Union. As a result, the Ukrainian Union's leadership council was abolished in September 1925, while the Russian Union survived until May 1928. In fact, it was the Ukrainian Party's decision to abolish the Ukrainian Mennonite Union that first drew central Communist Party attention to the Mennonites. In October 1925, an Agitprop conference was held to discuss the Mennonite question. The conference endorsed the

Ukrainian Party's decision to liquidate their Mennonite union but argued that it was premature to consider a similar step for the Russian Mennonite Union. Indeed, the Union was even allowed to hold its all-Russian conference in January 1926.[32]

At that gathering, the Union made a tactical mistake in sending a petition to the formal head of the Soviet government, Mikhail Kalinin, calling for the following rights:[33]

1. The right to conduct religious gatherings and discussions in the churches and in private homes, both for adults and for children.
2. The right to conduct special gatherings for children of a religious character, including choirs, the preaching of God's word and religious teaching in the churches and in private homes.
3. The right to organize Christian education classes for Mennonite children in orphanages.
4. The right to satisfy needs for published religious materials, including both bibles and textbooks for religious seminaries.
5. The right to organize Bible courses for the preparation and further training of religious leaders.
6. To declare the school a neutral territory, where science is taught without any propaganda for or against religion.
7. To free Mennonites from military service and from general military training, substituting for this some kind of generally useful work for the state.
8. To substitute for the oath a simple promise to be faithful in service.

This petition did no more than repeat demands that the Mennonites had been making persistently from 1921 onward but, coming in the wake of the abolition of the Ukrainian Union and coming from a nation-wide Congress of what the Party saw as a purely *agricultural* union, it was received with particular indignation. Above all, the Bolsheviks were enraged at the suggestion that they – a Party for whom ideology was the central value – should be *ideologically neutral* in their own schools. It would appear that this petition led to Abolin's angry memorandum accusing the Russian Union of being little better than the Ukrainian Union, only masking their activities more carefully. This petition

was also attached to the materials leading to a June 1926 Central Committee decision that began what would be a two-year-long process of gradually abolishing the Russian Union by detaching its regional cooperative branches.

The second major charge directed against the Mennonite unions was their extra-territoriality, the fact that they serviced *only* Mennonites and intentionally isolated themselves from the surrounding non-Mennonite populations. After all, the economic value that the Mennonites had to offer the Soviet state as agriculturists involved not only their own economic production or the foreign aid they might attract but also their positive economic influence on the surrounding non-Mennonite communities. Party reports again and again stressed the Mennonites "isolation" (*obosoblennost'*) and their "closed-off nature" (*zamknutost'*), their attempt to "build a wall" between themselves and local non-Mennonite communities and local organizations. (This rhetoric is strikingly similar to complaints directed against the Mennonites and other German colonists by Russian nationalists in the Tsarist period.[34]) A report from the Samara Communist Party committee in the Middle Volga region in April 1928 complained that the Mennonites, on average, had sixteen acres per farm while the local non-Mennonite population had only six acres. The report said that the surrounding peasantry "reacted extremely negatively to the situation where the Mennonite colonists preserved their higher land allotments, allowing some [Mennonite] households to conduct small-capitalist enterprises. . . . [Since 1923] the number of written and oral complaints by local peasants demanding the expropriation of Mennonite land continues to grow dramatically." This report did note, accurately, that the current Mennonite higher land holdings were legal, but regretted this fact and requested permission for the redistribution of Mennonite land.[35]

The third and most damaging charge was the one related to foreign ties. As already noted, Abolin accused the Union of Citizens of Dutch Descent of economic espionage due to its close ties with foreign Mennonite organizations. Likewise, a March 1928 Central Committee document summarizing the activity of the all-Russian Mennonite Agricultural Union accused it of organizing the Mennonite emigration by working closely with the Berlin firm, Ausland Deutsch, which was headed by "well-known Fascist activists such as Admiral Khimtse, Von-Dergolts and others."[36] This was an early instance of what would ultimately be the devastating accusation of "fascist" German connections.

By 1925, the Soviet government was growing increasingly concerned about both Poland's and Germany's interest in the Russian Polish and German populations. A 1925 government control commission reported the following:[37]

> Our information demonstrates the existence of national chauvinism in the Polish population, the enormous influence of priests, which creates a base for the influence of [foreign] Poles. The German, Polish and, to a degree, the Czech colonies are a foothold for spreading the influence of their governments, nests of spies in support of these governments. It is interesting to note that tied to the election of Hindenburg [in 1925], in the German colonies a rumor is spreading about a 15-year German occupation of Ukraine.

In connection with this suspicion of foreign ties, a word should be said about the increasing interest of the Soviet political police, the GPU, in the Mennonites and other German colonists, especially given the major role that fear of the GPU has played in Mennonite memoir literature.

In January 1926 the GPU submitted a report on their work "servicing" the foreign colonist population in Ukraine for the year 1925.[38] This report noted that until the fall of 1924, the German colonies were "serviced" in the same matter as the surrounding population. Surprisingly, no special measures were taken. The report went on to say that "a series of circumstances has forced us to direct our attention toward the German colonies and to engage in more work to discern the situation and popular mood in the colonies." These circumstances included:

1. The exceptional role that the German colonists played in the Civil War, when they created special German battalions and self-defense units [here a reference to the Mennonite *Selbstschutz* and other comparable organizations], that fought within the [White] army.
2. The particular enclosed nature (*zamknutost'*) and isolation *(obosoblennost')* of the [German] population in the years following the Civil War.
3. The extremely strong interest shown by the German government in the conditions in the colonies, not only in the famine years, when a variety of German aid organizations were active, but in the latter years right up to the present moment.

4. The existence in the colonies of national organizations such as the "Colonist" union, and the Union of the Citizens of Dutch Descent; moreover, the latter organization continues to exist up to the present moment. (In fact, the union's leadership was dissolved in September 1925, but its local cooperatives continued to exist.)

Unsurprisingly, the role of foreign ties was of considerable interest to the GPU. Their annual report contained a special section describing GPU surveillance of the Mennonite colonies. Since this is the only such report I have ever encountered, I will quote from it at length:

The Mennonites.

In our work in the Mennonite colonies … we have two important and distinctive tasks: first, the servicing of the Union of Citizens of Dutch Descent; and second, the examination of the activities of the Mennonite pastors.

The Union of Citizens of Dutch Descent … using the cover of its economic activities, carries out a hidden political activity in the direction of protecting the Mennonite masses from Soviet influence. On the other hand, being tied with Mennonite organizations in America, Canada, Germany, Holland and other countries, it endeavors to carry out a policy supporting the unity of the interests of Mennonites world-wide, from which comes the desire to be as independent as possible from the government on whose territory they reside. The 1925 emigration was nothing else but a planned transfer of 2500 individuals to Canada, through a jointly planned operation by Canadian and Ukrainian organizations … [in our battle with this organization] we are creating an opposition group within the current leadership of its Central Directorship.

As for the activities of Mennonite pastors, one must say they are the Union's closest helpers. Moreover, Mennonites are the strongest sect in Ukraine. They conduct strong religious propaganda, publishing the journal "Unser Blatt" and organizing the masses, so as to minimize Soviet influence. For instance, in the battle for influence over youth, in opposition to our Komsomol the [Mennonite]

preachers create discussion circles, which along with religious questions, discuss so-called "pure scholarship", sport and song …

This document is of unusual value, for it gives voice to the policy orientation that would gain the upper hand in 1928 with the abolition of the New Economic Policy and the onset of a radical program of socio-economic transformation.

Collectivization and Emigration

In 1928 Stalin launched his famous Revolution from Above, which fundamentally transformed the Soviet Union and the Mennonite community along with it. The construction of a socialist society involved the following policies: nationalization of all industrial production, rapid industrialization, abolition of the market, collectivization of all agricultural land, complete domination of society by the Communist Party, and establishment of Stalin's personal dictatorship. To effect this transformation, the Party unleashed an unprecedented wave of terror. The terror was not, however, random. There were particular targets: the "former people" mentioned in the previous lecture (landlords, industrialists, Tsarist officials, White Army volunteers, and others associated with the old regime), the so-called "bourgeois specialists" (non-Bolshevik professionals such as engineers, teachers, academics, and so forth), the clergy, and the kulaks (or rich peasants). The strategy was clear enough. The New Economic Policy had meant a temporary policy of cooperation with useful non-Bolshevik elites. With the commitment to a fundamental transformation of society, those elites could only be seen as an obstacle. Needless to say, this meant that the Mennonites' entire strategy of political accommodation through direct elite negotiation with the Soviet regime immediately became obsolescent. This wave of terror affected the Mennonite community in largely the same fashion as it affected the rest of the Soviet Union's peoples, although, again, with the same qualifications we made earlier concerning the Mennonite experience of the Civil War: one, the Mennonites had more to lose; and two, they were exposed to a greater degree of class hostility from the local population, and especially the local Bolshevik authorities, who tended to view them as a *kulak community*. The entire leadership of the two abolished Mennonite unions, if they had not already fled abroad, as B. B. Janz had done, were targeted for arrest or internal exile to Siberia and the Far North. Through the revolutionary

years, despite enormous chaos, famine, and flight, there had been a fundamental continuity in the Mennonite teaching community. This changed irreversibly in 1928. Teachers with any black mark – participation in the *Selbstchutz*, landlord or kulak relatives, past religious activism, a pattern of anti-Bolshevik comments – were removed and replaced with loyalists, often non-Mennonite Germans, but also the many Mennonites who joined the Communist Party in this time period.

Mennonite clergy suffered particularly dramatic losses from 1928 to 1933. According to Mennonite historian Colin Neufeldt, "of the approximately 40 ministers who had once served villages in the Khortitsa colony in the late 1920s, 30 had been exiled by 1933 . . . of the 72 preachers who had once lived in the Molochnaia colony in the late 1920s, there were fewer than 10 ministers still serving the villages by mid-August of 1933."[39] These are truly breathtaking numbers and convey better than most the complete decimation of the traditional Mennonite elite that took place in those years. Again, this was not the result of a policy that targeted Mennonites specifically. In the first half of 1930 alone, over five thousand clergymen of all confessions were exiled to Siberia and the Far North.[40] Nevertheless, if Neufeldt's numbers are correct, Mennonite clergy suffered disproportionately. If this is true, then the explanation probably lies in two factors. First, concessions granted to the Mennonites in the NEP period emboldened and enabled more members of the Mennonite elite to engage in what would soon be categorized as anti-Soviet behavior than was the case in other communities; since the Mennonite clergy was a major part of the Mennonite elite, there were simply more Mennonite pastors with black marks on their record. Second, already by about 1925-26, the Bolshevik leadership began to reverse its attitude toward the religious sects. They had found that their support of these sects had not been reciprocated in the manner they wished. Instead, the Baptists and Evangelicals, in particular, had used their limited religious freedom to proselytize aggressively and successfully. With the attack on the churches and clergy in 1928, I believe that the sectarians were actually hit harder than the state churches. After all, if one is targeting religious activity, then religious groups that emphasize mass lay participation will appear more dangerous. I have no statistics to back up this claim for the 1928-1933 period, but it certainly was true of the terror in 1937-38 and I suspect it was the case for this earlier period as well.[41]

If the decimation of the Mennonite clergy represented an unprecedented assault on the traditional Mennonite community, an even more dramatic attack came with the policy of collectivization, that is, the expropriation of all private agricultural land, all horses, all agricultural implements, and most livestock, as well as the creation of collective farms and collectivized agricultural production. This policy began gradually in 1928 in response to a crisis in grain collections in the winter of 1927-28 that most historians would attribute to the low prices the state was willing to pay for grain, but that Stalin blamed on a "kulak grain strike." In order to break this strike, Stalin traveled out to Siberia in January 1928, and encouraged local officials and the secret police to jail kulaks and grain traders as speculators and to increase coercive grain collection. This was a clear violation of the New Economic Policy and signaled to both local Bolsheviks and peasants alike that a policy change was in order. Coercive collectivization only began on a large-scale in the second half of 1929, and took on epic proportions after Stalin's December 1929 speech declaring that the peasants were now voluntarily entering the collective farms (a clearly mendacious claim) and calling for "the liquidation of the kulaks as a class." This latter policy, called dekulakization, began in February 1930 and would result in the arrest of tens of thousands of kulaks and the deportation of an astonishing 1.8 million peasants to Siberia, Central Asia, and the Far North in the course of 1930-31, a total of 2.1 million by the end of dekulakization in May 1933.[42] Once again, circumstantial evidence suggests that the Mennonite community suffered greater losses from dekulakization than did other communities.

The Mennonite community's response to the collectivization campaign was unique and again extraordinary. It was not the result of any centralized planning but rather the spontaneous actions of local Mennonite communities and individuals. The non-Mennonite peasantry resisted collectivization violently with, according to GPU statistics, 9,000 acts of peasant terror against Soviet representatives in 1929 and another 14,000 in 1930; likewise, in 1930 alone there were 13,754 local peasant rebellions involving over 2.5 million individuals.[43] While there were a few uprisings in the Mennonite villages, the Mennonites' primary response was a mass movement to Moscow to petition for the right to leave the Soviet Union. In short, the Mennonites were true to their historical political tactics, those of the mobilized diaspora. If it was not

possible to make a deal with the government, then leave. Unfortunately, it was not that easy.

This spontaneous Mennonite emigration movement had serious political consequences, and not only for the Mennonites.[44] On October 10, 1929, the German embassy in Moscow sent its agricultural attaché, Professor Otto Auhagen, to the Moscow suburbs to investigate reports of the mass arrival of German peasants. Two German and three American journalists accompanied him. The next day Auhagen reported they had found around 4,500 Germans. Most were from Siberia – where following Stalin's visit violence was particularly severe – and about ninety percent were Mennonites. They told of horrible repression and reported they had sold or abandoned all their possessions and were resolved to emigrate to Canada. The foreign correspondents immediately published accounts of this visit that led to enormous media coverage and created a large political scandal in Germany. An organization, "Brothers in Need," was formed to raise money for the Soviet Germans, and President Hindenburg donated 200,000 Marks of his own money to it. The German embassy, initially inclined to downplay the issue, was forced to intercede aggressively on behalf of the Soviet Germans. Surprised by this unexpected development, the Soviet government behaved erratically. They first threatened to deport all the Germans, then to permit them all to leave, and finally, after five weeks of negotiations, they allowed 5,461 Germans to emigrate and returned another 9,730 to their original places of residence. The episode ended up embarrassing the Soviet government at the height of the collectivization drive and significantly souring Soviet-German relations.

This had an important impact on two Soviet policy realms crucial for the Mennonites: nationalities policy and foreign ties, in particular, cross-border ethnic ties. In theory, collectivization was not supposed to have an ethnic dimension – there were no decrees specially targeting any national groups – but in practice, it quickly developed one. The anarchy and violence of collectivization led to the expression of repressed ethnic hostility. As we have noted, local peasants and local Bolsheviks resented Mennonite privileges. Popular opinion, again shared by local Communists, viewed all Germans as kulaks. A Central Committee report noted that "certain high officials have the incorrect opinion that all German villages are exclusively kulak."[45] A Turkmen Communist put it more colorfully: all Germans were "kulak colonizers to the

marrow of their bones."[46] The numerous internal reports attempting to explain the emigration movement unanimously agreed that these sentiments had led to an exceptionally harsh treatment of Germans during collectivization.

The Mennonite emigration movement significantly undermined a major premise of the Soviet nationalities policy: that granting ethnic groups national territories, national schools, a national press, and other forms of national self-expression would reduce national unity and sharpen class differentiation. The emigration movement forced the Soviets to admit that they were confronted with "a united national front" and a distinct national form of resistance to collectivization. As one Mennonite put it, "we are not so stupid as to organize rebellions and uprisings. We have another way out, we will abandon our farms and leave for Canada."[47] This strategy completely undermined what had been a Soviet policy of using the nationalities policy to attract the support of ethnic groups in neighboring states, such as the Ukrainian and Belorussian minority populations in Poland. Instead of attracting foreign support, the Soviet Germans were fleeing abroad in huge numbers. And not just the Germans. There were also smaller emigration movements among the Poles, Finns, Latvians, Greeks, Estonians, Lithuanians, Czechs, Swedes, and Bulgarians.

Not only were Soviet citizens fleeing abroad, but foreign diplomats were overtly interfering in internal Soviet affairs. In March 1930 the German ambassador wrote Berlin that "I leave no occasion unused to impress upon the Soviet government that measures against the German colonists will have an unavoidable impact on German[-Soviet] relations."[48] Germany had made protection of Germans abroad a major concern and aggressively used the League of Nations to that end. Prior to 1929, Germany had exempted the Soviet Union, not a League of Nations member, from this policy. Now Germany informed the Foreign Ministry that "the protection of German minorities in other nations plays an extremely important political role in Germany and therefore must be paid attention to by the German government."[49] Internal Soviet documents complained bitterly about interference by the foreign bourgeoisie and foreign consuls. We can date an enormous escalation in the suspicion of Soviet authorities toward their diaspora nationalities to the Mennonite mass emigration movement of 1929.

Let us now briefly summarize the transformed Soviet view of the Mennonites. During NEP, the Mennonites' status as a religious sect earned

them preferential treatment or at least mitigated Soviet anti-religious campaigns; now Soviet repression of sectarians was, if anything, more extreme. During NEP, the Mennonites' agricultural skills were considered to be "of state significance" by the Soviet Agricultural Ministry; with collectivization, these skills were now worthless as a negotiating tool. During NEP, the Mennonites' cross-border ethnic ties had been a strong plus in negotiations with the Soviet leadership; now they had led to a major international scandal and were increasingly seen as *ipso facto* treasonous. Only two NEP-era factors still continued to work in the Mennonites' favor. One, Bolshevik class ideology still rejected the idea of a kulak community and rebuked local activists who behaved otherwise. All communities were made up of class-friendly and class-hostile elements. Second, despite increasing Soviet suspicions of their diaspora nationalities, the Soviet nationalities policy remained in effect.

In fact, surprisingly, the official response to the Mennonite emigration movement, both in published and in secret Communist Party resolutions, called for an intensification of the existing nationalities policy. This policy had not failed, it was declared, but rather had never been properly implemented and had been seriously distorted during collectivization. This explained the emergence of a united national front. This was not simply verbal cover for a real change in policy. Throughout 1930, enormous effort was put into increasing the number and quality of German national institutions. Of course, there was also an increase in repression. The GPU was ordered to remove "notoriously malicious elements" who had led the emigration, and German institutions were purged.[50] Nevertheless, neither Germans nor Mennonites were yet categorized as "enemy nations."

Two further events would be necessary to bring about this tragic development. The first was the great famine of 1932-33, during which approximately six to seven million peasants starved to death, about four to five million of them in Ukraine.[51] Mennonites were concentrated in all the four major famine zones – south Ukraine, the North Caucasus, the middle Volga, and northern Kazakhstan – and so suffered terribly during the famine, though it is impossible to determine how many Mennonites perished. (My great-grandfather received a letter from his sister in south Ukraine in 1933 begging for a needle to be sent, as hers had broken and without her sewing income she would perish; as far as I could find out, she did indeed die in the

famine.) For understanding how the Mennonites, as Germans, came to be categorized as an enemy nation, two aspects of the famine crisis need to be taken into consideration.

First, the Soviet leadership faced a grain requisitions crisis in the fall of 1932. They were undertaking desperate efforts to extract all the grain from the peasantry after a disastrous harvest, exacerbated by the violence of collectivization and unreasonably high grain exports in 1930-31, had left them without enough grain to feed the population. They were determined to feed the urban population and the Red Army. Facing the threat of catastrophic famine, the peasantry naturally resisted this policy, usually through theft and hiding grain rather than through open violence. This resistance was greatest in the Soviet Union's two largest grain-growing regions: Ukraine and the regions of the North Caucasus inhabited by the ethnically Ukrainian Kuban Cossacks. Stalin, therefore, interpreted this peasant resistance as the result of anti-Russian Ukrainian nationalism, and he decided that this nationalism had been fed by his own policy of supporting the Ukrainian language and the promotion of ethnic Ukrainians to positions of leadership. He also blamed cross-border ethnic influence from the highly nationalist Ukrainian community in Polish Galicia. On December 14, 1932, for the first time the Soviet Politburo passed a resolution that blamed its own nationalities policy – in this case the policy of Ukrainization – for creating nationalism. This opened the door to a fundamental revision of that policy and the emergence of the category of "enemy nations."

The second important aspect of the famine was again the German and, in particular, the Mennonite response to it. As with collectivization, Mennonites did not respond with violent resistance; an emigration movement was no longer possible, but it was still possible to mobilize cross-border ethnic ties. In this case, the major impulse came from Mennonites and Germans abroad, especially in Germany, but it was seized upon with alacrity by the Soviet Germans. The strategy was the mass sending of food packages and, in particular, foreign currency transfers from individuals in Germany (which sent ninety percent of the aid) and North America that could be used at the Torgsin hard currency stores established in the Soviet Union in 1932-33 to extract the remaining gold and valuables from the starving Soviet population. The major campaigner for this movement in Germany was the well-known Russian Mennonite leader Benjamin Unruh. The legal firm Fast (a Mennonite) and Brilliant in Berlin

helped organize the financial transfers. Various German organizations, including "Brothers in Need" (formed during the 1929 crisis), raised money.[52] The latter raised 500,000 Reichsmarks in the first half of 1933 alone. According to the data of the Ukrainian GPU, from April 1933 to April 1934 (when the transfers were officially stopped), Ukrainian Germans alone – who represented less than half the total Soviet German population – received a remarkable 487,825 gold rubles.[53] According to Colin Neufeldt this aid led to substantially lower mortality rates in Mennonite villages than in surrounding Slavic peasant villages. But, as we shall see, it also had serious long-term political costs.[54]

Why did the Soviet Union allow this mass transfer of resources? This question becomes even more difficult to answer when we realize that the violently anti-Communist Nazi movement, headed by Adolf Hitler, came to power in January 1933 and quite quickly formed a mortal threat to the Soviet Union's existence. This, along with the famine, was the second factor making possible the stigmatization of the Germans as an enemy nation. By mid-1933, all of the organizations raising money for the Soviet Germans were thoroughly Nazified. Benjamin Unruh's political patrons included prominent Nazis. The Nazi Party supported and publicized this movement. Members used the starvation of the Russian Germans to propagandize their anti-Bolshevik views. Why, then, did the Soviet Union permit this to go on? It was only a few months ago that I finally realized the rather simple answer: a Russian colleague of mine, Elena Osokina, gave me a paper that demonstrated that resources gained from the Torgsin stores had contributed a whopping one-fifth of the total foreign currency resources used to fund Soviet industrialization.[55] The Soviet Union wanted the money.

By April 1934, however, the cost of allowing the transfers had become higher than the value of the foreign currency received. Transfers were now stigmatized as "Hitler help," and a wave of terror was launched against individuals said to have organized the movement. In May 1934 the head of the Ukrainian GPU reported the following measures: "in order to paralyze fascist work in the German national regions, it is necessary to take decisive measures . . . among them, . . . conduct a determined purge of Party, soviet, educational and cooperative cadres in the German national regions . . . carry out the arrest of active organizers of the "Hitler help" and the fascist agents. We have thus far arrested 85 individuals, mostly pastors, sectarian preachers, Catholic clergy, active lay church members, kulaks and so forth. We've already

targeted another sixty for arrest."[56] This would only be the beginning of a four-year arrest campaign that would devastate the Soviet German community. The official launching of that purge campaign came with a November 4, 1934 telegram sent out by Stalin to the Party leadership in all of the Soviet Union's German regions. It read:[57]

> The Central Committee of the Communist Party has received information that in the regions, settled by Germans, in recent times, anti-Soviet elements have become more active and are openly carrying out counter-revolutionary work.
>
> Moreover, local Party organs and the organs of the NKVD [that is, the secret police] are reacting to these activities extremely weakly, in reality therefore aiding them, completely mistakenly thinking that our foreign policy requires such concessions to the Germans or other nationalities living in the USSR who are violating the principle of elementary loyalty to Soviet power.
>
> … The Central Committee considers such behavior on the part of the Party and local organs and the NKVD completely incorrect and suggests that they immediately take repressive measures against the most active counter-revolutionary and anti-Soviet elements, carry out arrests, deportations and for notorious leaders, sentence to execution … explain to the population [of these regions] that even the smallest attempt at anti-Soviet activity will not be tolerated … the local organs should demand from the population a complete end to all ties with foreign bourgeois fascist organizations, the receipt of money or packages.

This telegram, in my opinion, marks the definitive emergence of the categorization of the Soviet Germans, including the Mennonites, as an enemy nation, as identified essentially with the fascist enemy. The historically effective Mennonite political tactics, associated with their role as a mobilized diaspora, which had seemed to be succeeding in 1926 and which were pursued doggedly through 1934, had now failed. They had not only failed but had proven counter-productive. For the next nineteen years, until the death of Stalin in 1953, Mennonites would suffer terribly not as Mennonites but as Germans, as members of a stigmatized diaspora nationality. That is the sad subject of our concluding lecture.

Terror, Forced Labor, and Internal Exile, 1935-1955

Our previous lecture concluded with Stalin's November 1934 telegram that unleashed a wave of mass terror in the Soviet Union's German national regions. This event marks a decisive turn in our account of Soviet-Mennonite relations. After 1934 the Mennonites become much more a passive object in our narrative rather than an active subject. This final lecture has much less to say about Mennonite survival strategies but much more to say about Soviet repression of the Mennonites. Yet that is not quite correct, for from 1934 to 1953, the Mennonites did not suffer *as* Mennonites but rather overwhelmingly *as* Germans. This fact had a strong long-term impact on Mennonite identity, greatly strengthening their ethnic identity as Germans and weakening their sense of themselves as a separate Mennonite *people*.

From 1934 to 1953, the Soviet German community experienced two major forms of state violence: arrest and exile. Arrest affected a substantial minority of the population, particularly men, and it typically led to incarceration in a concentration camp or, particularly in 1937 and 1938, to execution. Internal exile, on the other hand, was the fate of almost every single Soviet German citizen (only a few German women, married to non-German men, were exempted). Exile in turn involved the experience of forced labor in the so-called Trudarmei – or labor army – during World War II, and agricultural servitude after the war.

Ethnic Cleansing

Soviet ethnic deportations or, as we now would call it, ethnic cleansing, began in the Soviet Union's western border regions in 1935.[58] The targets were diaspora nationalities – primarily Poles, Finns, and Germans – whom the Soviet government suspected of treasonous cross-border ethnic ties to a foreign nation-state. As we noted in lecture two, these diaspora nationalities were subject to considerable popular ethnic hostility, which led to harsh treatment during collectivization and the resulting emigration movements that in turn

raised further concerns about their loyalty. These concerns escalated in 1933-34, when a campaign was launched in Germany to help starving German "Brothers in Need" in the Soviet Union by sending tens of thousands of food packets and foreign currency remittances (called "Hitler help" by the Soviets). This campaign provided still more evidence that the diaspora nationalities could be used by foreign governments as weapons against the Soviet Union. To quote the Ukrainian secret police: "from the moment of Hitler's rise to power, there was a significant rise in activity in our German national soviets and among the German consuls in Ukraine . . . the Hitler government through its [pan-German] organizations organized in the fascist press a broad anti-Soviet campaign about famine in Ukraine, organized displays of photographs of starving [Ukrainians] and published provocative declarations of the German population in Ukraine asking for help."[59] As Hitler solidified power in Germany and destroyed the powerful German Communist Party with surprising ease, Soviet concerns escalated. The German-Polish non-aggression pact of January 1934 was seen as particularly ominous. These concerns eventually led to Stalin's November 1934 telegram and the anti-German terror campaign unleashed in its wake.

At the same time, in the fall of 1934, the Politburo formulated a new regime for its Western border regions. This regime created a "forbidden border zone," into which no one could enter without NKVD permission, that ran 7.5 kilometers deep along the whole western border but at times ran as deep as ninety kilometers. A variety of security measures accompanied this decree. One of them was ethnic cleansing. Between February 20 and March 10, 1935, a total of 8,300 families (about 42,000 individuals) were deported from the border regions of western Ukraine into the Soviet interior. Although Germans and Poles made up only a few percent of the local population, they represented 57.3 percent of the deportees (very few of these Germans would have been Mennonites). This limited initial action against "unreliable" elements was expanded in the course of 1935. In July an additional 300 Polish households were deported. This was now a completely ethnic deportation. In October the Ukrainian Party petitioned Moscow for permission to deport still another 1,500 Polish households. In response NKVD chairman Genrikh Iagoda wrote that the spring deportations had "significantly cleansed the border regions, especially Kiev oblast, from counter-revolutionary nationalist [Polish and German] and

anti-Soviet elements . . . [but] there remain significant cadres of counter-revolutionary Polish nationalist elements" that must be removed.[60]

In January 1936, before this third deportation had even been completed, the order was given for a massive new deportation of fifteen thousand German and Polish households, now to Kazakhstan in Central Asia. In Kazakhstan they were quickly reduced to the same status as the formerly deported kulaks of 1930 to 1933, which meant they were placed under NKVD supervision and subject to forced labor and other deprivations. These deportations, however, still remained partial. Not all Germans and Poles were labeled counter-revolutionary and deported. The deportations of 1935-36 included approximately half the German and Polish population of the Ukrainian border regions. No Poles or Germans from outside the border regions were deported, which meant that there had not yet been major deportations from the Khortitsa or Molochnaia Mennonite regions. At the same time, there were comparable deportations of Finns, Latvians and Estonians from the Leningrad border regions. In 1937 the entire Korean and a substantial part of the Chinese population of the Soviet Far East would be deported to Central Asia.

Enemy Nations

By 1937, then, the Soviet Union's diaspora nationalities had been stigmatized as collectively disloyal and subjected to a first wave of ethnic cleansing. As I have noted, the Mennonite German population largely escaped this initial phase of ethnic deportations. However, with the onset of what historians call the Great Terror of 1937-38 when Stalin, in anticipation of a future war with Hitler's Germany, unleashed a mass wave of terror against all potential "fifth columnist" elements, not only did ethnic cleansing spread outward to all the Soviet border regions but terror against diaspora nationalities spread inward to embrace the entire Soviet Union. This process had already begun with Stalin's November 1934 telegram, but it took on truly horrific dimensions in the summer of 1937 with the launching of the Great Terror's so-called "mass operations." In July 1937 the Politburo issued a decree calling for mass arrests and executions of "former kulaks, criminals and other anti-Soviet elements." Each region of the Soviet Union was given a quota for the number of anti-Soviet elements to be executed (category 1) and incarcerated in a concentration camp (category 2). The quotas were raised again and again throughout this unprecedented

mass terror campaign until, by the end of the Great Terror in November 1938, approximately 1.5 million individuals had been arrested; of these, a shocking 680,000 were executed.[61]

The "former people" (such as kulaks, criminals, White Army officers, non-Bolshevik political party members, and so forth) made up only half of the mass operations. The other half focussed exclusively on the Soviet Union's diaspora nationalities, including the Germans. On August 9, 1937, the Politburo confirmed NKVD decree 00485, "On the Liquidation of the Polish Sabotage-Espionage Group and the Polish Military Organization." This decree launched what the NKVD called their "Polish operation," which resulted in the mass arrest and execution of Soviet Poles.[62] This Polish decree served as the model for a series of NKVD decrees targeting all of the Soviet Union's diaspora nationalities. The NKVD referred to these decrees collectively as "the national operations" (to distinguish them from the other mass operation targeting "former kulaks, criminals, and other anti-Soviet elements"). A January 31, 1938 Politburo decree extended this "operation for the destruction of espionage and sabotage contingents made up of Poles, Latvians, Germans, Estonians, Finns, Greeks, Iranians, *Kharbintsy*, Chinese, and Rumanians, both foreign subjects and Soviet citizens, according to the existing decrees of the NKVD." This decree also authorized a new operation "to destroy the Bulgarian and Macedonian cadres." Koreans and Afghans were targeted by NKVD decrees as well. The NKVD spoke of their "German operation" and "Latvian operation." They arrested individuals "according to the Polish line" or "Finnish line" of the nationalities terror. Most revealingly, internal NKVD documents referred to their operations as directed against "nationalities of foreign governments," a designation for the diaspora nationalities – the vast majority of whom were Soviet citizens and whose ancestors, like the Mennonites, had resided for decades and sometimes centuries in the Soviet Union and Russian empire.

The national operations were not at all a minor part of the Great Terror. According to recently released statistics from the former KGB archive in Moscow, from July 1937 to November 1938, a total of 335,513 individuals were convicted in the national operations, of whom 247,157 or 73.7 percent were executed. Thus, diaspora nationalities made up 36.3 percent of all individuals executed during the Great Terror.[63] We do not yet have exact statistics for the number of Germans repressed, but a sophisticated study by the Moscow-based scholars and human rights activists, N. G. Okhotin and A.

B. Roginskii, estimates that 69-73,000 Germans were repressed during the Great Terror, of whom approximately 40-45,000 would have been executed.[64] In other words, Germans made up approximately four percent of total victims and seven percent of total executions during the Great Terror, although they represented just under one percent of the total Soviet population. The Great Terror was not random. It specifically targeted diaspora nationalities, among them the Soviet Germans.

The NKVD did not keep statistics by religion, so we do not know, and may never know, how many Mennonites were repressed in the Great Terror. Mennonites made up about eight percent of the Soviet German population, so if they were affected at the same rate as other Germans, there would have been about 5,500 Mennonites arrested and 3,500 executed. Working from information collected by the German SS during World War II, Peter Letkemann has estimated that 8,000 to 9,000 Mennonites may have been repressed.[65] Sectarians were also a target of the Great Terror, which would have affected the Mennonites to a greater degree than other Germans, as it would individuals with relatives living abroad. So, while the Mennonites were not specifically targeted in the Great Terror, they may well have suffered even more than the larger Soviet German population.

In order to put a human face on these terrible numbers, let me quote from two Mennonite eye-witnesses who related their experiences to German investigators in 1941. The first from the village of Burwalde in Khortitsa: "So began the year 1937. On September 5th five men were taken from our village by NKVD officials. Between spring and fall in 1938, the NKVD arrested another sixteen men. These arrests always happened at night and involved intensive house searches. Consequently in the space of several months the twenty-one wives who lost their husbands and the many children who lost their fathers were subjected to a wretched existence. . . . The fate of the twenty-one hard-working and capable men remains unknown to the present day. They have vanished without a trace. . . ."[66] As we now know, it is most likely these men were executed. A second report comes from the same village from a man who was arrested towards the end of the Great Terror and then, as sometimes happened after November 1938, released in February 1939:[67]

> After our arrest we were taken by trucks to the prison in
> Zaporozhye. There we were incarcerated for some two weeks. . .

> During this period we had the opportunity to discover what such an arrest really meant. Eighty men were imprisoned in a room suitable for twenty or thirty. In the morning and evening we could leave the room for some five or ten minutes. We slept on the floor. There was no contact with one's family. Men who had been there for some time told us of the gruesome, merciless treatment given them by the NKVD. Men returned form the NKVD interrogation with thick swollen feet and wounded bodies. They cried and moaned because they had been excessively tortured. We were all made aware of the accusation against us. By and large this involved the fact that we were in contact with Germany and, in the event of war between Germany and the Soviet government, we wanted to help the Germans. . . .

One could produce thousands of such accounts from Soviet citizens of all nationalities.

Mass ethnic cleansing and the national operations were unsurprisingly accompanied by decrees in December 1937 abolishing all national territories and national schools of the stigmatized diaspora nationalities. These national institutions were declared to have been "artificially created." Stalin's close comrade Georgii Malenkov stated that it was often not even the Party that had created them: "it has now been established that in numerous cases national districts were created by the initiative of enemies of the people in order to ease the development of counter-revolutionary espionage and wrecking."[68] In any case, from 1938 onward, German institutions and German language schools were not permitted anywhere except in the Volga German republic, where they would exist until the mass deportations of all Germans in August 1941.

War and Internal Exile

The period from the end of the mass operations of the Great Terror in November 1938 to the invasion of the Soviet Union by Nazi Germany in June 1941 represented a breathing space for the Soviet Germans after the carnage of the preceding decade. This was especially the case after the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact in August 1939 that officially made Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union allies, and that unofficially divided up eastern Europe into a Nazi

and Soviet sphere of influence. This agreement led to the invasion and occupation of Poland in September 1939. Nazi German ideology considered all ethnic Germans living beyond the borders of the Third Reich to be future citizens and therefore to be under the protection of the Reich. As we have seen, Stalin likewise viewed the Soviet Germans in this manner and for that reason the Soviet Germans had suffered six years of terror as putative "fascist spies." Now Stalin was deathly afraid of a Nazi invasion – for very good reasons – and was willing to do almost anything to forestall a German attack. As a result, arrests and exile of Soviet Germans almost entirely ceased in this period, although those already in exile were not allowed to return home; the many Soviet Germans in the GULag were not freed; and German national institutions were not restored. Nevertheless, if we look at the grim quarter-century from 1928 to 1953, undoubtedly the least grim years for the Germans were the period from September 1939 to June 1941.

As part of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, all ethnic Germans living in territory conquered by the Soviet Union after September 1939 – which included eastern Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and parts of Romania – were repatriated to Germany. Only a tiny fraction of these Germans were Mennonites. Their fate, however, would in many ways anticipate the fate of many Mennonites during the so-called Great Trek of 1943 to 1945, when those Soviet Germans who had remained under German occupation in Ukraine retreated with the German army and suffered enormous hardships and mortality, even though they were considered, as Germans, to be infinitely more valuable than the eastern Slavic populations. Likewise, the ethnic Germans repatriated in 1939 to 1941 were scheduled to replace the deported and exterminated Polish and Jewish populations of western Poland. However, due to Nazi bureaucratic inefficiency and callousness, they actually spent these years suffering in transit camps.[69] One further aspect of this population transfer is relevant for our concerns. Before allowing the Germans to leave, the Soviet security police systematically recruited a network of informers among them to serve as spies.[70] This is important for our topic, since many Germans ended up as displaced persons after World War II in the American and British zones of occupation and were subsequently returned to the Soviet Union. Of course, the Soviets assumed that the Americans and British had done the same, which would lead to the punishment of these Germans as American and British spies.

It is often asserted that Stalin saw in Hitler a kind of fellow dictatorial soul-mate, that he trusted Hitler implicitly from 1939 to 1941, and that he was completely surprised by Hitler's betrayal of him in June 1941. This is nonsense. Stalin used the two years prior to Hitler's invasion to engage in a massive and ultimately successful build-up of Soviet military and defense industry potential. He desperately sought to delay the war, and so allowed himself to be surprised by the timing of the war but not by the fact that Hitler would attack. Stalin was paranoid but not naïve. As part of these plans for war, given the Soviet obsession with categoric enemies and potential fifth columnists, it is not surprising that plans were in place for arrests and exile in the case of war. In the Moscow archive of the NKVD, I have seen some of these plans, and naturally Germans figure in them as one of the major arrest categories.[71] What I have not found, nor have any other researchers with better access to secret materials than I, is a plan for the deportation of all Soviet Germans in the event of war. It was long suspected that such a plan did exist, but this does not appear to have been the case. This fact explains why the majority of the south Ukrainian Mennonites were not deported before the German army reached their settlements.

On June 22, 1941 the German army crossed the Soviet borders and advanced with extraordinary speed on all fronts. The same day an order in Moscow called for "the internment of all German citizens." Three days later the NKVD called for a "strict regime controlling the movement of persons of German descent." Already in July 1941 selective deportations of Soviet Germans began. Finally, on August 3 the military council of the Army's southern Ukrainian front claimed that German settlers had shot at the retreating Soviet army, that German villages had greeted the German army with bread and salt (the traditional Russian welcoming gesture), and that therefore there should be an immediate deportation of these "unreliable elements." On August 12 the State Defense Committee, which replaced the Politburo for the duration of the war, ordered the deportation of the entire population of the Volga German republic. Subsequently – primarily in 1941 but continuing through to 1948 – 1.2 million of the 1.4 million Soviet Germans were deported to Siberia and Kazakhstan.[72] The rest of the population was already living in those regions, or they fell under German occupation and either escaped to the west or died during the war, or they were returned to the Soviet Union and deported. (This is why the deportations continued through 1948; all those repatriated from Germany after the war were then deported to Siberia.)

When the orders were given to deport the south Ukrainian Germans, the German army was already approaching the major Mennonite settlements of Khortitsa and Molochnaia. All Khortitsa villages received evacuation orders between August 8 and 16, but only 831 Mennonites were deported before the arrival of the German army on August 18. In Molochnaia, where the Soviets had more time to carry out the deportations, because the villages lay to the east of the Dnepr river, a little over half of the settlement was exiled. Still, the majority of the Ukrainian Mennonite community was not exiled.[73] The entire Russian Mennonite community, however, was either exiled or already living in Siberia, so approximately sixty to seventy percent of the Mennonite community ended up in internal exile in 1941. When the Germans retreated in 1943, they took with them about 35,000 Mennonites, about 12,000 of whom ended up in the west after the war.[74] The remainder either perished in those years or were repatriated to the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, I do not have precise statistics for how many Mennonites were returned to the Soviet Union from Germany after the war, but it would undoubtedly have been thousands. These Mennonites suffered most severely, for they were assumed to be spies or potential spies.

For those who were exiled by the Soviet authorities in 1941, the actual process of deportation typically went as follows.[75] A village, or an entire settlement, would be ordered to gather in twenty-four hours for what was usually called "evacuation." During this period, the secret police would arrest some two to three percent of the population, those deemed to be "anti-Soviet elements" and so considered likely to resist deportation or create trouble during the long train ride eastward. German Communists and Komsomol activists would actually participate in and help organize their own deportation. Each family was given a strict weight limit for the amount of personal belongings they could take with them. Livestock and machinery were left behind – unless there was a danger of German army occupation, in which case they would be evacuated elsewhere. The Germans would be promised similar livestock and machinery in the place of deportation, but this never materialized. On the day of the deportation, the villagers would gather in the central square and they would be taken to nearby trains and loaded, typically into cattle cars, for deportation. Anyone who resisted, which was rare indeed, or failed to appear, would be arrested. The actual train trip to the place of deportation took

agonizingly long, due to war-time demands on the railway system, and disease and malnutrition killed a little under one percent of the deportees.

When the trains did arrive at the places of settlement in Siberia and Kazakhstan, there would theoretically be housing waiting for the deportees, but this was also rarely the case. Instead, as my grandmother's cousin told me when we met in northern Kazakhstan in 1990, they were dumped onto the open steppe and had to dig themselves earth huts to survive the coming winter. Her family was fortunate that they were deported to an area with a pre-existing German Lutheran settlement which could provide them with some minimal emergency assistance. Others were less fortunate. I do not have precise mortality statistics for the German deportation, but in the subsequent deportations of the Chechens, Crimean Tatars, and other nationalities in 1943-44, the typical mortality rate in the first year was a loss of 15 to 25 percent of the entire population, overwhelmingly through disease and malnutrition. Typically it took four to five years before the birth rate once again exceeded the death rate in these settlements. For the Germans, due to extreme wartime privations and family separations, this did not occur until about 1948-49. However in the last six years of the deportation regime, from 1949 to 1955, the German population was experiencing real population growth.[76]

The worst wartime experience was not deportation or life in exile, as bad as those were, but forced labor in the so-called Trudarmei or what was formally called "mobilized labor columns." On January 10, 1942 a State Defense Committee decree called for the mobilization of all German men between the ages of 17 and 50 to undertake forced labor for defense needs. On October 7, 1942 this requirement was made much more onerous by including not only men aged 15 to 55, but also all women aged 16 to 45 so long as they did not have children under age 3. Children aged 3 to 14 were to be given to their grandparents or their nearest relatives, or to anyone in the community who would take them in.[77] As a result the German exile communities in the war years consisted of children, mothers with infants, and the old. This naturally increased mortality rates enormously in the exile communities.

The majority of mobilized Germans were put in concentration camp-like conditions, surrounded by barbed wire and guarded by NKVD troops, where they worked on either construction projects or on felling timber.[78] These construction sites were mostly under the official supervision of the

Soviet GULag, that is, the concentration camp system, which had great expertise in exploiting forced labor for construction purposes. Indeed, a Russian scholar has concluded that in 1942-43 the conditions in the construction sites were every bit as bad as in the actual GULag concentration camps, both in terms of the meager food rations and the work required of the Germans.[79] Since fatality rates in the GULag were higher in 1942 than in any other year in Soviet history, we can only imagine how many Germans perished in these camps. Conditions improved somewhat in the last two years of the war and immensely after the end of the war, when the barbed wire was removed, NKVD supervision much reduced, and food rations raised. Nevertheless, the Trudarmei veterans were mostly not allowed to return to their families in exile. Instead, in many cases they were required to continue with their forced labor through to 1948 when the Trudarmei was finally shut down, and the MVD (the new name for the NKVD) adopted a program of family reunification on the grounds that this would increase economic efficiency.

Life in Exile 1948-1955

From 1948 to 1955, then, the majority of Germans lived together as families, albeit often families missing many members, particularly males, for those in the GULag system proper were not freed to join their families. They lived mostly in agricultural villages (collective farms) in Siberia and Kazakhstan. Soviet authorities did not categorize the Germans by religion, so it is impossible to say much about the distinctive Mennonite experience by relying on Soviet documents. Mennonites, Lutherans, and Catholics were often settled together and, judging by the experience of my relatives, intermarriage was common, if not the norm. The Soviets did divide their German exile community into five categories: first, those deported in 1941-42 (this would include those who served in the Trudarmei and then returned to their family after the war; in 1953, there were 856,000 in this category); second, the local Germans already living in Siberia and Kazakhstan in 1941, such as the Mennonite communities of Orenburg and Slavgorod (111,000); third, the so-called mobilized Germans, that is, the small percentage of Trudarmei veterans who did not go to the exile settlements – usually because they had no family to return to – and instead continued to work in their Trudarmei jobs (49,000); fourth, the repatriated Germans, those Soviet Germans who had lived under Nazi occupation, and

were either captured by the Red Army or returned to the Soviet Union by Britain and the United States according to their treaty obligations (208,000); fifth, the so-called Volksdeutsche, namely those Soviet Germans who had, according to the judgement of Soviet authorities, acquired German citizenship from the Nazis (4,800).[80] Of these five categories, those considered most suspect in the eyes of Soviet authorities were the repatriated Germans and, even more so, the Volksdeutsche.

What was the exile regime like in 1948? In many ways, the best analogy is with the pre-1861 Russian institution of serfdom, in particular the so-called state peasants who had no personal master but were in essence owned by the state. There were in 1953, 2.8 million of these twentieth-century serfs, who were called by the Soviets "special settlers." Of these, the Germans made up almost half or 1.2 million. The majority of the other special settlers were also deported due to their nationality: Chechens, Ingush, Karachai, Balkars, Meshkhetian Turks, Crimean Tatars, and others, who were all accused of collaboration with the Nazis. There were also a large number of deportees from the newly acquired Baltic and west Ukrainian territories, where dekulakization and a violent civil war were then taking place. A few religious sectarian populations were also deported: Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-Day Adventists, and the True-Orthodox Christians. Finally, there were individuals deported for serving in the Nazi army and peasants deported for failing to work hard enough in the collective farms.[81]

The Special Settlers were similar to nineteenth-century serfs in that they lived as families in villages that looked pretty much like other Soviet villages – by 1953, many German villages were more prosperous than surrounding "free" Russian villages – they were not under guard and could, in their local village and even township, move about freely. In other words, their day-to-day life did not feel like or look like a prison camp. There was no barbed wire surrounding their settlements. However, they lacked the right to leave their villages and take up residence elsewhere. They were, like serfs, attached to the land. Like serfs, they also owed forced labor to the state. They could not choose or change their occupation. In the war, this meant forced industrial service wherever the state chose to send them. For many Germans, this situation continued after the war as well, but for the majority it now meant forced agricultural labor. Even as agriculturists, however, they could be uprooted

at a moment's notice, say, when the state needed fishermen and would send a whole Special Settler village to a fishing village to work there. It is important to remember, however, that forced labor was not uncommon in the Soviet Union. There was no yawning divide between free and forced labor as in some serf or slave societies. Most collective farmers, for instance, viewed their work in the collective farms as a form of forced labor and, as I just mentioned, tens of thousands of peasants were exiled for shirking their collective farm labor duties. Likewise, from 1940 to 1953, industrial workers were not free to leave their jobs for other work without receiving permission, and many workers were jailed for doing so. So the German Special Settlers occupied a position on a spectrum of more or less forced labor. And they did not even occupy the extreme position. That was reserved for the GULag concentration camp inmates.

Along with restrictions on mobility and forced labor, the Special Settlers were also in the uncomfortable position of being under the direct supervision of the political police. All settlements in a given county were under an MVD special commandant who was in essence a local dictator. All settlers had to report to him once every two weeks in the early years; later this was reduced to once a month. The MVD operated an extensive network of secret informers among the Soviet German population to monitor the mood of the Special Settlers and to identify individuals who made anti-Soviet comments. Such individuals were then often arrested. This meant that many Germans were coerced into serving as secret informers against their own neighbors and even their own families, under the threat of arrest and incarceration. This naturally had a terribly negative moral effect on the entire community, both on those who served as secret informers and those on whom they informed.[82]

The Soviet Germans were in a difficult moral position for they had been stigmatized as traitors, as allies of the fascist invaders. The published justification for their deportation in August 1941 stated that "according to reliable data, received from military authorities, among the Volga German population, there are tens of thousands of saboteurs and spies who are waiting for a signal from the German army to commit acts of sabotage."[83] This charge was repeated by local officials in all the areas where the Germans were re-settled.[84] As a result, both state officials and local residents treated the Germans as a particularly stigmatized and odious population. This stigma was, according

to the memoirs of many Germans, internalized to a considerable degree and felt as a source of shame throughout the Soviet period. Especially stigmatized were the 200,000 repatriated Germans, who were viewed as potential spies since they had been on enemy territory and, in some cases, had been in contact with American or British authorities. For instance, in 1951-52 between 17 and 30 Mennonites were arrested in Tajikistan in Central Asia. All were sentenced to twenty-five years hard labor and their putative leaders, Dietrich Klassen and Heinrich Wiens, were sentenced to death (though only Wiens was executed). Both Wiens and Klassen had retreated with the German army and then escaped to the American zone of occupation in Germany, where they had been visited by American Mennonites. They were later forcibly repatriated and subsequently accused of espionage.[85]

Finally, the Soviet Germans and other deported nationalities suffered the unique fate of having been exiled "eternally." Until 1948, all of the exiled Special Settler populations, including the 2.1 million kulaks deported in 1930-31, were exiled for a limited period of time; sometimes the period was stated clearly and sometimes it was left open-ended. On November 26, 1948, however, the so-called "national contingents" were declared to be "eternally" exiled. They could never hope to return to their home regions in the Volga or southern Ukraine. Even the so-called "Vlasovtsy," individuals who served in General Vlasov's Russian Liberation Army and fought alongside the Nazis against the Red Army and therefore had definitely committed treason, were only exiled for six years and were in 1951 freed from their Special Settler status. The Soviet Germans and other nationalities, however, had no such hope for eventual freedom and rehabilitation.

A final word needs to be said about religion. As I have noted several times, the Mennonites suffered in this period as Germans, not as Mennonites. In reading thousands of pages of published and unpublished archival material, I have not yet encountered the word "Mennonite" in a Soviet document of the period, though surely there must be a few such documents. (Of course, one sees the names Dyck, Epp, Friesen and assumes that these documents refer to Mennonites.) Organized religion was not possible in the special settlements. There were no churches and there were no legal gatherings, though we gain a glimpse occasionally of underground religious activity. Walter Sawatsky, for instance, tells the story of Elder Johann Penner, who had been ordained in

1941 and who, after the war, returned from the Trudarmei and began traveling to isolated Mennonite communities and secretly baptizing individuals. But such heroic efforts were the exception.[86] By and large, religion, to the extent it did survive, was confined to the home and sometimes even to the conscience of individuals.

There was, however, a crucial change in official state religious policy in this period. World War II had intensified the Soviet state's rehabilitation of Russian nationalism. Russian patriotism and traditional pre-revolutionary heroes were officially propagandized during the war to encourage a patriotic defense of the Russian Soviet fatherland against the Nazi German invaders. Along with this came a rehabilitation in 1943 of the Russian Orthodox church, which involved permission to elect a new Patriarch, the re-opening of several monasteries and seminaries, as well as permission to publish a church journal. A year later, a much bigger surprise came with the recognition of an All-Union Council of Evangelical Christian Baptists, which gave legal recognition to the indigenous Russian sectarian movement, in particular the Baptists and Evangelical Christians.[87] This marked the official end of any attempt to exterminate religion entirely in the Soviet Union. From now on, there would be occasional serious waves of persecution and much routine repression; there would be constant surveillance and interference in church affairs; but the actual existence of organized religion itself would no longer be placed in doubt. This change did not initially affect the enserfed German Special Settlers, but it would have an important long-term effect on the Mennonites, since the newly-formed Evangelical Council would provide a legal umbrella for Mennonites seeking recognition of their churches.

Conclusion

Our lecture can end on a comparatively happy note, with the death of the dictator Iosif Stalin in March 1953 and the subsequent surprisingly rapid dismantling of the great Soviet slave labor system.[88] At the time of Stalin's death, there were over five million individuals in the GULag and Special Settlements. Within three years, there would be only several hundred thousand, many of them convicted for ordinary criminal behavior. Already in 1953-54 large numbers of Special Settlers were released from their villages and allowed to return home. For the Soviet Germans, foreign ties once again emerged as

crucial to their fate. In the negotiations leading up to the visit of West German chancellor Konrad Adenauer to the Soviet Union in September 1955, Soviet authorities agreed to issue a decree in December 1955 that freed all Germans from the status of Special Settler, though it did not rehabilitate them and still forbade them from returning to their home regions. A subsequent 1964 decree did formally rehabilitate the Germans by declaring the 1941 charge of collective treason baseless. Finally, a 1972 decree removed the remaining restrictions on German mobility, though it still did not allow the re-establishment of the Volga German republic or any of the Mennonite German regions.

Let us conclude by returning to our specifically *Mennonite* story. From the emergence of the Dutch Mennonites in the sixteenth century, through their movement to Poland and then to Russia, all the way up to 1928 in the Soviet Union, a distinctive and united Mennonite community existed. Moreover, it existed and functioned not only as a religious community but, thanks to a lack of proselytizing and inter-marriage as an ethnic community as well. As a sometimes persecuted ethno-religious community, the Mennonites developed a political tradition of negotiating special deals with monarchs and aristocrats, which allowed the community to survive and prosper. I have called this the "mobilized diaspora" tradition. The quarter-century of Stalinist repression killed that Mennonite community. After 1955, there were still over a hundred thousand individuals of Mennonite descent in the Soviet Union, but there was no single Mennonite community, nor did one re-form under the comparatively less repressive post-Stalinist conditions. Individual "Mennonites" did form isolated communities – religious communities identifying themselves as Baptist, German-speaking Baptists, Mennonite-Baptist, Mennonite Brethren, or church Mennonite (though many others adopted a Baptist identity and abandoned the Mennonite label entirely). Perhaps the majority abandoned any organized religious identity and simply identified themselves as Soviet Germans.[89] This was the case with my relatives.

In any event, "Mennonite" ceased to be an ethnic label and became exclusively a religious label. When I traveled through the formerly Mennonite colonies in Orenburg in 1990 and spoke with many Penners and Dycks and Friesens, and would casually refer to them as Mennonites, they would, unless they happened to be regular church-goers, correct me politely and point out that Mennonite was a religion, that they were not believers, and that surely I

meant that they were Germans. When Gorbachev and Kohl opened the floodgates to mass emigration to Germany, then *former* and practicing Mennonites left as they had attempted to in the 1920s, yet no longer as a mobilized diaspora community but as individual Germans, some religious Mennonites and some not. If a Russian Mennonite community does re-form, it will now have to do so in Germany. If it does, then surely a crucial part of its identity will be the historical memory of the tragic Russian Mennonite encounter with the Soviet state under Stalin's rule.

Notes

[1] Alf Lüdtke, *Police and State in Prussia, 1815-1850* (Cambridge, 1989), 206.

[2] John B. Toews, "Early Communism and Russian Mennonite Peoplehood," in John Friesen ed., *Mennonites in Russia, 1788-1988. Essays in Honour of Gerhard Lohrenz* (Winnipeg, 1989), 265-88.

[3] John B. Toews, *Czars, Soviets and Mennonites* (Newton, KS, 1982), 95-106.

[4] Terry Martin, "The Mennonites and the Russian State Duma, 1905-1914," *The Donald Treadgold Papers* no. 4 (December 1995): 1-77.

[5] James Urry, *None But Saints: The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia, 1789-1889* (Winnipeg, 1989), 21-63.

[6] *Ibid.*, 174-218.

[7] Harvey Dyck, "Russian Mennonitism and the Challenge of Russian Nationalism," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 56 (1982): 307-41.

[8] Martin, "The Mennonites and the Russian State Duma."

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] Eric Lohr, "Enemy alien politics within the Russian Empire during World War I" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1999).

[11] David Rempel, "Zum 200 jährigen Jubilaüm der Mennoniten Einwanderung in Russland 1789-1889," *Der Bote* (1991), nos. 22-23.

[12] My grandmother, Margaret Horst geb. Lohrenz, grew up in the Terek settlement in what is today northern Dagestan.

[13] For classic accounts, see Diedrich Neufeld, *The Russian Dance of Death: Revolution and Civil War in Ukraine* (Winnipeg, 1977); and Gerhard Schroeder, *Miracles of Grace and Judgment* (Lodi, CA, 1974).

[14] On the *Selbstschutz* episode, see Toews, *Czars, Soviets and Mennonites*, 79-94.

[15] On the Bolshevik class paradigm, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Ascribing Class: The Construction of Social Identity in Soviet Russia," *Journal of Modern History* 65 (December 1993): 745-70.

[16] Richard Pipes, ed., *The Unknown Lenin: From the Secret Archive* (New Haven, 1996), 50.

[17] Heather Coleman, "The Most Dangerous Sect: Baptists in Tsarist and Soviet Russia, 1905-

1929" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois-Champaign/Urbana, 1998).

[18] Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca, NY, 2001).

[19] Meir Buchsweiler, *Volksdeutsche in der Ukraine am Vorabend und Beginn des Zweiten Weltkriegs – ein Fall doppelter Loyalität* (Gerlingen, 1984).

[20] Terry Martin, "The Origins of Soviet Ethnic Cleansing," *Journal of Modern History* 70 (1998): 813-61.

[21] For documentation, see lecture two.

[22] Toews, "Early Communism and Russian Mennonite Peoplehood," 270.

[23] RGASPI [former Central Party Archive] 17/113/611, 93-98.

[24] Good documents describing this policy can be found in B. V. Chyrko et al., eds., *Nimtsi v Ukraini 20-30ti rr. XX st. Zbirnyk dokumentiv derzhavnykh arkhiviv Ukrainy* (Kyiv, 1994). The policy is contextualized in Chapter eight of Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*.

[25] Lawrence Klippenstein, "Mennonite Pacifism and State Service in Russia: A Case Study in Church-State Relations, 1789-1936," (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Minnesota, 1984).

[26] The classic studies of this movement are Frank Epp, *Mennonite Exodus. The Rescue and Ressettlement of the Russian Mennonites since the Communist Revolution* (Altona, MB, 1962); and John B. Toews, *Lost Fatherland. The Story of the Mennonite Emigration from Soviet Russia, 1921-1927* (Scottdale, PA, 1967).

[27] Chryko, *Nimtsi v Ukraini*, 71-72.

[28] RGASPI 17/113/202, 33-37.

[29] The discussions took place on the following dates: 09.01.25, 20.11.25, 08.05.26, 04.06.26, 05.07.26, 15.10.26, 06.05.27, 30.03.28, 18.05.28. The materials may be found in RGASPI fond 17 opis' 112 dela 627, 713; and opis' 113, dela 200, 202, 211, 235, 288, 611, 624.

[30] RGASPI 17/113/611, 87.

[31] RGASPI 17/113/202, 37.

[32] RGASPI 17/113/202, 40-43.

[33] *Ibid*., 35-36.

[34] Dyck, "Russian Mennonitism." Terry Martin, "The German Question in Russia, 1848-1896," *Russian History* 18 (1991): 373-434.

[35] RGASPI 17/113/611, 93-98.

[36] *Ibid*., 96.

[37] GARF [Moscow State Archive] 374/27s/594, 79.

[38] TsDAHOU [Ukrainian Party Archive] 1/16/2, 117-133.

[39] Colin Neufeldt, "The fate of Mennonites in Ukraine and the Crimea during Soviet collectivization and the famine (1930-1933)" (Ph.D. diss., University of Alberta, 1999), 91. This is an important new work, based on both Mennonite and Soviet sources, that greatly advances our understanding of this important period of Mennonite history.

[40] N. A. Ivnitskii, *Repressivnaia politika sovetskoi vlasti v derevne (1928-1933 gg.)* (Moscow, 2000).

[41] There is no good single source for this question and I am generalizing from my own archival work and scattered remarks and documents I have encountered in others' works. I hope to address this question directly in the near future.

[42] The best study of this is Ivnitskii, *Repressivnaia politika*. In English, a good study that focuses on peasant resistance is Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin* (Oxford, 1996).

[43] See the charts in Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin*.

[44] This discussion summarizes a passage in Chapter eight of my book *The Affirmative Action Empire*.

[45] RTsKhIDNI 17/113/786, 44.

[46] GARF 1235/141/561, 59.

[47] RTsKhIDNI 17/113/822, 13ob.

[48] Captured German Materials Reel 1416, 307.

[49] CGM Reel 5213, K481216.

[50] GARF 3316/64/759, 2.

[51] I dicsuss this in Chapter seven of, *The Affirmative Action Empire*.

[52] Buchsweiler, *Volksdeutsche in der Ukraine*, 64-71.

[53] Chyrko, *Nimtsi v Ukraini*, 175-85.

[54] Neufeldt, "The Fate of Mennonites," 237-62.

[55] Unpublished paper. Elena Osokina is preparing a book on the role of Torgsin and the sale of art and other cultural treasures abroad to help fund industrialization in the 1930s.

[56] Chyrko, *Nimtsi v Ukraini*, 184-85.

[57] RGASPI 558/11/51, 71-72.

[58] The following summarizes Terry Martin, "The Origins of Soviet Ethnic Cleansing," *Journal of Modern History* 79 (1998): 813-61.

[59] Chyrko, *Nimtsi v Ukraini*, 179.

[60] GARF 5446/16a/265 (1935): 14-15.

[61] The best summary of this is Oleg Khlevnyuk, "The Objectives of the Great Terror" in Julian Cooper et al., ed., *Soviet History, 1917-1953. Essays in Honour of R. W. Davies* (New York, 1995), 158-76. The actual document authorizing the mass operations has been translated and published in Arch Getty, *The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks* (New Haven, 1999).

[62] I address these mass operations in Chapter eight of *The Affirmative Action Empire*. See also N. V. Petrov and A. B. Roginskii, "'Polskaia operatsiia' NKVD 1937-1938 gg." in *Repressii protiv poliakov i pol'skikh grazhdan* (Moscow, 1997): 22-43.

[63] Calculations from Petrov and Roginskii, "'Polskaia operatsiia.'"

[64] N. Okhotin and A. Roginskii, "Is istorii 'nemetskoi operatsii' NKVD 1937-1938 gg." in *Nakazannyi narod. Repressii protiv rossiiskikh nemtsev* (Moscow, 1999): 35-74.

[65] Peter Letkemann, "Mennonite Victims of 'The Great Terror,' 1936-1938," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 16 (1998): 33-58.

[66] Toews, *Czars, Soviets and Mennonites*, 164.

[67] *Ibid*., 164-65.

[68] RGASPI 17/114/829, 122.

[69] Gotz Aly, *'Final Solution': Nazi Population Policy and the Murder of the European Jews* (London, 1995).

[70] V. I. Pasat, *Trudnye stranitsy istorii Moldovy, 1940-1950-e gg.* (Moscow, 1994): 88-90.

[71] I am referring here to the archive of the NKVD-MVD in GARF fond 9401, not in the KGB

archive.

[72] Alfred Eisfeld and Victor Herdt, eds., *Deportation. Sondersiedlung. Arbeitsarmee. Deutsche in der Sowjetunion 1941 bis 1956* (Köln, 1996): 37-50.

[73] Toews, *Czars, Soviets and Mennonites*, 171-75.

[74] Marlene Epp, "Moving Forward, Looking Backward: The 'Great Trek' from the Soviet Union, 1943-45," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 16 (1998): 60-61.

[75] On the deportations, see Eisfeld and Herdt.

[76] V. N. Zemskov, "Spetsposelentsy (po dokumentatsii NKVD-MVD SSSR)" *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia* no. 11 (1990): 8-9.

[77] *Istoriia rossiiskikh nemtsev v dokumentakh (1763-1992 gg.)* (Moscow, 1993): 168-69, 172-73.

[78] The best documentary source on the Trudarmei experience is Eisfeld and Herdt, *Deportation, Sondersiedlung, Arbeitsarmee*.

[79] G. Malamud, "Mobilizovannye sovetskie nemtsy na Urale v 1942-48 gg." in *Nakazannyi narod*, 128-45.

[80] V. N. Zemskov, "Zakliuchennye, spetsposelentsy, ssyl'noposelentsy, ssyl'nye i vyslannye (statistiko-geograficheskii aspekt)," *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia* no. 5 (1991): 155.

[81] See Zemskov, "Spetsposelentsy" and "Zakliuchennye".

[82] On this, see L. Belkovets, "Spetsposelenie nemtsev v Zapadnoi sibiri (1941-55 gg.)" in *Nakazannyi narod,* 158-79.

[83] Eisfeld and Herdt, 36-37.

[84] For examples, see the important document collection, *Iz istorii nemtsev Kazakhstana (1921-1975 gg.). Sbornik dokumentov* (Almaty-Moscow, 1997).

[85] Sawatsky, 306-07.

[86] Ibid, 305-06.

[87] On this organization and its significance for the Soviet Mennonites, see Walter Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II* (Kitchener, ON, 1981).

[88] On this, see the two previously cited articles of Zemskov as well as V. N. Zemskov, "Gulag (istoriko-sotsiologicheskii aspekt)," *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia* 6 (1991): 10-27; and V. N. Zemskov, "Massovoe osvobozhdenie spetsposelentsev i ssyl'nykh," *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia* 1 (1991): 5-26.

[89] Again, see the article and book by Sawatsky cited above for this period.

My Life and My Theological Reflection:
Two Central Themes

Gordon D. Kaufman

I am not a religious man but I cannot help seeing every problem from a religious point of view. –Ludwig Wittgenstein[1]

In these remarks I take up two central themes with which I have been preoccupied throughout my life, and which are expressed in the development of my theological reflection from a very early age on: the problem of God – the questionableness of all our thinking and talking about God (probably going back to before my high school days); and my life-long concern that human relations should be pervaded, above all, by loving, caring, responsible attitudes and activities (going back at least to the seventh grade). The more visible of these two themes in my writing has been my attempt to get clear, and to make new proposals respecting, the problematics of God-talk today; but underlying and deeply shaping my thinking about God have been my moral commitments, my convictions about how we humans should live.[2]

I.

I have no memory of a specific moment when the question of the intelligibility and plausibility of the central symbol of our western religious traditions, *God,* became an issue for me. But perplexity about what has been taken by Christians and many others to be the fundamental reality with which we humans have to do – a reality strongly affirmed in my home and community – has been with me as far back as I can remember, sometimes becoming quite strong, sometimes receding, but always there. The "God is dead" theological movement of the 1960s sharply focused this question for me, and from that point on I felt

increasingly driven to address it directly. The so-called neo-orthodox theology which had been dominant in the United States among Protestants for several decades, and which I had more or less accepted in graduate school as the proper basis for my theological work, simply dodged the major issue of how God's reality was to be understood. It was necessary, therefore, to re-think from the ground up how theology was to be done.

I thus began what was to become a fairly long period of reflection on questions of theological method: What is going on in theological work? With what sorts of themes does it deal? What kinds of claims can theologians properly make? What alternative methods and procedures are available to theologians? This culminated in the development of a conception of theology that I call *imaginative construction;* and in consequence I have been led to re-think the whole Christian theological enterprise from this standpoint. A central feature of this reconception is my proposal that the traditional metaphors of creator, lord, and father – on the basis of which the western image/concept of God has been largely constructed – be replaced by the metaphor of *serendipitous creativity,* as we seek to construct a conception of God more appropriate to today's understandings of the world and of our existence in it.

I grew up in a Mennonite home and community; my second life-long concern, that human relations should always be *loving* ones – even with those whom we take to be "enemies" – was a central Mennonite conviction. Going the second mile, turning the other cheek (Matt. 5:39-41), was strongly emphasized by my parents, and particularly well exemplified by my mother's demeanor and activities both at home and beyond; she was a much-loved person by all who knew her. It was a conviction also strongly emphasized in the community in which we lived, the campus of Bethel College in North Newton, Kansas, a Mennonite institution of which my father was president for many years. During my teens, in the late 1930s and early '40s when America was preparing for and then became a participant in World War II, this community was a sanctuary for me and my pacifist convictions when patriotic fervor became strong in nearby Newton, particularly in Newton High School. From an early age, I had been convinced of the correctness of this Mennonite pacifist emphasis on how life should be lived. I remember well an episode in the seventh grade when I directly challenged my highly respected math teacher, Mr. Bilger, who refused to believe that Jesus ever instructed his disciples to

love their enemies. (Why this issue came up in math class, I have no idea.) I knew that in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus had commanded his disciples to do precisely that (Matt. 5:44), and I did not hesitate to embarrass Mr. Bilger, who taught a Sunday School class at the local Methodist church, on this important point. During that same period I was trying to inform myself about those whom our American society then regarded as its principal enemies by reading Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* (in English translation), and then reporting on what I was learning to my literature class – to the distress of the teacher, Miss Sinclair. I was not, of course, advocating Nazi beliefs about hating and destroying their enemies; that would have gone directly counter to my Mennonite convictions. I was simply trying to understand why anyone would advocate such a horrible view of life, hoping this would help me think more clearly about how we should respond to the Nazis.

This fundamental Mennonite criterion respecting how human life was to be lived, epitomized in such teachings of Jesus as "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31) and "Love your enemies," and by his dramatic, nonresistant death on the cross at the hands of his enemies, has remained with me.[3] It underlies my attempts in recent years to sketch a Christian ethic in connection with my notion of humans as biohistorical beings, and to address theologically such knotty issues as the enormous religious and cultural pluralism of human existence, an issue with which we must come to terms in a new way.

In 1943, when I was eighteen and about to be drafted, my concerns about the problematic character of our talk and thinking about God, and about how human life should be conducted, came together fairly strongly in my consciousness. It was the second of the two that was dominant in my decision to become a conscientious objector, not the first. I had no uncertainty about the wrongness of all killing or about the injunction to love our enemies as well as our neighbors, but I had a great deal of uncertainty about who or what God was, or whether I believed in God. This was a serious matter for me because – as Mennonites had stressed from the period of the Reformation on when they were denounced as "Anabaptists" (re-baptizers) – religious faith was a matter of thoughtful personal conviction and of mature decision and commitment about how one's life was to be led. It was not something to be taken for granted as part of the general socializing process through which we

all go from infancy to adulthood. Moreover, the Selective Service Act specified that only *religious* objectors – not those whose refusal to serve in the military was based on political or moral convictions alone – could be allowed to substitute Civilian Public Service for military service when drafted. However, since I was a Mennonite in good standing, and the Mennonite churches publicly took a pacifist position, I was given conscientious objector status with few questions asked. My worries about God never became an issue with the draft board.

These relative certainties/uncertainties – deep convictions about the fundamental moral issue of how life should be lived, considerable uncertainty about all our thinking and talk of God – have dominated my entire life. They have driven my attempts to work through the question of how important are Christian (or other) convictions about God. How important are they for human existence generally? How important should such convictions be in my own life? It is with these particular nuances that the central Mennonite theme – about the interconnection of a radical ethic of love with radical faith in God – has been at the center of my intellectual development, indeed, at the center of much of my life.

My father, an ordained Mennonite minister and former missionary to China, was president of Bethel College during my formative years. He had completed a Ph.D. at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago in 1928, and had in his personal library many books by Shailer Mathews, Shirley Jackson Case, Henry Nelson Wieman, Harry Emerson Fosdick, and other liberal religious thinkers. I read a good many of these works in my high school years and later. References to God, prayers to God, Bible reading, hymn singing, and the like, were all frequent in our home and in the Mennonite community roundabout. So God was a quite familiar, if somewhat puzzling, figure to me. In the summer of 1937 when I was twelve years old, I became excited in reading a recently published book on evolution, *Man the Unknown* by the French writer Alexis Carrel, a volume available on the coffee table in our home. The conflicts between Carrel's evolutionary account and the biblical stories found in Genesis were clear to me, and this modern scientific view seemed much more plausible than the Bible's story – an exciting and important discovery. My father encouraged free discussion of all such issues, both in our

home and at the college, where there were religious liberals on the faculty (who took evolution for granted) as well as more conservative biblicists.

Largely because of increasing hostility toward Mennonite pacifists during my junior year in high school, especially after the U.S. entered the war in December 1941, I decided to skip the senior year and to enter college, at Bethel, in the fall of 1942. (By the end of my junior year I had already completed 15 of the 16 credits required for high school graduation, so this was not difficult to arrange.) This made life somewhat easier, of course, with respect to my pacifist convictions, but it only deepened further my perplexities about God. Two of my teachers, both historians, were of the more religiously conservative wing of the faculty. One of them, Melvin Gingerich, taught a year-long introductory course in the history of western civilization; the other, Cornelius Krahn, a course in church history. In neither case did these teachers want students to get the impression that human affairs unfolded somehow on their own, quite apart from God's governing activity; God was, after all (as the Bible taught), the Lord of history, and the course of history must have unfolded along the lines that God had laid down for it, however much it might also be filled with human evil, sin, rebellion. So some of the books that we read, and all the lectures we heard, presented this religious view of the history of the world and the church; but other textbooks presented the basically secular picture of historical developments that has been favored by most modern academic historians. I found the secular picture, and the evidence and arguments on which it was based, totally convincing, while the religious interpretations and claims of my teachers seemed to be largely special pleading and not persuasive. Along with these courses in history, I was also taking work in the social sciences and the hard sciences, especially chemistry and physics. For both of the latter and also for mathematics I had strong aptitudes, and I found these studies fascinating and their modes of argument quite convincing. In all of this, so much the worse for God, and for a life based on faith in God!

I was drafted in October of 1943, four months after I had turned eighteen, and was sent to Civilian Public Service Camp #5 in Colorado Springs, one of the camps administered by the Mennonite Central Committee. The men at this camp were working in a variety of agricultural programs under supervision of the Soil Conservation Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. My year at C.P.S. 5 provided a new and interesting experience, as I interacted with Mennonite and other conscientious objectors, many of a

very religiously conservative stripe, but some quite liberal, including some radical utopians and anarchists. My many arguments with the conservative conscientious objectors only increased my skepticism about God. But my pacifist convictions were deepened by my encounter with radicals who advocated, for example, ceasing all cooperation with the U.S. conscription program by walking out of camp, even though this action would probably lead to a prison term. This raised a question I was to debate with myself during my stay in C.P.S., as well as in later years when conscription was reinstated in connection with the Korean War.

I was in C.P.S. for nearly three years. After a year in Colorado Springs, I was transferred to the Ypsilanti Michigan State Hospital for the mentally ill, where I worked on the wards for fifteen months; after that I was transferred to a camp in Gulfport, Mississippi, to help build privies (under the supervision of the U.S. Department of Public Health) for poor people who had no sanitary toilets. Throughout this period I read widely on theological, moral, and philosophical issues, attempting to further my interrupted college education. For example, during my year in Colorado Springs I read for the first time (with very little understanding) a book I would read many times over: Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. This and others of Kant's writings have deeply influenced my overall thinking on philosophical and theological issues; in particular, Kant has helped me to understand the bearing of the symbol "God" on the moral dimensions of human existence, and vice versa. I was also exploring this problematic in other less intellectual ways. I looked into studies of mysticism during these years and into writings by mystics. But, although mysticism has continued to interest me, it has always been from a distance, so to speak. I seem to be "tone deaf" with respect to so-called religious experience. When others speak of their "experience of God" or of "God's presence," or the profound experience of "the holy" or of "sacredness," I simply do not know what they are talking about. Perhaps this is one reason why the problem of God has been, throughout my life, so baffling and difficult. I have long since concluded that talk about *experience* of God involves what philosophers call a "category mistake" and should not, therefore, be engaged in. (My gradually developing understanding of the symbol "God" as a human imaginative construction [see sections IV and V below] explains how and why I came to this conclusion.)[4]

In the latter part of my freshman year at Bethel College I had begun dating a very vivacious and intelligent young woman, and this relationship developed into serious courtship during my years in C.P.S. We were married after the war ended, and for the next fifty-and-a-half years – which ended with Dorothy's death in January 1998 – our lives were bound together. We had four children, and they have all married and have given us the joy of being grandparents several times over. There is much that I could (and perhaps should) say about this side of my life, but space will not permit that.

II.

After World War II, with my return to college, my earlier interest in the hard sciences was giving way to deep concerns about the meaning of human life and its proper ordering. My academic work became increasingly concentrated in the social sciences and philosophy. At the time of my graduation from college in November 1947, my intention was to enter a doctoral program in philosophy; but before I did that I wanted, as I said to myself, to give the Christian faith "a last chance to say something to me" that I could take seriously. So I applied to Yale Divinity School for admission to the B.D. program (for what we now call an M.Div. degree), though I had no intention of going into the ministry.

The several months before beginning that program were spent working toward a master's degree in sociology at Northwestern University, studies that were to have a permanent impact on me. Three important developments should be mentioned. I became acquainted with the writings of George Herbert Mead and worked carefully through his posthumously published book, *Mind, Self, and Society*.[5] His claim that human selfhood and mentality were created in and developed to high levels through the evolution of language – and thus were thoroughly *social* in character – totally reversed the commonsense belief that language is the creation of mind with the contention that our human minds are themselves a product of increasingly complex linguisticality. This insight enabled Mead to give a convincing evolutionary account of the appearance of human mind on planet Earth, and also by implication an evolutionary account of human spirituality, including religion and morality. I found these ideas fascinating and persuasive. They expanded and deepened

my early interest in evolutionary theory, and furthered my developing naturalistic understanding of everything human.

Second, sometime during these months at Northwestern, I became acquainted with Ludwig Feuerbach's mid-nineteenth century book, *The Essence of Christianity,[6]* which argued that what had hitherto been thought of as *theo*logy was really disguised *anthropology* (human studies). Feuerbach showed that all the major doctrines of Christian faith, including especially the doctrine of God, could be understood as expressions of an unconscious projection of human characteristics and qualities onto a non-existent external cosmic reality. So, specifically theological claims should also be understood naturalistically.

Third, during one term at Northwestern I was permitted to join a special graduate seminar, conducted jointly by the chairpersons of the departments of sociology, psychology, and anthropology. We took up exciting interdisciplinary problems, and I presented a paper posing questions about the psychological, social, and cultural *relativism* that everyone in the seminar (including me) seemed to take for granted. My interest in this problem had perhaps begun with my experience as a conscientious objector, when I tried to understand why the Mennonite "cognitive minority" of which I was a member, and the much larger majority of American Christians, disagreed so completely about the rightness and wrongness of participation in the killing of war – each side being thoroughly convinced it knew what was truly right. These questions deepened at Ypsilanti State Hospital when I encountered delusional patients who obviously took themselves to be living in entirely different worlds from the one that I, and most others roundabout, took for granted. How could this drastic difference in our most basic judgments of reality, truth, and right be understood? Is everyone living in his or her own private delusional world, from which there is no possible escape? Are all human judgments relative to the psychological, social, and cultural contexts within which they are made? Wouldn't such a conclusion undermine the possibility of making any truly valid judgments about anything?

Those were the issues I presented to the seminar, finishing up with one last question: If we take the concept of psychological, social, and cultural relativism seriously, must we not conclude that this very concept, which all of us in the seminar took for granted, is itself in question? Imagine my surprise and disappointment, then, when no one agreed with me on the importance of this problem. In this seminar, I was told, we were dealing with psychological,

social, and cultural *facts* – not with confusing philosophical questions and theories. If I wished to pursue these obscure and probably insoluble issues, I would have to go to some other department of the university. I received my M.A. in sociology from Northwestern at the end of the summer, and by now it was clear that to deal with the questions in which I was most interested, I would have to go to "some other department." I was ready to take my concerns and problems to Divinity School.

The Yale Divinity School that I entered in 1948 at age twenty-three was dominated by a basically neo-orthodox theology with a strong social ethics component, and was thus equipped nicely to assist me in thinking through the two central themes in which I was particularly interested. Professor H. Richard Niebuhr was working out a way of reconciling a thoroughgoing conception of human historicity (including historical relativism) with Christian faith and its claims about divine revelation.[7] Moreover, in doing so he drew upon and amplified G.H. Mead's social theory of human selfhood and mind, and in some of his seminars and lectures took up figures like Feuerbach and showed how they too could be fitted into – indeed, could make a significant contribution to – his sociohistorical conception of human life and Christian faith. All of this was quite appealing to me.

Niebuhr argued that humans were to be understood as strongly shaped by the historical and communal context within which they emerged and were gradually formed into responsible selves. For most of their lives people inevitably live and work largely in terms of such communally-shaped values and meanings. This explained well my own experience and self-understanding. It fitted into Mennonite emphases on the importance of Mennonite community meanings and values, and it helped me understand why others, growing up within and informed by quite different communal values and meanings, disagreed so decisively with us Mennonites. Moreover, with this understanding it was possible to think of God not so much as an extremely problematic and uncertain mysterious something-or-other – the reality and significance of which had to be established before faith could be possible – but rather as a central meaning and value orienting Christian faith and life. "God" is the principal focusing symbol in the Christian way of understanding life and the world.

The question of God was thus to be addressed in terms of whether one wanted to live a Christian life, not in terms of some abstract notion of truth.

In this way my two life-long themes were beginning to come together and reinforce each other. Life is oriented with reference to God, if it is ordered in Christian terms. What is *morally required* in human living, not some supposedly autonomous epistemological norms, is the pertinent issue here. One's moral stance – including the set of meanings and values, symbols and rituals, in terms of which one's life is oriented and formed – is the basic ground for faith in God. (This was obviously a strongly Kantian move in Niebuhr, and also increasingly in me.) Although my convictions about the validity of a radical Mennonite Christian ethic were somewhat threatened by the essentially Calvinist social ethics of Niebuhr, Liston Pope, and others at Yale Divinity School, they were not destroyed. Rather, they became better nuanced through these reflections, and thus (especially in the context of conversations with some of the other pacifists, of whom there were very few in the student body) they were in fact deepened.

These developments led me to consider taking a doctorate in theology instead of philosophy. I discovered that if I entered Yale's doctoral program in philosophy, I would not be permitted to continue theological studies to the extent I wished; but if I enrolled in the Divinity School's program in philosophical theology, I could take as many philosophy courses as I liked. I decided to stay in the Divinity School. (I had already been taking numerous courses in philosophy during my B.D. studies, and I continued that when I entered the doctoral program in theology.) My growing convictions about the interconnections of theology and ethics also led me – when I left Yale in 1953 to take a position in the Department of Religion at Pomona College (Claremont, California) – to seek ordination as a Mennonite minister. Though I did not intend to become a church pastor, my Mennonite connections and stance were important to me, and I wanted to speak and write as an authorized interpreter of a Mennonite understanding of Christian faith and life. So, as Dorothy and our young son and I traveled through Kansas on our way to our new home in California, I was ordained in my home church on the Bethel campus.

At Pomona College my teaching was lodged substantially in two large introductory courses in Bible, one in Old Testament and the other in New Testament. I also taught courses in philosophy of religion and ethics. Any courses in theology proper, however, were ruled out by my departmental chairman as probably unacceptable to the rest of the faculty and certainly

impolitic to propose. At this time I became increasingly interested in the writings of Karl Barth, including his commentary on Paul's letter to the Romans,[8] which seemed to illuminate in a striking way my own faith situation. Barth presented a highly dialectical conception of faith: as our principal human connection with God, faith must be seen – following Paul, Augustine, Luther, and others – as God's gift. Humans can in no way bring themselves into a stance of faith by their own efforts, however sincere and persistent. Thus, the more we try to believe in God, and the more we believe that such efforts are warranted, the farther we are from true faith. And contrariwise, paradoxically, the more we recognize our unfaith, our doubts, our disobedience – and thus freely acknowledge our alienation from God, our sinfulness – the more we actually stand before God in faith. So, could my deep, troubling doubts and disbelief, with which I had been preoccupied for years, be seen as actual marks of faith in God? Very puzzling and very paradoxical, but that seemed to be the conclusion to be drawn from Barth's highly dialectical and rhetorically powerful analysis. This is what the Protestant doctrine of justification by grace through faith was all about. With the help of H.R. Niebuhr and Karl Barth – and also Paul Tillich, a figure taken up in my dissertation, who had developed a notion of "justification by *doubt*" – I was finding my way into a theological stance within which I could live productively and fruitfully.

    This dialectical approach helped develop further my thinking on the problem of relativism, since it left me completely free theologically to work out a thoroughly this-worldly, and thus naturalistic and historicist, understanding of the relativities of human life and the human pursuit of truth. My doctoral dissertation was on "The Problem of Relativism and the Possibility of Metaphysics." With the help of writings by Paul Tillich, R.G. Collingwood, and Wilhelm Dilthey, I worked through an extensive study of the literature on relativism and historicity, and developed a constructive position of my own on these matters. The dissertation proposed an understanding of human existence and knowledge as always actively responding to demands of the living existential *present,* a present inexorably shaped by a particular historical past but ineluctably moving forward in anticipation of a relatively open and unknown future. So we live and work and think, as best we can, in the present in which we find ourselves – never escaping the relativities of that present – as we seek to resolve the problems that confront us in our movement into the future. The dissertation was completed in the spring of 1955, and a revised version was

published in 1960 under the title of *Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith,*[9] my first book. In it are seeds of much of my later thinking about epistemological, anthropological, and theological issues.

III.

I left Pomona College in 1958 to join the faculty of Vanderbilt Divinity School as Associate Professor of Theology. There, for the first time, I had to put together a year-long set of lectures on systematic theology. So I worked out conceptions of creation, the fall, and sin; the doctrine of the trinity and christology; evil and eschatology; Christian ethics and the moral life; theological method; and so on. (I was beginning to discover the extent to which Christian theology must be understood as basically human *imaginative construction*!) In 1959 I was invited to give the Menno Simons Lectures at Bethel College, and I took that opportunity to sketch in five lectures the overall theological position I was developing. It was a theology grounded essentially on the moral necessities of human life, presenting the central Christian claims about God and Christ, humanity and the world, as a kind of picture of human existence and its context that served well and made intelligible our moral responsibilities and decision-making. These lectures, revised and somewhat enlarged, were the basis of a small book published in 1961 as *The Context of Decision.*[10]

The systematic theology that I was working out at Vanderbilt was thoroughly *historicist* in character. Following H.R. Niebuhr, I argued that we humans always live out of the symbol-system that we have inherited, and that Christians therefore need make no apologies for, nor attempt to justify, their attention to and concern about the central symbols that give form to their faith, their living, and their thinking (this latter assumption I would soon put sharply into question). The problematic dimensions of Christian God-talk were handled simply by saying (confessionally): this is the world-picture with which we Christians live and work; this is the way we organize our lives and thinking; we recognize that there are many other symbolic pictures by means of which humans orient their lives, and this is ours. My experience as a conscientious objector in World War II had taught me that even though we may regard our way of living and thinking as right and true, we must be willing to live with and in the midst of other quite different ways of ordering life, as we seek to love our neighbors (Christians and others) as ourselves – even though we believe

these others are completely wrong in many of their ideas and attitudes. Here my moral concerns about how we ought to live were beginning to outrank and to reshape my thinking about human truth-claims, so often regarded as absolute and not to be compromised.

It was a kind of Christian *pluralism* toward which I was working (though that word was not available to me at that time); and this later served as the model for my reflection on problems of religious and cultural pluralism generally, and for my development of the notion of pluralistic or dialogical truth as a way of moving beyond the impasse created by the diverse truth-claims emphasized in different religious traditions.[11] But none of this was clearly visible at that time. My *ethical* convictions (basically still Mennonite) were for me more important and more certain than any others, and this meant I already had a standpoint that implied we should deal tolerantly with the variety of human faith-stances, not only among Christians but in the wider world as well. Humanly more important, and thus more fundamental, than any truth questions – about which there would always be doubts and other problems, never certainty – is the moral question of how we are to live together in the world in which we find ourselves. In my theology lectures at Vanderbilt, in my Menno Simons lectures, and in some other writings for Mennonite publications, I worked out my earliest formulations of these issues.

When I finally published my *Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective*[12] in 1968, all these matters, and many others, had been pulled together into a systematic statement of what I took to be the major Christian contentions and concepts, inherited from nearly 2000 years of history, that were still plausible. To make such a contemporary, comprehensive, fresh reinterpretation of the received Christian symbol-system, in all its finely-wrought details, was what I at that time understood systematic theology to be about. Though I was taking up the essentially confessional neo-orthodox stance that I had acquired at Yale Divinity School, there were some harbingers of things to come. Here are some examples: in the Preface, the book was characterized as "a work of the theological imagination" (xv), not simply as a new interpretation of tradition, an idea I was later to develop into a full-blown revisionary conception of theological method; the entirety of Chapter 28, deliberately avoiding the tendency of many theologians to tip-toe around sensitive issues, was devoted to a thorough discussion of Jesus' alleged

resurrection, reaching the conclusion that it is not plausible today to hold that the historical Jesus had come back to life again after his crucifixion and this implied, moreover, that Christian hope should no longer be understood as involving life after death for us mortals;[13] in Chapter 19, a theological outline of "The History of the World," contemporary astrophysical, biological, and historical thinking was employed in a sketch of cosmic and human development from the origins of the universe (as then understood) to the present. All of this was laid out in the largely confessional terms that I had appropriated from H.R. Niebuhr and Karl Barth.

In the end, however, this approach to theology – though it reconciled in certain respects the two basic themes that had been driving my intellectual activities – proved unsatisfactory. Partly because of my growing sense of the artificiality of Barth's dialectical interpretation of faith, which had enabled me to put aside doubts and unbelief for a while; and partly due to the impact of the so-called Death of God discussions among theologians in the early '60s, in which I was participating, I began to move away from this neo-orthodox confessionalism. In my last years at Vanderbilt and my early years at Harvard (where I moved in 1963), I increasingly came to see that *God* was the principal theme – and also a major *problem* – with which Christian theology had to come to terms, and the largely confessional approach I had been following simply ignored its problematic dimensions.

IV.

I sought to formulate and address the issues I was beginning to discern in a number of essays, some of them initially published before my *Systematic Theology* came into print. During our family's sabbatical leave in 1969-70 at Oxford, it became obvious that I was now moving to a quite different standpoint. This new way of thinking began to show itself especially in a lecture entitled "God as Symbol," which I wrote in England and presented there several times, and an expanded version of which was published in 1972 as Chapter 5 of my next book, *God the Problem*.[14] In that book, in addition to the contention that we order our lives largely in terms of certain fundamental *symbols*, and that it is the business of theology to examine, analyze, and assess these symbols and symbol-systems, it was stated forthrightly that the only possible test of our central symbols is pragmatic:

There is no way to establish the "truth" of the notion of God by ordinary rational or philosophical argument: that is in principle impossible. The only relevant question of truth . . . here concerns that ordering of life and the world which faith imposes: is such an ordering of the world appropriate to the world as we experience it and to the nature of our human existence, or does it involve misapprehensions of our situation and result in a stunting of human life and its ultimate breakdown? Is some other fundamental paradigm or "root metaphor" more apposite or adequate for grasping the world so as to enhance and deepen human life, or does the theistic imagery and pattern most effectively perform this function?

Note that in this passage a major criterion for assessing theological truth-claims – a *pragmatic* criterion – is *the way the symbol "God" enables us to live in the world.*

As I was writing that lecture and essay, I realized I was now working within a quite different way of thinking about the theological enterprise: theology was to be understood as through and through *a human imaginative construction* of a world-picture which could orient human life.[15] A theological picture was distinguished from other similar imaginative constructions not by its grounding in divine revelation, as the neo-orthodox and much of the theological tradition as a whole had held, but rather in its utilization of the master-symbol *God* to bring all dimensions of its world-picture into focus. All claims about divine revelation were part of our God-talk, and were thus *derivative* from what was implied by the symbol "God." Since the notion of revelation itself thus presupposed, and indeed employed, the symbol "God," it could not properly be regarded as the principal ground justifying our human use of this idea. This meant that some new questions needed to be addressed by theologians, questions of this sort: How and why did this particular symbol ("God") come to be deployed by (some) humans in their world pictures? Out of what materials has the human imagination constructed this symbol? How is it held before the mind – in prayer and worship? in contemplation? in day-to-day life? in theological reflection? Does it perform certain unique functions for humans? Are there some distinctive dangers to human life and well-being to which the employment of this symbol may give rise, or which it may aggravate?

And so on. In the last days of our stay in Oxford, I hastily wrote a paper (largely for myself) entitled "Theology as Construction," in which I attempted to sketch the conception of theology now beginning to come into view. This paper was the first draft of the central chapter in my next small book, *An Essay on Theological Method*.[16]

Theology is there acknowledged as through and through *human* work, a constructive activity of the imagination, as Feuerbach had argued. If we are to engage in this work self-consciously and deliberately, along what lines should our constructive activity proceed? What objectives should we set? In terms of what norms should we judge our work? How can we do this work of imaginative construction most effectively? What is directly implied in this understanding is that theology is no longer to be thought of as basically a hermeneutical task, simply interpreting God's revelation in the Bible and tradition for a new day. So methodological issues now became a high priority on my theological agenda. The *Essay on Theological Method* (1975) was my first attempt to address these issues in print and, in its latest revised edition (1995), it remains my clearest and most compact statement on them (along with a short piece most recently revised and republished under the title "Theology: Critical, Constructive, and Contextualized").[17]

There is no space to summarize the argument of the *Essay* here, but I shall note briefly what is taken up in its three main chapters. Chapter one argues that *God* is the central theme which distinguishes theology from all other intellectual endeavors, and this theme is highly problematic. A brief sketch shows how the word "God" is used in English-language discourse, and lays out some of the peculiarities of this word and its usage. (The influence of Ludwig Wittgenstein and other "ordinary language" philosophers makes itself evident here.) The second chapter argues that all speaking and thinking of God, even of the most simple and unsophisticated sort – our prayers to God, our worship of God, our reflection on God – *presupposes* constructive imaginative activity and would be impossible without it. The task of formal theology thus now becomes one of developing norms for judging the effectiveness and validity with which this imaginative work has been carried out in the past, and of proposing criteria to help us assess our own attempts to carry through this work today. The third chapter brings the book to a conclusion by arguing that there are three indispensable constituents of all adequate

theological thinking: (1) "the explicit development of a conception of the overall context within which [our human] experience falls, a concept of the world"; (2) construction of a "concept of God, of that further reality which relativizes and limits the world and all that is in it," including us humans; (3) reformulation of the concept of world so that it "fits" intelligibly with "the God thought to be its ultimate ground and limit." The third constituent involves careful adjustment of "each of these [two] concepts to the other" so that "a theistic interpretation or understanding of the world . . . [is] developed"[18] along with a viable conception of God. It is claimed that if these several tasks are not all carried through carefully, theological work will be faulty and inadequately presented and argued.

The *Essay* is only a methodological sketch. It was first published just a year before Dorothy and our youngest child and I were to go to Bangalore, India, where I would teach in the United Theological College for two terms, testing out some of my ideas for the first time in a non-western setting. This was an important year for all of us, enabling us to get some distance on the western culture and forms of life which we heretofore had taken largely for granted. In my *Essay on Theological Method* I had been careful to note from time to time that what I was proposing was all expressed in terms of *western* theological and philosophical concepts, methods, languages, and traditions, and that I could not, therefore, make universalistic claims for it. It was very gratifying, however, to discover rather quickly that this way of thinking freed my Indian students to do their theologizing in terms directly pertinent to their own religious and cultural context, instead of confining themselves to repeating the rigid propositions of the Euro-American theology handed down to them and regarded as universally normative by missionaries and their disciples – a relativizing of theological truth-claims in light of what was *morally demanded* for ongoing human living in the Indian sociohistorical context. My experience in India brought me into direct contact with many different religions and cultures, and I began to see that all these fascinating forms of symbolization, ritual, and morality – these exceedingly diverse ways of thinking about the world and human existence in it, and of attempting to live fruitfully within the order and orientation provided by these various inherited symbol-systems – were also to be understood as products of human imaginative creativity adapting itself in diverse locations to a wide range of historical and geographical settings and circumstances.

My Indian experience encouraged me to attempt to construct a Christian theology open to and appreciative of the many different cultures and religions around the world, and while in India I began to sketch outlines and notes for developing such a theology. But it would take fifteen years and more to give it satisfactory form. In those intervening years Dorothy and I would make a number of visits to Japan, visits to South Africa, Israel, and China, another visit to India, and several to England. I also became regularly engaged in Buddhist-Christian dialogue both in Japan and the U.S., and more briefly in Jewish-Muslim-Christian dialogue in the Near East and in the U.S. I attempted to take into account these broadening and deepening experiences as I gradually worked away in class lectures and in essays[19] on what would finally be published in 1993 as *In Face of Mystery: A Constructive Theology*.[20] During this period I found myself gradually giving up the personalistic side of the traditional Christian conception of God – which until then had been at the center of my theological reflection – as I attempted to appropriate new cosmological and ecological thinking. An adequate contemporary constructive theology (it seemed to me) must take into account what we have learned about the evolutionary character of our world and ourselves in the modern astrophysical, geological, biological, ecological, social, and historical sciences. In the *Essay* of 1975 I had already suggested that an "existentialist" constructive theology (as I labeled it at that time), though it has some plausibility and seeming advantages over the "cosmological" approach I was pursuing, was not really adequate today.[21]

The first clear sign that I was getting seriously concerned about the basic anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism of traditional Christian thinking about God had appeared before the *Essay on Theological Method* was written: it is in a paper on "The Concept of Nature: A Problem for Theology," prepared for the American Theological Society meeting in the Spring of 1972.[22] In it I argued that there is a fundamental tension – a conceptual and logical incompatibility – between, on the one hand, the traditional personalistic understanding of God and of God's intimate relation to humanity, and, on the other hand, our growing awareness that human existence is essentially constituted by, and could not exist apart from, the complex ecological ordering of life that has evolved on planet Earth over many millennia. At that time, however, I could see no way of overcoming this incompatibility of naturalistic and theistic ways of thinking. It was only in consequence of my new

methodological approach, and further reflection on these questions over the next twenty years, that with *In Face of Mystery* I finally found my way through this impasse.

My explicit movement away from traditional Christian thinking of God as a personal being first appeared publicly (I think) in my presidential address on "Nuclear Eschatology and the Study of Religion"[23] to the American Academy of Religion in 1982. I argued there that the notion of God's providential care was getting in the way of our taking seriously our full human responsibility for the nuclear crisis in the midst of which we were living.

> Christian theologians and ordinary Christian believers alike . . . dare no longer simply assume that we know from authoritative tradition or past revelation the correct values and standards, i.e., the correct faith-orientation, in terms of which life is to be understood and decisions and actions are to be formulated. . . . [We] must be prepared to enter into the most radical kind of deconstruction and reconstruction of the traditions [we] have inherited, including especially the most central and precious symbols of these traditions, *God* and *Jesus Christ*.

In the little book, *Theology for a Nuclear Age*, based on my Ferguson Lectures at the University of Manchester and soon to follow this address, I suggested the kind of reconstruction of the image/concept of God that I had in mind: We should replace the anthropomorphic notion of God, as a kind of cosmic person/ agent, with the much vaguer idea of the "*hidden creativity* at work in the historico-cultural process [and in] . . . the complex of physical, biological and historico-cultural conditions which have made human existence possible, which continue to sustain it, and which draw it out to a fuller humanity and humaneness" (emphasis added).[24] These ideas were worked out in some detail in the constructive theology later published as *In Face of Mystery*.

V.

I cannot summarize that large book here,[25] but I will sketch three key concepts developed in it: first, the understanding of humans as "biohistorical" beings; second, my attempt to develop a viable conception of God by employing the metaphor of "serendipitous creativity" which manifests itself; third, in what I

call "directional movements" or "trajectories" that emerge spontaneously in the course of evolutionary and historical developments.

What is at stake in the notion of humans as *biohistorical* beings? Most of my readers probably take it for granted that human history and historicity emerged within, and are in a significant sense completely dependent upon, the evolutionary/ecological web of life on planet Earth. But we may not have thought much about the extent to which this emergence of our *historicity* has affected the character of human existence: it has even transformed significantly the biological base of human life. The gradually growing network of human sociocultural and especially *linguistic* practices (remember G.H. Mead's ideas) appears to have put demands on the emerging human brain that account at least in part, as brain scientist Terrence Deacon has argued, for its growth into an organ of such great size, complexity, adeptness, proficiency, and creativity.[26] This developing co-evolution of language and the brain has opened up enormously the possibilities of human life, and has facilitated decisive transformations in the character and quality of human existence in general.

Consider the effects of the growth over many generations of what we call knowledge. In the course of history human knowledge has become increasingly comprehensive, detailed, and technologized, providing us with considerable control over the physical and biological (as well as sociocultural and psychological) conditions of our existence. Indeed, we human beings and the further course of our history are no longer completely at the disposal of the natural order and natural powers that brought us into being in the way we were, say, ten millennia ago. Through our various symbolisms and knowledges, skills and technologies, we have gained some measure of *transcendence* over the nature of which we are part. And, in consequence (for good or ill) we have utterly transformed the face of the earth and are beginning to push on into outer space, and we are becoming capable of altering the actual genetic make-up of future generations. It has been *qua* our development into beings shaped in many respects by historico-cultural processes – that is, humanly created, not merely natural biological, processes – that we have gained these increasing measures of control over the natural order as well as over the onward movement of history. In significant respects, thus, our *historicity* – our being shaped decisively by an evolution and history that have given humans themselves power to shape future history (and even future evolution) in significant ways –

is the most distinctive mark of our humanness. We are, all the way down to the deepest layers of our characteristically *human* existence, not simply biological beings, animals; we are *biohistorical* beings.

Despite the great powers that our knowledges and technologies have given us, our transcendence of the natural orders within which we have emerged is far from adequate to insure our ongoing human existence. Indeed, the ecological crisis of our time has shown that precisely through the exercise of our growing power on planet Earth we have been destroying the very conditions that make life possible. Paradoxically, then, our understanding of ourselves and of the world in which we live, and our growing power over many of the circumstances on planet Earth that have seemed to us undesirable, may in the end lead to our self-destruction. In orienting our lives we need to take much fuller account of the environment in which we live than we have in the past. Thinking of the world around us as constituted by (a) cosmic serendipitous creativity, which manifests itself (b) through evolutionary and historical trajectories of various sorts, working themselves out in longer and shorter stretches of time, will facilitate this.

There are many cosmic trajectories moving in diverse directions and overlapping each other in very complex ways, and on planet Earth there have been many quite diverse evolutionary trajectories producing billions of species of life in complex interaction with each other. But we can consider here only that one trajectory which eventuated in the spread and development of *human* life over all the earth, the trajectory that issued in the creation of beings with historicity. Our human existence – its purposiveness, its greatly varied complexes of social/moral/cultural/religious values and meanings, its virtually unlimited imaginative powers and glorious creativity, its horrible failures and gross evils, its historicity – all this has come into being on this trajectory, this particular manifestation of the serendipitous creativity in the cosmos. We do not know in what direction this evolutionary-historical trajectory will move in the future – perhaps toward the opening of ever new possibilities for human beings, as we increasingly take responsibility for our lives and our future; perhaps going beyond humanity and historicity altogether, however difficult it is to imagine how that should be understood; perhaps coming to an end in the total destruction of human existence.

Keeping this outline of our present situation in mind, let us return to the question of God. The biblical stories present a picture of God as an ultimate *personal* power behind all things, the ultimate origin of things. In my view we cannot continue to think along these lines. What could we possibly be imagining when we attempt to think of God as an all-powerful personal reality, existing somehow before and independent of what we today call "the universe"? As far as we know, personal agential beings did not exist, and *could not have existed,* before billions of years of cosmic evolution of a very specific sort, and then further billions of years of biological evolution and growing historical development, also of very specific sorts, had transpired. How then can we today think of a person-like creator-God as existing before and apart from any such evolutionary developments? What possible content can such a more or less traditional idea of God have for those who think of the universe in our modern evolutionary-historical way, according to which no life or consciousness can be imagined apart from the development of these very specific and quite extraordinary conditions?[27]

In contrast with the traditional notion of a creator, however, the idea of *creativity* – the idea of the coming into being through time of the previously non-existent, the new, the novel – has considerable plausibility today. Indeed, it is bound up with the very belief that our cosmos is an *evolutionary* one in which new orders of reality come into being in the course of increasingly complex temporal developments. I suggest that we can and should, therefore, in our theological thinking, continue to utilize the idea of creativity (a descendant of the biblical idea of creation), but that we no longer think of this creativity as lodged in a *creator-agent* (a concept no longer intelligible). It was, I believe, my reading many years ago of H.N. Wieman's 1946 book (in my father's library) *The Source of Human Good*[28] that planted the seed of this proposal.

We should not think of creativity as a sort of *force* at work in the cosmos, bringing the new into being, a way of thinking that simply substitutes the notion of some kind of *im*personal power for the idea of God-the-creator. To make a move of that sort presupposes that we know more about the coming into being of the new and the novel than we do. Creativity is itself profoundly mysterious, as the ancient phrase *creatio ex nihilo* emphasized. We can see this most vividly, perhaps, when we consider the old unanswerable question, Why is there something, not nothing? Creativity *happens*: new and

novel realities come into being in the course of temporal developments. This is an utterly amazing mystery. As Nicolas Berdyaev put it (in a book I first read while at Yale Divinity School): "Creation is the greatest mystery of life, the mystery of the appearance of something new that had never existed before and is not deduced from, or generated by, anything."[29] If we think of God in terms of the metaphor of creativity, we are thus drawn into a deeper sensitivity to God-as-mystery than was true of our religious traditions with their talk of God as *the Creator;* for this latter concept suggested that we knew God was really a person-like, agent-like being, one who "decided" to do things, who set purposes and then brought about the realization of those purposes. It was this human-like model that was drawn upon by the biblical writers and their successors in their thinking about creativity. But with Darwin we have learned that significant creativity can be thought of in other ways as well. Indeed, according to the evolutionary theory *agential creativity,* of the sort exercised by humans, itself came into being ("was created") only as cosmic processes, in course of long stretches of time, brought into being certain very complex forms of life. For us today, therefore, the truly foundational sort of creativity appears to be that exemplified in the evolution of life rather than that portrayed in human purposive activity.

I am suggesting that the metaphor of creativity is appropriate for naming God because (1) it preserves and indeed emphasizes the ultimacy of the *mystery* that God is, even while (2) it connects God directly with the coming into being – in *time* – of the new and the novel. I highlight the importance of these points by calling attention to the "serendipitous" aspect of the creativity manifest in our world – its unexpectedness, its being utterly inexplicable, and its great significance and value from our human point of view. Apart from certain particular creative developments in the evolution of life, we humans would not exist at all. We can hardly fail, therefore, to regard the continuous coming into being of the new in our cosmos as "serendipitous," as a highly beneficial (for us) – though quite surprising and chancy – sequence of events.

The picture I am sketching here can help us discern our place within the evolutionary-ecological world that is our home. Let us note five points in this connection. First, this picture provides a way of thinking within which we can characterize quite accurately, and can unify into an overall vision, what seems actually to have happened in the course of cosmic evolution and human

history. Second, this approach gives a significant, but not dominant, place and meaning to the distinctive *biohistorical* character of human life and of the human niche within the cosmic process. Awareness of this enables us, third, to understand better the actual context of our lives and the import of the events through which we are living, thus facilitating our taking up more responsible roles in the world. (Note once again the extent to which this activity of imaginative construction is driven by the *moral* necessity of living rightly in the world.) Fourth, because this picture highlights the linkage of *cosmic creativity* with our humanness and the humane values so important to us, it can support hope (but not certainty) about the future of our human world, hope for truly creative movement toward ecologically and morally responsible human existence. Finally, fifth, a hope of this sort, grounded on the mystery of creativity in the world, can help motivate today's women and men to devote their lives to bringing about this more humane and ecologically rightly-ordered world to which we aspire.

VI.

Our modern/postmodern world-picture, taken together with the conception of God as serendipitous creativity, evokes a significantly different sort of faith and hope and piety than that associated with the Christian symbol-system as traditionally understood. The child-like trust and assurance and consolation, characteristic of the conviction that throughout our lives we are cared for lovingly by a heavenly father, is no longer available. In exchange, we humans become aware of ourselves as a unique species deeply embedded in the magnificent intricate web of life on planet Earth, with distinctive obligations and responsibilities to that web and the creativity manifest in it. Thinking of God in this way undercuts the arrogant stance of much traditional Christianity vis-à-vis the natural world as a whole, as well as with respect to other religious and secular traditions.

Moreover, understanding God – the ultimate mystery of things – in this way facilitates (more effectively than the traditional anthropomorphic creator/ lord/father imagery did) maintaining a *decisive qualitative distinction*, though not an ontological separation, between God and the created order. This distinction, perhaps the most important contribution of the monotheistic religions to human self-understanding, provides the basis for regarding God (creativity)

as the *sole* appropriate focus for human devotion and worship, that which alone can properly orient human life. All other realities, being finite, transitory, and corruptible – created goods which come into being and pass away – become, when worshipped and made the central focus of human orientation, dangerous idols that bring disaster into human affairs. This important distinction between God (the ultimate mystery of things) and the idols is strongly emphasized in the symbolic picture I am sketching here.

Similarly, conceiving humans as biohistorical beings who have emerged on one of the countless creative trajectories moving through the cosmos – instead of as the climax of all creation, distinguished from all other creatures as the very "image of God" (Gen. 1:26-28) – makes it clear that we are indissolubly a part of the created order, and not in any way to be confused with the serendipitous creativity manifest throughout the cosmos. In this picture, the too easy human-centeredness of traditional Christian thinking is thoroughly undercut. We can exist only (as far as we are aware) within the boundaries and conditions of life found on the particular trajectory within the created order in which we have appeared.

These contentions have very important implications for the way we think about ethics. The Christian ethic that we have inherited was focused almost entirely on our attitudes toward, and interactions with, other persons or personal beings. But if God is understood as the creativity manifest throughout the cosmos, and if humans are understood as deeply embedded in, and basically sustained by, the web of life on planet Earth, then our attitudes and activities are to be ordered in terms of what fits properly into this web of living creativity, all members of which are neighbors that we should love; and what is in response to, and further contributes to, the ongoing creative development of our trajectory (the activity of God) within this web. Thus, the two central themes of my life and my theological reflection – the problematic of faith in God and the deep conviction about the significance of radical Christian ethics – meld into a unified naturalistic/historicistic conception of human existence in a world pervaded by serendipitous creativity.

There will be those who say that in this theology God has really disappeared in the mists of mystery, and that true faith in God is thus also gone. To that I reply, true faith in God is not living with a conviction that everything is going to be okay in the end because we know that our heavenly

father is taking care of us. It is, rather, acknowledging and accepting the ultimate mystery of things, and precisely in face of that mystery going out like Abraham (as Hebrews 11:8 puts it), not really knowing where we are going, but nevertheless moving forward creatively and with confidence: confidence in the serendipitous creativity that has brought our trajectory and us into being, has continued to sustain the human project within the web of life that surrounds and nurtures us, and has given us a measure of hope for that project here on planet Earth. Though strikingly different from certain traditional Christian emphases, this understanding of God and of the human is clearly a form of *radical monotheism* (to use H.R. Niebuhr's term).[30]

Moreover, this conception can be developed into a full-orbed Christian interpretation of human faith and life, if the creativity that is God is brought into significant connection with the poignancy and power of the story and character of Jesus and the radical ethic which he lived and inspired in others. Since we now see that we are to love and give ourselves and our lives not only to our *human* neighbors and enemies, but also to the wider orders of life, this perspective deepens and widens the radicality of the Christian ethic.

I have recently come to reflect again on Nietzsche's cry that "God is dead," and to reassess it from the standpoint of my proposal that we think of God as creativity – keeping in mind that Nietzsche (as much as I) strongly emphasizes creativity. And I now can see, more clearly than earlier in my life, that for me, as for Nietzsche, the traditional anthropomorphic God has long since died; it was precisely the authority and authoritarianism of that God with which I was struggling for much of my life, and which for a long time I found difficult to repudiate. But with my realization that theology is, and always has been, essentially an activity of human imaginative construction, I came to see this development as the death of a particular human symbolic formation – a symbolism doubtless very important in western religions and thus in western history (and in my own life), but no longer pertinent to or nourishing of our human condition today. Theologians should not, however, give up their vocation to think through the problematics of our God-talk and our faith in God. That would be to throw out the baby with the bath. They are called, rather, to seek to re-imagine, reconceive, reconstruct the symbol "God" with metaphors drawn from the ways in which we now understand ourselves and our world.

For traditional Mennonite understandings of Christian faith, what was most important was not the creeds that we confess but how we live our lives in the midst of our neighbors and our enemies: we should be concerned about all our fellow humans, and seek to live among them in love and in service to their needs. In continuing to hold this conviction (now in an ecologically expanded form) I remain very distant from Nietzsche, who focused his life and hopes on the glorious creativity of the *Übermensch,* showing little concern for all those "little men" whom he scorned. In my view it is only as we give our lives in service (as Matt. 25:40 puts it) to "the least of these" little men and women on Earth, and to the processes that sustain all of Earth's creatures, that we gain true human dignity and fulfillment. Not because an authoritarian divine king has so ordered things, but because (and this is one of the mysterious serendipities of history) the supposed divine authority of that king and of a man thought to be his "only begotten son" led to the formation of historical traditions that emphasized the radical ethic of agape-love, of forgiveness and reconciliation, as the right way to live humanly and humanely – even, perhaps especially as we today can see, in an ecologically-ordered cosmos pervaded by glorious creativity.[31]

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Notes

[1] Quoted in Norman Malcolm, *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 1. What I mean by this remark is probably quite different from what Wittgenstein meant by it. I hope my meaning will come clear in the course of this paper.

[2] For a general statement about the background of my theological work, see "Some Reflections on a Theological Pilgrimage," *Religious Studies Review* 20, No. 3 (1994): 177-181; for those who want to know more about how my Mennonite background has influenced my thinking, see "Apologia Pro Vita Sua," in *Why I am a Mennonite: Essays on Mennonite Identity,* ed. Harry Loewen (Scottdale PA: Herald Press, 1988), 126-38, and another called "The Mennonite Roots of My Theological Perspective," in *Mennonite Theology in Face of Modernity: Essays in Honor of Gordon D. Kaufman*, ed. Alain Epp Weaver (North Newton, KS: Bethel College,

1996), 1-19. Short pieces on specific themes in my work include "The Influence of Feminist Theory on my Theological Work," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 7, 1 (1991): 112-15.

[3] In two early articles (among others), I explored some aspects of this central Mennonite conviction: "Some Theological Emphases of the Early Swiss Anabaptists," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 25. 2 (1951): 75-99; and "Nonresistance and Responsibility," in *Concern: A Pamphlet Series for Questions of Christian Renewal*, no. 6 (1958): 5-29 (reprinted, with changes, in my book *Nonresistance and Responsibility, and Other Mennonite Essays* [Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1979], 63-81); see also *The Context of Decision* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1961). Some more recent articles bearing on this theme: "Jesus as Absolute Norm? Some Questions," in *The Limits of Perfection: A Conversation with J. Lawrence Burkholder*, ed. R.J. Sawatsky and Scott Holland (Waterloo, ON: Institute of Anabaptist-Mennonite Studies, 1993), 118-21; "Mennonite Peace Theology in a Religiously Plural World," *Conrad Grebel Review* 14. 1 (1996), 33-47; and "The Mennonite Roots of My Theological Perspective," *op.cit.*

[4] A more explicit and detailed analysis of this matter can be found in Gordon D. Kaufman, *An Essay on Theological Method* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), chs. 2-3.

[5] G.H. Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934).

[6] Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity,* trans. George Eliot (New York: Harper & Bros., 1957).

[7] I found H. Richard Niebuhr's, *The Meaning of Revelation* (New York: Macmillan, 1941) particularly helpful.

[8] Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans,* trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1933).

[9] Gordon D. Kaufman, *Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

[10] Gordon D. Kaufman, *The Context of Decision* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1961).

[11] A brief sketch of this way of thinking about religious truth-claims is found in my last book, *God – Mystery – Diversity: Christian Theology in a Pluralistic World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996) chs. 12-13. The earliest steps in this direction are found in my 1958 essay on "Nonresistance and Responsibility," *op.cit.*

[12] Gordon D. Kaufman, *Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective* (New York: Scribners, 1968).

[13] *Ibid.*, 464-71.

[14] Gordon D. Kaufman, *God the Problem* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972). Also translated into French. The citation here is from page 99.

[15] The phrase "imaginative construction" was probably derived from my dissertation work on R.G. Collingwood, who used it to characterize the historian's act of putting together historical materials into a coherent account; see especially *The Idea of History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), 241-49. I used the term frequently in my Ph.D. dissertation and in my first book based on it, *Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith*; see, e.g., 44f., 93, 102.

[16] Gordon D. Kaufman, *An Essay on Theological Method* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1975, 1979, 1995; now published by Oxford University Press). Also translated into Japanese and Korean. All page references are to the third edition. This book and its title were inspired in part by R.G. Collingwood's *An Essay on Philosophical Method* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933).

[17] Ch. 2 of *God – Mystery – Diversity.*

[18] Kaufman, *Essay,* 56, 59, and 71, respectively.

[19] Many of these latter have been collected and published in books: *Nonresistance and Responsibility, and Other Mennonite Essays* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1979); *The Theological Imagination: Constructing the Concept of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981); and *Theology for a Nuclear Age* (Manchester, England: University of Manchester Press, and Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985). This last book has been translated into German, Italian, Japanese, and Korean.

[20] Gordon D. Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery*: *A Constructive Theology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

[21] See ch. 3, endnotes 8 and 18.

[22] First published in the *Harvard Theological Review* 65 (1972): 337-62. Later reprinted (with some alterations) under the title, "Theology and the Concept of Nature" in *The Theological Imagination,* ch. 8.

[23] First published in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 51 (March 1983): 3-14; and later, with some revisions, becoming the first chapter of *Theology for a Nuclear Age* (1985). The citation here is from this revised version, 13.

[24] *Ibid.,* 41-42. Just a couple of years later I presented a paper entitled "God and Emptiness" to the Buddhist-Christian dialogue group of which I am a member. In this "experimental" piece I explored respects in which our understanding of God would be revolutionized if we dropped our (almost universal) presupposition – taken over from Greek metaphysical reflection – that God must be thought of in terms of the concept of *being* (either as "a being" or as "being itself"), substituting instead the Buddhist notion of *emptiness* (*sunyata*) as our most fundamental metaphysical concept. Such a change would lead to radical reconception of what we mean by God, a reconception that would thoroughly undermine western thinking of God so largely in reified notions of *power* (omnipotence), and would open theologians to much more radically Christomorphic ideas of God's "weakness" and "nonresistance" – a Mennonite-grounded proposal that I had earlier made in my *Systematic Theology* (see 219ff., 493ff.). These sorts of reflection, I think, helped prepare me to give up the substantival thinking of most traditional conceptions of God as I worked out the notion of God as "serendipitous creativity". This paper was first published in *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 9 (1989): 175-87 under the title, "God and Emptiness: An Experimental Essay," with a slightly different version in *The Religious Philosophy of Nishitani Keiji,* ed. Taitetsu Unno (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1989), 82-97. It has been republished (with some additions) in *God – Mystery – Diversity,* 141-56.

[25] A briefer presentation of the position worked out in *In Face of Mystery,* together with specific discussion of the bearing of that position on the problems posed for theology by human religious and cultural diversity, was published three years later in *God – Mystery – Diversity.*

[26] See Terrence Deacon, *The Symbolic Species: The Co-evolution of Language and the Brain* (New York: Norton, 1997).

[27] For further elaboration of this problem and of the paragraphs immediately following, see my article, "On Thinking of God as Serendipitous Creativity" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 69 2(June 2001): 409-25.

[28] H.N. Wieman, *The Source of Human Good* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946).

[29] Nicolas Berdyaev, *The Destiny of Man* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1937), 163.

[30] See H. Richard Niebuhr, *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1960).

[31] In these reflections I suggest that, after giving it a trial for some years, I gave up as inadequate for today's world the more or less traditional *confessional* stance in theology that I acquired at Yale Divinity School. That claim should, perhaps, be further nuanced. Two points should be mentioned. First, although the understanding of God that I ultimately construct – featuring the metaphor of serendipitous creativity – does seem more appropriate to modern evolutionary/ ecological thinking than traditional anthropomorphic conceptions, it can hardly be regarded as rationally *coercive*. It will become effective in human life, therefore, only if and as it is affirmed and implemented through "acts of faith," including faith in modern cosmological, biological, and social scientific ways of understanding the world and our human place within it. Thus, a kind of confessional move is still involved, though it is one that claims a significantly greater degree of "appropriateness" to today's world than the confessionalism I acquired at Yale. Second, with respect to the other theme of this paper – my (Mennonite) emphasis on a radical Christian ethic of love – I may seem to remain on more arbitrary confessional ground. Many others (including most Christians) do not find this kind of stance convincing. Is my ecological/ethical position, built on a transformed Christian pacifism, just as arbitrary as the confessionalism of the traditional God-talk that I have found so deeply unsatisfactory? Or is there justification for holding (as I do with reference to my reconstructed God-talk) that – considering the state of the world today – a radical ethic of self-giving love has a certain "appropriateness" that should be taken seriously? Two observations are worth considering in this connection: (1) Given that we humans are rapidly destroying the natural environment that sustains us (along with much other life), it is imperative that as many of us men and women as possible – especially those living in the high-consumption industrial world – *sacrifice* our own desires for comfort and ease (a "high standard of living") in the hope of reversing continuing damage to the ecological order. (2) Given the sorry state of human affairs in the world, it is imperative that as many of us as possible act in self-sacrificial ways to promote reconciliation, peace, and justice (instead of continuing power struggles and warfare). In short, an ethic grounded in Christian self-giving love, though indeed involving a confessional stance that many may not want to adopt, has significant pragmatic justification. In my view, in the position to which I have finally come, the two basic themes (God-talk and Jesus' radical ethic of love) are not treated in substantially different ways. My overall stance is not an *arbitrary* confessional one, but one that can be regarded as *fitting* in this time and place in human history on planet Earth.

The Faith to Doubt: A Theological Autobiography

C. Norman Kraus

Sometime during my forties I remember asking Brother S. C. Yoder, the kindly bishop and former president of Goshen College, whether temptations to doubt and discouragement grew less intense when one reached seventy. He always seemed so calm and self-controlled, and his book on the Psalms exuded devotional confidence. His quiet and unelaborated answer was "no." Now I'm well above seventy, and I can only agree with him. Indeed, I have come to the conclusion that a religious profession, such as that of the scholar, teacher, or pastor, is one of the most vulnerable to temptation. The prayer of the professional scholar of religion must always be "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief."

We all have our own doubts and temptations. Each of us must find our own way through what Michael King has called "trackless wastes" in his book *Trackless Wastes and Stars to Steer By* (Herald Press, 1990) at one time or other in life. I remember walking under the brilliant stars of a rural Ohio sky many years ago asking why a senseless accident should have taken the life of my best friend. I remember the career-changing disappointment in the late 1950s that made me wonder about God's wisdom and my Christian brothers' trustworthiness. (I must confess immediately, however, that I have decided that God was right after all.) But these are not the kind of personal doubts and struggles I want to write about. Rather, I want to reflect on my theological journey – my search for doctrinal and ethical beliefs which I could live by.

It was Martin Luther who observed that God is not only most clearly revealed in Christ, but also most profoundly hidden in the scandal of his

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humiliation, suffering, and death. From the earliest centuries Christians have been ridiculed for the weakness, irrelevance, and irrationality of their claim that the crucified Jesus is the power of God! Understanding the nature and implications of this paradox involved in God's personal disclosure has been the persistent challenge of my theological journey. I think that I would have simply succumbed to unbelief if it had not been for the wise insight of the Lutheran theologian, Paul Tillich, who pointed out that doubt is not the opposite of faith. Rather, he observed, it is a profound and necessary part of believing.

The Theological Significance of Doubt

There are many things one must doubt in order to hold on to faith in the God who is the profound and Transcendent Mystery of the universe. Indeed, most of the gods, and many of the religious values in vogue today in the name of evangelical Christianity must be doubted in order to follow the nonviolent Jesus whom we confess to be the Christ. They are rightly designated, as Freud correctly observed, the product of our wish projections, and, in the most precise meaning of the word, they are idols. This, of course, is not to say that the Transcendent Mystery whom Jesus called Abba is a wish projection! The central theological task is to distinguish between and rightly name these two different entities. It is theologically significant to realize that the first century Christians were called atheists by their highly religious neighbors because they rejected the gods of the Pantheon!

I have "doubted" just about every belief in the confessional statement of the church. I did not set out deliberately to do that, but in working my way through the teachings of the Christian church, and more particularly the Mennonite church of which I am a part, I found it impossible not to question the partial and often conflicting doctrinal statements. The one thing I found that I could not doubt, however, was the personal impact on me of the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. I have never doubted Jesus in the sense of forsaking him as "the Way" although I have explored other ways. With the first disciples ("Lord to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life." John 6:68), I simply could not find a satisfactory alternative.

By "doubt" I do not mean a merely systematic academic "bracketing of beliefs" for the sake of organizing class notes. One of the first serious doubts I had was about prayer. I heard other Christian believers talk about prayer as

though it was a kind of pressure put on God by the fervent faith of those praying – "if we pray hard enough, ..." When I suggested to a Wednesday evening college men's prayer group that prayer is more like opening the door to the God who is already there knocking than trying to get God to open the door we want opened, some of the students were disturbed enough to ask for a second meeting. Simple as it sounds, this change, which I first encountered in O. Hallesby's classic entitled *Prayer*, signals a profound shift in the stance and expectations which we have for prayer. To put it in the words of Paul Lehman, ethics teacher at Princeton Seminary at the time I was there (1953-54), prayer is trying to get on God's bandwagon rather than trying to get God on ours!

Doubting Rational Systems

My early questioning was framed by the modernist-fundamentalist controversy. This debate was already in progress as the twentieth century dawned, and it set the terms of theological debate for the next fifty years. While it was often described as a battle between believers in the Bible and miracles on the one hand, and infidels and rationalistic critics of the Bible on the other, it actually was a head-on collision between two rational systems of thought. Orthodoxy began with the assumption that God is the ultimate embodiment of Reason, and God's Word (the Bible) defines the parameters of rational thought. Modern liberalism argued that the final arbiter of rational thought is empirical experience upon which logical reflection is based. What characterized twentieth-century orthodoxy as "fundamentalism" was its insistence that the biblical truth must be empirically verifiable. Thus miracles were defined as the empirical verification of supernaturally revealed information about God. In this sense fundamentalism was a modern "ism"! For example, one of the fundamentalist critics of my Christology expressed critical dismay at my statement that Jesus' deity was not empirical in the sense that his humanity was! And a book reviewer criticized me because I did not believe there was empirical evidence for Jesus' pre-existence.

At Princeton Theological Seminary I did an original study, later published as *Dispensationalism in America*, of the rise of the Bible and Prophetic Conference movement which emerged in the 1870s. The speakers at these conferences understood and defended the Bible as the inerrant words of God.

They argued that the Bible is the miraculous, absolute, rational authority on every issue it discusses. The miracle is that the absolute (rational) truth of the transcendent God has been transmitted to us in the words of the Bible. Some of the Bible Conference teachers actually said that the words of the Bible had been dictated by God. Others denied this claim but held that the effect was the same as if they had been. It became clear to me that although these teachers were extolling the Bible, it was for the wrong reasons. They believed in the authority of the Bible because of its rational perfection. This was, as Benjamin B. Warfield (1851-1921), the great orthodox Presbyterian Bible scholar of the day admitted, a form of rationalism.

On the other hand, the modernists of the early twentieth century also appealed to human reason as the final ground for belief. Reason for them was empirical reason – human rationality based on inductive and deductive reason. There were no miracles to establish biblical truth. The authority of the Bible's truth claims was dependent upon its historical accuracy and its ability to inspire the reader. This was a more consistent rationalism, but it seemed to me unable to account for the unique significance of Jesus as recorded in Scripture. But more of this later when I speak of christology from "below." So the questions for me became these: What is the nature and power of the life of Jesus in history? How does he "save" humankind? And how is the biblical record related to the historical reality? All these were questions that were supposedly already firmly answered, and to even ask them seemed to my critics a sign of "liberalism."

I became convinced that the Bible's authority and power in our lives is not based on human reason and could not be demonstrated by means of rational arguments such as inerrancy. In the Mennonite Church of the early 1950s this conclusion was a highly problematic one. I wrote an article on the inadequate nature of inerrancy, which I shared with my colleagues at Goshen College, but I was afraid to let the editor of the *Concern* pamphlet series publish it for fear of repercussions. (The *Concern* pamphlets, published in the fifties, reflected the issues and convictions of a group of young scholars who had become known as the "Concern" group. John H. Yoder edited the series.) I remember at another time being kindly reprimanded by Dean Harold Bender for preaching that the Holy Spirit, who inspired Scripture, is the final authority, not the inerrant words of Scripture! However, the 1963 *Mennonite Confession of Faith* dropped the word inerrancy.

All this undercut the rational certainty of Christian evidences, which had made faith so comfortable and comforting. Apologetics, i.e., the rational defense of the Christian faith, and Christian Evidences, which built the rational foundation for Christian belief, had been standard core courses in my seminary years both at Eastern Mennonite School and Goshen Biblical Seminary. Now it seemed that all one could do was to recognize the "paradoxical" character of reality, and affirm with Kierkegaard and Pascal the truth of the seeming contradiction. That was the way suggested by the existentialists. This solution, however, became less and less appealing. After all, paradox is part of the complexity for which we are seeking an ontological solution. It is itself hardly the solution.

Doubting Biblical Literalism

At another level, questions about the nature of the Bible's truth claims also raised the question of the nature of language and of the biblical accounts of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Is there a uniquely religious use of language to talk about subjective spiritual experience? Does language relate to both empirical (sensory) data and non-empirical (transcendent, spiritual) data in the same way? How do our words relate to the "objects" which they claim to describe? And when the grammatical object is not an empirical object, i.e., one that can be observed by the senses, what can be the relation? After all, God is not an object!

One simple example may help clarify the problem. While the grammar is the same in the sentences "My mother loves me" and "God loves me," they do not have the same meaning. Parents are *objects* in our experience whose *observable* actions indicate to us their feelings. God is not an object; neither are actions attributed to God empirically verifiable. Indeed, a parent's love serves as the metaphor for God's love. Or, again, the two theological statements "Jesus is a man" and "Jesus is God" do not have the same historical value. Grammatically they function the same way, but do they have the same semantic function, i.e., do they indicate the same kind of historical reality? How are words and meaning related? What does it mean to say, "God told me so," or "Daddy told me so?" In light of this problem Paul Tillich suggested that the word "God" really functions as a "symbol of God," i.e., the Ontological

Mystery, and biblical scholars spoke of the mythical symbolism of the biblical stories.

This language issue may seem very theoretical and abstract to anyone who simply assumes, like Humpty Dumpty in *Alice in Wonderland*, that a word means "just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less." But, believe me, these differences have profound implications. To remove "God" to the realm of metaphor and symbol is to question God's "existence" in my everyday experience. Not necessarily God the Transcendent Mystery, but God who exists for me in the reality of my everyday life. Authors of the period referred to this phenomenon as "the silence of God," or "the absence of God."

If I may digress, I sometimes wonder whether our more recent emphasis on worship is not a tacit recognition of this "absence" and an attempt to reestablish a short-circuited connection. In charismatic services the worshippers attempt to establish the connection through a free emotional expression. God's presence is experienced in spirited, uninhibited singing and prayers. Emphasis is not on the simple *believing* of a biblical truth, but on *claiming* that word in an ecstatic experience. In such an experience God is perceived as speaking in the present. The spiritual connection is established! While many of our Mennonite congregations do not follow a purely charismatic pattern, the movement has had a profound impact on the way they think about the dynamics and goal of worship.

My own conclusion was that the language of Scripture is a language describing human reality in its depth dimensions, i.e., in its relationship to God, the ultimate Personal Mystery, the creative source of its very being. The primary reference of theological language is to our personal-social, historical experience with its openness to transcendent dimensions. It describes human reality as "in the image of God." Thus human reality becomes the medium through which we understand the transcendent reality we name God. Or in other words, it becomes the metaphor for God-in-relation to us. The error of the Positivists and Logical Empiricists was not their understanding of the language mechanism, but their denial of the reality of the depth dimensions of our historical existence to which our language points.

It seemed to me that traditional orthodoxy was in great danger of simply reifying the God-language, i.e., simply converting abstract symbols into concrete

objects as though verbal statements (dogmas) themselves are the reality. This in effect made our definitions of god "God," rather than "symbols of God." We seemed to forget that words like "Trinity" really say nothing about God's essential being. They only attempt to describe, in the words of John Calvin, how we have experienced God; and we use them, as Augustine said, only in order not to be speechless. Thus, it seemed to me, we turned God, the Transcendent Mystery, into an idol, "*our* god." And it did not help when we fervently glorified this god's transcendence through "worship," or elevated personal, mystical experience, whether individual or corporate, as the way to know God.

Religious symbols are given concrete reality only through personal interaction and relationship, and apart from this concrete social-personal reality religious language has little objective meaning. Thus the crucial question was one of *authenticity* rather than orthodox language. The "concrete" meaning of God can be realized only in a social context of relationship. People "see" God reflected in the life of individuals-in-relationship in the obedient community. This is the profound significance of the church as the salt and light of the world (Matt. 5:13-14), and the anticipatory sign of the kingdom of God.

Doubting the Compromise of the Church

My concept of the church as the community of disciples empowered and guided by the Holy Spirit of Christ was first formed under the tutelage of Dean Harold Bender and Guy F. Hershberger. In the 1950s Bender's idealistic interpretation of the sixteenth-century Anabaptist movement was normative for us. The Schleitheim Confession, with its clearly enunciated two-kingdom theory and its sharp demands for separation from the world, was embraced as the model for the modern Anabaptist-Mennonite church. But increasingly, as I pondered and tried to explain this radical cultural-political separation of "church" and "world," I began to question the adequacy of its theological rationale as well as its pragmatic feasibility.

A number of movements within the church were critiquing the two-kingdom theory and exploring its meaning for the Mennonite churches of the twentieth century. The Mennonite Community Association explored the practical possibility of establishing a "para-church" Mennonite-Christian socio-economic community to maintain the ethical separation. Mennonite Mutual Aid was

begun to extend and professionalize local property aid plans. The post-war mandate of Mennonite Central Committee was expanded, and some individuals became active in the civil rights movement especially as it was led by Martin Luther King. All of the emerging models modified the traditional Mennonite two-kingdom concept with its strict cultural and political separation from the dominant English culture. John C. Wenger tacitly approved this extended version when he interpreted "nonconformity" as "separation *unto* God," rather than *from* the world, in his book of that title, and Guy F. Hershberger added his sanction with the publication in 1958 of *The Way of the Cross in Human Relations.*

I myself was introduced to the tension through my participation in the nonviolent Civil Rights movement of the late 1950s and the '60s. I became caught up in the hopeful excitement of the Black church as we stood in a circle praying and singing freedom songs full of faith that God would work a modern exodus. Through the late '60s and '70s I was increasingly dissatisfied with, and disappointed in, the church's response to the social and ethical issues that confronted us. It seemed to me that although we had argued with Reinhold Niebuhr's ethics of compromise, we were in fact compromising on a regular basis. I found myself increasingly disillusioned with a church that claimed to take the biblical message literally but refused or was unable to take a radical gospel stance on issues like human rights.

This intransigence of the church was, and continues to be, my greatest disappointment and temptation to abandon the institutional church. My acquaintance with Clarence Jordan, who was at the time translating the *Cotton Patch Version* of the New Testament, and my visits to Koinonia Farm near Americus, Georgia firmly cemented the concept of the church as a socio-spiritual movement into my thought patterns. Frustrated with the inertia and rationalization of the institutional church, I remember asking Clarence, the founder of Koinonia Farm, after he had been excommunicated from a local Baptist congregation for bringing a dark-skinned man into the service, how long one should stay in such a compromised church. His answer was "As long as they will let you!" which, of course, put the burden back upon me where it belonged.

Of one thing I was certain, the language of *metanoia*, personal and social repentance and transformation, was at the heart of the gospel, and this

language was not merely symbolic or metaphorical. Reinhold Niebuhr had said that Jesus' Sermon on the Mount should be taken "seriously but not literally." But it seemed to me that the language of *metanoia* demanded a literal conversion, not just individual but social as well, from violence and injustice to the *shalom* of God's rule. If the church were to be taken seriously, it would need to demonstrate and call for fundamental changes in the social order of which it was a part.

My study of the New Testament and Anabaptism convinced me that Jesus had intended to begin a movement for spiritual and social change, not another religious institution to foster worshipful religious experience. Movements are defined by their actions. Had Jesus himself not chided his disciples, "Why do you call me 'Lord' and do not do what I say?" He said that he had come to cast fire on the earth, and it seemed to me that the best the church could do was keep a sputtering candle from going out! As Ralph Abernathy put it when I was interviewing him in the midst of the Black movement for civil rights (summer 1964), the church that was supposed to be a headlight had turned out to be a taillight. It was not leading, but following.

Doubting the Universality of Orthodox Formulas

After many years of teaching at Goshen College, my experience teaching theology in a variety of Asian and African cultures persuaded me of the significance of "contextualization" at a time when it was still highly suspect in evangelical circles. A missionary message that created duplicate churches and parroted western theology impressed me as an inauthentic witness to the gospel of freedom in Christ. As the apostle Paul already argues in his letter to the Galatians, the message and application of the gospel must be freed from cultural literalism, either theological or ethical. I remember standing on a Sappora train platform one night with a Japanese colleague soon after I arrived in Hokkaido. He asked me what I had come to teach the churches, and I returned the question by asking him what he thought was needed. After a moment's reflection, he said, "I think it would be very helpful if you could help us understand why Jesus had to die." I was surprised, but he continued, "We know what the missionaries have taught us, but to be truthful, it does not make very good sense to us." His candid, trusting admission became the guiding challenge for my ministry in Japan.

Every cultural perspective has its own assumptions and values, and raises its own questions. For example, to call Jesus "God" and to speak of the Trinity in pantheistic, polytheistic, or naturalistic settings does not have the same meaning as in our western theistic tradition. To speak of Jesus' death as "satisfying God's justice" makes little or no sense in cultures where shame, not guilt, is the social sanction. Words have meaning within a cultural context. Therefore, we need as much as possible to use indigenous languages, thought forms, and social patterns when making cross-cultural theological translations. For me, this was the genius of the incarnation, which set the precedent for spreading the gospel.

With these considerations in mind, after many years of teaching in the western culture, I sought out an Asian culture within which to write a christological statement – in this case, Japan. How would one explain the mystery of God in Christ in a Shinto culture, which had been overlaid with Buddhism? Sociologist Robert Bellah had discovered the fruitful concept of "civil religion," which he used to critique American Christianity through his studies of Japanese culture. What might I find that would help us transcend the traditional theistic limits of western theological categories? And how might I be helpful in the cross-cultural missionary task of giving witness to the gospel?

I intentionally attempted to go beyond the traditional statements of western orthodoxy with which I had become dissatisfied. I was trying to picture Christ as "the human face of God," as John Robinson had put it, not in the abstract terms of Greek metaphysics. Orthodoxy in the second and early third century first sought to understand and describe Jesus according to the rational categories of Greek metaphysics; then in the fourth and fifth centuries it reified these categories and used them as prescriptive dogma. Thus, increasingly, the theological question was how Jesus of Nazareth fits the orthodox explanation of incarnation, not how can we most adequately picture "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6).

The essential question, it seemed to me, was not how Jesus could be both God and human at the same time. That is a metaphysical problem that arises in part because of the inadequacy of the Greek philosophical categories used. In Japan, where I was teaching as I wrote *Jesus Christ Our Lord*, these Greek categories were not definitive. In that cultural context one was free, indeed, encouraged, to reframe the question and find more adequate ways to

present Jesus to the Asian mind. Given this new context, the more crucial question was how Jesus in his humanity became, and becomes for us, the very "image of the invisible God," as Paul puts it. Thus the language of paradox to accommodate inherited metaphysical categories did not seem adequate. In fact, it was precisely in his humanity that Jesus became the new name of God for us ("the name above every name") taking the place of the name Yahweh. His life, death and resurrection became the basis for a new covenant "in my [Jesus'] blood" (Luke 22:20).

Perhaps I was naïve, but I was unprepared for the repercussion of my work in the American Mennonite church. I assumed that my new insights gleaned as a missionary from an Asian setting, which was in some respects nearer the biblical culture than our modern western patterns, would be welcomed. Instead, it was read as an extension of modern western liberalism. Former college and seminary colleagues gave my book a fair hearing, but representatives of the more right-wing Mennonite groups like Fellowship of Concerned Mennonites reacted vigorously with cries of heresy and calls for discipline.

More unsettling than these outcries was the way in which the leadership of the church, in the name of keeping the peace, attempted to quiet the disturbance without facing the issue of contextualization. While some leaders quietly assured me that they personally agreed with me, they carefully avoided taking a public stand. The institutional church dealt with the issue as a pragmatic political matter. The publication board was mildly criticized by implication for not consulting broadly enough "before publishing materials for distribution." And the General Board expressed its concern "that the [Kraus book's] level of readability has made discussion in the church difficult." (*Gospel Herald*, January 10, 1989, page 25) Gradually the hubbub died down and the Mennonite Publishing House published my second volume, *God Our Savior: Theology in a Christological Mode*, and a revised edition of *Jesus Christ Our Lord.*

Holding on to Faith

Very early in my career when teaching a course called *Life of Christ*, I came across words of Jesus that became a motto for me. Translated they read, "Have faith in God" (Mark 11:22). The setting for this admonition was the withering of the fig tree under the curse of Jesus. The disciples were not only

astonished at the miracle but also baffled that the tree, which symbolized God's people Israel, should be destroyed by one whom they believed to be the messiah. Their consternation was a temptation to doubt the authenticity of Jesus, and in that situation Jesus quietly admonished them, "*Hold on to* (a strong present imperative) *your faith in God*."

What I have discovered is that the faith to which we hold is not of our own making but is truly God's gift to begin with. Faith, again, in the words of Paul Tillich, is not our grasping for God but *our being grasped by God*. Or, to put it in the words of a Zen master, enlightenment is simply the realization that all the while we are searching for God, we are actually being held in the palm of God's hand! We must learn to distinguish between the skeptical doubt which is "unbelief," or rejection of God's gift, and what has more recently been called the "hermeneutic of suspicion," which can clarify and deepen our understanding. The former is a kind of blindness, but the latter is, in Anselm's oft-quoted words, "Faith seeking understanding."

Literary Refractions

The poems published here are selected from an unpublished suite of poems entitled "Tante Tina-Little Haenschen Dialogues." Tante Tina, who is – along with Rudy Wiebe's Frieda Friesen and Armin Wiebe's Yasch Siemens – undoubtedly one of the most memorable characters in Mennonite literature, first appeared in 1983, in a volume of David Waltner-Toews's poetry entitled *Good Housekeeping*. There "Tante Tina's Lament" was published alongside two poems spoken by Tina's son, Haenschen, and another called "Roots" which, like the first poem here, features a character identified as Rudy Wiebe.

"Tante Tina's Lament" appeared again in 1986 in the Waltner-Toews section of *Three Mennonite Poets* and once again in 1995, in the "Mennonite Blues" section of *The Impossible Uprooting*. In the latter volume, this first Tante Tina poem appeared alongside other poems featuring Tina's inimitable voice: "Tante Tina Talks About Her Man," "Tante Tina Calls in to a Radio Show," "A Request From Tante Tina to the Mennonite Women's Missionary Society to Put Salman Rushdie on the Prayer List," "Tante Tina Returns From Visiting Her Cousin in Mexico and Goes to the Grocery Store with her Grandson Little Haenschen," and "Tante Tina Puts the Gulf War into Perspective."

Here, in "Tante Tina and Little Haenschen: How Rudy Wiebe saved the Communists," Waltner-Toews once more blends English and German in Tina's endearing code-switching (so typical of her generation of Russian Mennonites). The poem/dialogue confuses more than language, though. Here the Molotschna and the Chortitza, Tolstoy and Trotsky, the Anabaptist martyrs and the victims of the Russian Revolution, fiction and history, the living and the dead are made indistinguishable. These conflations throw into question the very process and substance of Mennonite memory and myth-making. The poem ends playfully with an image and an evocation that further question the nature and texture of the Russian Mennonite story: a provocative photograph of Tina's mother, already dead yet handsomely attired and propped up for a family photograph, and a teasing reference to the Mennonites' principal story-teller/myth-maker, Rudy Wiebe.

Perhaps what literature allows, and conventional history is compelled to eschew, is the play and playfulness of tone. Tante Tina's "Bible Stories,"

published here, for example, display layers of both irony and emotion as they address what were regarded for most of the past century as unspeakable questions about Mennonite immigrant women's experience. The ironies persist in "Tante Tina and Little Haenschen: What was Uprooted," where disruptive references to the Russian Mennonites' colonization of others' land (another unspeakable subject) are casually swept aside and, in effect, suppressed by Tina's mischievous reference to grandchildren.

Tante Tina's last comments in this suite of poems (published here are four of the fourteen poems comprising the suite) question the Mennonites' persistent pursuit of a "Promised Land," a trope that seems to underlie so much of the Russian Mennonite collective memory. Just after two wonderful novels by major Canadian novelists have offered re-creations or readings of the Russian Mennonite story (Rudy Wiebe's *Sweeter Than All the World* and Sandra Birdsell's *The Russlaender,* both published in 2001), it seems appropriate that we should hear, as a kind of coda, Frieda's always inevitably ironic musings, gently undercutting the enterprises of Mennonite history, fiction, and myth-making.

Hildi Froese Tiessen, *Literary Editor*

David Waltner-Toews is a veterinary epidemiologist who teaches at the University of Guelph and consults on environmental matters around the globe. He is the author of six volumes of poems, including, most recently, The Impossible Uprooting *(McClelland & Stewart) and* The Fat Lady Struck Dumb *(Brick Books). Waltner-Toews grew up in Winnipeg and now lives in Kitchener, Ontario.*

Four Poems from the
Tante Tina-Little Haenschen Dialogues

David Waltner-Toews

Tante Tina and Little Haenschen: How Rudy Wiebe saved the Communists

Listen Little Haenschen, one time in the Molotschna when
the Revolution was -
the picture on the table there, by the window
on the doily, see? My mother is there,
but she already dead was.
There Red soldiers were and White soldiers
and the Machnovites who were a black flag waving
and the Mennonites in the *Selbstschutz*,
who just hello waved with Wilma Thiessen's laundry,
they not fighting were,
only self defending by shooting and
very fast running and then being shot.
Always Mutti has soup gemade
for everyone, no matter what colour.

Rudy Wiebe was one time the kitchen rug out-shaking
for my mother; he visiting was
and something for his soup he needed to do.
Mutti wasn't soup for nothing giving.
But the Reds they are seeing him waving and thinking
he is with the *Selbstschutz*, so Tolstoy
himself is coming and after Rudy running.

                                        Tolstoy? You mean Trotsky?

Ja, the Kommunist, that one, through the barn
and over the river chasing. He is wanting

Rudy Kommunist to be making or to shoot.
But it is April and in the Dnieper River has a hole cracked
in it like the old toilet seat behind the house,
slippery and cold just like that,
so Trotsky is through falling.
Plumps just like that. Nick has once almost been
in slipping like that even.

> In the river?

In the outhouse.
Then Rudy the cries hears Help! Help me comrade!
and is turning and him helping
from the hole.

> This is just like in the Mennonite Martyrs book
> Felix Manz or someone.

We have soup from Felix the cat made
after the Revolution. But that is a different story.
And after they are to Mutti's
for soup coming.

> I think in the Martyrs book
> the fleeing Mennonite is hauled up before the Catholics,
> or was it Lutherans? And drowned,
> hung into the icy water by his feet.
> Or maybe crucified, or burned
> in a street full of shoppers.
> That sounds like a German thing,
> doesn't it? How *did* they kill,
> usually? His mouth gagged? How will
> you sing now? they laughed.
> But he hollered through the rags.
> Some early version of *Ich weiss einen Strom.*[1]

---

[1] *Ich weiss einen Strom* – literally, "I know a stream," but in English titled "Oh have you not heard," or "The Beautiful Stream," is a hymn which was composed in the nineteenth-century and has since become (in German) something of a Mennonite standard.

> This, after dragging the pursuer to a warm inn.
> That's the *Englische*[2] for you. Not even singing
> moves them.[3]

Listen, *bursch*. I am about Russia talking.
Are you not history knowing?
Then Trotsky is to Mexico
going, because there are so many Mennonites
and he is the soup so much liking and at home
to be feeling. He has there I think a Petkau girl married.

>   Trotsky?

Tolstoy. Listen *mal*, there is more.
More important.
So many soldiers to feed
my mother is in the evening down lying
and in the morning she is not up-getting.
My Uncle Fritz is looking.
The Lord has come for Mutti, he is saying
but I have already
for the picture taker paid,
because Nick and I will be to Canada going
and everyone else is behind staying
so we a picture are needing. But Mutti with the Lord is.
Was ist zu tun?[4]
We are the navy dress on her pulling
and the Sunday hat with the flowers
on her planting,
and Nick and me are her upholding
so now we the picture have,
all my life to remember.

---

[2] *Englische* is used here as a generic term for all non-Mennonites.
[3] The story is actually attached to Dutch Anabaptist Dirk Willems, who saved his pursuers from an icy grave. The man he saved immediately arrested him; Willems was burned at the stake on May 6, 1569.
[4] What's to be done?

                                                    Your mother is dead
                                                      in this picture?

A good picture, *Ja*?   She doesn't look dead.

So ist das Leben.[5]
I am wondering now
what has to Rudy Wiebe happened?

Tante Tina: Bible Stories

At the gate in Latvia
on the train the soldiers came.
At each seat they are stopping.
Papers, they are papers wanting.
And things. Where is that samovar from?
Did you steal it?
And then they are taking it.
Or they are saying, these papers are not right.
And then Fred Peters from the train must go
and Mrs Peters and the girls they are weeping,
please please.
When they are by me standing
where I am with my brother Nick,
I am not anymore a little girl running.
A squeal there is, in my heart, a piglet
through the mud scrambling, my fear
everywhere splattering.
So, running away from home?
No mummy and daddy?
Why not here be staying? We can take care of you.
One of them is my cheek touching and laughing

---

[5] That's life.

but the other one, he is asking,
What are you reading.
I read the Bible. It is all.
I need no others.
Ah so many good books
you are not reading, they laugh.
One is me on the breasts touching.
So many good stories you are missing.
I am about Jael thinking, how she
her body used, to bring the enemy into her tent, even,
ja, how she a tent peg used his brains out to be poking,
how many stories these soldiers are not knowing.
And then we through the gate are.
Look, look said Nick, we are free.
But I the story am reading, about David
seeing Bathsheba in the bathroom.
And I am about the border-guard thinking.
In Canada, I have heard, the Indians are tents having.
So, I am thinking, they must tent pegs have.
A safe country. I am thinking. A safe country.

Tante Tina and Little Haenschen: What was Uprooted

Ja, we like the trees were
in Prussia and when they were us uprooting
to Russia how those Germans were missing us!
Who would feed them now?
Who would boats make for them?
And Catherine the Great she was
us welcoming with arms as big as the steppes.

<div align="right">

And rounding up Cossacks
and sending them away.

</div>

Ah you *knirps*, what do you know.
And when the Kommunists have come

and us sent away for being good farmers

                                        Rich farmers, and German speaking

Ja, don't be so smart
like Goethe, or Friedrich Engels, German speaking, even.
So we to Canada are coming

                                        And the Indians sending away.

They are sugar beets picking.
And last year, Nick is me telling
how all the Indians are coming
and working so hard, they have farms gebought
in Clearbrook.

                                            Those were different Indians.

But after, they are us missing
because they have dirt and no farmers
like gums with no teeth.

                                    And Oma sits there, quiet,
                                              rubbing her gums.

And after all the stumps were out-gepulled,
like rotten teeth, brown and twisted, the roots
have there been lying.
The furrows like torn gums.
And only after many years, the cows
and sunflowers. And

                                        Grinning toothlessly at me

Grandchildren.

Little Haenschen: The Ballad of the Travelling Mennonites
     the last song for oma in the nursing home

In 1780 the Mennonites came
from Prussia to the old Ukraine.
Schlepped by horses, through the mud,
not like in the 30s, when they had the old Ford.

Not from Namaka to Manitou
no windows open, hot air blowing through.
Just miles and miles of rain and mud,
with Elder Toews and the voice of God.

Off to the Promised Land they marched

Ja, and then they Elder Epp followed
to meet God in Samarkand.
And in the Green Hell in Chaco.
And Trotsky in Mexico.
And Doft in Altona.

Who is writing this song, Oma?

I don't know. You are making up anyway.
We had no Ford. We Nettie the horse had.
Trotsky didn't visit the Mennonites.
And we no Promised Land are having.
Like Jews without Israel. But I am thinking
maybe it is better, having nothing to kill for
like that. Maybe a Promised Land is a curse.
It is better to have a promise
and no land.

And Canada?
Ha bursch, you make a joke.
Too many mammon worshippers we are having

here, Maggie Thatcher's little hatchlings
like Harris, and Chretien, and Campbell,
and that Kleine knirps in Alberta.
Ja, this is only where we are stopping,
like that Greek.
Zorba?
Odysseus.
You read the Odyssey?
I am three children through school putting,
what do you think?
He didn't last one year I think
after home coming.
My Dad?
Odysseus. Too much time at konference and demons fighting.
Like the Mennonites. Our paradise is not a place to be going.
Our paradise is in the wandering
Now sing me once more about the ants.
The ants?
Ja, you are singing, The ants are my friends
they're blowing in the wind.
In Paraguay, cousin Aaron has me written,
the ants big as rats are traipsing in
and everything from the kitchen carrying away,
even Truda's rollkuchen, and once, from the window sill,
a whole rhubarb pie.

In 1990 the Mennonites went
from Winnipeg to old Tashkent.
They brought a cookbook, a Bible too.
And they sang four parts all the long night through.
Vorsaenger, backslider, one and all,
they sang on the journey from spring to the Fall,
carousing choruses, journeying blues.
So ist das Leben. Was ist zu tun?[6]

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[6] That's life. What can we do?

A. James Reimer, *Mennonites and Classical Theology: Dogmatic Foundations for Christian Ethics.* Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2001.

The design on the cover of this new collection of essays – one hand in the soil, the other in the sky – reflects a theme that has marked the author's theological work for the past twenty years. In order for us contemporary Christians to *engage* prophetically and lovingly the creation and culture in which we are rooted, we must reach toward the divine that *transcends* nature and history.

 Mennonites and Classical Theology, a feast of Reimer's writings since the late 1970s, is essential reading for graduate students, teachers, and church leaders interested in current conversations about Mennonite theology and ethics. Reimer offers a critique of modern/postmodern thought in the West and notes its impact on Christian theology, traces limitations he sees in recent Mennonite theological work in light of "the classical imagination," and proposes correctives. While this book is not for the theologically fainthearted (some background in theology or philosophy will lubricate your way through the more than 550 pages of text), Reimer sets out his argumentation in a straightforward way, accessible to anyone with intellectual curiosity and a theological dictionary at hand.

 Because most of the essays were previously published but widely scattered in various sources, this new publication permits a sustained look at Reimer's developing theological voice. His work is notably consistent in fundamental direction since the early '80s. He good-humoredly notes specific shifts in his assessments of the work of Gordon Kaufman and John H. Yoder as a result of personal contacts. He states that since 1980 he has "moved in the Barthian direction of saying that good theology has its own dogmatic ground distinct from and before all political ethics" (444), and notes that his earlier emphasis on God's absolute freedom "seems now to be too voluntaristic a notion" and his view of civil institutions "too one-sidedly negative" (487). But his critique of post-Enlightenment thought and his call for renewed emphasis on the transcendence of God and attentiveness to classical Christian doctrines and creeds remain unshaken.

 That Reimer preserved the original essays (annotating each and setting it in context) marks the project with a certain freshness and vulnerability. This strength, however, is also the book's greatest weakness: it is frequently repetitive.

Additionally, even with the annotations, the reader must make a labyrinthine effort to identify Reimer's fullest and strongest argumentation for his repeated claims and to see clearly how his theological argumentation developed over the years.

The range of topics addressed in Reimer's work in addition to classical theology is remarkable – among others, religion and science, theology and the modern university, Jewish Christianity, exorcism, homosexuality, apparitions, policing and the civil order, imagination and utopian movements, free will, and the believers church. What holds them together, according to Reimer, are several convictions. First, "the classical imagination . . . is far richer and more fruitful for Christian systematic theology than acknowledged in much modern and postmodern thinking" (227). Second, ancient dogmatic thinking was imaginative and dynamic, not "abstract and doctrinaire petrification of certain dogmas with little sensitivity to changing times" (227). Third, Mennonites in their focus on ethics "dedicated to radical non-violent love ('pacifism'), dare not attempt an end-run around creedal antiquity on the way to the biblical text itself. . . ." (554). A trinitarian theology and commitment to Jesus as both human and divine are essential so that "faithfulness to the normativity of Jesus is not one of pragmatism or a legitimizing of the modern project but one of obedience to Jesus as the *Cosmic Lord*, because what he is, does and teaches is eternally true or intrinsically right" (198).

Reimer's turn to classic theology was a response to a shattering critique of post-Enlightenment assumptions. Under the influence of Canadian philosopher George Grant, Reimer had a kind of "intellectual conversion" in the mid-70's. He was moved by Grant's belief that ecological disaster, uninhibited exploitation of the weak, and the threat of nuclear annihilation were "in some sense intrinsically linked to the Enlightenment and the triumph of technical reason." (162) Reimer began to see how the development of modern philosophical thought, culminating in Nietzsche, left humans without a sense of divine transcendence, no longer accountable to an objective realm of absolute norms for ethics. He also began to articulate his deep concern about the modern preoccupation with historical time.

When historical time is absolutized, Reimer explains, it undercuts the coherence of Christian confession of faith in a divine reality which transcends history. The meaning of transcendence is redefined; it no longer refers to a

reality *external* to history but to a future hope or transformation *within* history. Reimer passionately rejects the assumption behind future-oriented theology that "one gradually gets closer to God," for "all historical moments are equidistant from the divine, because the divine is by definition beyond time and space" (157). Classical theology recognizes that "the end of history is no closer to God than the beginning or middle. . . . Only in this classical model can the ultimate dignity and value of every historical moment and creature under the providence of God be safeguarded" (192).

Reimer argues that ancient Trinitarian theology imaginatively and dynamically holds together transcendence, historicity, and immanence within a Christian understanding of God. In this framework "human freedom and action within history is not considered autonomous and unlimited in what it can do and achieve – it is not on its own – but is perceived as restrained by and held accountable to that larger theological, ontological, and metaphysical foundation" (201).

Having made a case for this metaphysical framework, Reimer attends to a number of limitations he rightly sees in much of North American Mennonite life and theology. The most prominent are these:

1. *Contemporary Mennonites focus so much on history and ethics that they neglect the transcendent and sacramental.* Reimer affirms that the Anabaptist emphasis on discipleship, and particularly the capacity to critique violent contemporary culture, is a gift that Anabaptist-Mennonites offer to the world. Indeed, "what Anabaptists did bring to classical orthodox Christianity was a heightened ethical consciousness that appeared to be missing in the ancient creeds" (393). But he is concerned that this prophetic critical stance be preserved without sacrificing the sacramental and mystical dimension of the Christian faith. Citing the work of David Tracy, Reimer suggests that Mennonites need to pay more attention to "the gracious and 'world affirming' aspects of experience" (204). This includes "a much greater recognition of the 'disclosure' and 'revelatory' nature of tradition and traditional classics" such as "texts, events, images, persons, rituals, and symbols – for the present situation" (197). A strong trinitarian theology can help Mennonites remember both the prophetic-transcendent and the sacramental-immanent dimensions of our experience of God.

2. *Mennonites may reflect too much historical and anthropological optimism.* Reimer notes that an emphasis on practical Christianity in connection with an assertion of free will and voluntarism led Mennonites to strive for perfection and a church "without spot or wrinkle." He believes however that ". . . the concept of the pure church is no longer adequate for our growing conviction that the church is not only a redeemed but also a redeeming community, in which individuals are not expected to be immediately perfect but are gradually nurtured to a fuller realization of God's intent" (519).

In addition, some Mennonite peace theologies seem too idealistic: "Our Mennonite peace theology, if it is not to deteriorate into a false romanticism, a kind of modern-day legacy of nineteenth-century liberalism, will need to deal seriously with . . . dark forces in the cosmos, in nature, and in our own psyches and communities" (489). To respond to innocent suffering, death, evil, and violence it is not enough to appeal to Jesus' example and the Sermon on the Mount: "Ultimately, we need a doctrine of God in which God himself is allowed to be radically free from our systems of morality and our vision of what God ought to be . . . even though we are called to be faithful to that christocentric ethic" (243). God need not be a pacifist, though we are called to express enemy love. A trinitarian doctrine of God can guide us: it is a framework which preserves the freedom of God while calling humans to an ethic based on the historical normativity of Jesus.

3. *Mennonites have an unwarranted prejudice against post-biblical doctrinal and ecclesial developments.* Reimer is particularly impatient with Mennonites who have a theologically and historically shallow view of early Christian doctrine, who make too sharp a division between Greek (ontological) and Judeo-Christian (historical) thought, and who view the institutionalization of the church symbolized by fourth-century "Constantinianism" too monolithically. He persuasively explains why he believes God was at work through classical theological imagination in the midst of social and political pressures in the formulations at Nicea and Chalcedon, arguing that theological orthodoxy and "Constantinianism" were not intrinsically linked. He notes that both Greek and Hebrew reasoning were fruitfully held together in theological development over the first four centuries, and suggests that Christian social ethics "is better served and more biblical when God's revelation in nature, human consciousness, and reason is seen not as alien to but consistent with

God's revelation in Christ, although it is only through the latter that the former is most clearly and fully understood" (476). And he wonders if Mennonites appreciate that it was because of missionary success that the early church grew incredibly, requiring new structures and forms of order. Nevertheless Reimer does support the radical Protestant critique of "Constantinianism" if narrowly defined as "political theology in which theology and politics are fused, or worse, where theology functions as an instrument of political ideology" (269).

4. *Mennonite ecclesiology does not adequately emphasize the universal church and the work of God outside the church.* Convinced that an adequate Christian vision of the church must not be limited to local expressions of the church, Reimer exhorts Mennonites to see themselves "as part of the church universal, which extends through time and throughout the whole world" (339). Many Mennonites tend to focus too much on local congregations, including in their method of interpreting Scripture, a method that often ignores interpretations developed through tradition. These "cannot be ignored for it is there that the Bible has come to its most normative expression in the ecumenical confessions of the early church"(352).

Mennonites both have "gifts" to offer the wider church (such as a heightened ethical consciousness and a peace witness) and much to learn from other Christians. Reimer considers the Pauline approach to "gifts" within the congregation as a model for approaching denominational "gifts" within the universal church. Though he does not provide a fully compelling case here, Reimer's desire to articulate a way of looking at the relation of the local church to the universal church which "allows for diversity without relativism, and unity without dogmatism" is commendable (551-52).

Reimer also worries that "The true theological significance of 'God-ordained' institutions . . . by which God preserves the world from total chaos and disintegration, is not adequately understood or acknowledged" in most Mennonite confessions of faith and systematic theologies (465). For when the church is understood in terms of a small group of believers rather than also in respect of its universal nature, the issue of how God governs or works in the world outside the church is not clearly addressed.

The theological claims encompassed by this volume should stimulate and deserve further conversation. Reimer's insistence that trinitarian theology

must ground Christian ethics should receive serious ongoing attention, especially among Mennonites. His argument that "God is not a pacifist" has already served as a catalyst for discussion among Mennonite scholars at the 2001 American Academy of Religion meeting. And his way of looking at the relationship of Mennonites to the universal church is both provocative and debatable. Reimer recognizes that he needs to explain further how he combines his confessional-dogmatic approach with his "Alexandrian leanings," and that nowhere in this volume does he engage "in a sustained, systematic treatment of Christian social ethics" (564). With this agenda and more, pastoral and professional theologians can look forward to the next twenty years of interaction with Reimer's theological imagination.

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Larry Towell, *The Mennonites*. London and New York: Phaidon, 2000.

During much of the twentieth century, and most notably since "the sixties," the visual theater performed by Mennonites-within-a-landscape or within-a-sunlit-space has provided North American photographers and painters with abundant material. Many groups of "Mennonites" on this continent, by the distinctiveness of their attire and their technology, their architecture and their communal habits, their history and their language, invite the public's eye. Many appear to be exotic; yet they are so close to home, neighbors to our urban mainstream. They seem to persist for decades on end, even centuries, in their visible display of an "otherness" with which cameras are keen to connect. Almost inevitably, partly because they adopt a lifestyle that the rest of us regard with some sense of nostalgia, even admiration, they tend to draw our cameras into a romantic response. We see their communalism, and the individual dramas that are nurtured within its framework, in ideal terms. Even photographers' attempts at detached documentary can not help, it seems, but turn into warm and appreciative applause.

Larry Towell's *The Mennonites* simultaneously disturbs and envigorates the corpus of photographic volumes about Mennonites in recent decades. His volume breaks the tone of expectation that we bring to books of photographs about an idyllic Mennonite life. In its combination of haunting dissonance and muted praise, it alters the very nature of a genre of books that we are used to enjoying for its apparently uncomplicated pleasures. This 280-page book, both sorrowful and reverent, resists and questions those pleasures and complacencies. Yet, in the end, though free of visual flattery in its treatment of this complex culture, Towell's book is astonishingly exhilarating and stimulating, engagingly compassionate and humanistic. We can debate the extent to which it is both weakened and strengthened by the audacious, even transgressive, sweep of its title. The book's visual kinship lies with the 1930s Depression-era work of American photographers such as Dorothea Lange and Walker Evans. Indeed, it draws on our conventional anticipation of pleasure in the emotionally powerful photographs that have come to define that decade in the United States.

Towell portrays and explores the lives of conservative farm people whose forebears began to leave Manitoba for Mexico and beyond in the 1920s,

when they opposed their children's being sent to government-regulated schools in Canada. Because of often grim economic conditions in Mexico, thousands have since made their way back to Canada as landless migrant workers to find jobs as laborers. It was in his own back yard in southern Ontario that Towell first encountered these people. As a prominent professional photographer, he found in them an extension of his broad interest in marginalized minorities – in El Salvador and Gaza, for example. The Mennonites from Mexico are, he stresses, a vulnerable and poorly-educated people cut off from the world, all too easily exploited by religious forces from within and by economic forces from without. Towell's closely observed visual studies – at once unruly and bleak, exuberant and spare – are the heart of the book. I saw a large number of these photographs for the first time in spring 2000 at the Bulger Gallery in Toronto, and some a year later at the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography in Ottawa. It felt like Towell was doing something new and important within the quiet spaces of those galleries, and it feels as though he is doing the same with the 115 photographs – all black-and-white, many with the camera mingling at very close range with its sometimes decentered subject – in this book.

Most of the photographs were taken in Mennonite colonies in Mexico; thirty were taken in Canada. Mostly full-page, or running across two pages, they are from the start unnerving and disorienting. For example, where we would expect the title page, we are confronted instead by three young men in a bare room where the plaster is cracking on the wall behind. The trio, positioned to form a near triangle, look straight at us, all three brash and male behind self-congratulatory smirks, the closest one blowing a casual puff of cigarette smoke toward the camera. Overleaf, the balanced sweetness of a tousle-haired child asleep amongst large barrels of freshly picked cucumbers is set off balance by hands reaching in from a figure partly outside the frame. The next photograph shows a man, slightly out of focus toward the back of a room, seated at a table for a sparse meal, and bending across the table in front of him is a young woman holding a knife, the most brightly-lit object in the picture and close to its centre. Many of the photographs move outside the enclosure of rooms to show figures in a broader landscape, in the grids of farm fields, for example, or along dusty roads. They show an often restless yet often subdued world where a little happiness seems to cut through a shot

here and there, but where a sense of social curtness, eerily alienated aloneness even in company, even sexual violation, also are palpable though unspoken. Some of the adults have put their hats in front of their faces, or seem deliberately to avert their eyes from the camera. Some children seem fearful, tense. Some people, males – a boy with a cracked mirror near the front of the book, a man with an oval-framed mirror in the final picture – intently study their own faces and reflect them to us.

Towell's written text – filled with words that touch on the vile as well as the pious – is divided into eight parts. The words can be stark, but we come away feeling their warmth. Their evocative and poetic effect is profoundly moving. The text includes a preface, then a section on life in Ontario, then six on life in the Mexican colonies. One section includes a four-page interview with "Isaak Klassen" whose father, excommunicated from the church in Mexico for owning a vehicle, migrated with his family to Canada. Mostly, the writings come from Towell's "train of thought composed of flashbacks and fixations drawn from diary notes and the silt of memory." Towell, a published poet, provides a poignant text rich in metaphor that, with the pictures, contributes to a sense of elemental, mythic, and sometimes terrifying forces at play within this culture.

For all their allusion to despair, the images and the words – stunning evocations of what is sanctified and what is repressed – are a great photographer's act of homage to a people. The book grips us with the sweeping beauty of its language, and with brilliantly-realized visual moments that cast brief blessings on a culture estranged from the modern world and uneasy within itself. The 115 pictures stand like icons, endlessly suggestive in their captionless condition, marked only by the dates and titles that locate them according to colony or county in the illustrated list at the back of the book. As artifact – with its black covers and black-ribbon marker, with onion skin paper provided for the written text – this volume gestures toward a kind of holy script.

The Mennonites represents a project that is both deeply personal and highly professional. Towell reveals here why he belongs to Magnum, the agency that for decades has represented many of the world's leading documentary photographers and photo-journalists. His publisher, Phaidon, is renowned for the high standards of its presentation of art projects. But the aesthetics of

professional detachment and objective impersonality here blend with the subjective. This volume is a personal work of art by a man who became empathetically engaged with Old Colony Mennonites when he lived, travelled, and visited among them from 1990 to 1999, sleeping in their pick-up trucks or on cots otherwise taken by their children. Towell likes these people, whom he treats as trusting friends, and he pays close attention to them. By his eye and mind, hand and heart, he exalts and ennobles their dry world, and brings it with grace into our midst.

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From the Ground Up: Mennonite Contributions to International Peacebuilding, edited by Cynthia Sampson and John Paul Lederach. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2000.

From the Ground Up is a very well-written collection of sixteen essays which provides an overview and analysis of Mennonite activities in international peacebuilding. To aid the reader in understanding how Mennonite involvement in peacebuilding has matured, the book is divided into three sections which profile the context for Mennonite action; offer case studies from Africa, Northern Ireland, Latin America, and the Middle East written by practitioners who carried out the activities; and conclude with an analysis of these efforts by experienced independent conflict resolution professionals. The result is an effective overview of the scale, scope, and impact of Mennonite peacemaking.

An opening essay by historian Joseph S. Miller traces the evolution of Mennonite institutional engagement in peacemaking, showing the debate and discussion that surrounded the formation of Mennonite Conciliation Services, Christian Peacemaker Teams, and International Conciliation Services. The personal journey of two noted peace educators, John Paul Lederach in Central America and Ron Kraybill in South Africa, sheds light on how the influence of these pioneers has shaped Mennonite understandings of institutional

peacemaking. As Kraybill so aptly notes, "[p]eacebuilding as here described, is only possible, then, as it is grounded in a community of people who share a common vision of reality and who are prepared to work actively, indeed, self-sacrificially, to extend that reality to others" (44). This foundational approach is highly evident in the nine case studies that follow.

Case studies describing the work of Mennonite Central Committee in South Africa, Christian Peacemaker Teams in Haiti and Hebron, as well as other efforts by Mennonites in Northern Ireland, Colombia, Somalia, and Liberia illustrate the opportunity to promote peace while underscoring the limits of foreign intervention and the challenges of trying to promote peace in the context of bitter long-term conflicts. The ethical dilemmas raised when there are gross power imbalances between oppressed and oppressor are explored. While some authors rightfully acknowledge that our obligation as peacemakers is to be faithful and not necessarily successful, Joseph Liechty, in writing about conflict in Northern Ireland, confronts this passive approach: "I sometimes think I see among Mennonites inclinations more toward 'ineffectiveness is faithful' or 'effectiveness is unfaithful,' and I fear that many of us might fail to notice an opportunity to be effective if it jumped out and bit us" (85).

The critique offered in the last four chapters by non-Mennonite scholars demonstrates a great respect for Mennonite approaches to conflict and an acknowledgment that these approaches are rooted in a way of life based on community. Marc Gopin reserves the strongest criticism for Christian Peacemaker Teams, accusing them of being "decidedly partisan" (248). He also emphasizes the dilemma of standing with oppressed people today who might turn out to be the next oppressor of tomorrow.

Several characteristics of this book make it good reading. First, the contributing authors are a collection of "insiders" who have formulated the theory or engaged in the practice of peacemaking, and "outsiders" (non-Mennonite scholars) who provide an independent critique of these efforts. The result is a thoughtful but realistic apologetic for Mennonite approaches to peacebuilding. Second, the chapters tie together well: authors of the various chapters not only knew what other contributors had written, they also engaged their colleagues in an analysis and discussion. Third, the breadth of the case

studies gives an example of the suitability of foundational peacemaking principles in diverse settings. While individual techniques may not be transferrable across cultural borders, the underlying values and principles are.

This informative volume will be of special interest to conflict resolution practitioners, the academic peace studies community, and others concerned about matters of international peace and justice. It is highly recommended as a resource for anyone who wants to take a deeper look at the incredible ripple effect that Mennonite values and beliefs have had on peacemaking.

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Gerald W. Schlabach, *For the Joy Set Before Us: Augustine and Self-Denying Love*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001.

"Why would a nice Mennonite boy like you be studying Augustine at Notre Dame?" So asked Professor Van Harvey when he learned Gerald Schlabach was focusing on Augustine for his doctoral work. Many of us might have related questions for Schlabach. Is he not aware that Augustine helped legitimate the employment of violence against enemies of both empire and church? That Augustine is responsible for a set of negative attitudes toward sexuality and the human body? That Augustine's strong rhetoric against Pelagius is partly responsible for causing traditions such as our Mennonite tradition to be labeled as Pelagian?

Schlabach is well aware of such questions. So, then, why Augustine? To answer that adequately is to discuss the book itself. It begins with a modern problematic, one certainly recognizable by Mennonites: Is it possible, in a theologically responsible way, to hold together self-love and self-denial? Many have argued it is not. Anders Nygren, the author of *Agape and Eros* thought that "self-love is the telltale sign in any Christian doctrine of love that is ultimately destined to undermine New Testament *agape*" (6). Augustine was one of the influential writers within the Christian tradition who Nygren said was guilty of mixing various forms of love – a clue, thought Schlabach, that Augustine's more integrated account of love might have something to offer.

Schlabach's project, stated in chapter one, is to employ Augustine's writings to combine a proper form of self-love with an "evangelical" self-denial, evangelical in that "it is only meaningful and proper in the light of the good that God intended and Christ proclaimed for human beings" (25-26). Chapter two discusses "the four loves" within Augustine's writings. For Augustine love of temporal goods, neighbors (including enemies), and self all have their relative importance when kept within the context of the ultimate love – the love of God. The next three chapters are on Augustine's conception, articulation, and practice of continence (self-denial or self-restraint). Let me mention three important points made in these chapters. First, contrary to popular impressions, for Augustine continence was not merely about sexuality but was a much broader concern. In fact, second and related, Augustine can easily be misunderstood if we think of continence only as a negative (i.e., self-denial). Properly understood, it is really about love, humility, patience, and even nonviolence. "Continence is [the] trustful, non-manipulative way of having a right relationship with the objects of one's love" (79). And third, Schlabach uses Augustine's own understanding of continence to argue that in encouraging the persecution and killing of enemies, Augustine was encouraging incontinent behavior, which is to say, wrong behavior by his own lights.

The final chapter, "Sustaining Self-Denial," is worth the price of the book. The seven theses and discussions presented there offer a rich feast of reflection. They amplify what Schlabach states earlier: "Self-denial is not a good in itself and self-sacrifice is not a freestanding duty. If Christ himself endured the cross for 'the joy that was set before him,' then even his own supremely sacrificial act looked with longing toward the *telos* of mutual love he had proclaimed as God's Reign. What makes joy in the mutual love that is 'set before us' something more than mere reciprocity is what Jesus Christ shows us about the way God creates and restores relations of mutual love: God has taken the first step, has loved and suffered first. Thus, all who seek mutual love in Christ-like ways will likewise be prepared to risk and to act first – not without hope nor altogether without thought of receiving love in return . . . but without any *guarantee* of receiving love in return" (17).

I don't know what Augustine scholars will make of this work. What I do know is that it is Mennonite theological engagement of another tradition at its best. Schlabach has not forgotten that he is Mennonite, yet through his

creative, careful engagement of Augustine he has retrieved riches not only for those Christians who call themselves Mennonite but for all Christians who take seriously our Lord's call to deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow the One whose loving embrace includes us as it extends toward the redemption of the whole world.

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Call for Papers

From Hill-Tout and Siddall to Harder and Harms: Settlers and Settlement in Yarrow and the Central Fraser Valley, 1890-1950

**University College of the Fraser Valley
Abbotsford, British Columbia
5-7 June 2003**

James Hill-Tout was an early church and community leader; Eva Siddall a faithful and long-time member of the Methodist church. Both were early pioneers of the Central Fraser Valley and witnessed the influx of Mennonite settlers in the late 1920s and 1930s. Elizabeth Harms was a Mennonite midwife who served the community for many years, while John Harder was the influential leader of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Yarrow. This conference will focus on the settlement experiences of these and other settlers in the Central Fraser Valley, as well as the broader context for those experiences.

Sessions are planned on the following topics: First Nations peoples; intellectual and spiritual pioneers; educational institutions; wartime experiences; post-war resettlement patterns; changing statistical profiles; comparative settlement studies.

The conference is sponsored by the Yarrow Research Committee with support from the University College of the Fraser Valley, Columbia Bible College, Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, Mennonite Historical Society of British Columbia, Chilliwack Museum and Historical Society, and the Quiring-Loewen Trust Fund.

Paper proposals of approximately 100 words should be sent to Ted Regehr, 39 Sierra Morena Circle SW, Calgary, AB, T3H 2W2, tregehr@ucalgary.ca

Call for Papers

Pilgram Marpeck: from Strassburg to New York

A conference to explore the implications of the 16th century Anabaptist's thought for the theological and social issues of our time.

7-8 June 2002 – New York City

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The goal of the Marpeck conference is to critically engage his theology and explore its relevance for the burning questions of our time. We invite papers along two lines. One of them is the presentation of research on Marpeck's thought and the influences which formed them. The other is the bringing together of impulses in Marpeck's thought with current social and religious issues, including the moral imperatives generated by the tragedy of September 11.

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