

MENNONITE LIFE

SEPTEMBER 1992



In this Issue

In April 1992 the Kansas Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution at Bethel College sponsored a conference, "Violence and Nonviolence in the American Experience." Historians and history teachers at that meeting explored possibilities for more peace-minded interpretation of American history. The papers presented will be published soon in the C. H. Wedel Series with the title, *Nonviolent America: History Through the Eyes of Peace*.

This issue of *Mennonite Life* presents revisionist interpretations of events in two American wars. William Juhnke's article on the Hiroshima atomic bomb, revised from his April presentation, tells how that event can be used for creative teaching. Juhnke holds the F. Henry Edwards Chair of Religious Studies and is Professor of History at Graceland College, Lamoni, Iowa. He had an article on "President Truman's Committee on Civil Rights" in a recent issue of *Presidential Studies Quarterly*.

Richard V. Pierard, outspoken critic of "George Bush's Holy War," is professor of history at Indiana State University. Pierard has served as a Fulbright Professor at the University of Frankfurt (1984-85) and University of Halle (1989-90) in Germany. He is a layperson in the American Baptist Churches U.S.A., member of the Baptist World Alliance, and co-author (with Robert D. Linder) of *Civil Religion and the Presidency* (Zondervan, 1988).

Elmer Suderman, veteran contributor to *Mennonite Life*, is a retired professor of English at Gustavus Adolphus College. His article in this issue analyzes the Mennonite literary theories of Al Reimer and John L. Ruth, both originally presented in the Menno Simons Lecture series. Ruth's lectures were published in the March 1977 issue of *Mennonite Life*. One of Reimer's lectures was in the June 1992 issue. All four lectures are scheduled to appear in the C. H. Wedel Series.

The October 1949 issue of *Mennonite Life* published a map of the Alexanderwohl village in the Molotschna settlement in south Russia just prior to the migration to Kansas in 1874. That issue also included a map of the new Alexanderwohl settlements in McPherson and Marion Counties in Kansas. Richard H. Schmidt, Taxidermist Emeritus from the Department of Biology of Emporia State University, has prepared corrected and improved versions of those maps. Schmidt's roots are in Hochfeld Village of Menno Township. We are pleased to include the fruit of his painstaking research in this issue.

Suzanne Lawrence is also a child of the Alexanderwohl community. Her poetry bespeaks a latter-day return to village roots and attentiveness to the voices of immigrant ancestors.

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Mushroom cloud formation that followed the detonation of an experimental thermonuclear or "hydrogen" device, at the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission's Pacific Proving Grounds, in the Marshall Islands in the fall of 1952.

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Teaching the Atomic Bomb: The Greatest Thing in History

by William E. Juhnke

On hearing the news of Hiroshima's destruction on August 6, 1945, President Harry S. Truman declared with his typical Missouri eloquence: "This is the greatest thing in history."¹ For a history teacher, searching for subjects that will not only engage students but will capture the richness of the historical discipline, the atomic bombing of Japan is nearly "fail-safe." The topic may be the greatest thing in history. "No novelist could have created a more exciting plot or . . . more memorable characters," longtime Yale teachers of "The Bomb" have noted.² The episode is alluring for teaching/learning in part because it is a pivotal point in history, punctuating the end of World War II and launching the nuclear age; in part because it has had such a rich historiography—"the most debated decision in history;"³ in part because it has the elements of high human tragedy, both in the Greek sense of inevitability and the modern sense of missed opportunity. Finally the topic entices because it is rich with possibilities for peace and conflict resolution education.

A historian and relative newcomer to peace studies, I still have some trepidation over doing history from a "peace perspective." From both the historical and teaching professions I hear reminders to be objective and dispassionate. Surely the true historian must be committed to presenting the story "as it really happened" rather than as she/he wants it to have happened. Similarly, if true learning is by discovery and if the ultimate goal of liberal education is freedom and critical thinking, teaching from an overt peace perspective may disarm the learning process.

I reach some peace of mind on these issues by noting, first, that history has never been ultimate objective truth; it is in its essence "interpretation." In

fact, it is arguable that unless values underlie our study of history, it "will end up as a sterile exercise."⁴ There is certainly no license for peace historians to be untruthful or inaccurate. But interpretation goes beyond that, and an interpretive framework that abhors violence and is sensitive to peaceful historical alternatives might lead to better questions and answers regarding causation and meaning of critical historical events. The ultimate story might be a better story, a more vital history in an age filled with the unprecedented potential to destroy or reshape human history itself. Secondly, regarding peace education, it occurs to me that authoritarian peace instruction, forcing peace interpretations down the throats of students, should be a contradiction in terms. A peace studies approach to history inherently involves discovery learning and critical thinking methodologies. Far from distorting the educational process, a peace studies approach to the history of the atomic bomb, for example, should fulfill the best intentions of modern pedagogy.⁵

Alternatives

A peace studies skill much discussed in recent years is the ability to imagine alternative futures.⁶ A peace historian's version of this skill might be to imagine the better alternatives of the past. Vernon Parrington, noted American historian of the "Progressive School," observed that the "familiar business" of the historian is "exhuming buried reputations and revivifying dead causes."⁷ Building alternative historical interpretations can begin with identification of paths, considered in the past, but not taken. While there are few limits to imagining alternative futures, the professional historian is limited by the facts,

by the parameters of imagination in historical time. Paths could not be taken if they were not imagined.

As the Pacific war wound down in the summer of 1945, five different courses of action might have been followed to end the war with Japan. All were given at least some consideration by decision makers of the era: 1) modify surrender terms, 2) demonstrate the bomb, 3) wait for Russia to intervene, 4) invade Japan, and 5) drop the bomb without warning. The fifth alternative became history.⁸ The fourth option, the expected course of action before the bomb was perfected, was scheduled for November 1, 1945. With the Okinawa campaign fresh in mind, no one was attracted to the idea of invading mainland Japan. The other alternatives, however, are intriguing. How viable were they? Could the ghastly application of nuclear power have been avoided? A curriculum on the bomb might spend considerable time developing alternatives such as these.

First, it would be important to assess how close Japan was to surrender by summer of 1945. There are a number of ways to measure this. The Japanese navy, virtually destroyed, could not venture out for offensive actions; its air force was reduced to Kamikaze attacks and offered little resistance to the wholesale bombing of Japanese cities; its armies, cut off from the mainland, were fighting only last ditch, suicidal efforts without hope of advance or effective retreat. Many American commanders recognized the enemy situation. The U.S. Navy, impressed with their effective blockade of Japan, thought that war was over. So did the Air Force. "We were running out of targets," one commander recalled.⁹ Some Japanese recognized the inevitable as well. The peace party within the

Japanese government was growing in power, and the Suzuki cabinet, with Emperor Hirohito's encouragement, was making peace overtures through the Soviet Union. Having broken the Japanese code, and informed by our Russian ally, the United States was fully aware of these "peace feelers." By the end of July these efforts were becoming desperate. Prince Konoye was sent to Moscow to "secure peace at any price," and American leaders saw deciphered Japanese diplomatic messages in late July that read: "There is only one obstacle to peace, 'unconditional surrender.'" ¹⁰

Thus the first option to the bomb was to modify surrender terms. Specifically, at the bottom line, modification meant, as Japanese specialists in the State Department knew, allowing the Japanese to keep their emperor. If there appeared to be Japanese willingness to negotiate on that basis, though not yet directly with the United States, there were signs that some American leaders were open to such consideration. Joseph Grew, Undersecretary of State and former Japanese Ambassador, John J. McCloy, Assistant Secretary of War, Henry L. Stimson, Secretary of War, and even Harry S. Truman were all sympathetic at some level to this modification of surrender terms, heretofore expressed as a policy of "unconditional surrender."¹¹ Indeed, an early draft of the Potsdam Declaration, the ultimatum that preceded the atomic bombs, included specific assurances regarding the position of the emperor. The arguments for this modification were alluring: 1) if the emperor, beloved and even worshiped by his people, were not protected, the Japanese were liable to fight "to the last man," a costly prospect for both them and us, and 2) any postwar reconstruction would be much smoother with the potential support of a constitutional monarch. But the ultimatum was amended. Assurances were not given, that is, not until after two atomic weapons were dropped, which critics argue is additional evidence for the efficacy of this alternative. Japan surrendered, not only after two bombs and Russian entry into the war, but only after *assurances for the emperor were made*.¹² Here was a real path, considered and not taken, a potential alternative to the horrors of atomic war in 1945.

The second alternative was a demonstration. In brief, the scenario for this

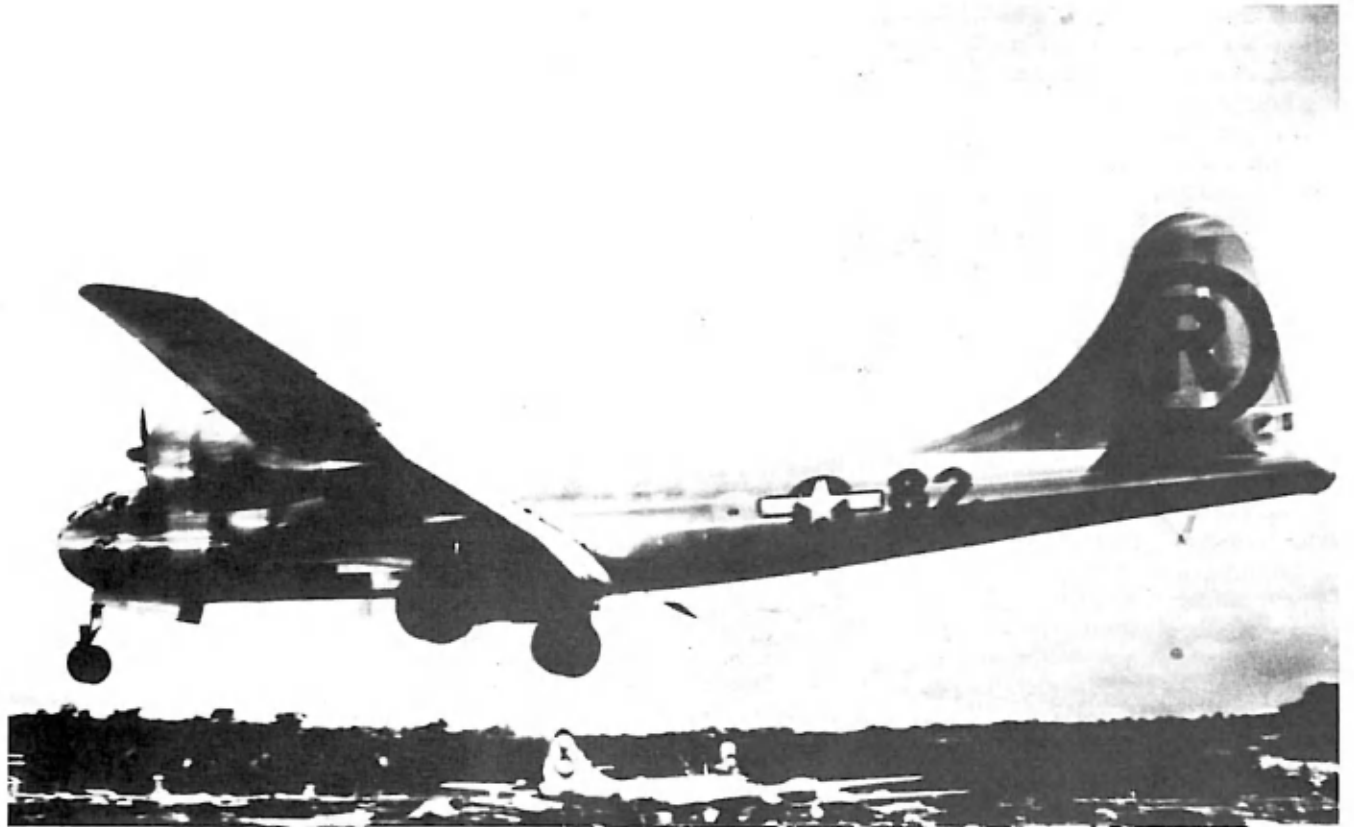


Hiroshima, Japan, Atomic Bomb Dome

option is that Japan, on the verge of collapse anyway, surrenders when the United States, with an eye towards the internationalization of nuclear power in the postwar era, accompanies a clear ultimatum to Japan with a non-military demonstration of atomic power. Further, this imaginative alternative proposes that, even if Japan continues fighting and other atomic bombs are necessary to end the war, America would have taken the high moral ground and established important precedents for the nuclear age. The first use of atomic weapons would have demonstrated reason, cooperation and restraint, characteristics not advanced by dropping the bomb on a Japanese city without warning.¹³

The most notable advocates of this alternative were a group of seven atomic scientists from the Metallurgical

Laboratory at the University of Chicago, headed by Nobel Prize winner, James Franck. In June 1945, they forwarded a report to Secretary of War, Henry Stimson, emphasizing the transformative power of the weapon they were creating, and arguing that its first use in warfare should be governed by its inevitable impact on the postwar world. They recommended sharing the secret, that could not long be kept exclusive anyway, and demonstrating the bomb on a non-military stage. The Interim Committee, charged with atomic planning, took up the demonstration alternative as well, asking members of a scientific panel to evaluate the efficacy of demonstrating the bomb. In July Leo Szilard, another atomic scientist who along with Albert Einstein had fathered the whole bomb project, circulated a petition eventually signed by 76 atomic



The Enola Gay, a Boeing B-29 Superfortress, landing on Tinian in the Marianna Islands after dropping the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima on Aug. 6, 1945.

scientists, calling on the government to sensitively use the bomb in some kind of non-lethal demonstration.¹⁴ So this option, too, was in the air in the summer of 1945, an intriguing path considered but not followed. Had it been taken up, perhaps in the form of a dramatic pyro-technical display over Tokyo Bay, at the window of the Japanese government as it were, there might have been a more hopeful ending to World War II.

The third option was simply to wait. Russia, courted throughout the war for assistance in the Pacific theater, had promised to come in three months after the close of the European conflict. By late July it was clear that Russia would attack in Manchuria no later than August 15. When those assurances were clarified at the Potsdam Conference on July 17, Truman confided in his private diary, "Fini Japs when that comes about."¹⁵ Truman seemed to understand the importance of Soviet entry into the war: Now it would be over before the scheduled invasion. Japan's initiative for mediation was through Russia, but Russia was preparing to attack. What would have been the impact of waiting for that last open door to slam

shut? But America would not wait; the first two atomic bombs were dropped, literally, as soon as it was physically possible to do so.

The alternatives considered here are not ahistorical; they were imaginable in historical time. Our own Strategic Bombing Survey, established by Truman, concluded its postwar study of Japan's struggle to surrender: "Certainly prior to 31 December 1945, and in all probability prior to 1 November 1945, Japan would have surrendered even if the atomic bombs had not been dropped, even if Russia had not entered the war, and even if no invasion had been planned or contemplated."¹⁶ Any of the alternatives considered above might have changed history. If these paths had been followed simultaneously, it is difficult to imagine that there would have been over 350,000 casualties at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The post-war story of nuclear competition might have been better as well. The point of the second theme on the bomb, is to encourage the historical hunt for relevant, more peaceful alternatives. The three alternatives on the bomb discussed here should provoke a lively inquiry and discussion.

Wartime Decision-making

Another focus for an atomic bomb curriculum is decision making in wartime. Here we arrive at the central preoccupation of the historical profession—explaining why things happen. If there were real alternatives to the bomb that seem attractive from a peace perspective, why were they rejected? Why did those who held the destiny of atomic war in their hands, drop the first bombs on Japan without warning? It is not difficult to find in the historical record specific reasons why decision makers rejected each of the alternatives suggested above. It is tempting to say that they approached the bomb from a "war perspective," not a "peace perspective." Regarding "unconditional surrender," many policy makers found the Japanese imperial system and its cult of emperor worship anachronistic, offensive to democratic sensitivities, and susceptible to future military manipulation. Moreover, to allow the emperor to remain, Stimson explained, would have put the government in a position of reversing "its field too sharply; too many people were likely to cry shame."¹⁷ A demonstration might have

been taken as a sign of weakness; an announced display might have been foiled or, worse yet, it might have been an embarrassing dud.¹⁸ And to wait for Russia to play a military role, was to permit Stalinists to get in on the peace negotiations and division of the spoils of war in the East, a special concern of Jimmy Byrnes, the new Secretary of State in the Summer of 1945. With the bomb in hand, if it could be dropped in time, Russian intervention would not be necessary. Moreover, use of the bomb against Japan could make the Russians more amenable to American interests in the postwar period.¹⁹ Finally, the most pervasive argument in 1945 was that the bomb had to be dropped to end the war and save lives. To policy makers, the Japanese peace feelers were bogus; the military continued to dominate government councils in Japan; and Japanese military fanaticism showed no signs of abatement.²⁰ Identification and evaluation of such rationalizations can provide excellent grist for educational inquiry.

Even more useful to understanding Hiroshima and Nagasaki might be consideration of four broader explanations of wartime decision making: A rational

actor model, an organizational process model, a bureaucratic politics model and a war culture model.²¹ A "rational actor" model of decision making, assumes that individuals make choices, more or less rationally, on the basis of information before them. There are certain attractions to this approach. Among them for peace studies is the implicit faith that people make history and hence they can, or could have, made it better. The rational actor analysis, some historians explain, is helpful to understanding a number of aspects about the atomic bomb decisions; for example, the Roosevelt Administration's initiative to develop the bomb in the first place showed rational actors responding to evidence of the frightening prospect that Hitler could be developing the bomb himself.²² However, there are limits to rational actor analysis in understanding Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Truman, the presumed ultimate decision maker, who said he considered all aspects of the problem, dropped the bomb to save lives, and then lost no sleep over the matter,²³ despite his "buck stops here" recollection, may have made no decision at all. Unfor-

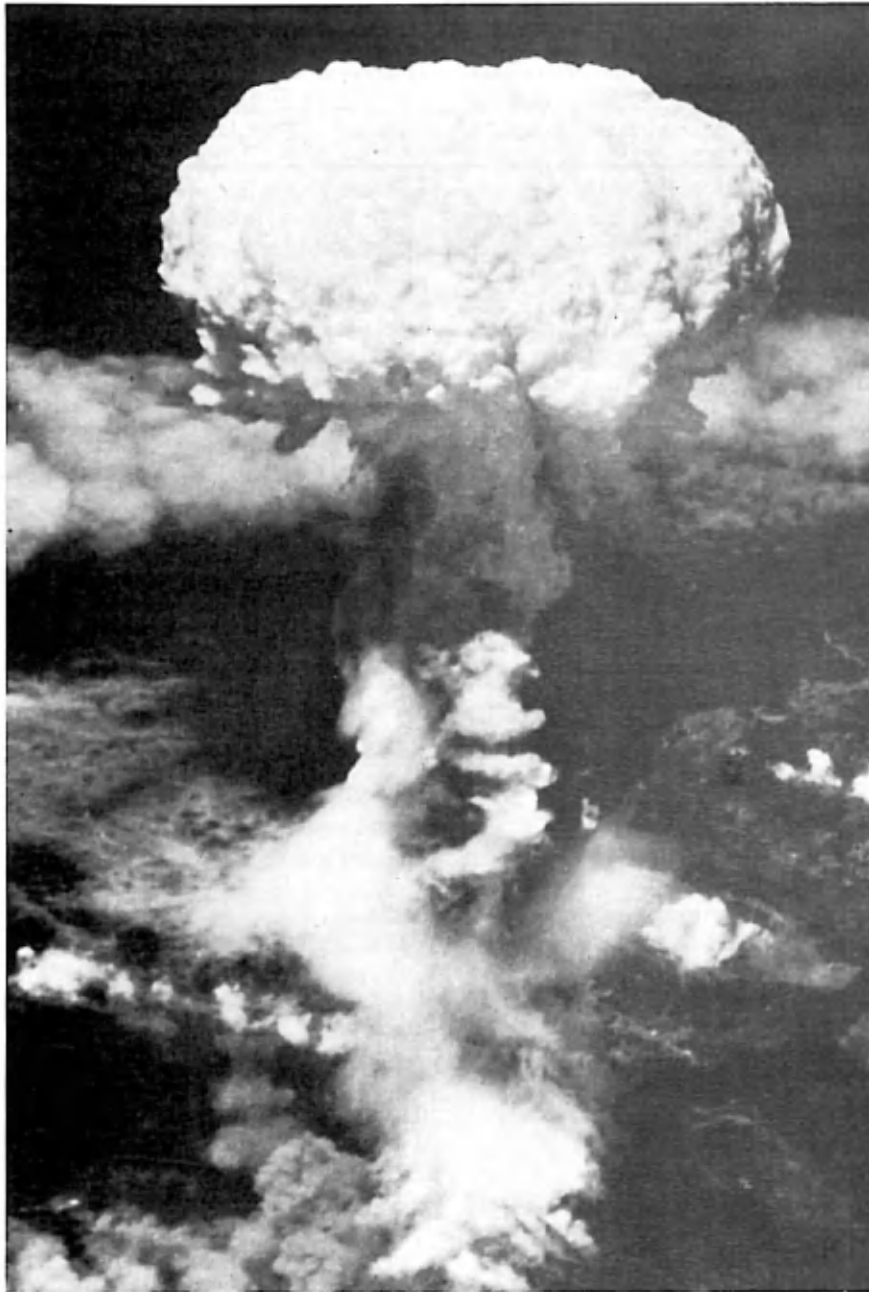
tunately, perhaps, for this decision of destiny, President Franklin Roosevelt died only weeks before the key atomic decisions were made. Truman, who had not been taken into Roosevelt's confidence regarding the bomb, had serious doubts about his own ability to fill FDR's shoes, asked few questions during the atomic bomb discussion,²⁴ and perhaps inevitably did little to stop the atomic momentum that was already underway when he became president. Roosevelt, in a 1944 discussion about the possible use of the bomb on Japan, told Churchill: "It might perhaps, after mature consideration, be used against the Japanese."²⁵ A supremely confident president, with 12 years of experience, might have been a more likely "rational actor" than the neophyte from Missouri, still wet behind the ears, as it were.

A second model of decision making, the "organizational process," model, is perhaps more helpful in understanding Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It emphasizes the role of group structure and group process in decision making. The compartmentalization and secrecy, which had early been imposed on the structure

A street in Hiroshima after the bombing, depicted in the eyes of a survivor of the blast.



八月七日早朝入市。翌八日
 余山の県庁本部より連
 絡用登ったの市内牛は
 方面之向ふ途中百島町
 に於て目撃した惨状。
 路上の馬も、水槽の死体
 悉く焼けふらして既に悪
 臭を鼻を立つ。
 広島県法向初支那の空馬口
 横山 正



Bombing of Nagasaki, Japan, Aug. 9, 1945

of atomic decision making, impacted at key points consideration of alternatives to dropping the bomb without warning. For example, the brilliant physicist Robert Oppenheimer, director of the bomb construction at Los Alamos, assured concerned scientists that the political leaders were carefully pursuing every avenue for peace. Unfortunately, Oppenheimer was outside of the information loop on such critical details as the Japanese peace feelers and Japan's hopeless military condition. "We didn't know beans about the military situation in Japan," Oppenheimer later admitted.²⁶ The scientific

panel, on which Oppenheimer served, reluctantly concluded that a non-military demonstration would not induce the Japanese to surrender. Without the full picture at their disposal, how meaningful is that conclusion? Yet the scientific panel's recommendation was the final link in setting the demonstration alternative aside.²⁷ Secrecy on the bomb project had been so pervasive that it inhibited open exchange on key policy issues.²⁸ Various advisory groups, which existed to evaluate atomic alternatives, seem to have been infected with "group think,"²⁹ that dissent-inhibitive tendency often found within organiza-

tional decision making bodies. Significantly, military reservations regarding the use of the bomb were not communicated effectively to Truman at the crucial June 18 war strategy meeting, because the standard operating procedure for the Joint Chiefs was to speak with unanimity.³⁰

"Bureaucratic politics" also worked against serious consideration of alternatives to using the bomb. Admirals Leahy and King, who had reservations about the bomb, simply had less political influence than General George Marshall, Army Chief of Staff, and the outspoken General Douglas MacArthur. Similarly, Joseph Grew, principal advocate of modifying surrender terms, and even Henry L. Stimson, who was beginning to show the effects of his advancing age, did not have the clout of Jimmy F. Byrnes. Young and politically savvy, Byrnes became the key player. He probably felt he should have been president rather than Truman (and Truman probably agreed), and he just happened to be a firm realist with no sympathy for modifying surrender terms, staging demonstrations, or coddling the Russians. It was Byrnes who was standing as "gatekeeper" when Szilard's petition came to Washington. He refused to take up Szilard's concerns with Truman. And it was Byrnes who would have the last word on the Potsdam Declaration.³¹ The internal politics of the situation proved determinative in closing out more peaceful alternatives.

Finally, and most broadly influential on the atomic decision process, was the corrosive impact of cumulative war, called above the war culture model. This model emphasizes that wartime decisions are precisely that, decisions made within the parameters of the logic and dynamics of war. The war culture of the "unconditional surrender" decision is a case in point. A modern battle cry, generated by propaganda needs of democratic war and the presumed failures of World War I strategy, "unconditional surrender," once advanced, was very hard to retract, no matter how illogical it might be when applied to Japan.³² In a sense American leaders became trapped by their own wartime rhetoric: As Stimson said, "Too many people were likely to cry shame."³³

John Dower in his provocative book, *War without Mercy*, takes a slightly different approach. He describes well the corrosive effects of the culture of war in the Pacific. "The dehumanization of

the Other," he argues, "contributed immeasurably to the psychological distancing that facilitates killing, not only on the battlefield but also in the plans adopted by strategists far removed from the actual scene of combat. . . . War words and race words" brought both sides to an "obsession with extermination—a war without mercy."³⁴ Truman's gut response to a suggestion that the bomb celebrations were unseemly, speaks volumes about this atmosphere of war time decision making: "When you have to deal with a beast," said the President, "you have to treat him as a beast."³⁵ War destroys compassion and understanding; it provides, not incentives for reflectivity or a search for alternatives to brutality,³⁶ but incentives instead to employ ever-better ways to kill and destroy.

America's progressive willingness to use civilian, terrorist bombing strategy in the Second World War, is perhaps the most important single military development directly relevant to the wartime decision to use the atomic bombs. Michael Sherry and Ronald Schaffer,³⁷ in separate studies of American bombing in World War II, describe the "dynamics of escalation" and the erosion of sensitivity regarding the use of air power. American policy early in the war, officially at least, approved only strategic or precision bombing of the enemy. And, at the outset, there was some reluctance to engage in deliberate terror bombing in practice. But air attacks were inherently imprecise—the Norden Bombsight was much over-rated—and civilian deaths, "collateral damage" it was called, were inevitable. As the war progressed, it became easier and easier to bomb cities with impunity. As late as February 22, 1945, Secretary of War Stimson was still asserting that "our policy never has been to inflict terror bombing on civilian populations;"³⁸ yet two weeks earlier, the Americans had joined the British in the fire bombing of Dresden, a relatively unimportant city strategically, whose population was deliberately targeted. And two weeks later, in the most "successful" air attack of the entire war, Tokyo was targeted for fire bombing. General Curtis LeMay wanted Tokyo "burned down—wiped right off the map."³⁹ Here the "collateral damage" was to strategic installations, and over 100,000 civilians died. Buoyed by this success, the air force began a systematic campaign to destroy Japan's major

cities, a campaign described by Sherry as "the triumph of technological fanaticism."⁴⁰

In this context, the Hiroshima decision is not much of a stretch. Caught in their "apocalyptic fantasy,"⁴¹ decision makers were inured to the "inevitability" of civilian casualties. Consider also that Oppenheimer had told his superiors that the bomb would produce about 20,000 casualties, and of course no one had anticipated the long-term effects of nuclear radiation.⁴² Given the 100's of thousands of civilian deaths accumulating through "conventional" bombings, the atomic strategy was old hat and the new weapon was simply a "big bomb." The momentum of war, and the pervasiveness of war culture, suggested that there would be little invested in looking for alternatives to dropping the atomic bombs.⁴³

The theme of "imagining alternatives," and this focus on "decision making," are in an inescapable tension: One emphasizes "missed opportunities;" the other explains why they were missed. Now, which is it? Was this a tragedy that could have been avoided or was it a tragedy that expressed the essence of the human condition in 1945? Neither position should be offensive to historians who come at it from a peace perspective. And the potential for classroom debate is substantial.

Morality of Atomic War

A third theme on teaching the atomic bomb that I would like to review is the morality of atomic war. The moral position of the pacifist can be anticipated. As unjust means can never fulfill just ends, use of atomic weapons are at least as abhorrent as any other level of violence. Indeed, dropping atomic bombs on civilians and the future specter of nuclear annihilation that the act raises may be the ultimate argument for the pacifist position. War itself is immoral. "So long as we resort to war to settle differences between nations," Ken Brown wrote some years ago, "so long will we have to endure the horrors, barbarities and excesses that war brings with it."⁴⁴ Hiroshima and Nagasaki become the ultimate "I-told-you-so," the final proof that war must be abolished.

Interestingly, from an entirely different perspective, there emerges at least surface agreement with the pacifists that war is totally abhorrent, atomic war only more so. There is a

lure to conclude from war's brutality that it makes no sense to apply moral ideas to the discussion of war.⁴⁵ War is immorality run wild. It is hell and there are no rules in hell. As General Curtis LeMay, author of the incendiary bombing strategy in the Pacific, said after the war, "All war is immoral, and if you let it bother you, you are not a good soldier."⁴⁶ President Truman himself warned against becoming preoccupied with atomic weapons. "War itself is the real villain," he said.⁴⁷ However, the viewpoint is, upon examination, self-serving and grossly ineffective as a moral guide. Given the fact of war, it would permit anything, not just two atomic bombs but chemical and biological warfare and use of entire nuclear arsenals in a war of total annihilation. In reality moral calculation has been important to mankind, occasionally in wartime, even to Truman, and arguably moral calculation in time of conflict can be refined and improved.

Accordingly, a discussion of the morality of atomic war must consider what is known as Just War doctrine. While Just War theory goes back to the Middle Ages, most contemporary discussion of modern war is framed in Just War terms. According to its doctrine, even though war itself may be inherently evil, there are just and unjust ways to prosecute it.⁴⁸ Thus, some strategies of war, it is argued, are more immoral than others. A justification of revenge, for example, apparent at some moments in the motivation of various American leaders in 1945, is given no moral standing in Just War theory. One version of a revenge justification for the bomb goes like this: Since Japan started the war unjustly—"Remember Pearl Harbor"—we have more moral license to respond with things like atomic weapons. The Japanese deserve whatever they get. The moral bankruptcy here is obvious. The argument (disregarding its ignorance of possible mutual responsibility in the outbreak of war) claims that it is right and good, not only to imitate the worst of the enemy, but to even outdo them in immorality.⁴⁹

The classic defense of dropping the atomic bombs, however, is stated in decidedly moral terms: The bombs were dropped to end the war and save lives. The argument seems to embody the essence of "proportionality," a key concept in Just War doctrine. The bad effects (20,000 deaths anticipated from one bomb) were far outweighed by the

good effects: an end to the dying on both sides—no invasion, no more fire-bomb raids, no continuing blockade, which “might have” cost hundreds of thousands or even millions of lives. In this sense, the bombs were a “miracle of deliverance” to both sides.⁵⁰ Dropping the bomb, by such calculation, was perhaps the most “humane” or most “highly moral” act of the entire Second World War.

The moral difficulties here are more subtle. In part they hinge on the answer to the question: Were the bombs in fact necessary to end the war and save lives? If there were no alternatives to an invasion, particularly, if “unconditional surrender” was the war aim of moral choice, then the “lives for lives” argument is more impelling. Though it is impossible to answer that question with certainty, we have raised some doubt about whether dropping the bomb without warning was absolutely necessary to end the war and save lives.

Adding to the moral difficulties, from the Just War perspective, is the principle of “noncombatant immunity; that is, innocent civilians must not be the direct, intentional object of military attack.”⁵¹ War strategists, to the contrary, argue that there are few innocent civilians in twentieth century war. Modern war is economic war, total war, they say. Whole peoples mobilize to support the war effort, and war is not over until their morale has been destroyed. “There are no non-combatants in Japan,” one officer announced. “Our enemy is the entire population of the country.”⁵²

But Just War theory does not retreat. It insists on wartime efforts to discriminate between those who carry out the war effort and those who may have simply paid taxes, prayed for their country, or merely waited in their baby carriages or rocking chairs. Just War theory asks, “What did they do to deserve annihilation?”⁵³ In wartime, care must be taken to minimize harm to innocents.

The atomic bombs did not discriminate. No one argues that more Japanese soldiers, direct war production workers, or military structures were destroyed at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, than ordinary civilians and commercial or residential buildings. The aim point was the center of the city. Truman may have called Hiroshima and Nagasaki “purely military” targets, but that was largely self-deception. “They wanted the bomb to

kill civilians,” writes historian Barton Bernstein.⁵⁴ The atomic raids, as the fire-bombings earlier, were terroristic attacks on civilian populations designed to destroy their morale and thus end the war. The presence of military targets in these cities, while not unimportant to the war planners, seemed secondary to the strategy of urban destruction. Just War analysis suggests potentially serious moral problems in such a strategy.

Michael Walzer in his book *Just and Unjust Wars*, hardly a pacifist treatment of the issues, endeavors to determine if there is ever a time when indiscriminate bombing of cities can be morally justified. He proposes a “doctrine of supreme emergency”: if there is an “unusual and horrifying danger” to civilization itself, it might be permitted “to override the rights of innocent people and shatter war conventions.” Walzer is willing to see such an emergency just prior to the Nazi Blitz of London in 1940. With civilization in the balance, Churchill’s decision to inaugurate terror bombing of German cities was acceptable. However, Walzer finds no such “supreme emergency” later in the war that would have justified the terror bombings of Hamburg, Dresden and Tokyo, no such unusual and horrifying danger to civilization in August of 1945 to justify the use of atomic weapons on Japanese cities. The threat then was not to everything decent in civilization—the Japanese were not genocidal, totalitarian Nazis, in his view, and they were losing, not winning, the war. The only threat was our plan to invade the Japanese mainland in order to achieve militarily, at great cost, what could not be achieved politically—unconditional surrender. Walzer concludes, “The victorious Americans owed the Japanese people an experiment in negotiation. To use the atomic bomb, to kill and terrorize civilians, without even attempting such an experiment, was a double crime.”⁵⁵

Another way to approach the morality of atomic warfare is to look at the problem of responsibility. At the end of World War II, the Allies tried over 20 surviving German leaders for war crimes. Had the Germans inaugurated nuclear war in their losing effort, it probably would have been listed as one of their crimes. Of course, there was no trial of American leaders for the atomic decision. Who bears the responsibility for the civilian casualties at Hiroshima and Nagasaki? The children

of Hiroshima, the Japanese military leaders, the government of Japan? Do President Truman, his military and civilian advisors, the bomber pilots and their crews, the atomic scientists, or the American people bear any responsibility? Or is, perhaps, the milieu to blame—American and Japanese cultures, nationalism, militarism, the human instinct?

Invariably the response of the accused at Nuremberg was that they were just following orders. Many Americans directly involved in the bomb project, from development to explosion over Japan, might have offered a similar defense. Does it wash? In a representative democracy, the citizens themselves bear a unique responsibility. The historical record is clear that fear of voter reaction to moderation and delay influenced the decision to use the bombs.⁵⁶ American citizens betrayed intense hatred towards the Japanese during the war, giving vent to a “latent racial bias.” One observer used the word “bloodthirsty” to characterize the populace. A Gallup poll in June 1945, revealed that 61% of people who knew Hirohito was Emperor of Japan believed he should be tried for war crimes, imprisoned for life, or summarily executed after the war. A *Fortune* survey in December 1945, revealed that 53% of the American populace favored the government decision to use the atomic bombs and another 23% would rather “have used many more of them before Japan had a chance to surrender.”⁵⁷ Faced with such attitudes, does it make sense to blame exclusively the politicians? As the glow of the first atomic bomb faded over Alamogordo, New Mexico, one scientist commented soberly, “Now we’re all sons of bitches!”⁵⁸ Perhaps we are all responsible.

In modern society it is increasingly difficult to locate moral responsibility for specific acts. Where is the moral fibre of a bureaucracy or a decision making process? Modern warfare makes things even more difficult. John Glenn Gray in his classic philosophic commentary on men in battle, emphasizes the growing “abstraction” of modern war. Instead of killing our enemy face to face, where we see, feel, and smell the slaughter (and, according to Gray, where we may have a searing memory that can lead to guilt and a search for atonement), modern warfare, as in the case of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, is done from a cultural and physical dis-

tance with sophisticated equipment and impersonal accounting of the damage. As such warfare, abstracted from concrete human interaction, becomes "terrifyingly normal" as it did in World War II. Gray fears, there is no atonement—a commitment to make up for things—because there is no memory, no sin, no guilt, no responsibility.⁵⁹

Treating the moral issues of atomic war including questions of responsibility can lead to the most provocative and successful of classroom experiences. A classroom trial of Harry S. Truman for "war crimes" might be a good launching pad for such consideration.

In conclusion, teaching the atomic bomb is a gold mine for relevant education, especially taught from a peace perspective. I am convinced that additional themes and approaches will emerge as peace historians teach this topic. However, as a beginning, I hope the themes suggested here will provide a useful stimulation for history teachers and curriculum planners. The educational effort may help fulfill the hope expressed in the Hiroshima memorial stone: "Rest in peace, for the mistake shall not be repeated."⁶⁰ If this cenotaph is honored, if Hiroshima and Nagasaki become the instructive memory of nuclear war, it will be the greatest thing in history.

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George Bush's Holy War

by Richard V. Pierard

Well over a year has gone by since the guns fell silent in the Persian Gulf region and President George Bush stood poised atop the pinnacle of success as a world leader. Now, at last, sober reflection has begun to replace the boundless self-congratulation. A nation that once was awash in a sea of yellow ribbons is no longer gushing with exultation, as the faltering economy and social explosion of Los Angeles have pushed martial glory out of the picture.

Add to this the realities that Saddam Hussein is still in place, democracy has not been established in Iraq, Kuwait, or Saudi Arabia, the level of human misery in the region is just as great as ever, and the Iraqi dictator was the recipient of American largess and virtually unqualified support almost to the last minute, and it is patently obvious that the bloodshed accomplished essentially nothing outside of a temporary ego uplift for a people trying to escape the ghost of Vietnam. It has no longer even assured Mr. Bush's reelection, something which many cynics believe was a primary motivation for his overkill adventure in the Middle East.

As one who believes firmly in the saving work of Jesus Christ, I found the conflict to be particularly grievous. I felt at the time, and in the subsequent months my conviction grew increasingly firmer, that people in my own evangelical community, and especially our leaders, were not willing to reflect seriously on the spiritual implications of this quick, clean, shiny, glorious military action.

Few of my fellow Christians were prepared to take a second look at Mr. Bush's war for righteousness, and as a result our credibility in the world has been seriously damaged. I hope that the following lines might have the salutary effect of encouraging at least some

evangelical Christians to engage in a genuine reassessment of their attitudes toward the conflict.

Support for the War

As the crisis which began on August 2, 1990, deepened and the military build-up of Operation Desert Shield followed, the divisions within the American religious community became obvious. But then, with the launching of the attack in January, most people in the United States closed ranks behind their President. Evangelicals and neo-conservatives in particular embraced Mr. Bush's war with gusto and invoked God's blessings on the U.S. service men and women positioned in the Gulf area.

Two examples will suffice to illustrate the point. In a letter to the editor of my local newspaper, a devout evangelical named Donald Tichenor praised the U.S. effort in a world that "is not a playground but a battleground between right and wrong and freedom and slavery." He compared it to Abram's war recorded in Genesis 14 which, he said, was "just a rerun of U.N. forces and Iraq." He added that "sometimes men have to mingle their blood for freedom just like Jesus gave His blood for our eternal salvation." The American people salute those "who fought in the Persian Gulf for a job well done to make this world a safe place for freedom loving people. Without question God is on the side of freedom."¹

George Weigel, writing in the organ of the neo-conservative Ethics and Public Policy Center, declared that the U.S. decision to engage Iraq militarily and the conduct of the war itself "was as closely conformed as is possible, in this kind of world, to the classic moral criteria of the just war tradition. It was

a just war. We won a great military victory." For all the human tragedy that it involved, the Gulf conflict still "was a war for peace. Its satisfactory conclusion is an occasion to sing 'We praise Thee, O God': not as crusaders, but as Americans who saw their duty and did it." He then condemned critics for "their monumental wrongheadedness" during the period between August and February and affirmed "the renewal of a country that fulfills the promise of liberty and justice at home while acting as a force for peace with freedom abroad."²

Nevertheless, many Christians had doubts about the wisdom of or necessity for the venture. On November 12, 1990, the U.S. Catholic Conference (the full body of bishops) issued a statement of concern about the crisis in the Persian Gulf,³ and on February 12, 1991, in a move orchestrated by the National Council of Churches, leaders of more than 20 Protestant and Orthodox denominations, joined by 15 Roman Catholic bishops, reaffirmed their opposition to the war. The latter declared, "The words of the gospel cannot be reconciled with what is now happening in the Gulf," and called for a cease-fire and "fresh effort to find a diplomatic solution."⁴ Even a distinguished group of Baptist clergy held a major prayer service in Washington on January 15, the day of the UN deadline for Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait, and urged restraint upon the Administration.⁵

Unfortunately, the leaders of American evangelical Protestantism lacked the same spiritual insight and fortitude to question the President's determination to initiate a war on behalf of his vaunted "new world order." Individuals who supposedly had committed themselves to the authority of Scripture and the power of God, surrendered their rea-

sons and wills to the god of the state and joyously welcomed the war and its expected outcome. In addition, they justified the conflict as God's will and judgment on an evil enemy. The overwhelming majority of the evangelicals (as well as most of the laity in the mainline churches, both Protestant and Catholic) grasped at the chance to put the ghost of Vietnam behind them and reaffirm American national pride and greatness.

The principal voices of American evangelicalism gave unqualified assent to the war. Evangelist Billy Graham came to Washington at Mr. Bush's behest the day Operation Desert Storm was initiated to provide spiritual counsel and lead a prayer service, while a few days later the National Religious Broadcasters unanimously approved a resolution supporting the President.⁶ The political spokesmen for the two largest conservative groupings in America, Robert P. Dugan, director of public affairs for the National Association of Evangelicals, and Richard D. Land, executive director of the Southern Baptist Convention's Christian Life Commission, both were quoted in the *New York Times* as agreeing the criteria for a "just war" had been met by Mr. Bush's effort in the Gulf. In fact, Land sarcastically declared that if the call for a cease-fire "were put to a vote of the membership of the churches belonging to the National Council, it would lose, and lose badly."⁷

One might justifiably conclude that these two rationalized their backing of the President's policy because they belonged to his party and shared his views. But simple believers across the country gave their unquestioning allegiance as well. They said that we must not "let our men and women in the Middle East down," even though more perceptive observers recognized this was merely a guise for supporting Mr. Bush. Thus, homes and churches were bedecked with yellow ribbons, prayers were said for and God's blessings invoked upon the troops, and patriotic hymns were sung in many worship services.

Saddam Hussein was portrayed as the ultimate personification of evil, the aggressor who had deprived poor, little Kuwait of its freedom. The fact that it was an oil-rich sheikdom, which had virtually no understanding of human rights, democratic processes, and religious freedom, was conveniently ignored. No concern was expressed for

the other victims of the war, the innocent Iraqi people and their conscript soldiers. Evangelicals with their deep commitment to foreign missions did not even let this dampen their enthusiasm for the conflict, even though it would surely set back the cause of the Christian witness in the Middle East for decades, if not centuries, since all the old memories of crusaders were evoked in the minds of the people there.

It was obvious that President Bush realized just how dependent the "American way of life" was on the continued supply of Middle East oil. He was exhilarated by his easy success in Panama in 1989 and recognized that the Soviet Union was no longer in a position to act. Thanks to the Reagan build-up, the military machine was in better shape than at any time since Vietnam, and he was ready to go for higher stakes. By carefully controlling media access to the actual combat situation in the Middle East, drawing upon the reservoir of support he had in the Christian community, and orchestrating popular patriotism and exploiting the emotional potential of civil religion, he was reasonably certain that he could pull off the greatest triumph of his presidency.

However, as a Christian who takes the Word of God seriously and emphasizes the demands of Christ on one's life, there was no way I could go along with this rush to take up arms. General Omar N. Bradley's famous statement about Douglas MacArthur's desire to

extend the Korean War to China is just as applicable here—"this strategy would involve us in the wrong war, at the wrong place, at the wrong time, and with the wrong enemy."⁸ The war against Iraq was unjust and immoral from the very beginning, and sooner or later America would have to pay a price for the few moments of pleasure, proud exultation, and national muscle-flexing that came from the victory.

The war was wrong on two counts—the gross misuse of "just war" theory by Mr. Bush and his entourage and his unabashed exploitation of civil religion. This situation was well-illustrated by the speech which he delivered on January 28, 1991, to the convention of the National Religious Broadcasters, the umbrella organization of televangelists and media moguls which some regard as the biggest event of the year on the evangelical calendar. It was the most remarkable address of this type since President Reagan's famous "evil empire" speech of 1983.⁹

Invoking the Just War Criteria

Since the principles of just war theory are quite well-known, there is no need to review these.¹⁰ In the NRB address Mr. Bush justified the war by painting the Iraqi dictator as the personification of evil. According to him,

it is not Iraq against the United States, it's the regime of Saddam Hussein against the rest of the world. Saddam



On Jan. 22, 1991, about 50 persons (foreground) gathered on the lawn of the Harvey County Courthouse in Newton, Kansas, to protest the U.S. military action in the Persian Gulf. They were threatened and driven away by about 200 angry pro-war demonstrators (background) carrying U.S. and MIA-POW flags and signs supporting the war against Iraq.



Another scene from the Jan. 22, 1991, incident in Newton, Kansas, with pro-war demonstrators in the foreground and peace protestors in the background.

tried to cast this conflict as a religious war but it has nothing to do with religion per se. It has, on the other hand, everything to do with what religion embodies—good versus evil, right versus wrong, human dignity and freedom versus tyranny and oppression.

The President declared that “the war in the Gulf is not a Christian war, a Jewish war, or a Moslem war—it is a just war. And it is a war with which good [*sic*] will prevail.” After mentioning Plato, Cicero, Ambrose, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas, he mentioned the six traditional just war criteria and told how his decision to take up arms fit these.

1. *Just cause.* It “could not be more noble” because we sought a complete, immediate, unconditional Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait, the restoration of Kuwait’s government, and security and stability in the Gulf. “We will see that

Kuwait once again is free, that the nightmare of Iraq’s occupation has ended, and that naked aggression will not be rewarded.”

2. *Right intention.* “We seek nothing for our ourselves.” The U.S. forces will leave as soon as their mission is over, and “we do not seek the destruction of Iraq.” We are fighting “for the right reasons—for moral, not selfish reasons,” and he reinforced his point with an anecdote about Iraqi brutality in Kuwait.

3. *Legitimate authority.* “Operation Desert Storm is supported by unprecedented United Nations’ solidarity, the principle of collective self-defense, 12 Security Council resolutions and, in the Gulf, 28 nations from six continents united—resolute that we will not waiver and that Saddam’s aggression will not stand.”

4. *Last resort.* “We did not want

war. But you all know the verse from Ecclesiastes: There is ‘a time for peace, a time for war.’” Then he related how we for 166 days tried to resolve this conflict, but Saddam Hussein rejected out of hand every overture made by the U.S. and other countries as well. “He made this just war an inevitable war.”

5. *Proportionality.* “War is never without the loss of innocent life” but when it “must be fought for the greater good, it is our gravest obligation to conduct a war in proportion to the threat. And that is why we must act reasonably, humanely, and make every effort possible to keep casualties to a minimum.” Mr. Bush was proud of the American forces for achieving this end, and “from the first day of the war, the allies have waged war against Saddam’s military. We are doing everything possible, believe me, to avoid hurting the innocent.” And what was the response? “Wanton, barbaric bombing of civilian areas. America and her allies value life. We pray that Saddam Hussein will see reason.” His use of Scud missiles, “weapons of terror,” has outraged the world.

6. *Probability of success.* “The price of war is always high, and so it must never be undertaken without total commitment to a successful outcome. It is only justified when victory can be achieved.” I have pledged and reassure that “this will not be another Vietnam.”

The Failure to Meet the Just War Criteria

But did the Gulf conflict really meet just war criteria as he so forcefully affirmed in this speech, and which his supporters restated and re-echoed in their publications during the following weeks? Was the emphasis upon sin and the moral flaws in the human race which is so crucial to just war thinking brought out, or were the arguments used as a smokescreen for what really was a war of national aggrandizement?

1. *Just cause.* The reasons for the war are surrounded by moral ambiguity. The aggression of August 2 is not the only story. One must look at what preceded it and gave President Bush the green light to move. For example, the U.S. poured tens of billions of dollars worth of arms into this highly volatile region. The nation refused to adopt any kind of a disciplined energy policy that would lessen its dependence on imported oil and thus was left with little

alternative but military action to safeguard its vital fuel supply. America had advanced no creative ideas for dealing with the Palestinian question. For at least two decades it had ignored the UN and had contributed little or nothing to the development of a truly multinational UN peacekeeping force.

Saddam Hussein was a product both of his own lust for power and the Western countries' willingness to downplay his brutality, when it was in their own interests to do so. The U.S. helped to keep Saddam in power during the war with Iran, to serve as a counterbalance to the nation it so hated since the hostage crisis of 1979-80. As *Time* magazine put it, "We created this monster," while Indiana Congressman Lee Hamilton pointed out, "As late as July, the administration still believed Saddam was a guy they could work with."¹¹ Ambassador April Glaspie assured the Iraqi government on July 25 that the U.S. would not take sides in Iraq's dispute with Kuwait. (Her testimony before a congressional committee in March 1991 explaining away the statement was rather unconvincing.)¹²

The U.S. shared in the responsibility for a heavily armed Iraq and did nothing about it so long as Saddam was keeping Iran in place. Suddenly, however, when he stepped over the border into Kuwait, an obligation to stop him appeared. But the rationale for war was rather weak when one took into consideration the American role there. As the *Christian Century's* James Wall so aptly put it: "If Kuwait's major export were Brussels sprouts, our reaction would have been far less vigorous."¹³

2. *Just intention.* Mr. Bush pleaded that America's intention was to seek nothing for itself, but his words had a hollow ring. It was patently obvious that a secure oil supply was needed to protect the American way of life. He wanted both to win the undying support of the American people and to show the world he was no wimp. The congressional leaders of his own party admitted openly that they intended to use the votes of highly ethical and thoughtful opponents of precipitous military action as a means to defeat Democrats and gain control of Congress.¹⁴

3. *Legitimate authority.* Mr. Bush stressed the UN solidarity and congressional resolutions as authority for his actions. But the belated discovery of the UN and his repeated invocation of the "new world order" were belied by

history. The whole complex of the forces arrayed in the Persian Gulf region demonstrated just how unilateral the decision making and command structure was. Added to this was the record of America's relationship with the UN when it would not function as an organ of the nation's foreign policy. The U.S. was several years in arrears in its dues, it rejected the World Court's jurisdiction over the mining of Nicaraguan harbors, and it often obstructed the UN on global issues—such as South Africa or Israel—when the actions were not to the liking of the national leadership. For decades conservatives in Bush's Republican party derided and belittled the UN, and it requires quite a leap of faith to believe they would embrace this or any other international organization as the savior of the world.

4. *Last resort.* This is the weakest defense of all. Saddam was no Hitler, in spite of Mr. Bush's efforts to make him into one, and the war was not about foiling aggression because nothing else had worked to keep the Iraqi dictator in check. There were two options not followed to their fullest, economic sanctions and negotiations.

Many responsible statesmen, including two former chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, six former Secretaries of Defense, and a near-majority of the Senate had urged a much more patient sanctions campaign.¹⁵ Not nearly enough time had been allowed for sanctions to have an effect. It is noteworthy that the U.S. waited for twenty years for sanctions to work in South Africa and did not use force to end apartheid, but George Bush could not even wait six months in Iraq. Yet, the small country's economy really was quite vulnerable, since it had a gross national product about equal to that of Kentucky. And would sanctions have hurt innocent people, as the opponents of this strategy claimed? What about the death and destruction of war? That was infinitely worse! America rushed into action much too soon. The rapid collapse of Iraq revealed that a policy of patience could have been adopted, and perhaps 200,000 more human beings would be alive today.

The second option was negotiations. But in his arrogance Mr. Bush kept making non-negotiable, absolutist demands, a procedure which is almost guaranteed not to bring about peace. Besides, the U.S. did not see itself bound by UN resolutions that were

against its perceived interests. The administration claim that it had "gone the last mile for peace" simply lacked any real credibility. The Iraqi leaders were offered only threats and no incentives for negotiations, and were denied the possibility of face-saving alternatives. Sadly, one must concede that this was the macho style of a person who was hell-bent on war—and he got just what he wanted—a war.

5. *Proportionality.* A war cannot be considered just if it is likely to beget more war. A peace that is obtained by arms would only lead to new acts of violence. It was illogical to argue that an international peace conference to deal with Kuwait, one that would have put the Palestinian matter on the table as well, would have "rewarded aggression." There was no evidence then or now that a lasting peace could come out of armed conflict.

6. *Probability of success.* Yes, military victory was likely. The administration had grossly misrepresented Iraqi power so that the Allied coalition ended up having a "turkey shoot" in the desert. Did the President know that Iraq was simply a "third-rate Third World power," as former U.S. Senator James Abourezk, the founder of the Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee, aptly labeled it?¹⁶ It is obvious now that the Iraqis had purchased a lot of fancy hardware which they could not use properly and that their vaunted million-man army was comprised largely of conscripts with little or no will to fight. Only time will tell, but more and more people are beginning to suspect Mr. Bush knew very well just how weak Iraq was.

Then there is the matter of the *conduct of the war*, an aspect of just war theory that Mr. Bush did not develop in the NRB speech but is quite relevant to the discussion. There are two categories here, *proportionality* and *discrimination*, and on both counts the conflict fell short. The U.S. put a massive army in the field, over 500,000 men and women, as much as at the height of the Vietnam War. Along with this was the calculated destruction of the Iraqi infrastructure which put the country back into the nineteenth century. The "smart" bombs were not so smart, e.g. the Baghdad bomb shelter "mistake." The news media were kept under such tight controls that the American people could not know how many of these were really "dumb" bombs that



A protest against the Gulf War in Wichita, Kansas, Jan. 18, 1991. About half the group were Bethel College students and local Mennonites.

missed their targets. And why were civilian vehicles bombed on the highway to Jordan? And at least 100,000 (and perhaps many more) Iraqi soldiers were killed like sitting ducks as a result of the ferocious carpet bombing and other forms of intensive aerial assault.

Related to this is the aftermath of the war. On February 15 in a speech at the Patriot missile factory in Andover, Massachusetts, George Bush urged the Iraqi military and people "to take matters into their own hands and force Saddam Hussein, the dictator, to step aside, and then comply with the United Nations resolutions and rejoin the family of peace-loving nations."¹⁷ But he did not lift a finger to help the Shi'ite and Kurdish rebels when they tried to do just that, and the result was brutal slaughters in both the south and north of Iraq.

Where is the moral high ground in all this? Mr. Bush could have supported the Iraqi opposition leaders in exile who were demanding human rights and free elections in their homeland. He did not. He and his people could have supplied food to the areas in revolt where people were starving, but they did nothing until their hands were forced by adverse public opinion. He could have announced that the responsible Iraqi officials would be held accountable for the brutalities and inhumanities in Kuwait and that they would be hunted down and brought to trial. But Mr. Bush did not, and Saddam and his crowd remained in

power long after the conflict had ended.

As Anthony Lewis wrote in the *New York Times*, "There is no stable new order in the region, much less in the world." As for the rebels, "it is a shameful record: a great power encouraging people to revolt against a tyrant and then letting them be crushed without a word, a sign."¹⁸ The President continually assured the public that he would not stumble into another "quagmire" like Vietnam, but the U.S. has not been able to disengage itself from the Middle Eastern swamp.

Civil Religion

This leads to my second indictment of the war. Not only did George Bush egregiously misuse just war theory, but he also exploited civil religion to the hilt. This is the public faith of the American people—the values and principles that are religious in quality and which undergird and shore up the American polity. The god of the civil religion is the unitarian god of "one nation under God" and "In God We Trust." The high priest of this civil faith is the President—who upholds his people before God, invokes the deity's blessing on them (e.g. the phrase "God bless America"), affirms their goodness, and perhaps even now and then holds the nation up for judgment before God, such as Lincoln did in his Second Inaugural Address. Civil religion and Christianity are *not* the same thing.¹⁹

George Bush has been one of the greatest practitioners of civil religion in American history. Space precludes a recounting of this, but one illustration seems quite germane. On three different occasions during the winter of 1989-90 he commented on the revolutions taking place in Eastern Europe with a choice phrase: "Today, the times are on the side of peace because the world increasingly is on the side of God."²⁰ In effect, he identified the American cause in the Cold War with that of God.

Civil religion was a key element in the January 28, 1991, address to the National Religious Broadcasters.²¹ After having set the conflict in a just war framework, Mr. Bush went on to boast that the outcome would be successful because we have "the finest Armed Forces ever assembled." Also, "we will prevail because of the support of the American people [who are] armed with a trust in God and in the principles that make men free. People like each of you in this room." He saluted them for their prayers and praised the "worship services for our troops" like the one Billy Graham had held at Fort Myer, Virginia, on January 17.

Then he pointed out: "America has always been a religious nation—perhaps never more than now. Just look at the last several weeks. Churches, synagogues, mosques reporting record attendance at services. Chapels packed during working hours as Americans stop in for a moment or two. Why? To pray for peace." He suggested that "with the support and prayers of so many, there can be no question in the minds of our soldiers or in the minds of our enemy what Americans think."

In the next sentence he declared: "We know that this is a just war. And we know that, God willing, this is a war we will win. But most of all, we know that ours would not be the land of the free if it were not the home of the brave." From battle we will "seize the real peace that can offer hope, that can create a new world order."

The President told his cheering audience that after two years in office he believed "more than ever that one cannot be America's President without trust in God. I cannot imagine a world, a life, without the presence of the one through whom all things are possible." He followed this with a Lincoln quote—"My concern is not whether God is on our side, but whether we are on God's side"—and affirmed without equivoca-

tion, going further than he did a year earlier, "My fellow Americans, I firmly believe in my heart of hearts that times will soon be on the side of peace because the world is overwhelmingly on the side of God." He ended by asking God to "bless our great country" and urging people to "remember all of our coalition's Armed Forces in your prayers."

Interestingly enough, Mr. Bush not only called for prayers during the war, such as the "National Day of Prayer" on Sunday, February 3, but also set April 5-7 as National Days of Thanksgiving. His proclamations were vintage civil religion documents, and ethicists Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon correctly labeled the prayer which he included in his February 2 radio address to the nation as "idolatrous and pagan, the same sort of prayer Caesar always prays to Mars before battle."²² In the proclamation for the National Days of Thanksgiving he declared:

It is fitting that we give thanks to our Heavenly Father, our help and shield, for His mercy and protection. . . . We prayed for a swift and decisive victory and for the safety of our troops . . . , and we have been blessed with both.²³

On March 28, he told the reporter Edward Plowman: "From day one, I was sustained by faith. And from day one, I think our troops were sustained by faith, and I know our commanders were." Bush underscored the point "there was never any doubt" that he recognized God during the strife.²⁴

Thus, the President told the public that the just war had been a righteous war, one in which he was sustained by faith in the national god who gave them the victory. There was no mention of the victims, or of sin on their part. Prayer had become his secret weapon on the home front. People joined in prayer vigils where God and country were inextricably linked, and the spiritual response of the American people to this patently unjust war was prayer, not protest. Those who protested obviously did not support the men and women in the Gulf.²⁵

Missing the Mark

It is on both counts—the just war and the invocation of the national god of American civil religion—that the Persian Gulf conflict fell short of a moral purpose that would be acceptable to even those sensitive Christians who are not

necessarily opposed to all wars. In reality, it was a holy war—a "war against the oldest enemy of the human spirit: evil that threatens world peace"—as Mr. Bush noted in his radio address for the National Day of Prayer.²⁶ But what was this evil? Was it America's own pride? Its lust to consume? Did the President make God into the Chaplain of the Aggressor? That is certainly how people in the Muslim world perceived it.

It seems to this observer that the true Christians were those church leaders—Catholic and Protestant alike—who had urged the President to wait a minute, hold off a while longer, give sanctions a chance, try negotiations. If their advice had been followed, perhaps the tragedy that ensued on January 16 could have been avoided and along with it the unfortunate situation that now exists in the Middle East.

Would that Americans had followed the example of Jesus and, in their self-proclaimed role as a "nation under God," reflected humility instead of pride in their achievements in the Persian Gulf conflict. The bottom line is that they really have little of which to be proud.

ENDNOTES

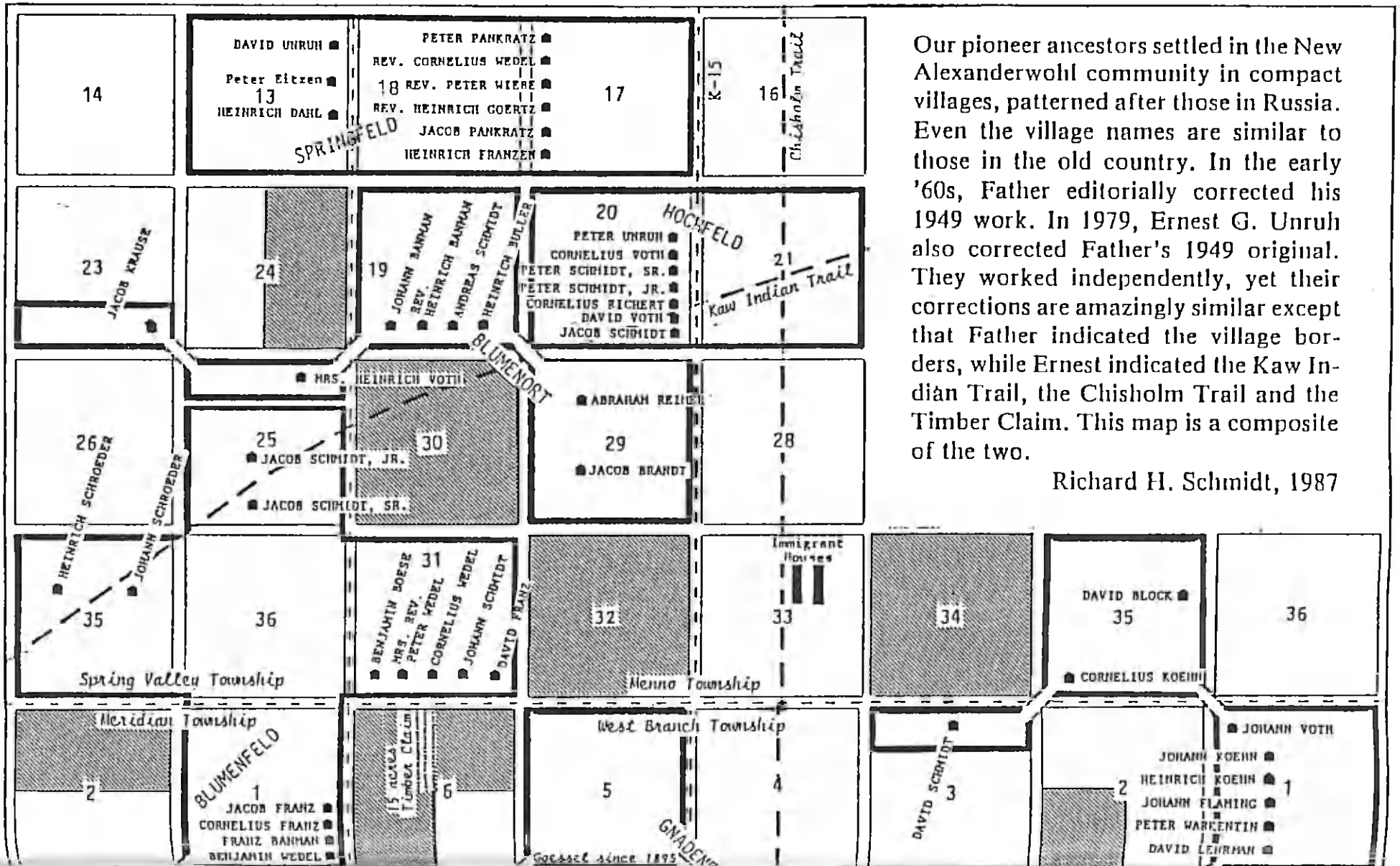
- ¹*Terre Haute Tribune-Star*, Mar. 20, 1991, p. A10.
- ²*American Purpose* 5 (March 1991), 17-18, 24.
- ³Text in *New Oxford Review* 58 (Jan.-Feb. 1991), 6-8.
- ⁴Text in *Christian Social Action* 4 (March 1991), 4-7.
- ⁵*Report from the Capital* (Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs) 46 (Feb. 1991), 8.
- ⁶*National & International Religion Report* 5 (Jan. 28, 1991), 1.
- ⁷*New York Times*, Feb. 15, 1991, p. A9.
- ⁸U.S. Senate. Hearings before the Committee on Armed Services and Committee on Foreign Relations, *Military Situation in the Far East*. 82d Cong., 1st Sess. (May 15, 1951), 732.
- ⁹The official text of the speech is in the *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* (Hereafter *WCPD*), Jan. 28, 1991, pp. 87-89. All quotations are taken from this text. The emphases have been added by the writer to clarify the points made.
- ¹⁰The literature on just war theory is voluminous. For an introduction to the problem see James Turner Johnson, *Just War Tradition and the Restraint of War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); *Can Modern War Be Just?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984); and *The Quest for Peace: Three Moral Traditions in Western Cultural History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987). During the time of the conflict the topic was discussed extensively in religious periodicals. The debate between James Turner Johnson and Alan Geyer, "Just War Tradition and the War in the Gulf," *Christian Century* 108 (Feb. 6-13, 1991), 134-35; and the

critique by John Howard Yoder, "Just War Tradition: Is It Credible?" *Christian Century*, Mar. 13, 1991, pp. 295-98, are useful delineations of the questions involved.

- ¹¹"A Man You Could Do Business With," *Time* 137 (Mar. 11, 1991), 60, 65.
- ¹²*New York Times*, Mar. 21, 1991, pp. A1, A7; Mar. 22, pp. A1, A7.
- ¹³*Christian Century*, Feb. 6-13, 1991, p. 183.
- ¹⁴*New York Times*, Mar. 17, 1991, p. IV, 16.
- ¹⁵*New York Times*, Nov. 29, 1990, p. A1; Dec. 3, 1990, p. A14; Jan. 12, 1991, p. 1, 1.
- ¹⁶He made this comment at a symposium "The Persian Gulf War: Perspectives and Concerns," Sioux Falls (S.D.) College, April 11, 1991.
- ¹⁷*WCPD*, Feb. 15, 1991, p. 177.
- ¹⁸*New York Times*, Apr. 5, 1991, p. A15.
- ¹⁹This matter is developed in considerable detail in Richard V. Pierard and Robert D. Linder, *Civil Religion and the Presidency* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), chap. 1.
- ²⁰In speeches on Dec. 12, 1989, Jan. 29, 1990, and Feb. 1, 1990. *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington: Government Printing Office), 1989:1697; 1990:125, 136.
- ²¹The text is cited in note 8.
- ²²*WCPD*, Feb. 2, 1991, p. 117; *Missiology* 19 (Oct. 1991), 422.
- ²³*WCPD*, Mar. 7, 1991, 263.
- ²⁴*National and International Religion Report* 5 (Apr. 8, 1991), 2.
- ²⁵William Alberts, "Prayer As an Instrument of War," *Z Magazine*, April 1991, pp. 97-98.
- ²⁶*WCPD*, Feb. 2, 1991, p. 117.

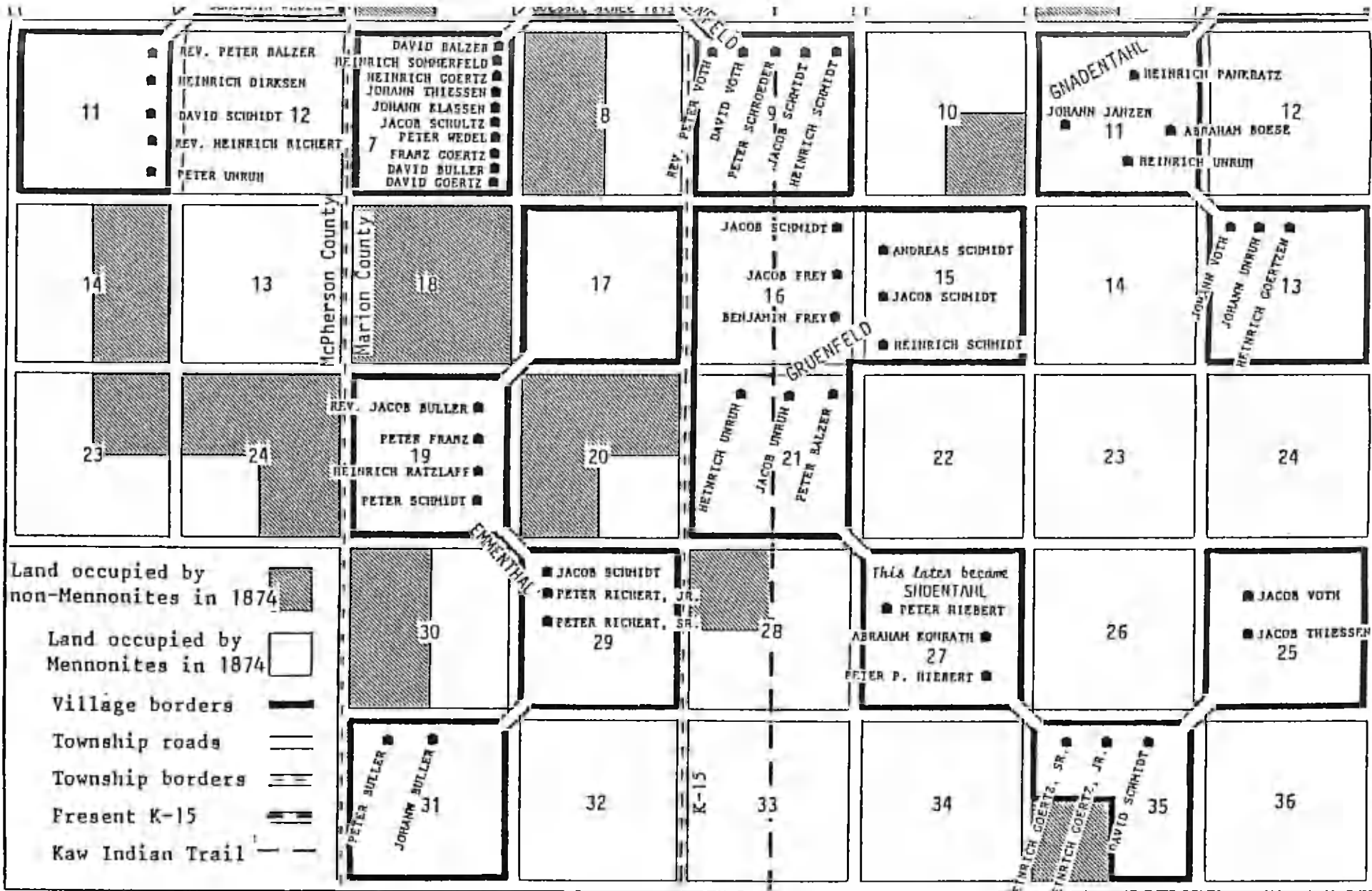
ALEXANDERWOHL VILLAGES IN KANSAS, 1874

(This is an edited version of father P.U. Schmidt's map published in the October 1949 MENNONITE LIFE)



Our pioneer ancestors settled in the New Alexanderwohl community in compact villages, patterned after those in Russia. Even the village names are similar to those in the old country. In the early '60s, Father editorially corrected his 1949 work. In 1979, Ernest G. Unruh also corrected Father's 1949 original. They worked independently, yet their corrections are amazingly similar except that Father indicated the village borders, while Ernest indicated the Kaw Indian Trail, the Chisholm Trail and the Timber Claim. This map is a composite of the two.

Richard H. Schmidt, 1987



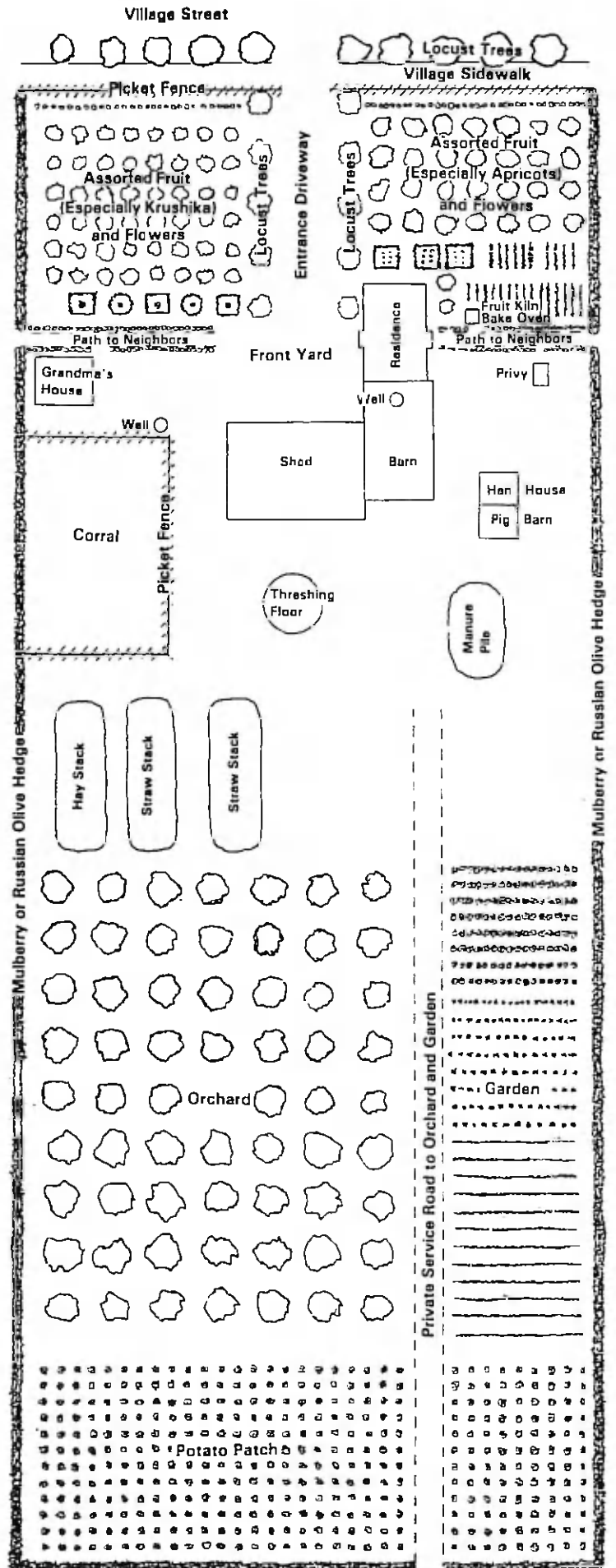
A Typical Village Homestead

Based on information by Tilly Enns, Sarah Giasbrecht and Henry Dick

Tilly Enns

Sarah

Henry Dick



Mennonites, the Mennonite Community, and Mennonite Writers

by Elmer Suderman

In 1976 John Ruth gave the Menno Simons Lectures at Bethel College on "Mennonite Identity and Literary Art." Fifteen years later Al Reimer addressed the same topic in his Menno Simons lectures on "Mennonite Literary Voices Past and Present." The topic of Mennonite identity in fiction, poetry and drama was an important one in 1976 although not much thought had been given to it. History and sociology—facts not story—identified Mennonites in 1976.

Both Ruth and Reimer agreed that the Mennonite identity largely depended upon a story, "a continuity of experience made conscious by the repeatedness of recognition," as Ruth expressed it; "Consciousness and personality are either continuous or incoherent. Both depend on at least some sameness perceived as a continuum." Identity, then, is dependent upon the memory of a shared story, and access to a meaningful past is mediated via story. The stories, Ruth points out, become a living tradition leading individuals "to a sense of who they are and where they have appeared in the life of the community. They place the individual in a context, they confront him with an identity which he must either do something about or shunt aside and allow to atrophy."¹

Both feel the Mennonite story is worth telling not only to other Mennonites but to a larger audience as well. Both are concerned that the Mennonite story not be ignored and consequently lost, not be swallowed up by other stories; both are concerned that the story be told honestly and effectively. Both are concerned that Mennonite scruples regarding story might hinder the telling and reception of the story.

The two lecturers come from different Mennonite traditions. John Ruth's

membership in the Mennonite Church and his Swiss Mennonite heritage account for his emphasis on community, obedience, simplicity, humility, defenselessness, the questioning of progress, and the maintenance of identity.

But Ruth knows the sophistication he rejects, having his Ph.D. in literature from Harvard. Ruth does not worry too much about Mennonite scruples against art. "There is room," Ruth argues, "in our scruples to operate; the values they support have dignity." Our tradition, he says, "is not, in its essence, contemptuous of the givenness, the concreteness of art." Ruth concludes that "ultimately it is not our true scruples that paralyze our art. They are guides which help us to imitate God in his redemptivity, as, by our art, we mirror his creativity. They help us to do what we must, as followers of Christ: obey God's will."²

While Ruth recognizes "The world" may "quite accurately, and even imaginatively, see 'our experience' from any number of interesting points of view which will prove very valuable to our own self-understanding," it cannot, as "my ancestors recognized" tell us or our children "our story as we alone can know and cherish it." The outsider simply cannot tell the story "from the unique center of covenant-conviction where we stand."³

Al Reimer speaks from a Russian Mennonite background and focuses almost exclusively on writers from that background, mostly Canadian. Reimer embraces the individualism, worldly sophistication, and artifice that Ruth's fathers feared, a fear which to some extent Ruth shares. Reimer is not afraid that art will lead to idolatry. The asceticism Ruth mentions is to be transfigured by the imagination.

Reimer's view of art is that it must

be rooted in contemporary life, that it must concern itself with the world in which we live and move and have our being, that to avoid that world is to deny one's artistic integrity. He would agree with Ruth that just as Mennonites do not find it "credible to be crude, sloppy, formless, apathetic" in their business and professional life, so they cannot afford to be careless in their artistic endeavors.⁴

Unlike Ruth, Reimer does not insist that the Mennonite story be told from within the tradition. Indeed he finds some of the most telling stories are told by those we used to call *auffafulne Mennonite*.

Both Ruth and Reimer speak from a commitment to the Mennonite community. John Ruth has had a life-time commitment to the Mennonite community. Al Reimer points out that "In the beginning, of course, I didn't know I was one and by the time I found out I didn't want to be one."⁵ A rebel in his teens, he was not interested in his father's attempt to get him interested in Mennonite history and culture. After his Ph.D. from Yale, and after accepting a position at the University of Winnipeg, and after a trip to Russia, he discovered the drama of his Mennonite background and became interested, intensely interested, in Mennonite culture. Like Ruth "the holy meaning of our identity [Ruth's phrase] is not an idle phrase for me. I am a Mennonite because I want to devote what remains of my life to finding out what that means."⁶ Both Ruth and Reimer, then, write out of a deep concern for Mennonite identity and art.

Much has happened on the Mennonite literary scene in the last fifteen years. Ruth mentions few twentieth-century Mennonite writers. His purpose is not so much to examine the history of Men-

nonite writing, though he does that, but to offer "reflections that may strike a spark here and there in thoughtful readers of any background, who are interested in the complex interplay of identity and literary expression."⁷

Reimer, on the other hand, though he, too, is interested in the interplay of identity and literary expression, examines that interplay through the works of some talented Mennonite authors, most of whom have written since Ruth's lectures. Reimer considers not what these writers should have done, but what they have done to write the Mennonite story. Ruth did not have the luxury of those examples, most of whom did not choose the direction that Ruth asked for. Rudy Wiebe and Warren Kliewer are the only two Russian Mennonite writers Ruth mentions, and their best work came later. He did not consider Arnold Dyck, one of the greatest Mennonite writers, who died in 1970, six years before Ruth's lectures.

Ruth and Reimer raise significant questions about author, context, text, and reader, specifically (1) the Mennonite writer, (2) the Mennonite community and society, (3) the relationship of the Mennonite writer and that community, and (4) the Mennonite texts.

Other points could and should be considered, particularly Mennonite women's voices, which Reimer effectively discusses. Another point is the Mennonite response to literature with a Mennonite theme written by non-Mennonites, Caroline Chesbro's *The Foe in the Household* (1871), Otto Schrag's (In spite of the common Mennonite name, I have found no evidence that Schrag was a Mennonite or knew very much about them) *The Locusts* (1943) and Leigh Brackett's *The Long Tomorrow* (1955) to cite just three examples. A third topic to consider is the absence of drama among Mennonite writings. These three by no means exhaust the issues raised by these lectures.

1. THE MENNONITE WRITER

The question of who is a Mennonite writer has long plagued Mennonites. Even the underlying question—Who is a Mennonite?—is not easy to answer. For forty years I was not a member of the Mennonite Church, but I and my friends, both Mennonite and non-Mennonite, would readily have identified me as a Mennonite or, at the very least, as a birthright Mennonite (to use

a Quaker term). The question of identity is not unique to Mennonites, however. Native Americans are asking with great urgency who can claim to be a Native American, and they have as much difficulty answering the question as Mennonites have.

It is even more difficult to say who is a Mennonite writer. Ruth and Reimer answer the question in very different ways. Ruth defines Mennonite writers as writing from within the covenant-community and bound to its discipline. They must tell the Mennonite story "from the unique center of covenant-conviction where we stand."⁸ Such writers must find their distinct voice and story not from models outside the community but from the center of the community. "In fact," Ruth argues, "our particular story may not be tellable in terms of the stylistic cadences of the stories currently in vogue. Our imagination must be our own. . . ."⁹

Reimer sees the Mennonite writer through a much larger lens, a wide-angle lens, including in the Mennonite canon "writers who spent at least their formative years in a Mennonite milieu—family and/or community and/or church—regardless of whether they now consider themselves Mennonite in a religious sense, or in a purely ethnic sense; in both senses or in neither sense."¹⁰

There is, then, no agreement as to who is a Mennonite writer. When I asked Jeff Gundy if he considered himself a Mennonite writer he did not hesitate to say yes, but quickly added that he was more. Warren Kliewer's answer was that it depended on which direction the wind was blowing. Rudy Wiebe would rather be known as a Canadian writer who is a Mennonite, though he does not object to the label.

Now that being a Mennonite has become respectable and ethnic literature is in vogue, Mennonites find it easier to accept the designation of a Mennonite writer. In the late 1940s when I wrote a Master's Thesis on "The Russo-German Mennonite Theme in American Fiction" only Ray B. West, Jr., my advisor, who had written a Ph.D. dissertation on Mormon literature, was interested in the topic. No one knew much about the Mennonites, and what they did know was often wrong. The English department at the University of Kansas had to be convinced that there was a Mennonite theme in American fiction, which in itself was not that easy, but Peter Epp's *Eine Mutter*, Arnold Dyck's

Verloren in der Steppe, Gordon Friesen's *Flamethrowers*, Otto Schrag's *The Locusts* and one novel by a non-Russian Mennonite using non-Mennonite material: Christmas Carol Kauffman's *Lucy Winchester* were available.

2. THE MENNONITE COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY

Both Reimer and Ruth define the Mennonite writer, but they do not define the covenant community. They assume that the community consists of communicant members of the Mennonite church. It is this failure to examine more carefully what is called the Mennonite community that causes some of the difficulty in our understanding of the relationship of the Mennonite writer to the Mennonite community.

The Mennonite Church as Society

To make my point it is necessary to distinguish between community and society, or between *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*. Both societies and communities are associations of individuals organized into groups in order that they may live together effectively. A society is a group of people sharing clearly understood aims and concerns. Societies are organized around laws explicit or implicit. The boundaries of behavior are clearly understood and the individual transgresses at the risk of disapproval, censure or banishment.

Societies encourage, indeed often require, submission to rules, respect for authority. Rudy Wiebe's Wapiti, the Mennonite Church in *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, is a society and shows the traditional, conservative, authoritative nature of society. The church in Wapiti accepts Deacon Block's authority. He rules the Wapiti Mennonite church and does so on the basis of rules he, and most of his parishioners, accept as inviolable. It is clear to Deacon Block that "the great matters of moral and spiritual discipline have been laid down once and for all in the Bible and our fathers have told us how we should act according to them. They cannot change."¹¹

But Wiebe and other writers recognize that the Deacon Blocks are in the long run more dangerous than those who admit that they do not know how to reduce life to simple, single ways of thinking and feeling in any situation. Good writers avoid what the Deacon

Blocks do not: speaking for God. Good writers recognize that the scruples of a society are often based on maps so old that the territory has long since changed and that it is impossible to find their bearings from the old and outmoded maps, no matter how much the Deacon Blocks insist on using them.

Societies are useful. They organize the world and keep chaos at bay. They offer security and stability. They give meaning to life. The disadvantage, of course, is that a society often stifles individual initiative. Thus it is understandable that any society, not just the Mennonite society, would have scruples about art, for fiction and poetry challenge accepted ways of seeing the world, deconstruct the world, call into question cherished beliefs. Many of the worst characteristics of a society show up in Ruth's list of scruples Mennonites have about art: (1) the fear of art as idolatry; (2) the concern that art will substitute worldly sophistication for simplicity, individualism and personal egoism for obedience to God; (3) the fear that art will stifle the striving for asceticism, that artifice will replace simplicity and that art will take time from more important matters, and, (4) that art cannot edify.

Some of us know that these scruples exist not only in the Swiss Mennonite but also in the Russian Mennonite communities/societies. Growing up Russian Mennonite, I lived with most of these scruples. Stories, I was taught, were lies and should be avoided. We told the truth. Novels were for the *Weltmensch*. "Would you want to be seeing a movie when Jesus comes?" we were asked. When I read books, my parents suggested that I do something useful like cleaning out the chicken house.

Societies, moreover, tend to be predictable and dull. They distrust play. They distrust beauty, particularly in religious expression. People who take their cue from society are more likely to keep their accounts than to rejoice with Gerard Manley Hopkins . . .

that God, whose beauty is past
change, "fathers forth"

All things counter, original, spare,
strange;

Whatever is fickle, freckled
(who know how?)

With swift, slow; sweet, sour;
adazzle, dim.¹²

A society cannot see that the world

is "charged with the grandeur of
God . . .

Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and
with ah! bright wings."¹³

Unfortunately Mennonite scruples make it too easy to distrust and even condemn Hopkins' flair for dramatic blessed excess.

Societies tend to be predictable. A well-organized and controlled world is not likely to look favorably on innovation, re-vision, in the sense of seeing again. Mennonites as a society do not nourish writers, will ignore them or, worse, repress and ostracize them, as both Ruth and Reimer fear.

It is clear to many Mennonite writers that the Mennonite church is not a community, but a society. Sandra Birdsell illustrates this point. Mika, a lapsed Mennonite, a member of no church, is talking with her Mennonite father:

"We're a community," Mika's Mennonite father says. "People united by our belief, like a family. When one member hurts, the whole family suffers."

But Mika knows better: "A family. I'm not part of a family," Mika said. "I don't belong anywhere."

"How can you say that? The [Mennonite] women welcome you into their homes. They pray for you."

"Oh, they welcome me alright. I'm to be pitied, prayed for. It gives them something to do."¹⁴

Mennonites as Community

In a community people have a sense of belonging. They speak to each other face to face, and when they speak, others listen and attempt to hear what the speaker is saying, not what they think he is saying. Quaker worship is based on the ideal of community. Someone breaks the silence with a concern. The meeting listens, then falls into silence. Only after silence do others answer a speaker moved by the spirit. More silence. At the end of a good Quaker meeting there is a sense of communion, but not necessarily of agreement.

Kenneth Burke's picture of the place of humans in the communal conversation tells us something about a community:

Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too

heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while until you decide you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers you; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another slings himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late; you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress.

Burke's model may be too confrontational for most Mennonites, but it illustrates the listening community. A community listens to the voices, both within and outside the community. A community is not afraid to open itself to dissent. It tolerates differences. It thrives on discussion.

3. THE MENNONITE WRITER AND MENNONITE SOCIETY

The influence of the Mennonite community/society on Russian Mennonite writers takes many forms. For many it provides them with stories. Others find in their background a literary voice. Nowhere is this more clear than in the writings of Armin Wiebe and David Waltner-Toews, who write Low German in English. Warren Kliever has written extensively about Mennonites, but he credits his background for his style as well. Beginning with the premise that all literature is at bottom language, Warren told me that growing up Mennonite and speaking three different languages (High German for church and for propriety, English for business and education, and Low German for swearing and colloquial contact) that he could never lose the cadences of those languages, nor would he if he could.

The Obligation of the Mennonite Writer to Mennonite Society/Community

Reimer and Ruth disagree about the responsibilities of Mennonite writers to the community/society. Ruth argues that Mennonite writers must have a loyalty to the Mennonite community greater than their loyalty to their art; they must subsume their art to the

covenant-community. This does not mean that Mennonite storytellers are unimportant; quite the contrary. Ruth expects Mennonite storytellers to be steeped in the past and be able by their stories to supply the continuity of experience, the repeatedness of recognition, to connect this place, this experience with another shared experience, thus perpetuating the community.

Reimer, on the other hand, holds that the first obligation of writers is to their vision of the world, which they must tell with honesty and integrity. That vision might include the Anabaptist vision, but would not be subsumed by it. Ruth spells out what the Mennonite writer's obligation to his community should be. Reimer examines what it has been, and discovers that the better writers today are *interpreters* of Mennonite experience rather than mere *reflectors* or *advocates* of it.

Not too many Russian Mennonite, or Swiss Mennonite writers either, would agree with Ruth. Writers, by and large, avoid alliances, at least in their writing. They would agree with William Stafford, who while writing from a moral position and from an awareness of the values—honesty, forthrightness, simplicity—in his Brethren background, nevertheless, chooses not to be doctrinaire and avoids “any orthodoxy, even of his own making since it chills the recklessness and freedom necessary to his art.” While Stafford recognizes the influence of his Brethren background, he prefers to shelve as many preconceptions as possible when faced with the presence of the poem at hand.¹⁵

Pat Friesen puts it this way:

I don't love obedience or disobedience
nothing that absolute I like
the world
grandfather's stories hovering around
the raspberry canes I love words
in the air balanced between
mouths and ears I love the way
they're smoke before they're
stone.¹⁶

Some Mennonite writers go farther and argue that the relationship of the writer to society must be confrontational. Writers thrive on conflict, on a unique and independent vision against a society which is grudgingly tolerant at best and hostile at worst. A restrictive society stifles writers, and for many contemporary Mennonite writers “the weight of almost five centuries of Anabaptist Mennonite faith, doctrine and practice as well as ethnic culture

has become a dead weight,” as Reimer reminds us.¹⁷

Let us take one example, one which seems particularly troublesome to many Mennonites: the scruple against profane language. Since Melville, Hawthorne and James were able to write masterpieces without using profanity, Ruth would have Mennonite writers avoid vulgar language as well. Reimer, on the other hand, argues that he would have been less than honest, if the Russian terrorists and murderous peasants in his novel *My Harp is Turned to Mourning* sounded “like Mennonites when they hadn't talked that way in real life.” Discussing the aversion, sometimes anger, of some Mennonite readers to the use of profanity, Reimer argues that “good literature is, after all, written in the language—the idioms and expressions—that people actually use.”¹⁸

But there is more to be said about the Mennonite society's scruples about vulgar language: they apply only to English. Those of us who grew up speaking Low German knew that it was perfectly all right to swear in Low German. We have heard our fathers speak English until they hit their thumbs with a hammer. Then, almost unconsciously, they shift to Low German to say what needs to be said under the circumstances with no scruples at all. “O shucks,” simply won't do under those circumstances, but Low German has the words which adequately express the pain and anger.

Low German is a colloquial language, direct, simple, more adequate for some than English to express deep feelings. Readers of Arnold Dyck are very aware of the centrality of that language in the Russian Mennonite tradition. Some find themselves reverting to Low German when they want to express feelings for which English does not have the words. It is, indeed, “dee Muttasproak.”

I do not want to be misunderstood. John Ruth's argument that the good writers can transfigure the scruples by their imagination has much to commend it. Some Mennonite writers have achieved that transformation, and I value their work. The “quiet mature acceptance of their faith and heritage, the restrained, compassionate and non-confrontational tone” in the poems of Sarah Klassen and Jean Janzen, are, as Reimer points out, examples of Ruth's point.¹⁹ What I am challenging is that such *Words for the Silence*, the title of

Jean Janzen's first book, are the only words available for rich Mennonite literature.

The Obligations of the Community to the Writer

Ruth is clear on the obligations of the Mennonite writer to the covenant-community. He does not, however, consider the obligations of the community to the writer. Reimer briefly discusses the obligation. The question may be more important than the question of the relationship of the writer to the community. Certainly it shouldn't be ignored. One would think that Mennonite leaders have an obligation to prepare the members of the community/society to read intelligently the rich literature written by, to and about the group. But I read few articles in Mennonite church magazines on the subject. Mennonite leaders and Mennonites in general who value community more than society have an obligation to develop an enlightened and sensitive audience for Mennonite writers.

How much freedom should Mennonite writers have? As much as they feel necessary to write honestly. They should have at least as much freedom as David had when he complained about God's ways with the world, as much moral sense as the prophets had when they castigated corrupt kings and religious leaders of their time, as much audacity as Job had in insisting that he speak not to his miserable comforters but to God himself.

That does not mean that the community will be blind to the writer's flaws. The community will criticize as well as praise, and too often we who are critics and writers tend to ignore the latter point, forgetting that Mennonite writers too need to hear the truth in love. There is not, it seems to me, a willingness, even on the part of those of us who write literary criticism, to speak that truth to our writers, who should expect from us the same rigor and truthfulness we expect from them.

4. THE MENNONITE TEXTS

In a study of literature the focus should be on the text. Too often, however, even in this article, the text does not seem to be primary. Mennonite critics often assume that Mennonite texts require a different approach than other literary texts. Such seems to be

Ruth's position. Mennonite texts should tell the Mennonite story and further the Mennonite identity.

But art, by and large, is neither doctrinaire or didactic, at least not overtly so. It invites us to explore, always incompletely, the world. It invites us to revise our lives as well as our stories, poems and articles (as William Stafford's book about writing—*You Must Revise Your Life*—tells us). It calls into question our habitual, automatic way of seeing in order that we might see the familiar world with fresh eyes. Fiction and poetry do not give us what James Dyck in Rudy Wiebe's *My Lovely Enemy* wants: "the cold precision of mathematics, the absolute impersonal logic of it makes conscience . . . unnecessary."²⁰ Fiction and poetry do not give us the straight, simple unambiguous answers James Dyck wants but leave us where Dyck was left: "hanging by threads."²¹

We do not approach other literature in quite that way. We ask only of good writers that they help us to see the world and ourselves as we really are. If we approached Mennonite writers in the same way, the question of their relationship to the community would not loom as large as it does now.

An approach which focuses too much on author and context runs the danger of confusing the convictions of the writer with the text. If a Mennonite writer's commitment is not to the community, then it becomes too easy to ignore or dismiss the text of that writer. That's unfortunate.

Good texts require close reading, close attention. They demand a discipline that readers find as difficult as the discipline of the Mennonite covenant-community.

Furthermore, many of the better Mennonite texts are disturbing. So, we might note in passing, are the Biblical texts. Jeff Gundy is right when he points out that "most Americans, Mennonite or not, are virtually closed to a search that contains real suspense and tension and concludes in something other than comfortable orthodoxy, religious or secular."²²

The old questions about any literary text still hold for Mennonite texts: Is it convincing? Not *did* it really happen but *could* it really happen is the question. When I first read and later wrote about Gordon Friesen's *Flamethrowers* and his depiction of Blumenhof and its un-

savory Mennonites, I believed that Friesen's novel was an unconvincing picture of Mennonite society, that Mennonite characters could not be as perverted as Friesen's Mennonites. Now I know that Mennonites can be and often are despicable and degenerate. In any case Friesen's novel, in spite of its excesses, does have more verisimilitude than I first gave it credit for. I had not read the novel carefully enough.

Friesen's assaults on my preconceptions about Mennonite society proved later to have a salutary influence on my thinking and to prepare me for Rudy Wiebe's *Peace Shall Destroy Many*.

In short, when we read Mennonite fiction and poetry the primary question is not whether they were written by committed Mennonites but whether they are authentic, giving Mennonite human nature (or all human nature) an incarnation that is viable, no matter how offensive.

Just as we would not judge Mennonite composers by their adherence to Mennonite traditions or to their submission to the covenant-community, so it is questionable to judge Mennonite writers on that basis. We ask that composers write the best music of which they are capable, making use of traditional and modern techniques to help them accomplish their work. We can ask no less of Mennonite writers. Ruth is right in asking Mennonite writers to ponder, preserve and imaginatively experience the Mennonite story and then tell that story beyond the level of sentimentality. But we must also insist that they be steeped in the literary tradition of which they are a part.

I plead guilty to Jeff Gundy's assessment that I approach literature in "a relatively conventional aesthetic framework which poses the artist's unique and independent vision against an audience and community [I would say society] which are grudgingly tolerant at best and hostile at worst," and that I insist "on the need for artistic integrity and independence, the distinct demands and strategies of aesthetics, and the virtues of literature as a way of knowing individuals and communities."²³

I plead guilty because I think that the focus should be primarily on the text and because I worry that a preoccupation with the writers and their context runs the great risk of ignoring the text. I do not object to studying the relationship of the Mennonite community/

society and the writer, but if we focused more on the text we might not worry quite as much about whether the Mennonite authors are knowledgeable about and adhere to Mennonite traditions.

CONCLUSION

Let Mennonite writers write freely as their craft demands, using any technique at their command—or any they can invent—making use of such Mennonite materials as they need, but not limiting themselves to Mennonite materials. Let Mennonite writers ponder their rich heritage and tell its story, knowing that their tradition is the story of what it was before it became what it will presently cease to be (to paraphrase Carl Becker's definition of history), aware that they live in that changing present. Let the Mennonite writers dream, innovate, celebrate, give themselves in a reckless abandon to the fascination and mystery—and misery—of the world. Let the Mennonite writers write and not worry too much about their audience, either Mennonite or non-Mennonite, whether they will approve or object, but speak the truth in love—or, if need be, in anger—to all. Let the Mennonite writers write the best poetry, fiction and drama they are capable of until they write a masterpiece praised not only by Mennonites but by all the world.

Let the Mennonite critics be generous, praise where praise is due but be ready to point out to authors where they think they are wrong. Let the critics never be satisfied simply to have Mennonite literature, no matter how congenial it may be. Let them settle for nothing less than the best Mennonite authors can do. Let the Mennonite critic write as well as the poets and novelists.

Let the Mennonite readers read, read with pleasure, read with anguish, read with perception and sensitivity. Let Mennonite readers rejoice when authors succeed, mourn with them when they fail. Let the Mennonite readers discover the community of compassion which does not judge too quickly nor manipulate but approaches life with humility, meekness, gentleness, patience and liberality. Let the Mennonite readers read texts playfully and through play fulfill, at least in part, the deep human need to respond intimately and affectionately to others. Let the Mennonite readers remember that love does not keep score, that mirth, music and rhythm are ends in themselves, worth-

while without any dollar signs attached to them. Let them use their imagination more than their credit card. Let them free themselves of scruples which impede their humanity and their neighbors. Let them leave, when they can, the tidy, sensible and orderly but often vapid life of Mennonite society to dance with the Lord of the dance, who Wiesel reminds us made [humans] because He loves stories.

Let all—critics, writers and readers—remember Elie Wiesel's story of the importance of story:

When the great Rabbi Israel Baal Shem-Tov saw misfortune threatening the Jews it was his custom to go into a certain part of the forest to meditate. There he would light a fire, say a special prayer, and the miracle would be accomplished and the misfortune averted.

Later, when his disciple, the celebrated Magid of Mexritch, had occasion, for the same reason, to intercede with heaven, he would go to the same place and say: "Master of the Universe, listen! I do not know how to light the fire, but I am still able to say the prayer." And again the miracle would be accomplished. . . .

Then it fell to Rabbi Israel of Rizhyn to overcome misfortune. Sitting in his armchair, his head in his hands, he spoke to God: "I am unable to light the fire and I do not know the prayer; I cannot even find the place in the forest. All I can do is to tell the story, and this must be sufficient." And it was sufficient.²⁴

Let all Mennonites remember that the story is important, that someday it may be all that we have. Let all learn the story so if that time comes, we will still be able to tell it.

ENDNOTES

¹John Ruth, "Mennonite Identity and Art," *Mennonite Life* 32 (March 1977), 15.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 5.

⁴Ibid., p. 13.

⁵*Why I Am a Mennonite*, ed. Harry L. Loewen (Kitchener, Ontario: Herald Press, 1988), p. 255.

⁶Ibid., p. 267.

⁷Ruth, p. 4.

⁸Ibid., p. 5.

⁹Ibid., p. 18.

¹⁰Al Reimer, "To Whom Are the Voices Speaking? Writing From Outside the Inside: Mennonite Writers and the Community." Menno Simons lecture presented at Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas, 27-29 October 1991.

¹¹Rudy Wiebe. *Peace Shall Destroy Many* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1961), p. 202.

¹²Gerard Manley Hopkins, "Pied Beauty," in *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. W. H. Gardner (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1953), p. 31.

¹³Gerard Manley Hopkins, "God's Grandeur," *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹⁴Sandra Birdsell. *Agassiz Stories* (Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1987), p. 141.

¹⁵Grey Elliot, "Introduction: William Stafford's Campfires" in William Stafford, *The Long Sigh the Wind Makes* (Monmouth, Oregon: Adrienne Lee Press, 1991), p. xiii.

¹⁶Patrick Friesen. *You Don't Get To Be a Saint* (Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1992), p. 18.

¹⁷Reimer. "To Whom Are the Voices Speaking: Writing from Outside to Inside: Mennonite Writers and the Community."

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Al Reimer, "Where Was/Is the Woman's Voice? The Re-Membering of the Mennonite Woman," *Mennonite Life* 46 (March 1992), 23.

²⁰Rudy Wiebe. *My Lovely Enemy* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1983), p. 133.

²¹Ibid., p. 34.

²²Jeff Gundy, "Separation and Transformation: Tradition and Audience for Three Mennonite Poets," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 4 (1986), 68.

²³Jeffy Gundy, "Humility in Mennonite Literature," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 63 (January 1989), 8.

²⁴Elie Wiesel. *The Gates of the Forest* (New York: Avon Books, 1966), end pages.

Suzanne Lawrence

Prelude

I.
A waterfall or a constant wind
I could take, but this
highway outside my bedroom window
is loosening my bolts.

I drive slowly past "For Sale" signs.
Kurt picks me up at work one day
and says "Okay".
We get the kids
and drive into the country.

II.
Dad promised Mom
before I was born
a train ticket once a year
to Kansas.
We always took it.

In my memory, the prickly pear
blooms perfectly
in the sheltered place
of the back pasture
the whole time I am gone.

The pasture is as good
as an old photograph
I hold before me
looking for where
my smile comes from
and the tightness in my chest.

I will settle
when we get there.
Home is a place,
I'm telling you.
I feel as territorial
as a cat.

III.
Stars are apples,
the darkness a well-pruned dome
of laden branches.
From a certain point
on the Goessel road,
I see every yardlight
in the Hillsboro-Lehigh valley—
fallen stars,
windfall apples.

We Wait for Words

between the parking lot and cemetery.
Lawn chairs and rows of blankets, damp with dew,
hold huddled, heavy-coated hopefuls waiting.

Although the sun is up, we wait,
wait for words—"He indeed is risen!"—
meaning Christ, who like so many others

also was taken. We wait in the sight
of the orderly graves. Will the bright,
newborn humans, full-grown, spring with dance

from moist, dark earth today? I turn to a woman
and ask, "What does the word on the gate mean?"
"Friedhof—this is a place of peace."

Joy springs from our mouths. If these dead sleep,
do they dream with us, dark earth and heaven?

Book Reviews

Peter and Elfrieda Dyck, *Up From the Rubble: The Epic Rescue of Thousands of War-ravaged Mennonite Refugees*. Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1991. Pp. 384, (\$14.95—paperback)

Peter and Elfrieda (Klassen) Dyck had unique and exceptionally rich and full careers. They served with the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) in wartime relief projects in England, in post-war relief programs in the Netherlands where they first came into contact with Mennonite refugees from the Soviet Union, and then in Berlin where the Dycks became vitally involved in one of the most dramatic events of modern Mennonite history—the rescue of more than a thousand Mennonite refugees from the American sector of Berlin. They accompanied these refugees, and others who joined them in Bremerhaven, to Paraguay. Later Elfrieda Klassen Dyck escorted several other shiploads of refugees to South America, including those on the ill-fated and unusually trouble-prone *Charlton Monarch*. *Up From the Rubble* is the story of these and many other experiences in wartime and post-war relief and resettlement programs, told in a spell-binding and fascinating way.

In their Preface, the Dycks state, correctly, that this is not autobiography or history as such works are usually written. It is, in their words, “an account of God’s leading and intervening in the lives of refugees and in our own lives.” (p. 10) The book was written “to give glory to God for his great mercy in delivering people from the ruins of War. The day of miracles is not over. The arm of the Lord is not shortened. In the words of C. F. Klassen, *Gott kann!* God can! God is able to open the way when humanly speaking there is no exit.” (p. 5)

These stories embody the convictions of the authors, of the refugees, and of many in the larger Mennonite community, about their God, some of the most turbulent events in their own history, and the heroes connected with it. They offer much food for thought and reflection for anyone interested in the am-

biguities and capriciousness of life in times of war and resettlement. Those eager to classify works according to their genre would describe this work as myth, but myths have earned a dubious reputation because myth-writers concerned about the religious objectives of their work have, all too often, sacrificed factual accuracy. Not so the Dycks. They tell the stories as they perceived and experienced those turbulent events. Their biases and their religious objectives and interpretations are clearly stated, without compromising their concern to be as factually accurate as possible. Their stories, like all good stories, transcend or defy narrow theological or ethical formulations. They deserve a wide readership, even by those whose theology differs from that of the authors.

The tragic psychological and emotional problems of the refugees, particularly of those who lived in the great uncertainty of not knowing what had happened to their spouses, whether they were dead or alive, is treated with great sensitivity and empathy in this book. The controversial position taken by the Mennonite churches and communities regarding the remarriage or common-law marriages of such individuals, particularly in South America, is reported in a factual and non-judgemental way, but some of the good and bad consequences are given. The difficulty of new beginnings in such situations of fundamental personal and family uncertainty is vividly described in this book.

There are other controversial issues which are dealt with in a manner that seems less satisfactory. The confident assertion that God could, and did, rescue the 12,000 Mennonite refugees from the Soviet Union is not without problems. Those readers inclined to see all of this as a great miracle of God might reasonably be asked to reflect on the fact of the other 88,000 Mennonites living in the Soviet Union in 1939 who did not escape, or, after escaping, perished on the trek or were overtaken by the Red Army and forcibly repatriated back to the Soviet Union. How does the theology that “God can,” and that he really did, rescue 12,000 Mennonite refugees from the Soviet Union, apply to the 40 million human beings who perished in World War II? or to the millions of Jews exterminated by the Nazis? On the other hand, can the fervent prayers and faith of refugees be dismissed as irrelevant to their rescue?

Answers to such questions fall outside the sources and methods of the professional historian, but they are the primary concern of the myth-maker. This book abounds in positive affirmations of the faith. An attempt is made in the conclusion to point to some of the possible benefits or blessings of intense suffering, but skeptics are not likely to be convinced.

Thoughtful readers will also find perplexing the uncritical acceptance by the Dycks of the argument advanced by senior MCC officials that the Mennonite refugees from the Soviet Union, but not those from Prussia/Poland/Danzig who came from the same racial stock, were really of Dutch origin and entitled to special consideration by the Dutch government and, more importantly, by the International Refugee Organization (IRO). This matter was the subject of prolonged and unusually bitter controversy between IRO officials and MCC representatives who had to resort to exceptionally heavy lobbying in Washington before American pressure forced the IRO to adopt a more accommodating policy toward the Mennonite refugees from the Soviet Union. It is true that the Dycks served, as it were, on the front lines and often had only limited knowledge or understanding of the external forces and events which influenced senior diplomatic and military decision makers. They have not, moreover, familiarized themselves with the secondary literature or the relevant primary documents pertaining to the events described in their stories which have become available in the meantime. But the dubious claims of Dutch citizenship, which others have dubbed “Hollaenderi,” directly affected the programs in which the Dyck’s were involved, and Elfrieda’s brother, C. F. Klassen, handled most of the often turbulent negotiations with IRO officials in Geneva. Other reports by MCC officials were far more revealing on this subject than the material presented in this book.

Another controversial issue is simply denied, but caused a good deal of trouble at the time. That was the preference given by the MCC to Mennonite refugees from the Soviet Union in the distribution of aid and relief supplies. The Dycks say relief was given on the basis of need, but their whole book documents a particular interest in, and concern for, the Mennonite refugees from the Soviet Union. There was, in

fact, an agreement, approved by the Council of Relief Agencies Licensed for Operations in Germany, whereby Mennonites in North America could send a relief package for one of the Mennonites if, in addition, they also included one which would be distributed on the basis of need. In addition, the German Mennonite relief organizations which drew most of their supplies from the MCC repeatedly raised objections because they feared not enough of the relief was going to the Mennonite refugees from Poland/Prussia/Danzig because MCC policies gave preference to those from the Soviet Union. These were serious issues, blithely dismissed by the Dycks with general statements that relief was given only on the basis of need.

Historians will treat this book as a primary source. The book has both the strengths and weaknesses of first hand accounts written forty to fifty years after the event, by two people actively involved in wartime and post-war relief and resettlement activities. In 1947 and 1948 these stories were the first detailed reports North Americans heard about those troubled events. It is good to have them available in a new book which, for the most part, repeats what was known and reported in the 1940s. Aside from scattered comments about the later experiences of individual refugees, this book offers much the same interpretation as was provided in the 1940s. It does not make reference to additional relevant information which has become available in the meantime.

T. D. Regehr
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

Paton Yoder, *Tradition and Transition*.
Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1991. Pp.
358. (\$28.95)

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, the pre-Revolutionary War immigrant Amish were establishing themselves in Berks and Lancaster Counties of Pennsylvania. Between 1816 and 1860, another 3,000-plus wave of Amish immigrants arrived, and they consolidated themselves into church settlements mainly in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Ontario, Indiana, Illinois and Iowa. During this half-century, *Ordnung*, Amish church norms for living in the Americas, were established, and leadership patterns were developed.

But by mid-century there were rum-

blings of trouble for the unity of the church when some were calling for stream baptism, less strictness on the ban, building meetinghouses and other innovations. A series of *Diener Versammlungen*, churchwide ministers meetings, were held from 1862 to 1878 to try to keep the peace and unity. They failed. By the end of the century what Paton Yoder calls The Great Schism had occurred among the Amish. The traditional group would become the Old Order Amish church of the twentieth century. The progressive Amish Mennonite conferences changed until they again joined the (Old) Mennonite Church. Some congregations in Illinois and a few in Ohio would eventually come under the General Conference Mennonite Church umbrella.

Until Paton Yoder's *Tradition and Transition*, the documents and main leaders of these nineteenth century Amish were among the untold stories of Mennonite history. Theron Schlabach wrote the American Amish and Mennonite 19th century social history in *Peace, Faith, Nation* (Herald Press, 1988), and the progressive wing's Illinois church stories can be found in Mennonite historian Steven R. Estes' congregational histories (*A Goodly Heritage*, 1982; *Living Stones*, 1984; *From Mountains to Meadows*, 1990).

But no one focused on the nineteenth century Amish in a documentary way. There are several reasons for this. Most twentieth century Amish scholars came from sociological and anthropological disciplines which give most of their attention to twentieth century Amish life, with a nod to Jacob Ammann and the 1693 division among the Swiss Brethren.

The exception is one Amish historian who has written these stories for his own people in a cautionary document: David Luthy in *The Amish In America: Settlements That Failed, 1840-1960* (Pathway, 1986). Many of the human interest stories of the settlements referred to in *Tradition and Transition* can be found in Luthy's book along with some genealogical information.

Mennonite Church people, over half of whom come from the Amish, had their own reasons for a disinterest in this segment of their history. They were embracing a Mennonite Church which was adopting most of the elements which their traditional Amish co-religionists were resisting—higher education, meetinghouses, revivalistic

Christianity, Sunday school and increasing engagement with modern America and Canada. Several days after the Indiana-Michigan Amish Mennonite Conference joined the Mennonite Conference in June 1916, Noah Long, a trustee at the Clinton Frame Amish Mennonite Church near Goshen, Indiana, went to the meetinghouse and expunged the name Amish from the sign. He was also brushing out a chapter of history. The last Mennonite historian to seriously study nineteenth century Amish life was John Umble (1881-1966) of Goshen College.

Yoder's story is in three segments. The first third is an introduction to nineteenth century Amish church polity, beliefs and discipline. Here are descriptions of deacons, full deacons, ministers, and the *Ältester* (full ministers or bishops as they came to be called). The full deacon became an especially ill-defined calling and the subject of some controversy. There is also the Amish view of Christ, the church, and banning and shunning as found in the Bible, the *Martyrs' Mirror*, and the Dordrecht Confession.

The centerpiece of the story is in the details of the *Diener Versammlungen* meetings for which there are extensive minutes. These meetings or conferences generally began the day after Pentecost Sunday and ran for three days. Ostensibly called to deal with some of the problems of certain regions on issues such as stream baptism or leadership disputes, they were, in the larger sense, the stage upon which were played out the cultural and religious changes in the various churches.

The *Diener Versammlungen* story climaxes early at the schism ("The Great Schism"), the fourth meeting in 1865 at the Oak Grove congregation in Smithville, Ohio. Although there were 16 of these meetings between 1862 and 1878, this meeting had the largest number of ministers present (89) and was the last year the conservatives attended.

The traditionalists, two-fifths of this 1865 Smithville meeting, had met several days earlier in Holmes County and drawn up a letter mentioning, as the minutes would say, "many things which were harmful to the church." But it was a modest, almost anti-climactic, turning point because this meeting left very brief minutes, and our main record is the surviving letter of the conservatives and the record that they never returned to future conferences. The rest of the

story is the emergence of three Amish Mennonite Conferences (Eastern, Indiana Michigan, and Western) from 1888 to 1893 and the emergence of the Old Order Amish.

This book is modest history told by a modest historian. Paton Yoder largely stays within the Amish world and presents the documents, the evidence and the people without much embellishment, analysis or judgement. He tells the story fairly with the literary motif of "do not offend"—either the traditionalist or progressive Amish descendents. The liberals or progressives are often called change-minded, apparently an attempt at a neutral term. This attempted sympathy for both sides, of course, can itself be offensive, but for this work, it is helpful.

Yoder generally lets the historical developments alone. Concerning the 1865 "point of no return" *Diener Versammlungen*, he notes that the liberals may have been more negotiable. However, he notes, that if the leaders had conceded too much to the conservatives, their members—already chaffing for new freedoms—would probably have rebelled. For the conservatives, he notes, principle was at stake, and compromise was sin. Even divisions have their virtues.

Paton Yoder taught American history at several colleges during most of his professional life, and in retirement began to study his religious and family ancestors, especially his great grandfather "Tennessee" John Stoltzfus. This study came from finding a bundle of previously unknown letters in a Lancaster, Pennsylvania, attic in 1982. Mennonites, Amish, and church historians can be grateful that *Tradition and Transition* obtained from his efforts. Obtained? Yes, it is a favorite verb throughout the book.

Levi Miller
Goshen, Indiana

Herbert and Maureen Klassen, *Ambassador to His People: C. F. Klassen and the Russian Mennonite Refugees*. Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1990. Pp. 261. (\$15.95—paperback)

Several years ago this reviewer was pleasantly surprised to meet one of the authors and to learn that a manuscript was being written about the life and work of C. F. Klassen. That name is

not really a household term for our younger generation. However, for anyone who has a connection at all to the post-World War II dispersion of Russian Mennonite refugees, that name will be remembered always.

The subtitle pinpoints a very central facet in the life of C. F. Klassen. A great deal of what he did and was concerned about related to that group of Mennonite people which in 1941-42 joined the dramatic trek from Ukraine to what became West Germany. Of the 35,000 or so who managed to survive the journey, about two-thirds were then taken back by the Red Army and sent to exile and labor camps in eastern and northern parts of the Soviet Union. The rest needed help desperately and Klassen did more than his share to get it for them.

Klassen's early life is sketched quite briefly, its beginnings noted in the settlement of New Samara, of north central Russia, with high schooling received in the Crimea, and a job following in Moscow. A period of time spent in the Forestry Service led to early leadership responsibilities in the larger Mennonite community. After attending the 1917 All Mennonite congress in Ohrloff, Klassen was asked to represent his home community in the struggle for independent colony status, a task which was made more difficult, and which then took him to Moscow after the October Revolution.

In the tumultuous months that followed, Klassen and his friend Peter Froese were asked to represent Mennonite interests in a newly formed United Council. It was set up to help conscientious objectors who were seeking exemption from military service. Then came other involvements: helping to run the Menno Center set up in Moscow; guiding relief efforts headed up by Alvin Miller; and building up an agricultural and reconstruction program in the Mennonite colonies of Russia.

In 1928, at the age of 34, Klassen left his native homeland. He had married Mary by then, and two children had been born. The family came to Winnipeg ultimately, and it was from that base that Klassen would complete the rest of his life's work. His tasks were connected almost immediately to the job of helping to collect the debts remaining from the Russian Mennonite emigration costs of the 1920s. He also attended several Mennonite World Conferences between the wars.

Then came World War II, and with its termination, a call from MCC for Klassen to explore possibilities for giving assistance to Mennonite refugees in Europe. Klassen would dedicate all his energies to the job of leading such assistance projects in the decade (almost) of his life that remained. He would die of a heart attack, perhaps related to exhaustion, on May 8, 1954.

It is an inspiring story, and should be appreciated as such. A definitive biography it cannot be, given the lack of detailed information which that would require. In the nature of the project it could not become a critical study, either. Relationships with colleagues in the work are not explored in depth.

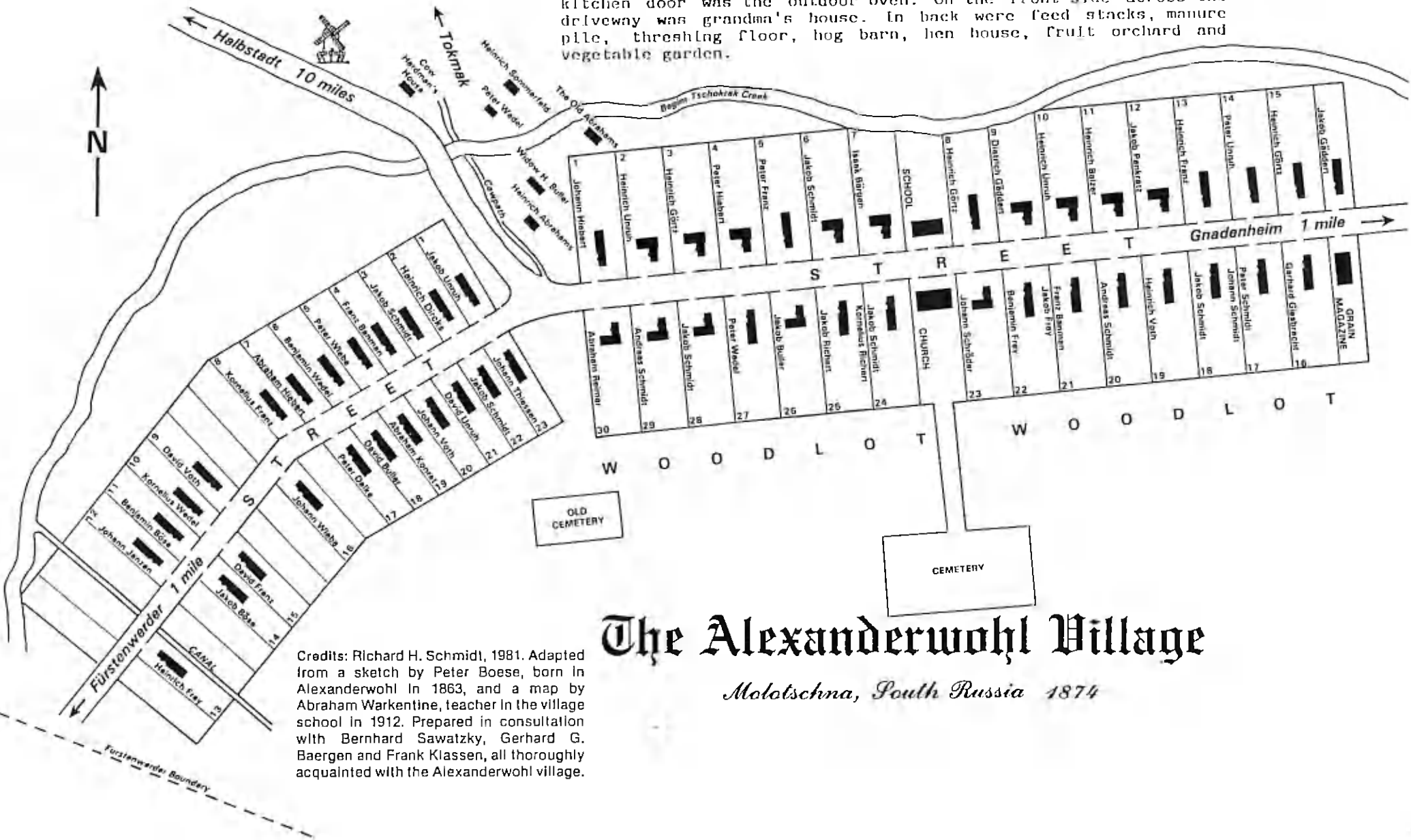
The authors do provide a good bit of helpful background in the Russian parts of the story. However, the telling does miss a beat or two here and there. Trotsky was really a Bolshevik, not a Menshevik (p. 35), and one is not quite clear whether the mention of Mennonites in the Russian army refers to regular soldiers or noncombatants (p. 40). Tradition has it that very few Mennonites joined the tsarist army as regular soldiers in World War I. Source references are a bit imprecise at points, and one cannot find the writing by Alvin Miller listed in the bibliography. Some spellings of place names needed checking (Arkadak, p. 59; Davlekanovo, p. 61). The page assembling by the printers has left a bit of confusion in the pages 20-23.

These are small matters, suggesting perhaps the need for a sharper editorial eye in the publishing offices. The reading public is well served by the final product. Many will be very glad that the story of C. F. Klassen, a dedicated Christian leader, humanitarian and concerned family head, has been pulled together and written down. They will always thank the authors who got this job done too.

Lawrence Klippenstein
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Map: Courtesy of Mennonite Library and Archives

All households were arranged alike. In front was a flower bed and a few fruit trees, including the popular krushyka. By the kitchen door was the outdoor oven. On the front side across the driveway was grandma's house. In back were feed stacks, manure pile, threshing floor, hog barn, hen house, fruit orchard and vegetable garden.



Credits: Richard H. Schmidt, 1981. Adapted from a sketch by Peter Boese, born in Alexanderwohl in 1863, and a map by Abraham Warkentine, teacher in the village school in 1912. Prepared in consultation with Bernhard Sawatzky, Gerhard G. Baergen and Frank Klassen, all thoroughly acquainted with the Alexanderwohl village.

The Alexanderwohl Village

Molotschna, South Russia 1874