MENNONITE LIFE

SEPTEMBER 1984

In this Issue

The Eleventh Assembly of the Mennonite World Conference at Strasbourg, July 24-29, 1984, is the focus of this issue. Mennonite World Conferences have been held as follows:

Basel-Zurich	1925	Kitchener	1962
Danzig	1930	Amsterdam	1967
Amsterdam	1936	Curitiba	1972
Goshen-Newton	1948	Wichita	1978
Basel	1952	Strasbourg	1984
Karlsruhe	1957		

The first conferences were small and were largely attended by Europeans. Now the conferences are large inter-generational gatherings with thousands attending from many countries. This issue centers on the meaning of this peoplehood.

The first article, an address delivered at the opening session, seeks to describe in impressionistic images this people known as Mennonite.

Mennonite periodicals have been filled with perceptive articles and editorials reflecting on Mennonite identity as observed at Strasbourg. In this issue are seven additional views on the meaning of Mennonite peoplehood and the personal impact on them of the World Conference experience.

In the March 1983 issue of *Mennonite Life* Diane Zimmerman Umble, producer of the film, "Strasbourg, City of Hope," wrote of the "Genesis of a Film." In this issue she writes a sequel on the experience of unveiling the film at the conference and to the French Mennonites who had volunteered to serve as actors.

The photographs which accompany the articles help describe nonverbally the conference experience.

John Thiesen, Newton, Kansas, who has assisted the Mennonite Library and Archives in many archival projects, writes a review of the film, "And When They Shall Ask," which has now been seen by tens of thousands.

—The Editors

MENNONITE LIFE

September 1984 Vol. 39 No. 3

Front Cover

Child with earphones at Strasbourg 84.

Back Cover

People and faces at Strasbourg 84, including Henry Enns of MCC Canada Handicapped Services, Million Belete—former President of the Mennonite World Conference, and Frau Marie Cornelson—Karlsruhe, Germany, who attended the 1930 MWC at Danzig.

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Mennonites in Strasbourg in 1984—Who Are We?

by Robert Kreider

At the Mennonite World Conference in Wichita in 1978 we saw that not all Mennonites look alike, speak the same language, dress alike, eat the same foods, or talk about their faith in the same way. Our president in 1978 was from Africa, and now our president is from Asia.

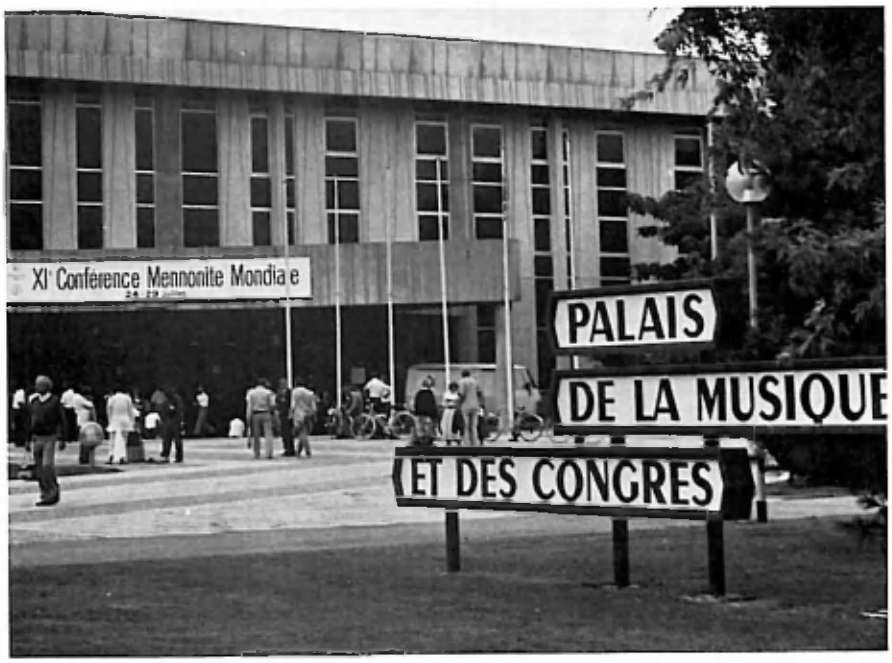
In 1912 when Heinrich Pauls of Lemberg in Poland proposed the idea of a world conference of Mennonites, ninety percent of all Mennonites spoke German and lived in 15 countries: in Europe—Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Poland, and Russia with a few in France and Luxembourg; in North America—Canada and the United States; in Latin America—none; in Africa—Nigeria, Rhodesia, and the Congo (Zaire); and in Asia—Indonesia, India and China.

Mennonites now come from 57 nations, represent 150 groups, speak a hundred languages and dialects, and are shaped by a hundred cultural traditions. We hear the words of Peter: "You are now the people of God, who once were not his people." (I Peter 2:10a NEB) In this assembly is the evidence of God's grace. Here is the story of scattered sons and daughters whom God has chosen to be his people. And yet as we celebrate our particular peoplehood, we know that God's love extends beyond us to his wider family as John records: ". . . . there are other sheep of mine, not belonging to this fold, whom I must bring in and they too will listen to my voice. There will then be one flock, one shepherd." (John 10:16)

Four hundred and sixty years ago in 1524 we were not a people—neither Mennonite nor Anabaptist, neither Doopsgezinde nor Täufer. We were then Catholic and Confucist, Hindu and Shintoist, animist and Buddhist, Muslim and Ethiopian Orthodox, and varieties of religious indifference. In the mysterious unfolding of God's providence we, who flow from a thousand tributaries, have been joined into a stream of 730,000 members—like the mighty River Rhine which flows past this city.

We search for definitions to explain this peoplehood. Definitions elude us as do efforts to define a mother's love or a martyr's tenacity of conviction. And yet deep in our being we know that we are a family which has been bonded together by an awareness of what is sacred, the work to be done, how we are related, the stories to be told, a common memory, a common authority, a confronted common danger, and an expected common future. (Jane Howard, *Families*).

Although the early Anabaptists were impatient with elaborate theological distinctions, they did seek to press into words those things which they believed as a covenanted and disciplined community. Up the Rhine River in the village of Schleitheim, not far from here, in February 1527 a small band of Anabaptists met to outline in seven articles what they believed. They spoke of walking in simplicity, living in hope, seeking unity, and being at peace. They af-



Left, the Palais des Congres, the headquarters of the Strasbourg Assembly.

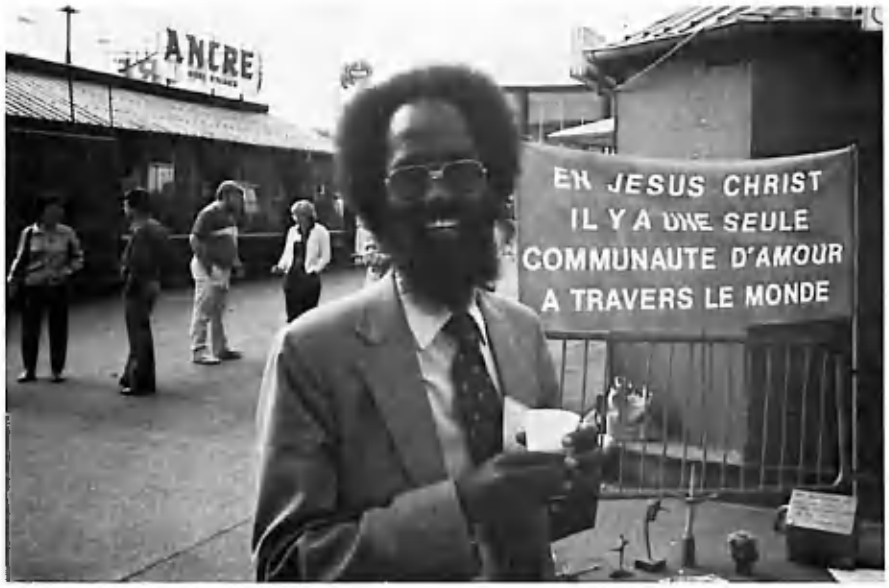
Upper right, Ovidio Flores of Honduras and Cesar del Aguila Canet of Guatemala; middle right Ahmed Haile of Somalia; lower right, children leaving Hall Rhenus for their morning activities.

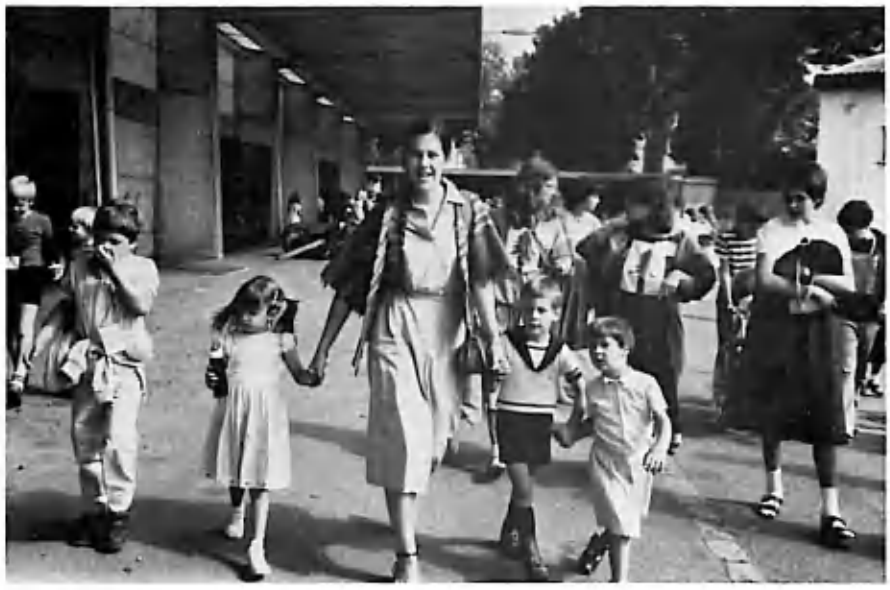
firmed their convictions concerning believer's baptism, congregational discipline, the Lord's Supper, separation from the world, the pastor as shepherd, peacemaking and truth telling. The spirit of Schleitheim lives today in this assembly. Listen to the words which pervade that early confession: "Christ teaches . . . Christ commands . . . Christ says . . . as Christ is minded . . . Christ present with us . . . through Christ . . . in remembrance of the shed blood of Christ . . . within the perfection of Christ . . . walking with Him . . . doing as He did . . . in His steps . . . taking up His cross . . ." Here is Christology with the lyrical voice of the psalmist.

Perhaps a key to an understanding of peoplehood lies in gesture, song and poetry. Ever since the hymns of the Anabaptists in Passau prison were gathered together in the *Ausbund* we have been a singing people. Ever since Tieleman van Braght recorded the stories of "blood witnesses" in the *Martyrs' Mirror* we have been a story-telling people. One remembers a saying of the Navajo Indians: "Those who would be our people must learn to sing our songs and weave our rugs." At Wichita we observed how we could transcend awkward efforts to communicate through the soaring flight of song. In our singing of hymns we find our peoplehood. As children of the Exodus, our God has "carried us on eagles wings." To us he says, "If only you will now listen to me and keep my covenant, then out of all peoples you shall become my special possession. . . ." (Exodus 18:5).

What brings us together as a people? If one is of "the house and lineage" of Schleitheim one finds one's worth and purpose in Christ who dwells in the midst of His people. One seeks those evidences of where Christ is incarnate in the common life of His own.

Who are we as a Mennonite people? As one moves among our people one observes that the Mennonite view of the church is woven of the warp and woof of relationships, a communal fabric: "the people of God" (I Peter 2:9), "the body of Christ" (I Corinthians 12:27), "the fellowship of the Holy Spirit" (II Corinthians 13:14). Brothers and





sisters meet Christ and from this triggers a chain-reaction of the spirit: Stephen meets Zedekia and Zedekia meets Gladys and Gladys meets Aristarchus and Aristarchus meets Hiroshi and Hiroshi meets Louise and Louise meets Sushil and Sushil meets Hector. The mark of a true fellowship in Christ is that as a family member one can immediately discuss the deep issues of life, without first probing cautiously, gingerly with small talk.

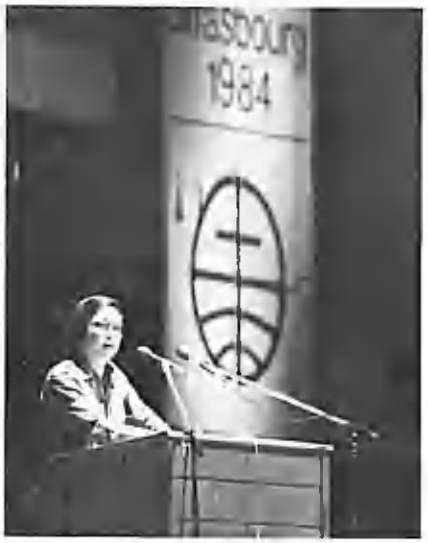
Who are we as a Mennonite people? Although we speak in a hundred tongues, we share a common biblical language. As one reaches out for analogy, metaphor or parable to communicate across the borders of culture, one draws from the deep well of Scripture. A mark of this fellowship has been that it moves and lives and has its being in the language and the mind of Scripture.

Who are we as a Mennonite people? We come to this place from more than a thousand congregations. Our congregations are our spiritual homes. To understand Mennonites as a people one is called to visit them in the infinite variety of their congregational setting. One can see those congregations now . . . . A congregation that meets under a thatched roof on the edge of the Serengeti. . . . Students and teachers worshiping in an upper room near the university in Sapporo, Japan. . . . Indian families praying under a metal roof in a lush upland valley of Guatemala. . . . An urban congregation meeting in a centuries-old meeting place with a great organ on the Singel in Amsterdam. . . . Plain people singing hymns without musical instruments in a white frame meeting house in the farm country of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. . . . The string of congregations in clearings in the rain forest around the base of Muria Mountain on the Island of Java. . . . Small groups meeting in homes—sometimes called "house chapels," in countries where authorities view the church with fear and hostility. . . . In San Pedro Sula, Honduras, a joyful throng of worshipers singing, clapping, hugging, with the worshippers enveloped by the throbbing beat of electronically amplified instruments. . . . In Hong Kong walking through a narrow pathway of a hundred tiny shops which opens into a courtyard filled with the singing of a young congregation. . . . Our peoplehood is a garden in which God has planted, cultivated, and watered his congregations with their endless variety and beauty. One shall know us by these local fellowships in Christ.

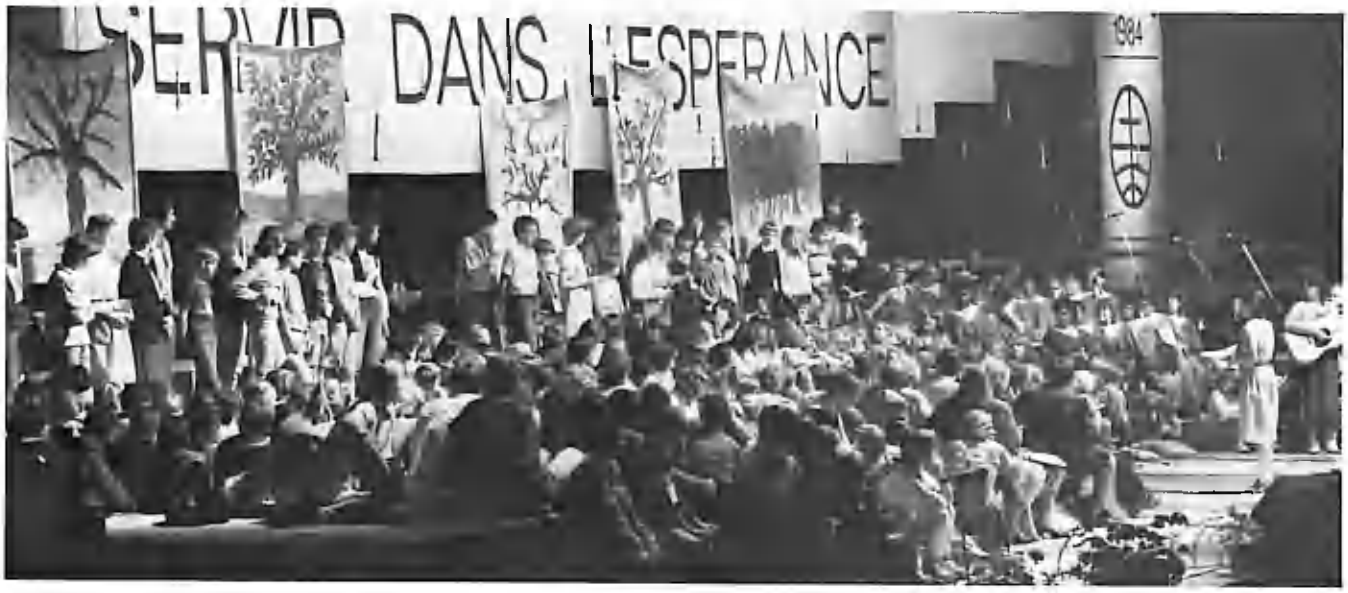
Who are we as a Mennonite people? We are a people with a long memory. The faith is passed from generation to generation by "bringing all things to remembrance." (John 14:26) Mennonites are a people who tell stories. Once there lived

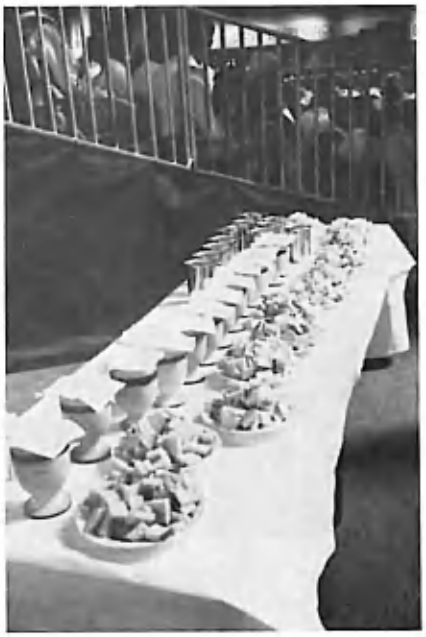
Below, final session and communion service in Hall Rhenus.

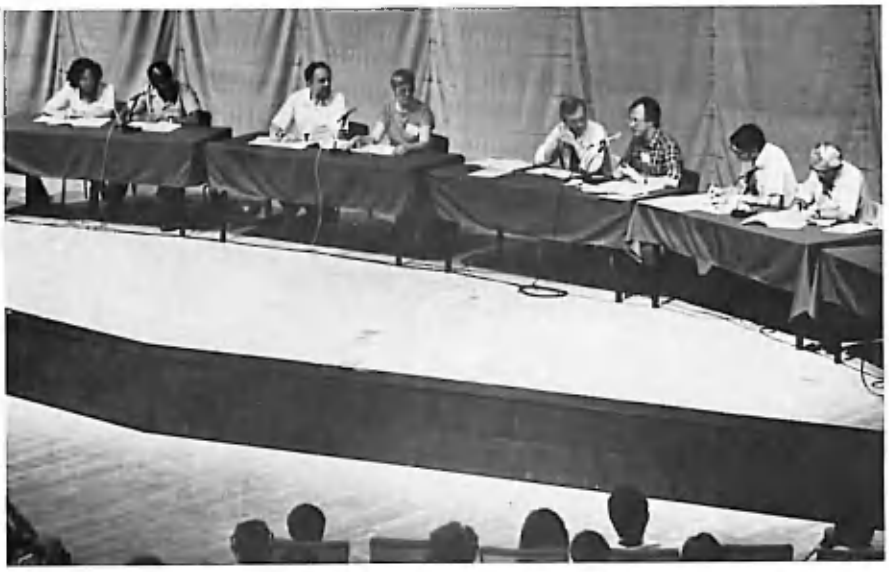
Upper right, Charles Christano of Indonesia and Conference President; upper center, Margrit Gerber Ramseyer of Switzerland leading singing in the opening session; lower center, program by children in Hall Rhenus; lower right, Dining Hall where noon and evening meals were served


1984


L'ESPERANCE


DANS L'ESPERANCE
1984

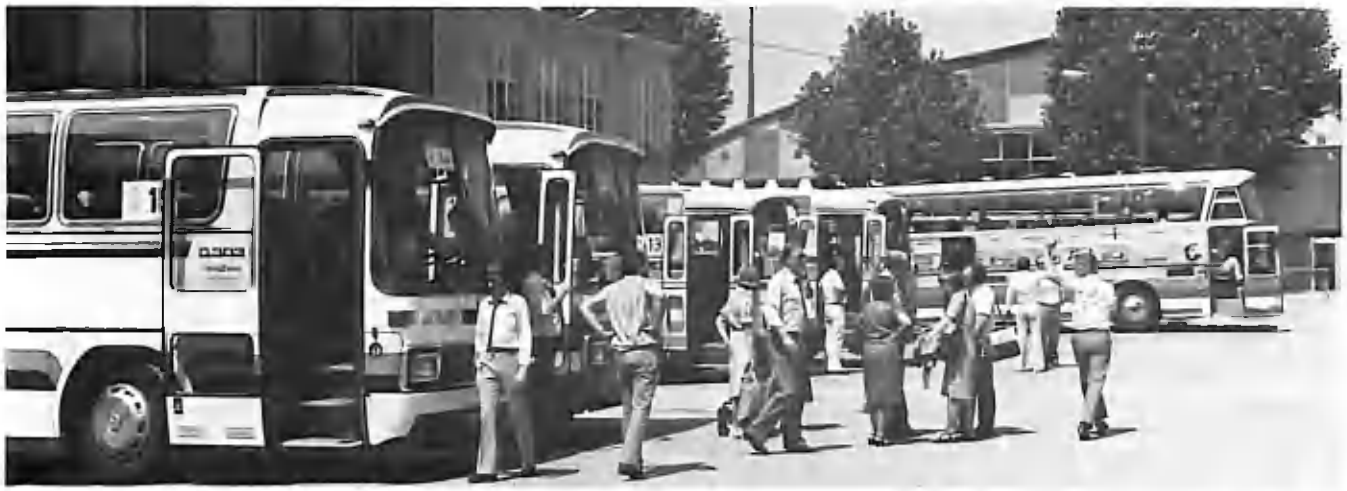


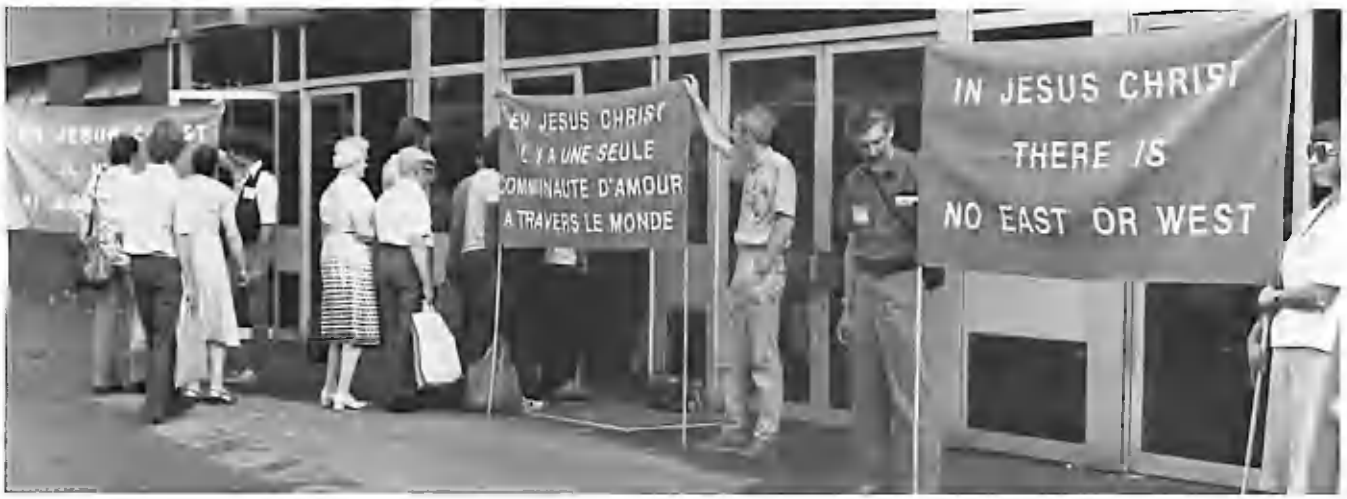


in Strasbourg a good man, Michael Sattler, who gave winsome testimony to his faith, who crossed the river into the Black Forest to nurture new faith communities. There he was seized and taken to the town of Rottenberg where he was bu.ned at the stake, his wife drowned eight days later. He died praying for his persecutors. . . . At that time living in this city of refuge, Strasbourg, was a woman, Catherine Zell, whose heart went out to homeless Anabaptist refugees. She was the wife of one of the reformers, but her kitchen door was always open to the Anabaptists. When there was a knock on the door, one could hear her say, "Come in. Come in. Make yourself at home." . . . One can see those boatloads of Swiss Mennonites slipping down the river past Strasbourg under cover of night, fleeing their lovely mountain valleys where they suffered the lash of harsh rule. The refugees had their eyes on new homes in Penn's Woods beyond the sea. Aiding them with counsel and funds on their hazardous flight were generous Dutch Mennonites. . . . One delights in those students in Kobe meeting in a garage for Bible study and covenanting to become that first Mennonite church in Japan. . . . One sees that boat laden with wheat arriving a Calcutta for the famine sufferers in India in 1898 soon followed by the planting of Mennonite churches in India. . . . And were we not there with those 18,000 Mennonite refugees camped on the outskirts of Moscow in 1929, positioned there to make their last desperate plea to emigrate? A story-telling people—old stories and new stories.

Upper right, French choir under the direction of Willy Nusbaumer; upper center, buses loading for tours of Alsace; lower center, banners at the entrance to the Rhenus; lower right, Dutch youth presenting "Ruth" under the direction of Dick Klomp.

Upper left, Marcel Rudloff—Mayor of Strasbourg, welcoming the Conference and a table set for communion for the closing service; middle left, a panel discussion following the morning session; lower left, four members of the Russian delegation —Daniel Janzen, Jacob Fast, Diedrich Tiessen, and Anatoly Sokolov.




EN JESUS CHRIST
IL Y A UNE SEULE
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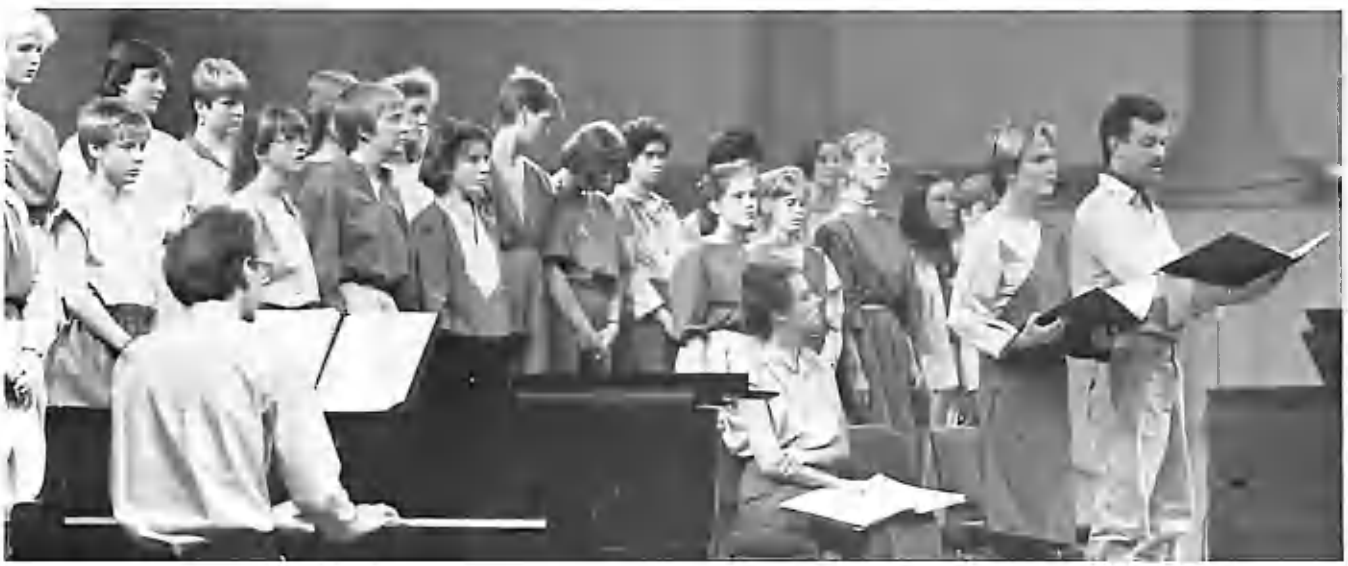
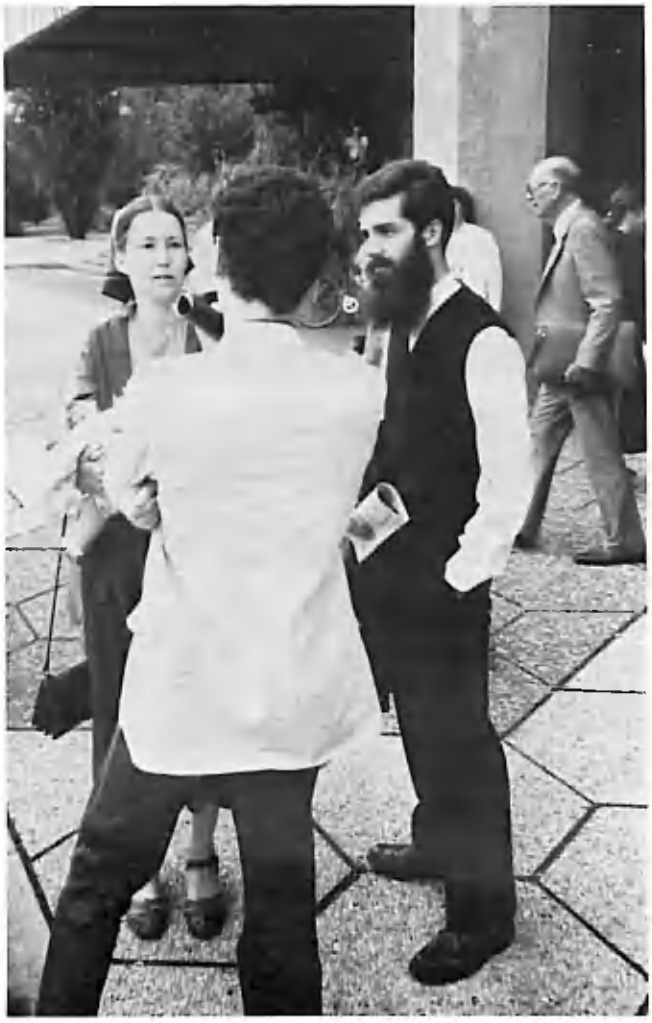
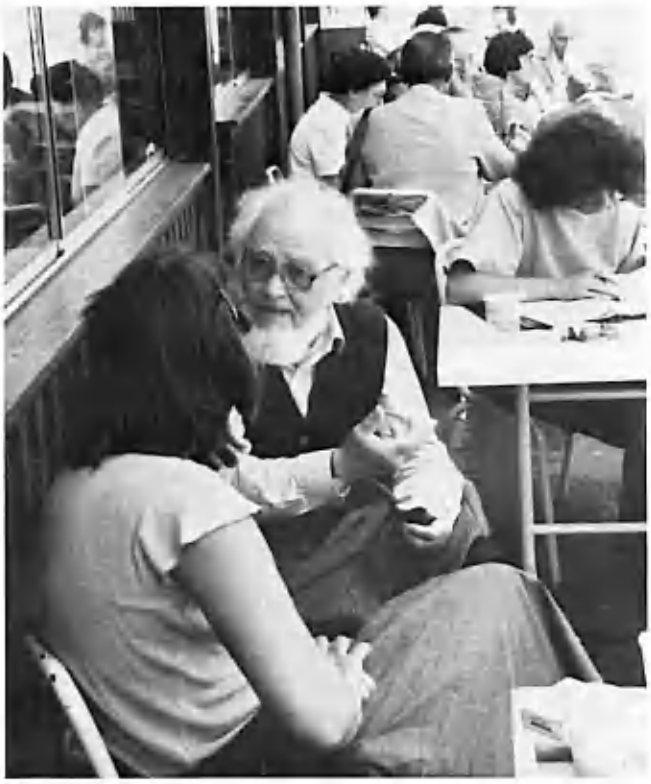


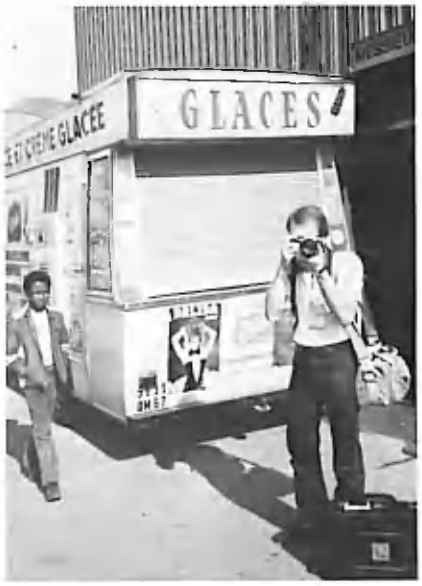


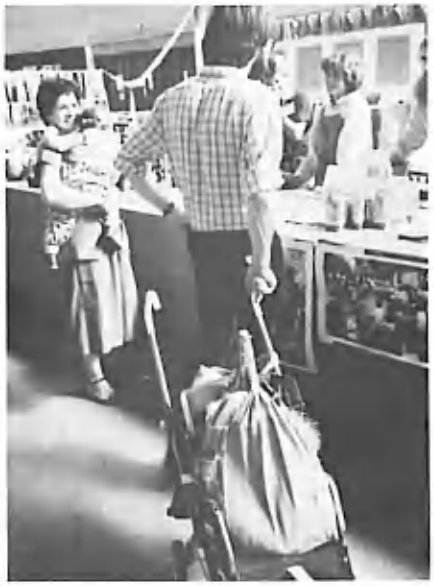


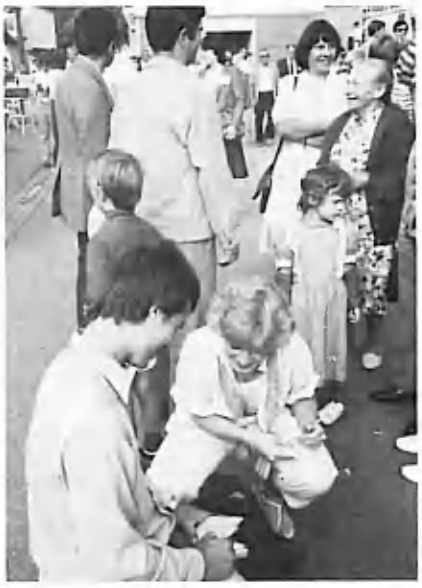
In our new-found peoplehood our storehouse of memories has increased a hundred fold. Your stories have become our stories; our memories have become your memories. We can now say that we all were on the little sailing ship Concord which brought those first Mennonites to Germantown in 1683. We all were chained in the hold of that slave ship named Jesus which carried a cargo of slaves from Africa to America. We all were in the Chortitza Colony when White, Red and bandit soldiers ravaged the community. We all are with that congregation in Managua, Nicaragua, as they pray that armies will not invade their land.

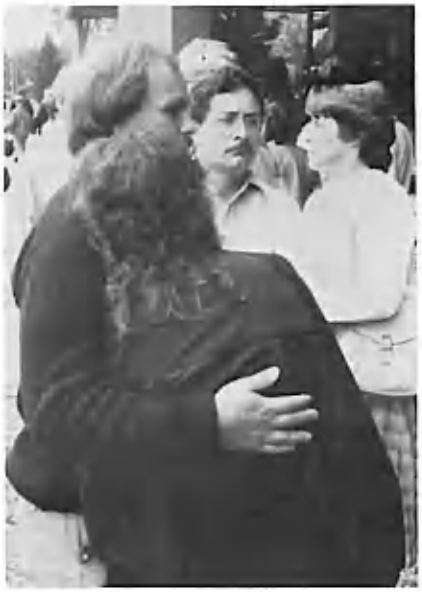
Who are we as a Mennonite people? Early in the 16th century when Strasbourg was a staging area for a broad missionary movement, we were known as a witnessing people. Anabaptist missionaries went forth two by two to tell the Good News spreading northward down the Rhine, eastward down the Danube. However, persecution contained the missionary fervor. Generations of quietude followed. But now in recent years has come a rekindling of the spirit of the Great Commission. Into our vocabulary have entered the names of new faith communities—music to our ears: Addis Ababa and Bukiroba, Mutopo Hills and Oraibi, Tshikapa and Kafumba, Hyderabad

Conversations in the plazas, in the halls, at cafes, along the street, at breakfast.









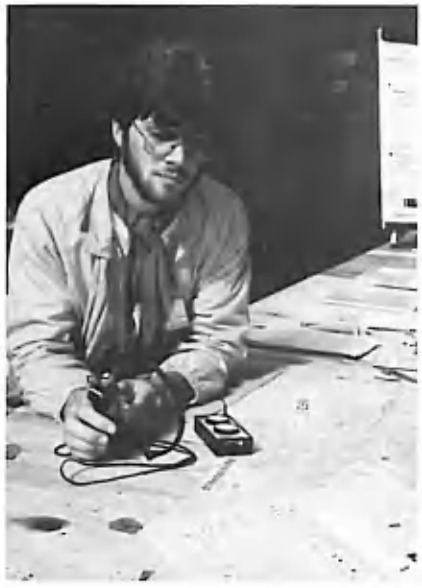
and Bihar, Kai Chow and Pati, Semarang and Osaka, Cachipay and Managua, Aibonito and Montevideo, Palermo and Dublin. Yoked with this missionary imperative has been an outpouring of relief, service, development, and peacemaking in response to that haunting, compelling question from Jesus' portrayal of the Last Judgment: "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and fed you, or thirsty and gave you drink, a stranger and took you home, or naked and clothed you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and come to visit you?" (Matthew 25: 37-38) Service "in the name of Christ" is a mark of this people.

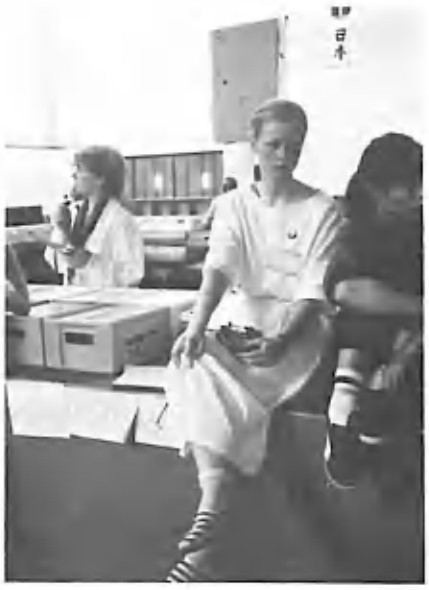
In travels among our people in different lands I often ask the question: "What is a Mennonite kind of Christian?" The answers rarely reflect the wording of the historic declarations of faith. They are fresh and spontaneous. A Chulupi Indian sitting by a waterhole in the Chaco bush observed: "Others teach one to be a Christian one day a week. Mennonites teach one to be a Christian seven days a week." . . . . A pastor who has lived through the painful years of civil war in his land explained that "we are drawn together because of the new birth, living out every day as the day of the new birth." He added, "Nonresistance is enormously important to us. It permits us to go anywhere in the world and in any situation to feel free." . . . . Someone working among

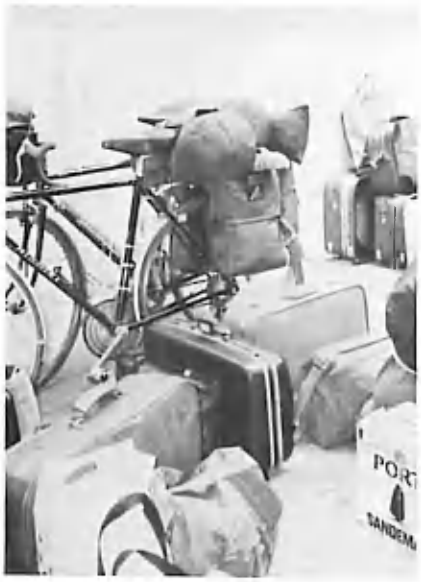
Left, scenes of parents and children, photographers, exchange of addresses, applause, and weariness.

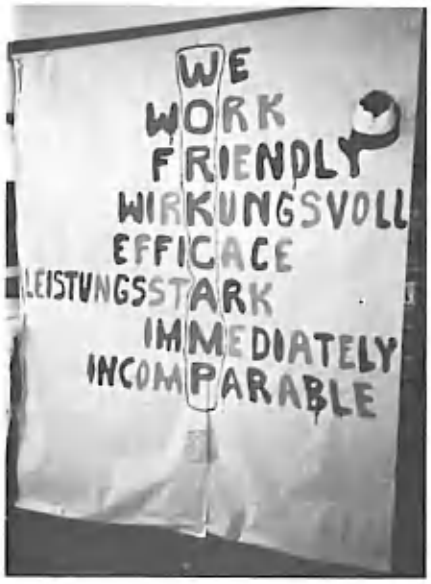
the independent churches in Africa commented on what "Mennonite" means to his Botswana people. "It is Ed and Irene, John and Ron." The image of Mennonite is incarnate in persons. . . . Another who has lived long in Indonesia observed: "First, Mennonites view the church seriously; second, they take the New Testament seriously; third, they have a strong desire to hold together." . . . In another country where the church is under trial, I asked a brother "What is a Mennonite kind of Christian?" His answers were simple and direct: "They stick to it. They can work in any situation. They take care how they teach their children. They are moderate—not given to doctrinal or liturgical extremes. They emphasize a practical living-out of the faith—pure living, Bible reading, tithing. . . ." Another living through a time of national testing said, "In this crisis we came under spiritual control. We talked together. We prayed together. We agreed we would do it the Lord's way. The Spirit is handling this. We are shaped by Bible teaching."

The beauty and the joy of our peoplehood is that Christians from young congregations can now be our teachers, pastors and parents in the pilgrim walk. In this assembly are brothers and sisters, who in their particular ways, open for us new windows and doors to Kingdom living. We see the world of need afresh through one another's eyes. Our









Upper right, youth volunteers checking out head phones for translations; middle right, a section of the baggage area and a sign of the international work camp; lower right, Bernie Wiebe, editor of the Mennonite, *checking the photograph collection, and A. J. Metzler, Scottdale, PA, who has attended the last eight conferences.*

brothers and sisters from other lands can liberate us from parochial and national idolatries.

As a family coming together after a long separation, meeting relatives whom we may never have seen before, we shall use this occasion to make new friends. We can transcend the small talk about air schedules and lost baggage to speak of things that matter: your pilgrimage . . . our home congregation . . . the persons who have shaped your life . . . our family and their interests . . . that which brings you to Strasbourg . . . my concerns for peace between our two nations . . . the hope that sustains you in a troubled world. Of such conversions is woven the fabric of our peoplehood.

The significance of Strasbourg will be found here in these great assemblies with the speeches, films, drama, singing, and prayers. Every bit as significant will be those talks with new brothers and sisters we meet in the corridors, on the steps, around the dining tables, under the trees, and on the streets of Strasbourg. At this gathering we are like the disciples on the Emmaus Road. We can walk and talk with each other about the deep issues of mind and soul, pilgrimage and hope. As we do this we can be assured that a stranger will draw close to us and will enter into the conversation. And as we invite the stranger to sit at table with us, he will make himself known to us in the breaking of the bread. And then we shall say to one another, "Did not our hearts burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?" (Luke 24:32).

Upper left, Henry Moore sculpture at the Palais des Congres; lower left, a branch of the River Ill in Strasbourg with the "covered bridge" and prison towers in the background, the Petit France section of the city.

Reflections on Strasbourg 84

Edgar Stoesz
Gladys Goering
Cornelius J. Dyck
Joanne Juhnke
John A. Lapp
J. Winfield Fretz
Erland Waltner

With 7,250 registered for the Mennonite World Conference, there were 7,250 impressions of the experience. Here are seven reflections on the Strasbourg conference —a sampling of one per thousand registrants. These are uniquely perceptive observers, who are responding to questions such as these: What bonds Mennonites together in 1984? What was the meaning of Strasbourg for Mennonite peoplehood? What did we learn about ourselves at Strasbourg?

Edgar Stoesz

What is the Mennonite World Conference? It is an assembly, a congress, a reunion. It is a mind-stretching experience as the idea of a global church becomes a living reality. It is lines—to eat, to register, to enter buses. It is headphones. It is a marathon of activities. It is big: the assembly hall seating 8,000, the stage alone bigger than 10 African churches, lodging in 56 hotels and dormitories, dining hall big enough for a regulation soccer game, and all this chaired by two 5'3" men —Carl Brusewitz and Charles Christano. And there were many announcements and many, many cameras—flash, movie, telescopic.

Who attends the Mennonite World Conference? 7,250 registered, the aging with cane and wheel chair, the grey and greying, the young—even infants, the rich with plastic money, the poor with help of a travel fund, and church administrators who find it a good place to meet people they work with around the world.

Much which divides: distance, theology, history, age, wealth, politics, nationality, language, culture. *But much which unites*: a common belief in Christ as Lord and Savior; a common belief in the scripture and its relevance to our times; a people of song, fellowship, and celebration; a people with a sense of history which includes suffering, not only in the 16th century, but also now; a people who believe that God's people should live in peace and work for reconciliation.

Humor, but not much: Strasbourg referred to by someone as "the Mennonite WC" . . . . when one dorm turned out not to have soap, a French resident commented, "No problem—in France we wear perfume." . . . the Mennonite church in Colombia likened to a bus—"you ride it awhile and then change." . . .

What has happened since Wichita 1978? Churches discovered in Angola and China, new churches beginning in Hungary and . . . . contact maintained with churches in Cuba and USSR despite obstacles . . . . a church closed in one country but it has continued to flourish and grow . . . . the rich growing richer while the poor continue to teeter on the edge of subsistence . . . a world population which has increased by a half a billion. . . .

Dress: mostly informal and comfortable, few ties or three-piece suits, few hose or heels, Chairman Christano in colorful and informal Indonesian batik shirts, little which was bizarre, too warm for a sweater and sometimes too cold without, few wearing prayer veiling. . . .

Disappointments? Not many. Spirited, dynamic, spontaneous preaching precluded by the need to submit and read manuscripts. The working groups too diverse, the topics too broad, and the time too short to get beyond a superficial statement of the problem. The tendency to be patronizing to the Russian delegation. Little recognition of the wider Christian church—those other sheep in other fields. Failure to address the problem of growing militarization and the nuclear holocaust which threatens. But the conference is probably as good as a conference this size can be.

Conference etiquette: When your eyes met those of someone you knew but the name didn't come, you dropped your glance momentarily to check the name tag and then with warmth and familiarity you said, "Great to see you again, Helen. . . ." When you really wanted to see someone you waited awhile and then cut in. The other person drifted away, likely to cut in on someone else. That is how it is that you meet many people but leave many conversations unfinished. . . .

An observation. I was struck, particularly at the mission consultation, how theoretical—you might even say how artificial—we from the sending church sound in comparison with the dynamism of leaders of the younger churches. We illustrate what we say with case studies while they speak of real life situations from last week. Our tendency is to divide the gospel message according to our western specialization while they find it more natural to present a wholistic gospel.

Edgar Stoesz, *Akron, PA, Associate Executive Secretary of the Mennonite Central Committee.*

Gladys Goering

MENNONITE is an attractive, fluent Indian woman saying, What we want most from the Western world is respect. Forget that you are superior. Respect us for what we are. MENNONITE is a Zairian accusing, We feel you look at us as objects. MENNONITE is feeling ashamed that such words are necessary.

MENNONITE is responding to music with singing, sometimes more jubilant and loud than beautiful. A Dutch girls' choir, young and appealing, singing a lilting story of Ruth and Naomi. Combined European choirs carefully rehearsed. A French youth group singing a joyous carol, and then slowing down to lead a congregation stumbling with unfamiliar syllables. Canadians with finely tuned choirs and stirring orations. Relishing the rich tones of instruments well played.

MENNONITE is also saying time for music should be reduced to make room for more sermons and Bible study.

MENNONITE is vigorous handshakes and hugs and kisses.

MENNONITE is instant in argument. Physical blows are not considered but verbal disputes about whether 100,000 people have to be willing to die for peace and justice are quick and strong.

MENNONITE from the west is to feel guilty about being among the world's wealthy, but to resist being told what to do about it.

MENNONITE is to argue that colleges have no right to expand and build new gymnasiums when people in other lands are hungry, and MENNONITE is to insist that healthy colleges are imperative to teach skills and techniques to deal with world problems.

MENNONITE is to choose world council members from our conferences and see 128 men and 6 women on stage as representative of the people at home.

MENNONITE loves a story. The

Upper left, exposed timber houses on the Marche aux Cheh de Lait with Strasbourg Cathedral in the background. Lower left, Rue du Bain aux Plantes in the Petit France section of Strasbourg.

great hall quiets as both children and adults listen to a story well told.

MENNONITE is to tell one's own story beginning, "I recall when. . . ."

MENNONITE is to say there are always alternatives to violence, and MENNONITE is to say there is sometimes no escape from the need to use violence.

MENNONITE is a Spanish woman calling for greater involvement of women in church and community from a country where "machismo" is the highest image, and ending her talk with, "But I think a wife should submit to her husband."

MENNONITE is Joseph's coat, richly ornamented.

Gladys Goering, *Moundridge, Kansas, member of the General Council of the Mennonite World Conference.*

Cornelius J. Dyck

The Strasbourg meeting of MWC was obviously a family style conference. All around me people were greeting long lost friends even on the last day. The meals seemed to be mini family reunion picnics. It looked and felt great. I wondered, however, how many new friends were being made, especially cross-culturally. How much could the nearly 4000 North Americans use this opportunity to get to know members of the Mennonite family from the three-fourths world? Despite the large numbers of non-North Americans present the conference felt very western and ethnically Swiss-Dutch. A few new Mennonites with whom I visited felt this was not really their party. We all have more homework to do.

There was something at this conference for nearly everyone, including children. With 67 discussion groups, 52 special interest groups, 22 work groups, concerts, films, excursions and many other events the needs and interests of most participants were surely met. It was a well-planned conference. The presentations were generally helpful and stimulating, though after one long, hot evening I couldn't help but say, "I can't believe I sat through the whole thing."

What I missed amid the wealth of material presented was a daily, or occasional pulling together and stating of central issues in a way which might have given some homogeneity to the conference. As it was each person or group was on their own, out of touch with the others. This led to a feeling of fragmentation and "doing your own thing" which did not further the unity of mind and heart and will. The rich diversity of people from over 50 nations was, therefore, not brought fully to bear on key central issues and concerns. We did not benefit as much from each other as we might have.

The theme of the conference was powerful: "God's People Serve In Hope." Hope is in short supply today globally. I came to the conference eager to hear old and new counsel about the meaning of hope in our troubled world. Some of this did happen in the devotional and discussion sessions, as well as in the meditations centered in I Peter. Still, I longed for more sharing and teaching about what hope means for believers when we sit with the Bible in our hand and the daily newspaper in the other. Some of this sharing must have happened in the small groups, yet I did not get much response during and after the conference when I pressed people about how Strasbourg 84 had helped them understand and lay hold of the meaning of Christian hope. We would all have benefited greatly from a more intense focus on this central theme.

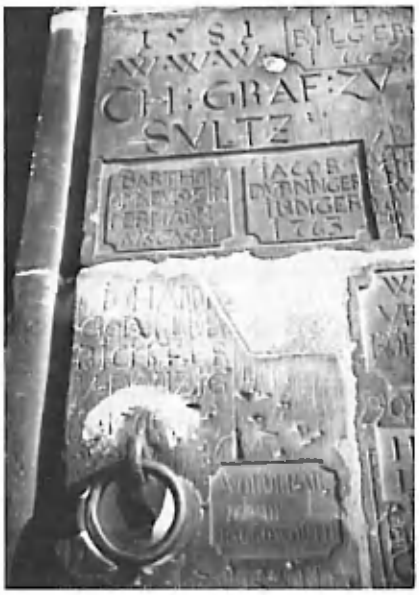
Finally, I had anticipated some common statement of concern from the conference about the crucial issues of nuclear armaments, Central America, the Middle East and the suffering many of our brothers and sisters are experiencing around the world. Such statements might have been addressed to our congregations, to select governments and others, but the biggest benefit might well have been the process of discussing these issues at the conference. There were some statements in the discussion/interest groups but not conference wide. The primary purpose of MWC is fellowship, but it is also witness and speaking the Word of the Lord. Addressing these issues would have been an immense encouragement to our congregations in the three-fourths world. Fortunately the Lord is raising up prophetic voices in all kinds of places on these and other issues. A global gathering of Mennos should have had a "thus says the Lord" word. But the Spirit can also work through each of us without that common ground.

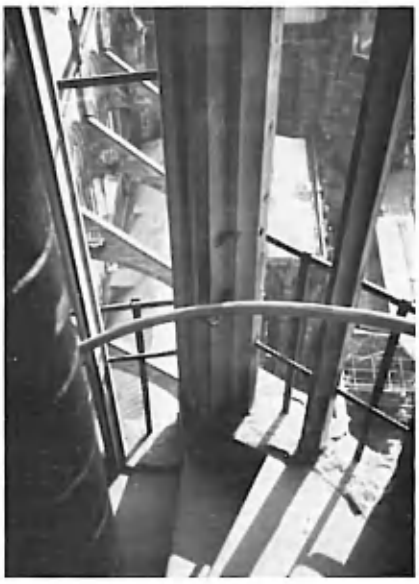
Cornelius J. Dyck, *Elkhart, Indiana, Mennonite Biblical Seminary and former Executive Secretary of the Mennonite World Conference.*

Joanne Juhnke

The days I spent at the World Conference left me with a lot of unforgettable memories. Some of my most vivid recollections are about togetherness: singing, praying, and worshipping as a group. I remember other images, though, that leave me feeling confused. There were so many differences between the people! They were speaking in different languages, wearing different styles of clothing, and discussing different thoughts and opinions. The not-so-obvious differences were even more staggering. People came with different histories, customs, ideas, and beliefs. Almost all the members in the discussion group I attended were North Americans and didn't have to cope with any language barriers, and yet we had a wide range of opinions. Our age span, coupled with our stances from radical to conservative, gave us enough hot discussion topics to keep us talking far longer than time permitted. The name Mennonite includes such a variety! How can such a diverse group even begin to feel like brothers and sisters?

The answer is that focusing on differences is counterproductive. Any large group of people will contain many different personalities. The likenesses must be more important than the differences; otherwise one can't feel a part of a group. When we overemphasize our diversi-





Above, graffiti dating back to 16th century carved on tower of Strasbourg Cathedral; middle, circular staircase of Strasbourg Cathedral with Gothic flying buttresses visible below; below, a 16th century inn at Place du Corbeau.

ty, we tend to forget our similarity.

In broadest terms, the common factor of all the people at the Conference was our Universal Parent, God. The theme of the gathering, God's People Serve in Hope, proclaimed our unity for all to see. We came together to worship God.

A second unifying influence was the desire to follow Jesus Christ. We believe that He was the Son of God and that he died for us. In that belief we try to follow his example of love, discipleship, and peace. Such a bond far transcends our small disagreements in customs and opinions.

Even our differences indicate an important unity. Admittedly, none of us can claim perfection. We are all searching to become better people and a better church. Some of the opinions set forth in speeches and small-group dialogues may have accentuated our differences at times, but listening to ideas other than our own gave us new insight. A discussion is no fun if everybody agrees. Total agreement is akin to total stagnation. It should not and must not happen in our church. God did not make us to be robots. Instead, we are all growing and searching—together.

I saw our differences at the World Conference, but I saw our brotherhood and sisterhood, too. I saw it in the many people who stopped to help my friend look for a lost pendant from her broken necklace. The volleyball players felt it as they overcame language barriers together and refrained from arguing over close calls. It appeared dramatically in the worship sessions and in the sharing of communion. I believe everybody there felt it at one time or another, as we joined together seeking unity through Christ. It was a marvelous experience. I can hardly wait until 1990!

Joanne Juhnke, *North Newton, Kansas 16, high school senior.*

John A. Lapp

The eleventh Mennonite World Conference was without a doubt an event! With over one percent of Mennonites and Brethren in Christ in attendance representing more than 40 countries something happened. The program was well conceived. Each session had sufficient substance with the promise of something new so that participants kept coming back. To miss a session was to miss an important part of the totality. The arrangements were excellent. Logistics and acoustics so essential to the smooth operation of a convention of 8000 people were all but flawless. I heard only compliments. The French touch to mass produced cuisine upheld their well-deserved reputation.

There were highpoints. The opening session line up of country representatives was a living demonstration of a worldwide peoplehood. Each of the morning addresses was good. I especially liked the theology of John E. Toews and Hugo Zorilla in "Who are God's People" and the social ethics of Takio Tanese and Ron Sider. I did not agree with Georgin Boiten-Du Riew, Elke Hübert and Willy Wiedemann's assertion that "Mennonite service today concentrates primarily on our own household" but their emphasis on church structures "which enable individual church members to serve the world with their gifts" was "right on." The Sunday morning communion service provided a profoundly meaningful conclusion to the five day festival. The story telling by Anita Lichti ostensibly for the children inspired everyone. The oratorio *The Abiding Place* especially written for Strasbourg by Barbara Smucker and Esther Wiebe was exciting and well produced. The contrast between the stoic Umsiedler choir and the vivacious Diamond Street Choir demonstrated two important cultural streams in the Mennonite ethos.

For everyone who attended, Strasbourg was an event. Mennonite World Conference should be expected to be the biggest, costliest, most interesting, best conceived, most representative Mennonite meeting. The big question remains—was

Strasbourg XI more than an event? Will it have an impact beyond the stimulation of the meeting itself and encountering friends from around the world? Will there be ripples beyond the getting together especially for the 99 percent not there and the larger Christian movement? In other words, was Strasbourg eventful?

Not every conference has to be eventful. If the church is real and vital there have to be occasions for joyful celebration, fresh Bible study, renewing of relationships, reporting God's work, with the reminder that "God's own people" are found beyond our own congregations, conferences, and national boundaries. Strasbourg had all of these. Indeed Mennonite World Conference emphasizes fellowship. For delegates who meet once every six years, this is the highest of expectations. It also means that at such occasions we do not explore the forces of disunity or project a program for the decade ahead. To be sure, much business was transacted at Strasbourg but this was between sessions or at satellite meetings rather than by the conference itself.

Yet I wonder whether the crisis of our age and the imperatives of Christian witness do not mandate some new initiatives. If "God's People Serve in Hope"—the conference theme—it may be time to look to Mennonite World Conference for sustained leadership in providing a global context for the re-ordering of Mennonite church unity, for reconceptualizing Mennonite theology, and for restructuring our service ministries. Then our coming togethers would be times of prayer and debate, study and strategizing, inspiration and commitment. In order to do this each Mennonite and Brethren in Christ conference as well as each agency and institution would need to relinquish some of their own prerogatives. But then the Mennonite World Conference could be eventful as well as an event.

John A. Lapp, *Goshen, Indiana, historian and Provost of Goshen College.*

J. Winfield Fretz

I asked friends and strangers at the recent conference why they came to this conference. Most of them responded with a puzzled look and a moment of silence. However, after further reflection all of them commented, some as follows:

"It was a chance to combine travel and inspirational fellowship."

"It provided an opportunity to study Mennonite history by visiting historic Mennonite spots in Europe as well as attending the conference."

"I have wanted to attend a Mennonite World Conference ever since I was a five year old girl. This is the first time we could afford it."

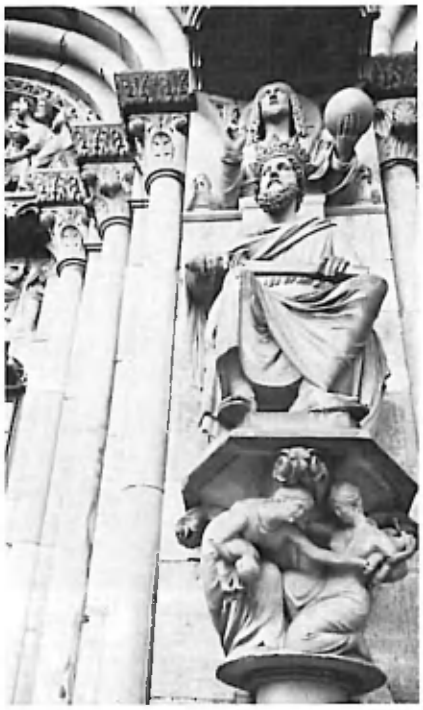
"It was an opportunity to feel the strength of the Mennonite Church. In our country the Mennonite Church is small and scattered."

"I came to see old friends and make new acquaintances."

"I attend a Baptist Church because there is no Mennonite Church where I live in Germany. I wanted to share in the Mennonite World Conference."

As I tried to answer my own question I found myself echoing some of the above sentiments. This was my fifth Mennonite World Conference. For me Strasbourg had a very special appeal. Its location in the historically rich city of Anabaptist memories, plus the equally rich environs of Alsace made attendance at the eleventh Mennonite World Conference irresistible. . . .

The west face of Strasbourg Cathedral currently being repaired.



It was a perfect time of the year to see this beautiful countryside between the Rhine river on the east and the Vosges Mountains on the west. Entire farm families in the fields haying and harvesting, the quaint villages beautifully adorned with crimson geraniums and other colorful flowers plus the industriousness of the native people made one wonder how our ancestors could muster the courage to leave such a land of enchantment. But one only needed to remind oneself that this too was a land repeatedly ravaged by war and by governments, citizens and clergy who were hostile to our peace-loving but non-conforming ancestors.

Now back to additional reasons for attending the M.W.C. I wanted to hear, see and talk with my brothers and sisters in the faith from the so-called third world. At the first such conference in Basel and Zurich there were only four central European and one North American country represented and only about 100 in attendance. By contrast, at this conference 56 countries were represented; 8,000 broke bread together, and the out-going president represented a third-world conference, Indonesia. His keynote address was delivered in excellent English.

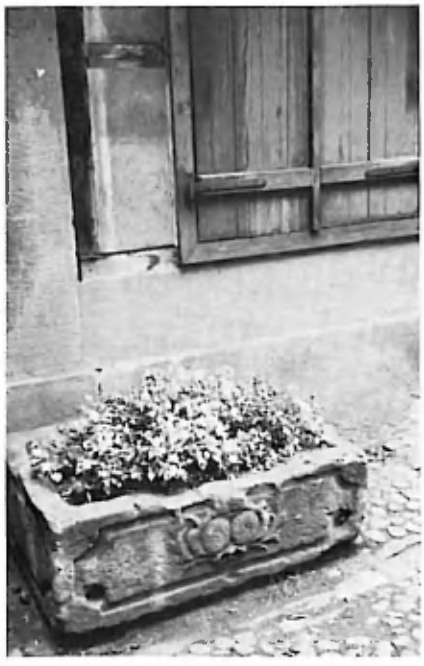
I was interested in trying to sense where the world Mennonite Church is in its theological views, its spiritual pulse and its social compassion. To ascertain these objectives, I assumed, would provide a basis for concluding in what direction my church was heading.

I left the conference with a very positive feeling. It was a superbly planned, organized and administered conference. The level of the addresses, the daily devotionals, the small group discussions, the special interest groups were generally informative and inspiring. The music was outstanding. One woman told me that the commissioned oratorio written by Esther Wiebe and Barbara Smucker and directed by George Wiebe was alone worth the price of coming to the conference.

As I reflect on what makes world conferences so very popular throughout the brotherhood, I think of four reasons. First, they are totally voluntary, people travel and register at their own expense. No one goes because they are sent or have to go in line of duty. Second, these conferences have no weighty controversial issues which take up long hours of discussion time and end in deadlocked decisions. Third, the conferences are primarily world festivals of fellowship—six days of visiting, eating, singing, discussing in large and small, formal and informal groups. Finally, world conferences are attractive to serious church members because they provide a basis for comparing one's own intellectual and spiritual status with that of others from the total world-wide brotherhood. Likewise it enables individuals to compare their local congregational life, organizational thought and spiritual health with sister congregations from other cultures and with different conceptions of discipleship.

Mennonite World Conferences seem to me to be well worth the effort. I hope to be able to attend a few more.

J. Winfield Fretz, *North Newton, Kansas, sociologist and who has attended the last five Mennonite World Conferences.*



Above, south portal of Strasbourg Cathedral showing the earlier Romanesque style. Below, shutters and former stone watering trough in a courtyard along the Quai St. Nicholas.

Erland Waltner

While early Mennonite World Conferences focused on historical celebrations (Basel, 1925, as 400th anniversary of beginnings of Anabaptism, and Amsterdam, Elspeet, and Witmarsum, 1936, as anniversary of the conversion of Menno Simons) and on Mennonite crises (Danzig, 1930, on the Russian Mennonite plight, and Newton-Goshen, 1948 on the fractured relationships among Mennonites left by World War II) Strasbourg 84 became a mirror of contemporary Mennonite identity. It is appropriate to ask, "What did we learn about ourselves as a Mennonite peoplehood at Strasbourg?"

Strasbourg 84 reflects Mennonites to be a global people, not only a European or North American people. Representing Mennonites from 50 different countries of the world, this was the most "international" of any MWC to date although previous sessions have in recent decades step by step been building up to this. While meeting in France, which has a relatively small Mennonite population (listed at 2,000), we represented 730,000 Mennonites. With over 7,000 Mennonites in attendance, we were literally about one percent of the Mennonites of the world.

Manifestly it is the Asian and African part of our peoplehood which is growing most rapidly. The fact that there are many more Mennonites in Zaire (66,408) than in all of Western Europe (37,500), and over three times as many in Indonesia (63,000) as in the former "mother country," The Netherlands (20,200), helps to dramatize the dynamic "reversals" in Christian history. This change was not, of course, yet fully reflected in the MWC XI program, partly because it could not be for economic and political reasons, but it is through MWC that we are made and kept aware of these massive changes.

The impact and implications of such changes dawn slowly on our awareness. To keep on insisting that the language of the hosting country should have been the dominant language of the conference, as some voices argued, ignores new realities under which neither North Americans nor Europeans by themselves make such conference decisions any longer.

Strasbourg 84 became a challenge to my sense of the importance of Anabaptist Mennonite history. While there were historical films and a magnificent historical musical at Strasbourg, my perception is that Strasbourg 84 was almost a-historical in ethos. One came away from Strasbourg 84 without significant awareness even of Wichita 78 or of Curitiba 72 or of Amsterdam 67. Strasbourg 84 was a kind of "nova," a contemporary happening brought into being by the immediate planners and as a work of the Holy Spirit. In short unless one reads some of the preparatory literature very carefully, the sense of discontinuity with previous Mennonite World Conferences was more marked than a sense of continuity.

Does this mean, either intentionally or unintentionally, that in the shaping of our Mennonite identity we no longer take our historical roots, be they European, North American, African or Asian, as seriously as we once did? Does this represent a new swing of the pendulum from "over preoccupation" with our Mennonite "heritage" to new foci of interest? Perhaps this was an accident. Perhaps it reflects who the Mennonites of 1984 are.

Moreover, Strasbourg 84 was experienced by many, more as a celebration of diversity than a celebration of unity. It helped to identify and accent our diversities (50 nations, different languages, different cultures, different music styles, different personal stories). This seemed very good. This rich diversity concretizes for us the richness of God's manifold grace to us as a global people.

There were unities manifest and expressed in Strasbourg, as in singing the same hymn in different languages, hearing the same presentation given in different translations, and confessing the same Hope in Jesus Christ our Lord, especially in the communion service so effectively conducted. Some of us, however, longed to be able to hear a bit more, or even to say a bit more TOGETHER. We were reaching for a clearer statement of what it means to have ONE HOPE (THE HOPE, as the French put it), in Jesus Christ. The call of Ephesians 4 is not only that we maintain the unity of the Spirit (v. 3) which was present at Strasbourg, but also that we grow in the unity of faith (v. 13) which received much less attention at Strasbourg.

Finally Strasbourg 84 demonstrated for me that Mennonite identity today is characterized more by affluence and the tourism this makes possible, than by poverty and a commitment to justice. Of the 3,500 North Americans who attended MWC XI, many participated in additional tours which had included Strasbourg on a larger itinerary. I do not criticize that, but I do reflect on what it says about Mennonite identity. We like to travel and apparently are able to afford it. MWC attendance at Strasbourg is in sharp contrast with Lutheran World Federation attendance meeting at the same time in Budapest, Hungary with 315 delegates plus several thousand other visitors, yet representing a much larger segment of the contemporary church (70 million). Neither is Mennonite tourism any longer simply the characteristic of North Americans and Europeans, for Taiwanese and Japanese were also conspicuously present at Strasbourg possessing and using their cameras. Other segments of Mennonite population were sparsely represented, mainly for economic and political reasons. This remains a continuing challenge to find deeper reality in our commitment to peace and justice.

Erland Waltner, *Elkhart, Indiana, former President of the Mennonite World Conference and who has attended the last eight Mennonite World Conferences.*

Filmmaking Revisited

by Diane Zimmerman Umble

Many filmmakers tell horror stories about the technical problems that plagued the premieres of their films. As Burton Buller and I prepared for the first showing of *Strasbourg: City of Hope* at the Mennonite World Conference, we were beginning to think that we too would have a horror story to share.

It was Monday, the day before the conference officially opened. My family and I had arrived in Strasbourg several hours before the first showings. Burton Buller had arrived in Strasbourg on Sunday carrying four copies of the film, one each in English, German, Spanish and French.

Our instructions were to show the German, and English versions on Monday evening to those who were conference workers and volunteers. Many in the audience had participated in some way in the film; as actors, as hosts to the crew, as contributors of props, equipment, money and planning. They were the people whose history the film chronicles. They were the people we most wanted to please.

The first public showing of a film is approached with mixed emotions by those closest to its production. On one hand, we were relieved that the film was finally finished. Planning had begun in late 1980. Filming was done in fall of 1982 and again in the fall of 1983. The translations of the narration were done that winter. The narrators were recorded in the spring of 1984.

Then the film was sent to the lab for corrections, processing and printing. The lab had delivered the non-English versions of the film to Burton at the airport minutes before his plane was to depart for

Illustrating this article are scenes from the film, "Strasbourg: City of Hope."

Europe.

And we were nervous—nervous about how the film would be received. The French Mennonites had agreed to the project with some hesitation. They now brought expectations to the film showing. I did not want them to be disappointed.

I sometimes think that the first showing of a film is like sending your child away on her own for the first time. After years of preparation and hours of devotion, you hope that in this encounter with the world the child will be appreciated and understood, accepted and affirmed. You hope that nothing happens to mar the child's first public appearance, some random circumstance that distorts the experience. With a child, you may worry about spilled milk or a scraped knee. With a film, you worry about devouring projectors and inept projectionists.

As the first audience was gathering in the auditorium, I saw many who had been part of the filming from Mennonite communities in Alsace. Our greetings were warm—it was good to renew acquaintances. Many memories of those rain-filled weeks of filming came flooding back. They could hardly wait to see the film.

Burton returned from the projectionist's booth, shaking his head. "I hope this isn't a disaster," he said quietly.

The projector was well-worn. The gate through which the film passes was loose, creating a flutter of the image as it was projected. Furthermore, the projectionist had threaded the film so loosely around the sound drum that the sound would be out of synchronization with the picture.

When Burton tried to correct it, he was not allowed to touch the projector. Projectionists are unionized in France, so their equipment is their domain. Since Burton speaks little French, he was certain that the projectionist had not understood his concerns.

As the lights went down, Burton and I both held our breath until the first scene began and we heard clearly the strains of organ music. Aside from some distracting focusing by the projectionist, the showing went reasonably well. The problems we anticipated were subtle and only noticeable to those experienced filmmakers in audience.

But the experience forcefully reminded me how precarious a showing can be. In the end, we hand over the film—the object which contains so many hopes, dreams and memories—we hand it over to a disinterested party for projection. No matter how special the film may be, how it is experienced has a great deal to do with much that is beyond the film itself: the condition of the projector, the competence of the projectionist, the screen, the setting, the sound system.

Following the initial anxieties about the technical problems, our primary concern focused on how people were responding to the film. Responses came in a variety of forms; some technical, some related to content, some related to impact.

Many of the initial reactions were in the form of questions. Who was the narrator? Where was the forest worship scene filmed? How did you get permission to film in the tower at the Covered Bridges? From those who had done some photography, there were questions on film stock and light levels and editing decisions.

One of the common technical questions had to do with the various language tracks. The film contains several dramatic vignettes that depict early anabaptists in Strasbourg. The actors speak in English. The narrator in a voice over the dialog tells the viewer what is being said.

In the non-English versions of the film, one can sometimes hear snatches of the English dialog. People asked why the dialog wasn't dubbed-in in the other languages. The voice-over narration was instead of dubbing because of expense. Dubbing is an extremely expensive process, and the budget didn't provide for that luxury.

The early showings generated discussions and a few debates. One debate centered on the length of the Maginot Line. At one point in the the film, we see a bunker on a Mennonite farm, a French farm near the Swiss border. The narrator refers to the bunker as part of the Maginot Line. Some said that the Maginot Line didn't extend that far south. Others said it did. By the end of the Conference, the concensus was that the script was technically correct, but some held that historically it was not.

Another debate focused on the translations and narrators. Creating a film in four languages was one of our greatest challenges. One of my worries was that some mistake would slip through in the translations or in the narrations. We selected the translators with care, using the Mennonite World Conference translators.

Indeed, we learned of a few mistakes. For example, the English narration describes Pilgrim Marpeck as a "moderate." In the German narration, "moderate" is mistranslated, and Marpeck is described as "mediocre."

The French and German narrators were a bigger problem. We would have preferred using European narrators, but travel expenses made that impossible. Instead we had to settle for German and French speaking persons who were in North America.

The reaction to the German narrator was favorable. "You can tell he's Canadian," one man said, "but his German is good."

Reaction to the French narrator was different. "His voice is flat," one said. "His accent is terrible," said another. "He can't be a native speaker." In fact, the narrator was a native speaker, a young French man from Strasbourg who was living in the midwest.

Among those who had participated in some way in the filmmaking, their first responses were of fascination. They wanted to see what *they* looked like in the film. They wanted to know how "their scene" looked and what they sounded like. During the showings, people could be heard saying, "That's Claude!" or "I know where that is!"

One French Mennonite in the film was repeatedly greeted throughout the conference week as Michael Sattler, the character he had portrayed in the film.

Another young man, who was shown in close-up in the scene of men taking a loyalty oath, told of people stopping him with cries of "I

saw you in the film." He was amazed that people he didn't know kept greeting him. He was particularly baffled by people who attempted to strike up conversations in English, since he speaks no English.

One local Mennonite commented, "It was worth it just to see Jean-Jacques Hirschy in that funny hat as a member of Strasbourg's City Council." Hirschy, a prominent Mennonite businessman, seemed to relish the part.

The Alsatian Mennonites saw familiar people and places in a different context, perhaps seeing themselves through others' eyes. The film showed their towns and villages, their farms, their landmarks. The film told *their* story.

French Mennonites are a minority in French society. They have never conceived of themselves as being rich in history. The film "confirms significance and importance" to the Mennonites in Alsace, one man reflected. "We learned that there was an important historical connection between Mennonites and the city of Strasbourg," said one local woman. "The film provides a thread of meaning through history for Mennonites."

One Strasbourg native said, "French Mennonites will learn their history through the film more than in any other way."

An estimated 13,000 people saw the film. Some watched it two or three times. By that measure, *Strasbourg: City of Hope* was extremely successful. By far the question we heard most often was, "When is the next showing?" All but four of the nineteen showings were before standing-room-only crowds. The smallest groups were for the Spanish version. The percentage of Spanish-speaking persons was smaller than other language groups represented at the conference.

Sometimes at a showing, we would meet someone with whom we had consulted on the planning and production of the film. We would watch them watching the film. The body language and comments revealed that they were appreciating the film. We interpreted nods, chuckles and sighs as positive reactions.

Filmmakers hope that the people whose stories are told feel that they have been fairly represented. We also hope that all people seeing the film will be stirred by them in some way. But I suspect that filmmakers really don't know what the impacts of their films really are, at least not within the minutes, hours or even days of the premiere. I'm not sure that people can or do tell the filmmaker what they really think or feel in response to a film.

Several critical approaches can be used to evaluate a film. A film can be critiqued on the basis of its formal techniques. It can be challenged on the basis of its content. A film can also be judged in terms of the role it plays within a community and the role it has in interpreting that community to a wider culture.

The first two types of critiques can be done now. But some time will need to pass before a final judgment can be made on the third.

For the community of persons who played some part in the production of the film, it embodies hopes, fears, joys and frustrations. It is an occasion for the celebration of that community. If the film is successful, it will invite those who see it to join the celebration as well.

We hope that telling the French Mennonite story recalls for all of us a faith, a history and a vision of a community of Christ, enduring and serving with hope.

Film Review: "And When They Shall Ask"

by John Thiesen

And When They Shall Ask. Written and directed by John Morrow. Produced by David B. Dueck.

This new Canadian motion picture has recently been making a phenomenally successful tour of Mennonite communities in North America. It has generated great excitement and played to packed houses.

The film is a mixture of documentary footage and dramatic vignettes telling the story of the Mennonites in Russia. The script is based on the recent book by John B. Toews, *Czars, Soviets, and Mennonites,* which was reissued in a special edition for the film tour.

Technically, the film was excellent. The documentary material was well edited. The sound track and narration were clear and relevant. The musical score, *Mennonite Piano Concerto* by Victor Davies, lent itself well to the subject matter. Its recording by the London Symphony Orchestra added a certain note of prestige to the film.

The docudramatic vignettes scattered throughout the film were, in general, mediocre although for some audiences they probably had a certain shock value. Some of the vignettes were done with a very heavy hand. The scene with the Mennonite boy and the German occupier's rifle could have made its point without having the boy jump up and fondle the gun. The scene of the Mennonites escaping Russia by train through the Riga Gate built up suspense at first only to degenerate into comedy with camera angle after camera angle of the train racing towards the Gate but never quite reaching it.

One aspect of the film was absolutely brilliant: the personal stories of nine Canadian Mennonites who formerly lived in Russia. Among the nine there was a good balance of opinion on controversial issues (such as the Selbstschutz) and a variety of responses to their suffering. Filming against a black background brought each person and his or her story to the center of the viewer's attention with great impact.

This film is strong on conventional wisdom and follows current popular interpretations of Mennonite history more or less uncritically. Some of these themes need to be examined more closely and perhaps challenged.

The film begins with a short summary of pre-1789 Mennonite history, portraying Mennonites struggling for survival as a people always without a country. This ignores the facts that Mennonites had lived in Prussia before 1789 as long as or longer than their descendants lived in Russia, and that Mennonites lived in southern Germany and the Netherlands since the Reformation. Mennonite history is not simply a story of migrations.

Russia is portrayed as a sort of "promised land" for the Mennonites. Not much is said of pioneering hardships and the large emigration of the 1870s. Not enough is said about inter-Mennonite conflicts. The concentration is on the Mennonite "golden age" of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and on the destruction of that golden age in the Russian Revolution and Civil War.

It is worthwhile to ask to what extent this was really a golden age. Certainly many Mennonites were prosperous, but were *all* Mennonites wealthy? Certainly there were Mennonite institutions, but whom did they serve and how much support did they have? It seems more likely that the Revolution prevented a golden age rather than ended one. Mennonites in Russia were just beginning to become aware of the world around them and the possibilities for mission and service.

The Russian Revolution and Civil War also could be put in broader context. The events did not just happen in a vacuum because of some Communist conspiracy. They evolved because of long-standing injustices. Persons such as Nestor Makhno were not merely bandits. They had specific political programs to implement and wrongs to right and went about it by force. The Red Army was in some ways a savior of the Mennonites, rescuing them from more radical groups such as the Makhnovtsi, bringing stability, and lifting some of the Czarist legal restrictions.

The sensitive question of the Selbstschutz is spoken to from both sides by those telling their personal stories, but the general impression given is that this was a lapse of nonresistance. Is this necessarily true in a situation of the total breakdown of normal law and order? Perhaps the Selbstschutzers should be seen as Mennonite heroes rather than backsliders.

The film's treatment of the Soviet period since the Revolution is interesting. The present-day scene is portrayed ideologically, with the faithful Mennonites clashing with a Soviet society building the "new

communist man." This seems somewhat out of date at a time when many observers of Soviet society are talking about so much cynicism and loss of confidence in Communism on the part of Soviet citizens. Perhaps the Mennonites in the Soviet Union are living in the midst of a society consumed by selfish, get-ahead materialism, not unlike the West.

Soviet Mennonites face varying degrees of official persecution, in contrast to North American Mennonites. The film suggests that this may be a "golden age of faith" for the Russian Mennonites, replacing the lost material golden age. While they have gone through persecution unequalled since the sixteenth century, they have had their conflicts, problems, and failings, just like any other group of Christians. With respect to the different situations, it is probably not helpful to implicitly compare the degrees of "faithfulness" of Soviet and North American Mennonites.

Towards the end of the film the narrator makes the very disturbing statement that Mennonites are "unique in their suffering." This type of narcissism is dangerously blind to other suffering. Certainly Mennonites have endured varying degrees of persecution, but it was not Mennonites who were enslaved in the American South and it was not six million Mennonites who were exterminated in eastern Europe, to cite just two historical examples. Mennonite experiences need to be seen in a broader perspective.

Ultimately, this is a film with a message. It clearly intends to warn North American Mennonites that their prosperity may result in a similar disaster. This is probably too simple an interpretation of the Mennonite experience in Russia. The Russian Mennonites did not cause the Revolution and Civil War by their prosperity. Even if they had been poor they would not have entirely escaped the violence. They were caught up in events beyond their control.

In addition, the situation of North American Mennonites in the 1980's is completely different from the situation of Russian Mennonites in the 1910's. Our prosperity must be examined from another historical context. There is no simple and obvious lesson to be learned from the experience of Mennonites in the Russian Revolution.

And When They Shall Ask fulfills its title perfectly. ". . . in days to come, when your children ask you what these stones mean, you shall tell them . . ." (Joshua 4:6,7). It is very similar to Dueck's earlier film on the Mennonites of Paraguay, *Heimat fuer Heimatlose*, in presenting a popular or traditional view of its Mennonite subjects. Like the Bible, these films are not strictly history but interpretation of history. Film, with its great sensory impact, is the perfect medium for interpretation, for questions of meaning.

The reason for this film's great popularity is that Mennonites are asking, "What has God been doing in our history? Where is God leading us?" This is not just a desire for historical facts but a desire for the meaning of those facts. This new film, despite some flaws, speaks forcefully to these questions.

John Thiesen
Newton, Kansas

Book Reviews

1. Marilyn Lithgow. *Quiltmaking and Quiltmakers.* Funk and Wagnalls, 1974, Pp. 100. 6.95.

2. Laura Siegel Gilberg and Barbara Ballinger Buchholz, *Needlepoint Designs from Amish Quilts.* Charles Scribner's Sons. 1977, Pp. 143. 14.95.

3. Lynda Musson Nykor and Patrica D. Musson. *Mennonite Furniture.* James Larimer & Co., Toronto. 1977, Pp. 95.

4. Robert Bishop and Elizabeth Safanda. *A Gallery of Amish Quilts: Design Diversity from a Plain People.* 1976, Pp. 96.

5. Michael Bird and Terry Kobayashi. *A Splendid Harvest: Germanic Folk and Decorative Arts in Canada.* Van Nostrand Reinhold Ltd., 1981, Pp. 241, 29.95.

This selection of illustrated books could have been further extended. They are chosen, more or less at random, because they have the following in common: They all deal with certain aspects of Mennonite or Amish material culture; they all contain rather accurate historical material; they all emphasize the high quality and unique nature of the folk art and craft of the plain people; and for non-Mennonites these books emphasize the high collectible value of the material treated.

Mennonites have resisted the idea that they should be known by any aspect of their material culture. They want to be known as a people of *faith*, not as a people who might be known for the way they do things, for the things they make, or for the foods they eat. At some festivals we serve foods our mothers delighted to cook but we call them "German" and "Swiss" foods even though the recipes for these foods can only be found in Russian, Polish or Ukranian cook books.

The authors in our selection of books take the position that Mennonites and Amish do have a positive and distinctive faith and because they have exercised this faith in a historical and geographic context they have done things in a certain manner. In other words, their daily life has tended to reflect the values inherent in their faith. Having taken this position, these authors proceed to examine such aspects of material culture as textiles, architecture, furniture, fractur, and gravemarkers.

Marilyn Lithgow is a fifth generation descendant of Mennonite settlers in central Illinois. She tells the story of the Reesors, her maternal ancestors, who came from Alsace, France and settled in Illinois prior to the Civil War. The author's contemporary context is derived from MCC relief auctions and the ongoing activity of the Mennonite women in providing quilts for these auctions. She observes that "Quiltmaking and related handcrafts still exist today because of people like the Mennonites who have never forgotten the importance of working with one's own hands to create objects of visual beauty."

The author not only treats the history and philosophy of quilting but also includes chapters on quilt design, quilt names and superstitions, quilt fabrics and dyes and a practical chapter on "how-to-do-it." This book should be used by quilters in all of the MCC relief auction areas. From observation of auctions at Goshen, Indiana; Arthur, Illinois; New Hamburg, Ontario; and Hutchinson, Kansas, the reviewer has seen that highly salable quilts include all these elements: choice traditional design, quality materials, desirable colors, and excellent workmanship.

The book by Gilberg and Buchholz begins with a chapter by Jonathan Holstein, America's outstanding quilt authority, on Amish background and a description of Amish quilts. Holstein offers this testimony: "Amish quilting is at its worst good, and at its best, superb. The stitching is fine, the motifs carefully planned and often elaborate." And again, "While the basic design elements in Midwest Amish quilts are different from those of Pennsylvania, the effect is broadly the same. One is struck by their richness, elegance, and harmony."

Using quilt designs for needlepoint is the subject of several books and constitutes, as this writer has discovered, an interesting approach to the study and use of quilt designs.

Mennonite Furniture is a serious and detailed study of this particular aspect of Mennonite material culture. The historical background of the Mennonites who settled in Ontario is carefully traced. As the authors indicate, "The European background that shaped beliefs and customs, the years in America, the events that prompted the move north —all of these factors had an impact on the craft of furniture making." The craftsmen are individually identified and the subtle

changes in style of this furniture over the years is painstakingly indicated.

This brief study (95 pages of text and illustrations) has been done with a sense of urgency and includes an appropriate study of Mennonite architecture as reflected in the homes, barns and meetinghouses. The changes now overtaking Mennonites in Ontario are occuring among all rural Mennonites in North America. Similar studies could and should be made of comparable phases of the material culture of Mennonites who pioneered in the prairie states, built distinctive houses and made furniture according to traditional patterns and along lines of functional usefulness.

Robert Bishop of the Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan and Elizabeth Safanda have gone a step beyond Jonathan Holstein, author of *The Pieced Quilts: an American Design Tradition*, and have given us a lavishly illustrated book of exclusively Amish quilts.

A Gallery of Amish Quilts has over 130 color plates of quilts, preceeded by a scholarly introduction giving a sympathetic account of the spiritual and cultural roots of Amish society and the evolution of the Amish quilt as an expression of that society. Exclusive art gallaries and auction houses have now recognized that Amish quilts are enduring works of art visually exciting and sophisticated.

When this reviewer requested Amish quilts for exhibition at the Mennonite World Conference in 1978 he was met with blank stares. It took people like Jonathan Holstein, Elizabeth Safanda and others to recognize and to proclaim the unique beauty of the Amish quilt. These collectors and writers sensed the visual appeal and superior craftsmanship of the Pennsylvania Amish quilt.

Few Amish quilts were made before 1860, and in recent years changes in color and design have led to quilts being made in some Amish communities which are no different from "English" quilts. The traditional Amish quilt confronts the viewer with subtle tones of blue and purple and green and mauve and earthtone browns. The patterns may include a variety of bars, star designs or geometric groupings of small squares known as "Sunshine and Shadow" or "Around the World" patterns. More recent popular designs include variations of the "Log Cabin," "Drunkards Path," "Grandmother's Flower Garden," and "Baskets."

The most comprehensive and ambitious effort at treating an entire spectrum of Germanic folk art in its material expression is the book by Bird and Kobayashi, *A Splendid Harvest: Germanic Folk and Decorative Arts in Canada*. As implied by the title, the authors have examined folk art of the older Germanic communities in Canada from Nova Scotia to the prairie provinces of Manitoba and Saskatchewan. While the authors do include continental German Lutherans and Catholics who settled in Canada, the major emphasis is on the Amish and Mennonites whose devotion to simplicity and whose family cohesiveness operated to produce and to preserve functional and beautiful material expressions of life.

Brief historical accounts of the movement of Germanic peoples into Canadian provinces are given as background. Aspects of folk art treated include architecture, furniture, fractur and drawings, textiles, pottery, decorated utensils, woodcarving, and gravemarkers. Illustrated with colored as well as black and white plates, the book succeeds in pointing out details of cultural expression and relating these to Mennonite faith and history.

A similar treatment of the Mennonite heritage of material culture in the plains states should be produced. Museums and archives in Hillsboro, Goessel, and North Newton, Kansas and Mountain Lake, Minnesota show much of this culture. Many artifacts and furniture still in private hands occasionally appear in centennial and other special displays. Sadly, too much of this furniture (tables, chests, cabinets, benches) have already left the Mennonite environment by way of antique shops and private collectors. Urban America homeowners take great pride in furnishing their home with "ethnic primitives." In Pennsylvania this has recently happened to the Amish quilt; in Kansas, Nebraska and other areas it is happening to the fractur, the schloopbank and the threshing stone.

Mennonites in the plains states must accept the fact that the term "Mennonite" applies not only to a religious faith but also to a way of life and the material expressions of that faith. The heirlooms of a people do tell a significant and dynamic story. We live our faith in a physical world as we eat and drink, provide for our shelter and comfort and communicate with others. As an antidote to the current tendency toward rootless living it is well that we occasionally make contact with the world in which our ancestors lived.

John F. Schmidt
North Newton, Kansas

Armon Wiebe, *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens*. Winnipeg, Manitoba: Turnstone Press, 1984. 176 pp.

Mennonite history, in fact, all church history, is most easily written if one uses readily available sources such as conference minutes, church periodicals, and the correspondence of the leaders. Armin Wiebe's *The Salvation of Yash Siemens* reflects the underside of the Mennonite experience which rarely finds its way into the history books. This under- and inner-history may be as significant in understanding a people as that which appears in official histories.

Although my background is neither Low German nor Manitoban nor Canadian, I found in this short novel a window of access into a house full of earthy, believable Mennonite characters, people who just may be much like those to be found in many other Mennonite communities on both sides of the Canadian-U.S. border.

The story is set in the mythical Mennonite village of Gutenthal in sight of a tall TV tower just across the border in the U.S. People talk a mixed-up language of Low German, High German, and English set often in a Germanic syntax and speak in metaphors which exude an aroma of barnyard and kitchen. The language and images may be a bit offensive for sensitive eyes and ears, but the

novel does have the sounds, smells, rhythms, loves and hates which seem to have a wholistic integrity.

Armin Wiebe, the author, is now teaching in the Canadian far north, up in the Northwest Territories. He was born in Altona, Manitoba, where he grew up and obviously lived long enough to store up a host of images which find their way into this story.

Yasch Siemens, the central character, was born "on the wrong side of the double dyke." His father wandered off to Mexico to visit his uncle and never came back. Yasch worked for neighbors as a hired hand and enjoyed a local reputation as a pitcher on the baseball team. There also is Oata Needarp, the 200-pound daughter of Nobah Naze, who appears on the scene in a "pink dress like a tent that would hold almost the Brunk Tent Crusade." The strange, reluctant Yasch-Oata romance is intermingled with a variety of questions such as true love and/or the attraction of father's farm, believer's baptism and/or baptism as a condition for marriage, the *schmallen Lebensweg* and/or the art of pleasing community opinion.

The world of Yasch Siemens moves about in three strata of language: Low German for farm, house and fun; High German for church and heavenly affairs; English for school and city. It appears that these language zones permit varied ethical behavior appropriate to the zone.

In a community where there are six named Jack Siemens, nicknames are essential and also an outlet for fun and alliteration. One meets John Deere Derksen, Ha Ha Nickel, Zoop Zack Friesen, Zamp Pickle Peters, Barley King Barkman, Rape Rampel, Milyoon Moates "with his eighty dollar shoes," and Klaviera Klassen, the church pianist.

People are known by the cars they drive: Nobah Naze's 51 Ford 4 door, Yasch's Chevy half ton with plywood over a hole on the floorboard on the "woman's side," and Hingst Heinrich's gray Vauxhall. You smell burning rubber and see flying gravel as young men execute fast get-aways from church yards and ball fields. One senses that much human worth is wrapped up in operating big farm machinery: standing on a 4010 John Deere tractor pulling a 20 foot deep tillage cultivator or a big CCIL disker. Yasch exults at one point: "Driving a big outfit, like a tractor or combine, now that's farming." In the handling of farm machinery one observes that fundamental changes are occuring in men's and women's roles.

One goes with nine year old Yasch and his father to a Brunk Tent Crusade at the fair grounds. He heard the preacher preach loud and long. The little boy was scared and his terror intensified as they began to sing, "Just as I am without one plea." He recounts the experience: "When they hummed it about ten times I couldn't stand it no more, so I grabbed [my father's] hand and he squeezed mine and . . . the hand seemed so strong and big like maybe I could crawl all the way into it . . . and I held on to Dad's hand all the way home to that little house by the train tracks. And I wasn't scared one little bit."

In the flashbacks to childhood experiences are intermingled joy and pain. Emmanuel Rempel moves to Gutental when Yasch is in the sixth grade. They become close friends. The school bully takes an instant dislike to Emmanuel and harasses him unmercifully. Again and again Emmanuel turns the other cheek and responds serenely to loathsome taunts and torture. Emmanuel weaves in and out of the later chapters as a kind of Christ figure.

Scattered through the novel are glimpses of frugal people emerging with dignity from rural poverty. Children make skipping rope from binder twine. Fly swatters are improvised from wire and a piece of old belting. Checkers are sawed as thin sections from a broomstick. In community are also rich farmers who add section to section, incorporate their holdings, sometimes reach for more land than they can manage, and have cottages at Mouse Lake.

One observes the rites of passage from childhood to adolescence and from adolescence to adulthood. These rituals are acted out in different settings such as the parking area around the Dairy Dell where Trudy Teichroeb's mother serves soft ice cream. After some years of varying degrees of alienation most seem to nestle into a life of family, farm and church.

The novel is strewn with bits and pieces of Mennonitica. The mother reads the *Steinbach Post* for news about third and fourth cousins in Paraguay. . . . Church members grumble about taking offerings for wayward youth at Ailsa Craig in faraway Ontario when there are bigger needs close at home. . . . We observe how the pianist gathers people into the church on a hot Sunday evening by playing softly, "Do Lord, Oh Do Lord, Do Remember Me," and then louder and faster so that by the fourth verse everyone is in church. . . . We listen to Preacher Janzen, who "had learned himself to preach in the States, and you know how the States people always have to make a big show out of everything, just like they were living on TV." . . . Ridiculed by neighbors about his simple farm operation, Yasch is tempted to go after them with a pitchfork but is restrained by an awareness that he is Low German and "full of *Wehrlosigkeit*."

Best of all are those glimpses of choir practice, Christian Endeavor services, ritualized testimonies, a funeral service, and that developing awareness that "maybe it's not so bad to do things that other people do, like go to church and get married and be a farmer." A 23-year old Yasch is ready to give up playing ball, to be a farmer, to get married in the spring, to stand before the preacher after he has learned the catechism and to let the elder pour water over his head.

This might be one of the great Mennonite novels of this generation. I hope this highly gifted Armin Wiebe continues to write. This novel should encourage other would-be novelists to tap the rich lode of Mennonite experience which holds so much folk wisdom on how communities are bonded together, values transmitted from generation to generation, and a people finds an inner identity over against the world.

Robert Kreider
North Newton, Kansas

Edna Gerstner, *Song by the River*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960, 153 pp.

Song by the River is a missionary novel based upon the author's ex-

perience at the Mennonite mission in Korba, India, in the 1920's. Although the book has long been out of print, it deserves notice because it was not reviewed in Mennonite periodicals at the time of publication.

Edna Suckau Gerstner is the daughter of Cornelius H. and Lulu Johnson Suckau, missionaries in India from 1909 to 1928. C. H. Suckau was the founder of the Korba mission station and later pastor of the First Mennonite Church of Berne, Indiana, and founding president of Grace Bible Institute. Gerstner is a graduate of Wheaton College (A. B.), and the University of Pennsylvania (M.A. in English). Both she and her husband, Dr. John Gerstner, have been active in the Presbyterian Church.

The plot for the novel is a love triangle, involving a married missionary couple and a single woman. Of special interest is the portrayal of the roles of women missionaries. The word of healing and discipline in this story comes from a fourth character, a strong woman doctor who admonishes the single woman in the triangle: "Never sympathize with a married man. All married men are misunderstood . . ." (p. 64). The story manages to sustain the reader's interest, although there is never any doubt that the requirements of morality and orthodoxy will be served in the end.

The novel makes no specific references to Mennonites or to the names of people at the Korba mission station. The author has penned a few notes in the margin of a copy recently deposited in Mennonite Library and Archives. The notes indicate that some of the events and persons in the novel are based on her experiences in Korba. The incidents of the story are somewhat overdrawn—a cobra attack, women missionaries fighting a tiger, a Muslim mob at the mission hospital during the independence upheavals, an attempted suicide, and more. This was a heroic age of missions, and it was the author's intention to portray both the greatness and the human frailties of her characters.

Beyond the inherent interest of the story, this novel is an important source, too long overlooked in Mennonite circles, for an imaginative understanding of issues, events, and social roles in mission work in India a half century ago.

James C. Juhnke
Bethel College

Willard H. Smith, *Mennonites in Illinois*. No. 24 in *Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History*. Foreword by Peter G. Schultz. Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1983. 613 pages. $24.95.

Here is Mennonite regional history written as it should be. Dr. Willard H. Smith, the author, presents a wealth of information about Mennonites who have lived in Illinois for 150 years. He holds one's interest with his narrative skills and his eye for the good story. He builds on the shoulders of Harry Weber's 1931 centennial history. Above all, the uniqueness of this 613 page volume lies in its inter-Mennonite approach. He seeks to look at the Mennonite picture whole.

The Illinois Mennonite Historical and Genealogical Society, a vigorous inter-Mennonite society engaged in gathering and preserving historical records and artifacts, is to be congratulated for its concept for and commitment to this project and its wisdom in inviting Willard Smith to undertake the task.

Dr. Smith approaches the subject with affection. He comes from an early Amish-Mennonite Illinois family. His uncle was the distinguished Mennonite historian, C. Henry Smith. Both share a gift of curiosity, story telling and facility with words. Dr. Smith's formal education has included Hesston College, Goshen College, the University of Michigan, the University of Chicago and the University of Indiana (PhD). He is Professor Emeritus of History at Goshen College, Goshen, Indiana, where he was a member of the faculty from 1929 to 1972. His writing has ranged over diverse subjects from the Mennonites in Paraguay to the Indiana politician—Schulyer Colfax to William Jennings Bryan to this, his crowning achievement.

Our attention is captured in the first paragraph by his account of Joliet and Marquette setting foot in Illinois country in 1673, ten years before that first boatload of Quaker-Mennonites arrived in Philadelphia. Throughout the book he is attentive to the broader American historical context which envelops the Mennonite story. The first paragraph underscores the theme of context; the last paragraph underscores another major theme—the fact and the vision of inter-Mennonite unity.

Illinois, which stands astride the lines of Mennonite movement East and West, has embraced unusual Mennonite diversity. Two major strands—the Mennonite Church (Old) and Amish-Mennonite—were united into the Illinois Mennonite Church Conference in 1920. In a second unity move the Central Conference and the General Conference were joined in 1946. Many groups are of Amish lineage: the Stuckey Amish (Central Conference), the Conservative Mennonite, the Beachy Amish, the Egli Amish (Defenseless Mennonites and since 1948, Evangelcal Mennonite Church), and the Old Order Amish. Add to these the Reformed Mennonites, Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Churches, the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren, and the Mennonite-related Missionary Church Association.

Chapters two through eight are devoted to a description of these conference and congregational histories. Chapters nine through eighteen focus on themes which cut across all groups: publications, Sunday Schools, revivalism, education, missions, war and peace, theological controversy, the city, acculturation, Mennonite cooperation, and much more. One senses a new maturity of perspective in this history. Dr. Smith does not avoid or gloss over the unpleasant episodes in the story. As he unapologetically opens closet doors, one senses authenticity in this account.

I was particulary intrigued with the dynamic presence of the city of Chicago in this history. Here lived for a time John F. Funk, pioneer publisher and facilitator of the 1870s migrations. In Chicago was established in 1893 one of the first city missions, the Mennonite Home Mission. Students were drawn to Moody Bible Institute, which penetrated in its influence many Illinois congregations. For a generation MCC held its meetings in Chicago. In the Chicago area at Reba Place an innovative intentional community took root. "Fresh Air Children" were distributed every summer among Illinois congregations in a

unique program of cross-cultural exchange. Mennonite Biblical Seminary was based in Chicago for more than a decade. There is still much which can be written about the powerful Chicago presence in the life of the Illinois congregations.

One observes in this history the commanding role of leaders from outside Illinois who shaped the life of the churches: John S. Coffman, M. S. Steiner, and Daniel Kauffman. One sees leaders like Joseph Stuckey, C. Henry Smith, and J. S. Shoemaker exerting an influence far beyond the state. One meets fascinating persons like Amos Hershey Leaman who was a city mission innovator with fresh air programs, a "gospel wagon for street evangelism," an annual Christmas dinner, the Happy Hour Mission, noonday religious meetings in a Loop theater, Easter sunrise services in Soldiers Field, and more.

Dr. Smith has many stories about the bits and pieces of Mennonite life. He tells of a converted priest, Father Hilary, who was received with enthusiasm by Illinois congregations and then gave evidence of being a con artist. He tells of the sleeping preachers. This history is not dull.

Mennonites in Illinois has an abundance of useful information at the end: an excellent index, lists of congregations and leaders of each, a fold-out chart of the origins of all groups, and an extensive bibliography. Distributed through the book are many photographs appearing in print for the first time.

Dr. Smith's full history should stimulate other studies. More could be told about the General Conference at Sommerfield, recently deceased, which was a highly significant organizing center for inter-Mennonite programs. More should be done in the future in making inter-state comparisons: Illinois and Iowa, Illinois and Indiana, and other states. One may ask why there was not the congregational purging in the 1920s as in some other states. As we gain more distance in time from some of the unlovely church fights of the past one can go further in analyzing the varied components of faithfulness, obstinancy, power acquisitiveness, external influences, fear, congregational discernment intermingled in these controversies. Many of the old labels are inadequate in describing the nuances. There is much further work to be done on acculturation and change in congregational life and on the impact of affluence on discipleship. How does piety correlate with good land and poor land? Illinois Mennonites dwell on much good land.

As one who was born in Illinois, and whose earliest church memories come from Illinois, this history is for me a particular delight.

Robert Kreider
Bethel College


FISCHER