



Roots & Branches

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"What we have heard and known we will tell the next generation."

PSALM 78



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"Bells pealed from the towers of the Grossmünster as Anabaptists from around the world streamed out of the 800-year-old church." Spires of the Grossmünster Church, Zurich, Switzerland, cradle of Anabaptism and location of the 500th Anniversary of Anabaptism Celebration, 2025. See story inside, p. 10

Photo source: Lorna Goertz. Photo taken by a member of her tour group.

Editorial

■ By Maryann Tjart Jantzen

In this issue, we again feature articles that commemorate the 500th anniversary of the birth of Anabaptism: from a look at the celebration of the 400th anniversary of this movement, to “outlier” early Anabaptist Hans Denck and the letter of an early Anabaptist martyr. This variety is a reminder of the complexity of this once radical movement that can seem so distant from our own lives. Given our experience of religious freedom in Canada, which of us today can imagine declaring like Nelleken Jasper (see Gareth Brandt’s paraphrase of her letter from *Martyrs Mirror*), while being interrogated by “the governor, two judges, and the clerk of the court”: “I won’t leave my faith commitment either!” She writes, “They warned me that I could suffer the same fate, and I said, ‘Go ahead, roast me on a rotisserie, boil me in oil, I will continue to trust that God’s grace will keep me in his truth till my dying breath.’”

Several articles also focus on the activism of Mennonite authors such as Sarah Augustine, of Pueblo (Tewa) descent, and Spanish scholar Antonio González as they seek to apply their Anabaptist values in their contemporary context. Augustine, the author of *The Land Is Not Empty: Following Jesus in Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery*, and a member of Seattle Mennonite church, has worked in North America and globally “on behalf of dispossessed Native people.”

González, who is involved with the Faith and Life Commission of the Mennonite World Conference, argues that “theology must *begin* with the poor. God’s reign—faith and justice—can’t be simply handed down as a gift from the prosperous elite to the poor.” And local activist Brett Van Bergen, a graduate of Columbia Bible College, is now a fulltime advocate for those caught in the “intersecting crises” of toxic drug use and homelessness. He hopes to “help Anabaptists understand what our friends facing these unimaginable oppressions are going through—and to cultivate a spirit of love that leads to justice and liberation.”

In contrast, the review of Ralph Friesen’s book *Prosperity Ever, Depression Never: Steinbach in the 1930s* highlights his portrayal of the tensions in this community between assimilation to Canadian and capitalist values and adherence to traditional Mennonite ways of living. In his review, Robert Martens summarizes Friesen’s view of his community at this time: “Steinbach was a town in conflict: old/new, aged/young, traditional/metropolitan. The virtue of humility, nurtured among Mennonites for hundreds of years, was in danger of acceding to a ‘crass boosterism.’ A can-do, independent attitude was replacing the former Mennonite ideal of community” (7).

The past and the present. It’s up to us to determine the future of our Anabaptist heritage.

The 400th Anniversary of the Anabaptist/Mennonite Movement

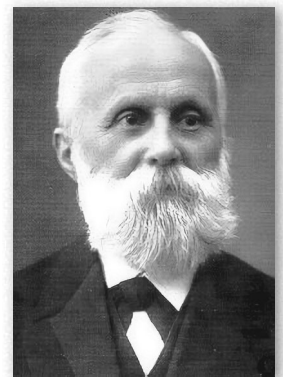
■ By Robert Martens

It was four hundred years since the first Anabaptist adult baptism, and Pastor Christian Neff of Weierhof, Germany, knew it was time to celebrate. A bit of cheer was desperately needed, considering the catastrophe of the Great War and the destruction currently erupting in Russia. Neff called for a gathering in Basel and Zurich, a global gathering in fact, the first Mennonite World Conference. The number assembled was small, with only one member from North America: Henry J. Krehbiel, president of the General Conference Mennonite Church. The conference turned out to be an assembly of reconciliation. Protestant Reformed

churchmen (no women among them) and theologians asked forgiveness, avowing that past disputes were behind them.

“How can we improve the spiritual life of our congregations?” was a primary theme.

It seems an odd choice, given the violence Russian Mennonites were enduring, but Mennonite church leaders of the time were quite vocal about a perceived lack of Christian resolve in their church communities. The days of the conference (June 13-16, 1925) are well-documented in the Russian Mennonite paper *Unser Blatt*, a



Christian Neff.
Photo source: GAMEO.

newspaper that was a last-ditch attempt to enable Mennonite communications while thousands were fleeing the country. (Most of its issues are available in the archives of the Mennonite Historical Society of BC.)

On the final day, H. J. Krehbiel was asked to close the conference with a few words. His speech is remarkable, and appears below. (It must be added: there may be an original English-language version somewhere. What appears below is translated from the German-language version, which must have been translated from English by one of the delegates.)

To conclude, Brother Krehbiel from America spoke compellingly:

It is unfortunate, for two reasons, that I must deliver the concluding address to this wonderful gathering. Brother Neff informed me scarcely two hours ago that the designated brother for this could not be here. Now, we Americans are accustomed to doing what we have been requested to do—good or bad. Second, I deeply regret, as an American who speaks almost exclusively the English language, that it is impossible to express my feelings of gratitude and joy and acknowledgment. And if I cannot do that for myself, how can I express the heartfelt gratitude from the entire Mennonite community to all the brothers and sisters involved in this celebration? You must feel this, you can understand this.

I have already said that there was a time when I was ashamed to be a Mennonite. However, if you have understood half as much as I did, or perhaps less, of what the theology faculty [of Basel] have said, then you can understand me when I say, I thank God that I belong to this Mennonite community. A miracle has taken place before our eyes, that after four hundred years we are standing upon this place where our community was founded, and where the founders died a martyr's death. It is extraordinary that these brothers [Swiss Protestant Reformed] have so warmly greeted the descendants of the persecuted, and have reached out to take our hands. That is a step forward over which the angels in heaven rejoice and for which we humans thank the Lord God with childlike hearts. It has already been said that the

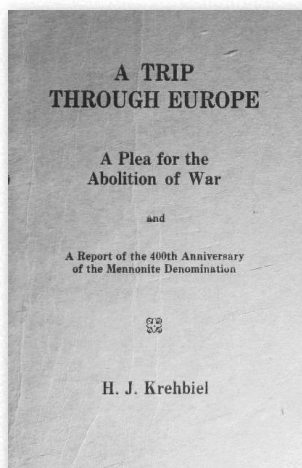


Attendees at the First Mennonite World Conference in Switzerland, 1925.

Source: GAMEO.

time is over, God be thanked, when God's children fight among each other. No: we know that we who call ourselves Christian wish to build up his Kingdom for which he came, that we are united on this point.

However, when we rejoice deeply over what has happened in this regard, then I stand, probably with all who are here, before the question: what will happen now? How can I develop and shape the kingdom of God in the future? I spoke yesterday, or the day before, about the fearful catastrophe that has befallen humankind. The principle mission for the Christian church is, to my understanding, to prevent such disasters. I will say why. I was on the battlefield in France. For me, the most tragic among the relics that we saw were the bones of a young German man and of an Australian lying together. I asked myself, why must a young man from Germany and one from Australia shed their blood, and why do their remains lie unburied upon the battlefield? Because in so-called "Christian nations" business people and capitalists were in competition with each other; because the diplomats in "Christian nations" had fallen into misunderstanding; because the military armed themselves for war. If the Christian



Church cannot prevent this, it is then not entitled to exist, then we have merely the life of a Christian organization. One of our highest-ranking generals said, if another world war occurs, the guilt lies upon the Christian Church, because the Christian Church has the power and influence to prevent this.

Dear brothers and sisters! If we work together in this primary mission and are able to fulfill it, then the

kingdom of God can be built. We must, however, stand side by side. God be thanked, we have realized that we have a greater responsibility than to fight over minor things. Jesus has sent us into the world to complete the work which he began on Golgotha in the hearts of individuals and among the peoples of the earth, and upon this we must unite.

Anabaptist Outlier Hans Denck

■ By Robert Martens

Harry Loewen, former Chair of Mennonite Studies in Winnipeg, once remarked that Hans Denck was his favourite Anabaptist. He didn't explain why. What could have prompted him to say that?

Denck was a very odd Anabaptist, but then Anabaptism was a very odd movement, so diverse as to be almost indefinable. And Denck himself, to this day, remains indefinable. Analysts of different faiths and ideas claim him as their own, but he seems to hover ever so slightly out of their grasp. His own inner diversity was a reflection of the debates and quarrels being carried on in Anabaptist circles. With poet Walt Whitman, he might have said, "I contain multitudes."

Even his date of birth is unknown, but he seems to have been born between 1495 and 1500 in Habach, Upper Bavaria. "I was taught the faith from my childhood by my parents," he would later say ("Denck" GAMEO 1). It was soon apparent that he was a gifted young man. Hans attended the University of Ingolstadt from which he graduated with a degree in two years, and then went on to study at the University of Basel. Denck was at home with the humanists of his time, was very likely a follower of the famous scholar Erasmus, and was fluent in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. He also studied under a renowned teacher of the time, Johannes Oecolampadius, but neither the teachings of Erasmus nor Oecolampadius seemed to have a lasting effect on this pensive, almost dreamy, young man. Denck earned his living for a spell as an editor in a printery and was influential in the publication of a Greek grammar.

The greatest influences upon the young prodigy, as it turned out, were rather different: the nascent Anabaptist movement, revolutionary in its ideas of civil and religious life; and the medieval German mystics, in particular Meister Eckhart disciple Johannes Tauler, who dived

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into the inner spirit and workings of the divine. Denck was also attracted to the *Theologia Germanica*, written during tumultuous times in the 1300s. The book, reissued by Martin Luther, was mystical yet practical in scope. Its teachings of inwardness and the imitation of Christ appealed to later Lutheran and Pietist traditions, the latter so influential among

Mennonites living in Russia. Yet Denck was also drawn to the revolutionary, apocalyptic mysticism of Thomas Müntzer, a key player in the 1525 Peasant Uprising.

At the age of twenty-three, Denck was nominated by Oecolampadius, who had Calvinist leanings, to the rectorship of the St. Sebald School in Nürnberg. Denck was not yet an Anabaptist but soon would be, perhaps compelled by political forces. He was intimate with a group of painters who were overtly questioning the basic rites of the Catholic Church. Denck was called upon by the authorities to defend his "questionable" points of view. He was banished, forced to swear an oath that he would never come near Nürnberg again. Shaken to the core, Denck left town forever, but before he left, he wrote a Confession in two instalments. "For a time I prided myself as possessing faith, but I have finally become convinced that it was a false faith, because this faith did not overcome my spiritual poverty, my inclination to sin, my weaknesses and my sickness.... I do not venture to assert that I now have the faith which translates into life, although I see clearly that my unbelief



Denck's teacher & influencer Oecolampadius.
Image source: Wikipedia.

cannot continue before God. Therefore I say: Yes, in the name of the Almighty God whom I fear from the bottom of my heart: Lord, I have the desire to believe; help me come to my faith.” And, later in the Confession: “Faith comes by hearkening to the Gospel. Where there is faith, there is no sin; where there is no sin, there the righteousness of God dwells” (qtd. in “Denck” GAMEO 1-2).

And so Denck’s dreadful wanderings began. In 1525 he was in St. Gall, where he stayed with Anabaptists; it is reported that he may have offended them with his talk of universalism, the ultimate salvation of all the world, but the evidence for that is sketchy. He moved on to Augsburg, in Bavaria, where he worked as a tutor of Greek and Latin to children of the aristocracy. In Augsburg, Denck finally became a full-fledged Anabaptist when he was baptized by Balthasar Hubmaier. After this, Denck became a leader of this emerging movement, and even drew apocalyptic thinker Hans Hut into the Augsburg group. But: another city, another disputation. Denck left, fed up, before he was called to defend himself. Weary but not broken, he settled in Strasbourg, a relatively tolerant city. History kept repeating itself. Exile followed another theological disputation. For a brief time, Denck lived in Worms, where Luther had made his famous stand before the authorities in 1521. Here he assisted Ludwig Haetzer in a translation of the Old Testament prophets.

During the climactic year of 1527, Hans Denck participated, and was a leader, in the writing of the Schleithem Confession and in a gathering at Augsburg which was later called the Martyrs Synod, since most of the participants there were soon put to death by the panicking establishment. By this time, though, he was bone-tired and ill. Denck moved to Basel, where he appealed to his old friend Oecolampadius for sanctuary. Oecolampadius complied, visited with him frequently, spoke in kindness and fellowship, and suggested that he write a manuscript of his views. Denck did so, listing in ten points a statement of belief. He acknowledged that he had

erred—and perhaps for that reason Oecolampadius published it under the deceptive title of *Hans Denck’s Recantation*—and emphasized the vital importance of the inward spiritual life. He also wrote that institutions and rites are not primary, and that he had no particular objection to infant baptism. Denck was reverting, perhaps to his youthful mysticism, and where Anabaptism became ideological, he was no longer interested—if he ever had been. But the manuscript was definitely not a recantation.

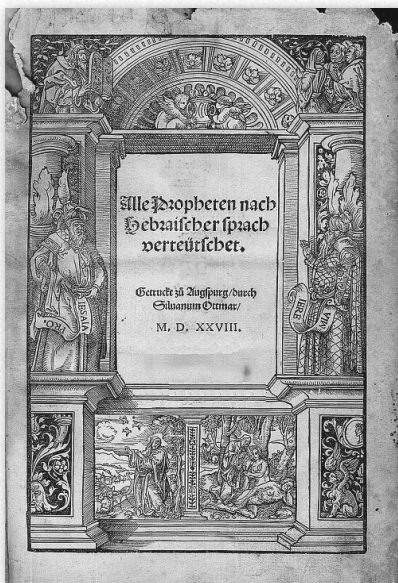
Before there were any consequences, perhaps yet another banishment, Denck died of the plague. He was probably in his early thirties.

Hans Denck authored several books, among them what has been called his best work, *Von der waren Liebe* (On True Love). He speculated that the Word, Jesus

the Lamb, has existed throughout all human history, and has always been accessible, even before the birth in Bethlehem. He meditated on true love: “One perceives a little spark of the Love in a few people, in some more than others, although in most people of our time it is regrettably extinguished; nevertheless, since Love is spiritual and people are carnal, it is certain that this spark, however small it is in man, is not of man but has come from perfect Love. This Love is God” (qtd. in Abraham 2). Denck was so focused on the inward divine life that he broke with most Anabaptists on the primacy of Scripture. “Holy Scripture I hold above all human treasures but not as high as the Word

of God that is living, powerful and eternal—unattached and free of all elements of this world” (qtd. in Abraham 2).

So who was Denck, and what did he really think? This might be ultimately unanswerable. He has been cast as an anti-Trinitarian, but this remains unlikely. He has also been embraced by some later thinkers as a universalist: that all humanity will in the end be redeemed. Lutheran Urbanus Rhegius reported that Denck had confessed to him, after a year of denial, “that he believed that no man or devil was eternally damned” (qtd. in “Denck” *Wikipedia* 2). But Rhegius was Lutheran and



Translation of the Old Testament prophets by Hans Denck & Ludwig Haetzer.

not a friend to any Anabaptist, so his testimony is not entirely trustworthy. It's easy for contemporary thinkers to claim Denck as a forerunner to their own "progressive" theology. They have valid cause for thinking so, but the fact is that Denck loved paradox: he played with opposing ideas simultaneously. Ambiguity in his beliefs didn't seem to bother him.

"I am a man who has erred and may yet err," he wrote (qtd. in Abraham 3). Denck was all too aware of his limitations, but believed that the inner Word would redeem him. He was very much a mystic and scholar, unlike most Anabaptists. The inner spiritual life, though, did not exist for him in isolation. Community, the body of the church, was vital, despite its limitations. "But you, when hearing your brother speak something that is strange to you, do not immediately contradict it but hear if it be true, that you might also accept it. If you cannot understand it, you should not judge him, and if he considers you to be slightly in error, consider whether your error might be even greater" (qtd. in Abraham 3).

Hans Denck was always willing to listen. In this, he was not unique among Anabaptists, but probably unusual. The times forced conflict upon these young reformers, and some responded, understandably, with

apocalyptic denunciations. But simply put: Denck was just a decent person: "He is one of the few personalities of the 16th century who never indulged in controversy except with a heavy heart; not a trace of abusiveness or unfairness is to be found in his writings" (qtd. in Neff et al. 4). Perhaps that is why Harry Loewen so loved him.

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The Adages of Erasmus: Philosophy, Formation and Wisdom

■ By Ron Dart

German Anabaptism also shows no small degree of influence by Erasmus, especially among the leaders on the Lower Rhine. Campanus and Thomas von Imbroich often quote him in their writings and speak of him in terms of great appreciation. On baptism and communion, the Trinity, and freedom of the will Erasmus offered so much that was in accord with Anabaptist teaching, that he was suspected not only of promoting their cause, but even of being one of them. In designating the Bible as the sole source of Christian truth, in promoting the use of the Bible in the vernacular, in stressing that "Christianity is essentially a life of discipleship of Christ," he expressed common Anabaptist demands. His Enchiridion militis christiani (1502), "a fine devotional book of the educated world," in which he promoted a Christianity interpreted by the Sermon on the Mount, was read in Anabaptist circles, especially after it was available in a Dutch translation (about 1550).

Vos, Karel, Nanne van der Zijpp, Christian Neff and Harold S. Bender. "Erasmus, Desiderius (1466-1536)." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. 1956. [https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Erasmus,_Desiderius_\(1466-1536\)](https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Erasmus,_Desiderius_(1466-1536))

I can hardly say what nectar sweet as honey I sip from your most delightful *Adages*, rich source of nectar as they are, what lovely flowers of every mind I gather thence like a honey-bee, carrying them off to my hive and building them into a fabric of what I write. To their perusal I have devoted two hours each day.

Niccolo Sagundino

As an expression of the Renaissance love of antiquity and as a work of instruction and reference, the *Adages* is unsurpassed in its sweep.... There is a close relationship between the *Adages* and Erasmus' other widely known works, from *The Praise of Folly* to the *Colloquies*.

William Barker

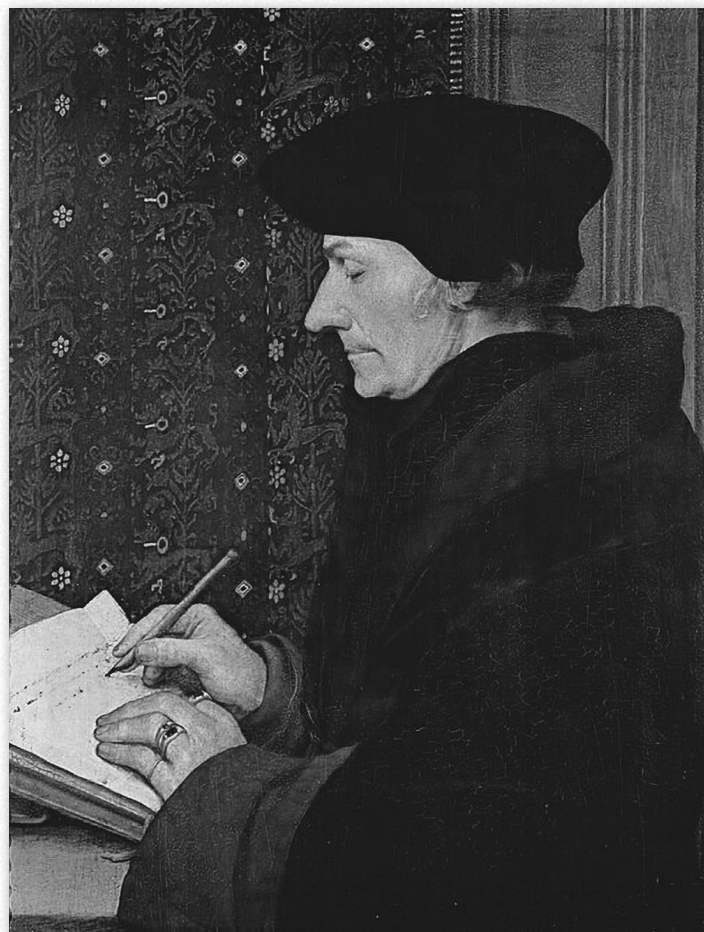
As a synthesis of classical and Renaissance proverb lore the *Adages* has never really been superseded.

William Barker

There is a way of doing philosophy that is about parsing various arguments, using inductive, deductive and logical arguments to reach reasonable conclusions, or studying the different positions of philosophers across the centuries of time. Such an approach to thinking and being has played a prominent role in shaping how the discipline, understanding and significance of philosophy are practised. But there is another approach to philosophy that comes as a check, balance and counter to these rather orthodox tendencies. This approach is more concerned about wisdom and insight, formation, and ordering desires, and the use of parables, stories, myths and varied folk tales to illuminate the journey. It was such an understanding of philosophy that held Erasmus and his ever-growing *Adages*.

The *Adages* drew deeply and thoroughly from the Greek and Latin wisdom traditions and the Christian internalization of such an aphoristic and parabolic approach to insight: short-story portals into the larger cathedral of seeing the journey in a fuller and more discerning way and manner. The *Adages* went through many an edition and grew larger and more expansive as the compilation developed.

The initial publication of the *Adages* left the press in 1500, Erasmus still a young man in his early thirties. The turbulence of the emerging Reformation was still in the future. The 818 proverbs listed in the 1500 edition were shorter, commentaries on them briefer. But, each of the 818 graphic tales told, each summarizing markings to note on the journey, are keepers not to miss. The growing interest in such wisdom tales meant Erasmus was inspired to add to his collection. Erasmus took to Italy in 1508 and, when there, met one of the foremost printers of the time: Aldus Manuzio. Manuzio walked the extra mile to encourage and support Erasmus in his journey with proverbial aphorisms; his “hasten slowly” symbol of the dolphin and anchor* was but a pointer to Erasmus’ layered tale of “The Labours of Hercules.”** The 1508 edition of the *Adages* was much expanded. The 3,260 aphorisms now included a growing commentary on them. But, in Erasmus’ sagacious and applied way, he



Erasmus. Painted by Hans Holbein the Younger, now in the Louvre Museum, Paris.

Source: Wikipedia.

blended the aphorism as a timeless insight with a timely application to the dilemmas and challenges of the early sixteenth-century ethos. In short, the timeless wisdom and myths of the classical tradition could still speak in a timely way to the obvious problems of Erasmus’ historic and troubling context.

One of the more perennial adages that held both the classical way of thinking (much concealed in the literal and external, much more revealed in the deeper internal probes) was the myth of “The Sileni of Alcibiades.”*** I supervised an MA thesis that was completed in 2005 called “The Silenus Metaphor: The Inner Spirit Theology of Erasmus and the Colloquies.” The external reality of Silenus tends to be offensive, bordering on the grotesque and lacking appeal, whereas the inner reality

* The Renaissance printer Aldus Manutius adopted the symbol of the dolphin and anchor as his printer’s mark. Erasmus (whose books were published by Manutius) featured the phrase in his *Adagia* and used it to compliment his printer: “Aldus, making haste slowly, has acquired as much gold as he has reputation, and richly deserves both.” Manutius showed Erasmus a Roman silver coin, given to him by Cardinal Bembo, which bore the dolphin-and-anchor symbol on the reverse side. *Wikipedia*

** If any human labours ever deserved to be called Herculean, it is certainly the work of those who are striving to restore the great works of ancient literature.” Erasmus

***Seilenoi were depicted as fat, elderly, white-haired men, with snub noses, balding heads, and the ears and tails of asses. They were sometimes covered in fluffy white hair and occasionally sported a pair of ox horns. *theoi.com*

of Silenus is ripe with beauty, insight and wisdom. Those who only see with the physical eye see not—those who have been trained to see with the inner, searching and spiritual eye see much that the literal and empirical eye sees not. Such is, when understood aright, the purpose of the proverb, adage and folk tale.

The third and more engaged social and political commentary of the *Adages* was published in 1515.

Margaret Phillips has called this Erasmus' "Utopian edition"—gone are the wisdom sayings that merely float above time and history—the 1515 edition does have a tendency to apply such insights to the pressing social, political, religious and economic issues of the time. The Reformation was heating up in both the Roman Catholic and potential Protestant tribes and Erasmus was alert to such realities—his first revised edition of the New Testament was published in 1516—many were the revisions that questioned the Vulgate and offended the conservative Roman Catholic Sanhedrin.

The *Adages* continued to grow in size and scope as an eager audience were delighted and charmed by such compact and succinct summaries of insights and longer commentaries on them. Some of the adages grew in length, such as "War is sweet to those who have not tried it"—this became a bestselling booklet. Or the "Twice-cooked cabbage is death," meaning something said that is silly can be initially tolerated but when mindlessly repeated again and again tests the patience to the tolerant extreme.

The fourth edition of the *Adages* was published in 1517-1518, fifth edition in 1520, sixth in 1523, seventh 1526, eighth 1528, ninth 1533 and the final edition months before Erasmus' death in 1536. The final total of adages reached a staggering 4,151 by the end of Erasmus' formal publishing journey. After the death of Erasmus, additions were made to the rather large and imposing collection and many were the shorter and more abridged

versions. There can be no doubt, though, that Erasmus used the adage and proverbial approach to formation and wisdom to highlight how the classical world that he had inherited had much wisdom and insight, and by

common grace, saw deeply and meaningfully into the substantive issues of our all too human journey.

The four sections of the *Adages* (one thousand in each section) begin with poignant and incisive political adages: 1)

"Between friends all is common"

2) "Make haste slowly" 3) "The labours of Hercules" and 4) "War is sweet for those who have not tried it." Each

of these primers has longer commentaries that embody reflections on issues that transcend time and place. The fact Erasmus has had such an impact on English religious and political life meant that many of his adages

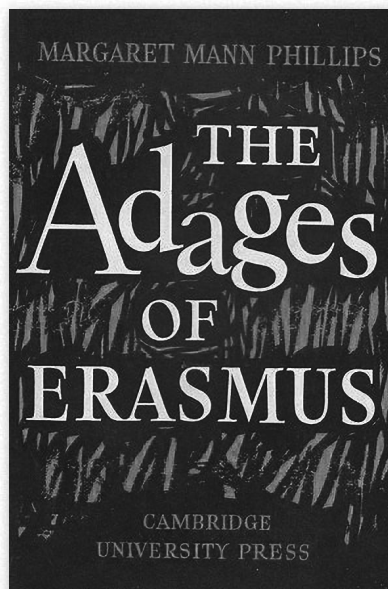
became part of the lore and pithy wisdom ethos of English culture, many of Shakespeare's compact proverbs being children of Erasmus' adages.

The publication of *The Adages of Erasmus* in 2001 (more than twenty years now since its publication) by University of Toronto Press is, in many ways, a tome more than worth the owning—like Sagundino, I would agree, the nectar is indeed sweet, lovely flowers visited, honeybees of insight carried to the hive of the mind—a daily lingering and inwardly digesting of them essential for a deeper formation of desires and longings to their

true home, hearth and end. Even though *The Adages of Erasmus* does not include all the 4,151 adages, there is more than enough in this bounty of a book to be a hiking companion until our journey comes to an end. Those with a greater interest and commitment to the wisdom tradition of the adages can sit with all of the adages in volumes 30-36 in the *Collected Works of Erasmus*, published by University of Toronto Press.

Ron Dart is a retired academic who has taught political science, philosophy and religion at the University of the Fraser Valley in Abbotsford, B.C., since 1990.

"...those who have been trained to see with the inner, searching and spiritual eye see much that the literal and empirical eye sees not."



A Letter from Nelleken Jasper

■ Paraphrase of a letter from *Martyrs Mirror* by Gareth Brandt

Warm greetings to you all, my dear sisters and brothers in the Lord. My friends, you need to know that I am happy and doing well. My mind has not changed, and I will continue to stick to the eternal truth till my dying breath.

Let me tell you what happened to me. I was brought before the leaders. There were four of them: the governor, two judges, and the clerk of the court. When I came into the room, I bowed to them and the governor said, “Well, my daughter, how are you?” I replied, “Quite well, sir.” He asked me if I was not tired of sitting in jail here and I said, “Yes, I am, why don’t you do away with me sooner rather than later. You’ve killed my parents and my two friends, and I miss them very much.” The governor said, “Don’t talk like this, my child. Give up your stubborn opinions and you can go free. It would make me too sad to do this to you. You haven’t been baptized; you have no reason to be here. Give it up!”

The judge asked the governor, “She has not yet been baptized?” “No,” I said, “I have not been baptized, but if you released me tonight, I would be baptized by tomorrow, I promise you!” Then they sighed over me, and I said, “The two boys were not baptized.” They replied, “That is true; we tried to change their opinions, but they would not budge.” And I said, “I won’t leave my faith commitment either!” They warned me that I could suffer the same fate, and I said, “Go ahead, roast me on a rotisserie, boil me in oil, I will continue to trust that God’s grace will keep me in his truth till my dying breath. You might as well do it today rather than wait till tomorrow.”

I firmly trust in God that he will help me. I have fixed my confidence in the Word, where it says, “Oh my chosen, do not be afraid; I will protect you in fire and in water, and I will not allow you to be tempted above what you are able to bear.”

Then they said, “Daughter, you’ve been deceived, your parents led you astray; you were only a child and they had authority over you; and you in your innocence

followed them. Now you have grown up a little and are out from under their influence. Surely you have the ability to make up your own mind. Give up your silly opinions and the king will pardon you. You are young yet. You are beautiful. You could get married to a fine young man.”

I said that I surely have my own mind and that I would rather keep what I have in the present. They said I should take some time to think about it and I said that I had thought about it enough already and wasn’t about to change for their sake. They tried another approach. “What about your soul? Don’t you want to be saved and go to heaven?” I told them that many people just wanted an easy ticket to heaven, but that few were willing to suffer with Christ. They argued that being a Christian had little to do with suffering. I said, “Christ himself had to suffer, how much more do we?” but they did not reply to this and instead said that I could talk to some priests about it. I said I wasn’t interested in this; that I wanted to keep what I had. They said, “If you died tonight, you would go straight to hell. Your parents and your two friends would be glad to be in your place, to have another chance to change their minds.” I said that I knew better than that!

We talked and argued a lot more, but it would take me too long to write it all, and besides, I’ve forgotten much of it. So, my dear friends, whom I love from my deepest heart, please pray for me that I will be able to end my life to the praise of God.

Dear friends, I have to be honest with you, I still may have to go through a great desert and sometimes I am very scared. This is a lonely and dangerous place. It’s like walking through thistles and thorns. But I also know that a crown of life is prepared



Image of a woman martyr from *Martyrs Mirror*.
Source: Kaufman Museum.



for us. We have the eternal truth, and I don't think any other will ever be found. God is a faithful supporter, a strength in weakness and a comforter in sad times. Let us snuggle close in God's arms and throw all our anxieties on God for God cares for us and will watch over us. One day we will all be together sitting around the table in heaven.

And so I commend you to the Lord, to the mighty word of grace. May the peace of God rule in your hearts. Say hi to all my friends.

Sincerely, Nelleken Jasper, a girl from Blijenburg, your unworthy sister in the Lord, December 12, 1569.

P.S. Please write back. I would love to get a letter sometime.

This edited paraphrase of a letter in *Martyrs Mirror*, 762 was inspired by Myron Augsburg's accounts of young martyrs in *Faithful unto Death*. For Nelleken Jasper's story see pp. 50-57.

Zurich 500 Gathering (anabaptistworld.org)

■ By Paul Schrag, *For Meetinghouse, Anabaptist World*,
June 5, 2025

Bells pealed from the towers of the Grossmünster as Anabaptists from around the world streamed out of the 800-year-old church. Lingered at the Zwingliplatz, they stood in the long shadow of history, having just celebrated the 500th anniversary of their faith tradition in the city where it began.

The estimated 3,500 Anabaptists who gathered in Zurich, Switzerland, on May 29 did more than praise the Radical Reformation and the global church it birthed. Along with the leaders of churches that once tried to crush the Anabaptist movement, they affirmed that faith in Jesus Christ now unites the spiritual heirs of former enemies.

Symbolizing reconciliation, Anabaptist and Reformed Church leaders—César García, the general secretary of Mennonite World Conference, and Setri Nyomi, interim general secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches—washed each other's feet.

The Catholic Church shared a message from Pope Leo XIV, read by Cardinal Kurt Koch of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity.

The statement from the pope—elected just three weeks earlier to lead the world's 1.4 billion Catholics—said that the Zurich celebration's theme, "The Courage to Love," reminded Catholics and Mennonites alike to show love, seek unity and serve others. "It likewise points to the need for honesty and kindness in reflecting on our common history, which includes painful wounds



Snow-capped mountains provide a background to the twin spires of Grossmünster Church in Zurich, Switzerland, cradle of Anabaptism and location of the 500th Anniversary of Anabaptism Celebration, 2025. Photo credit: Lorna Goertz.

and narratives that affect Catholic-Mennonite perceptions up to the present day," Koch read.

The pope's statement continued: "In the context of our war-torn world, our ongoing journey of healing and of deepening fraternity has a vital role to play, for the more united Christians are, the more effective will be our witness to Christ, the Prince of Peace, in building up a civilization of loving encounter. I assure you of my prayers that our fraternal relations will deepen and grow."

Representatives from 13 global church organizations led a procession into the Grossmünster, which seats about 1,200. When the church was full and the doors closed, hundreds were turned away. About 800 watched on screens at other sites, which also filled up.

The worship service concluded a daylong slate of events at churches and other venues along the Limmat River, near the site where Felix Manz became the first Anabaptist martyr, executed by drowning on Jan. 5, 1527.

In his sermon, García said the “Courage to Love” theme came from the words of the Swiss reformer Ulrich Zwingli, who mentored the Anabaptist founders in Zurich but rejected their radical ideas of adult baptism and nonviolence.

When Catholic authorities threatened to crush the Reformation in Zurich, Zwingli appealed to the city council to muster an army. “For God’s sake, do something courageous,” Zwingli pleaded. Thinking that going to war was the way to show courage, he was killed in a battle with Catholic forces on Oct. 11, 1531.

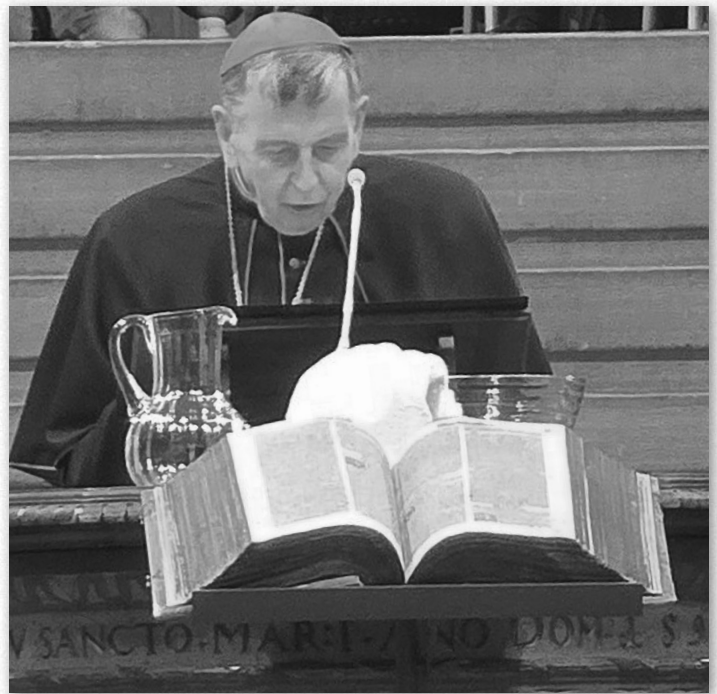
“Today, as we commemorate the early Anabaptists, I invite us to ask ourselves, both as individuals and as churches: What does it mean to do something courageous for God’s sake?” García asked. “Empowered by the Holy Spirit, can we find the courage to break cycles of violence? Can we directly confront our past, not to confirm our victimization but to heal our wounds and those of others and to mend fractured relationships?”

For a biblical example of courage, he pointed to 2 Kings 5, in which an enslaved Israelite girl boldly urged the foreign commander Naaman to seek healing from the prophet Elisha. Though she had no right to speak, the girl gave the oppressor not what he deserved but what he needed: the chance to be transformed. Jesus, who cited the story in Luke 4:27, showed the way to transformation.

García said the Anabaptists of Zurich 500 years ago believed it was not naïve to love their enemies, because they found courage in their relationship with Jesus. “For them, the courage to love, made possible by the work of the Holy Spirit, was the only path to a new humanity,” he said.



César García, general secretary of Mennonite World Conference. Photo source: Mennonite World Conference Newsletter.



Cardinal Kurt Koch reads a message from Pope Leo XIV during the celebrations.

Photo credit: Dale D. Gehman for Anabaptist World.

In addition to Cardinal Koch, leaders from the Lutheran World Federation and the World Communion of Reformed Churches joined with Mennonites to affirm unity and healing.

“We all inherit a legacy of pain from Reformation divisions,” MWC representative Janet Plenert said. “We know that differences of theology and practice remain, but we rejoice in a journey of reconciliation that we have shared together.”

For Mennonites and Lutherans, a process of reconciliation was completed in 2010. Reaffirming confessions and forgiveness from that time, Larry Miller of MWC and Anne Burghardt, general secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, anointed each other’s foreheads with the sign of the cross. “We thank God that more and more Lutherans and Mennonites appreciate each other’s witness to the gospel,” Burghardt said.

Mennonites and Reformed Christians completed a reconciliation process this year. The Reformed tradition includes Presbyterian, Congregational and other denominations. Nelson Kraybill, a former MWC president, noted that in 2004 the city of Zurich and the Swiss Reformed Church erected a plaque on the bank of the Limmat River recognizing the execution of Manz and six others.

In a new joint statement with MWC, Reformed Christians acknowledge that the persecution of

Anabaptists was “a betrayal of the gospel.” For their part, Anabaptists “confess that too often our convictions, ideals and memory of martyrdom have fostered self-righteousness and a reluctance to see the face of Christ in our Reformed sisters and brothers.”

Gladys Geiser and Lukas Amstutz, co-presidents of the 1,860-member Swiss Mennonite

Conference; Henk Stenvers of the Netherlands, MWC president; and Martin Rüschi, the Grossmünster’s pastor, welcomed the crowd.

The service featured a planned “disruption” styled after Anabaptist George Blaurock’s interruption of a Reformed sermon at nearby Zollikon in 1525. The disruption included a shower of leaflets—printed with the words of Matthew 5:1-7 (the Beatitudes) as they appeared in the 1531 Froschauer Bible, favored by Anabaptists at that time—dropped from the balcony.

Several disrupters, identified as “your Anabaptist forebears,” quoted scripture and made declarations such as “to the powerful we say war is contrary to the will of God” and “we will obey God rather than human authority.”

Throughout the service, the Eastern Mennonite University Chamber Singers sat at the front of the stage. Ensembles from Switzerland, Paraguay, Indonesia and Kenya also sang.

Worshippers sang “Holy God We Praise Thy Name” during the opening procession. The South African song



The Grebel family home on the right, with the tower where Conrad Grebel was incarcerated in the background.
Photo credit: Lorna Goertz.



Inscription on the wall of the Grebel house in Zurich.
Photo credit: Lorna Goertz.

“Siyahamba (We are marching in the light of God)” enlivened the recessional.

Activities preceding the worship service included historical exhibits, a quilt show, films and seminars. A panel discussion on peacemaking featured Amos Chin of Myanmar, Rebeca Gonzáles of Mexico, Siaka Traoré of Burkina Faso, Hansuli Gerber of Switzerland and Carolyn Yoder of the United States.

Throughout the afternoon, outside the Grossmünster, the crowd, including a few in Plain garb, mingled under clear skies, applauding the choirs and enjoying free ice cream.

“It was my dream come true to see this place,” said Subroto Dey of India, sitting in the shade near the river. “God has given me the opportunity, and I am very grateful to see where Anabaptism started.”

Rebecca Osiro of Kenya, a former MWC vice president, thought the scene looked like a preview of heaven. “I feel at home here,” she said. “I feel spiritually connected to the people of the past, and they are speaking to us today. I am proud to be an Anabaptist.”

Genealogy Feature: The Ties that Bind

Anna Eitzen—An Enigma Unravelled

■ By David F. Loewen (All photos courtesy of the author)

Anna Eitzen was born in 1872 to Johann and Helena Eitzen in Orechow, South Russia, the eighth of thirteen children (eight survived childhood). Following marriage, Johann and Helena lived in Orechow for twelve years, where Johann was in partnership in a mill with his brother-in-law, Peter Eitzen. Based on the Eitzen children’s place of birth, it



Anna Eitzen @ 1915.

appears that Schoenwiese became their place of residence after 1873; however, based on their children's baptismal records, Schoenwiese appears to have been the centre of their faith community throughout that period of time.

In 1891, Anna was baptized in Schoenwiese and, five years later, her younger sister, Maria, was baptized in Ignatyev, as were her other younger siblings. This would suggest that somewhere between 1891 and 1896, the Johann Eitzen family moved to Ignatyev, and based on the 1899 census for that colony, they were joined by daughters Anna and Katharina, who were still single. Their son, Daniel, was engaged in "service."

In 1905, Johann and Helena Eitzen made one more move, joining two married daughters and their families in the newly established settlement of Orenburg. The Eitzens, along with two adult children, Daniel and Anna, settled in the village of Suworovka. Their daughter Margaretha, with husband Abram Driedger¹ and family, had moved to Pretoria in 1900, and a second daughter, Maria, with husband Abraham Loewen (this author's grandparents) and family, had moved to Pretoria in 1904.

Their oldest son, Johann, and his family settled on a *Gut*, east of Saratov.² Their two oldest daughters, Helena and Aganetha, with their respective families, remained in the Chortitza colony. Aganetha died a horrific and untimely death in 1922 while trying to appease "bandits" demanding food of them. Retrieving food from the cellar, Aganetha tripped going down the stairs and fell, impaling herself on the butter churn handle. She died later in hospital. Katharina, with husband Abram Paetkau and family, had moved further east to Siberia.³

Of the Johann and Helena Eitzen family, my paternal grandmother alone succeeded in fleeing Russia. Three siblings had passed by 1924, but her four surviving siblings remained and fell victim to the communist maelstrom that engulfed the Soviet Union following Stalin's seizure of power.

Over the last several years, using a variety of sources, including personal interviews and my grandparents' personal correspondence, I have been able to piece together the stories of my grandmother's siblings, except for Anna's story.

Anna Eitzen's life has been somewhat enigmatic for me. GRanDMA shows Anna as married to Kornelius Bergen, and she was, but I had only his name. No parents are listed; no birthdate or date of marriage is given.



L-R: Helena Eitzen Janzen, Anna Eitzen, Johann Janzen. Children: Johann, Jakob. Date of photo – ca. 1900.

Any photos I have of Anna depict her as a single woman. She appears single in numerous family photos dated the early 1900s. She is shown posing with her older sister, Helena, and her family, and she appears in a photo with two nieces—her younger sister's oldest girls.

We know that Anna was baptized in Schoenwiese in 1891—which usually precedes marriage—but the Ignatyev census of 1899 shows her living with her parents. And when her parents moved to Orenburg in 1905, records show that she accompanied them.

I was left with questions I could not answer, and the family members who could have provided that information have all died. In a letter sent from Anna to my grandmother, dated February 1932, she refers to herself as a divorced woman. Given the information that I had, I concluded that she must have been married in the early 1890s, following baptism, and that her marriage had been terminated by 1899.

My curiosity was piqued. Divorce at that time within the wider Mennonite community did occur, but was



Johann & Helena Eitzen Eitzen family, ca. 1911.

Back row: L-R: Abram Driedger, Abraham J. Loewen, Daniel Eitzen, Helena Loewen, Johann Loewen, Abram Loewen. Middle row: Helena Driedger, Margaretha Eitzen Driedger, Maria Eitzen Loewen, Helena Eitzen Eitzen, Johann D. Eitzen, Anna Eitzen, Sara Driedger. Front row: Jacob Loewen, Daniel Loewen, Martin Loewen, Isaac Loewen, Maria Loewen, Maria Driedger, Margaretha Driedger, Johann Driedger, Abram Driedger.

rare. The Eitzens were an affluent family, which in itself raised questions about a divorce. On what grounds would Anna and husband have been divorced? When did their marriage dissolve? My searching failed to uncover any new information. I was prepared to accept that this puzzle piece would remain lost.

Then the unexpected occurred. Another letter in my grandparents' collection was translated, answers to my questions emerged, and conclusions I had reached regarding Anna's marriage were contradicted. I also found that details provided by other correspondence that had seemed insignificant at the time now served as invaluable clues that allowed me to draw logical and well-founded conclusions. The letters in my grandparents' collection had not been translated chronologically, which had led to some of my incorrect assumptions.

Of all the family members that Abraham and Maria Loewen corresponded with in the Soviet Union, Anna was the most prolific letter-writer. Without a family of her own, any letters from Canada were most appreciated, as noted in almost every letter she wrote: "It is such a shame that you do not receive my letters" (October 3, 1928); and "How I waited for an answer after I wrote you, but always in vain" (November 19, 1939).

The recently translated letter, which provided the

unexpected answers, is dated October 1933. It is a long letter in which Anna Eitzen shares with her sister in Canada a frank and sad account of her brief marriage to Kornelius Bergen and the divorce that ended it. The primary questions I had about Anna Eitzen's marriage were now satisfied. Together with another letter, I was able to identify the dates of their marriage and their divorce and gain an understanding of the causes for the divorce. Anna had not married following baptism, as I had assumed. She had remained single most of her life.

Anna described how Kornelius Bergen began visiting (courting) her daily after her return from Moscow.⁴ In fact, the letter suggested his courting had begun the previous year before the Moscow trip: "When we got back, K. Bergen came here again every day. At Christmas, Driedger's children started teasing me, that Bergen and I were thinking of getting married. I said neither of us were thinking about it. Then Maria said, 'Let's make a bet.' I said, 'Let's do it'; she wanted 5 rubles if she would win. Later I learned it had been hurtful for him."

A letter from Anna to her niece in Canada, dated 8 March 1931, referenced a poem sent to her from Isaac Loewen,⁵ following, as she stated, her divorce. Based on these two letters, I was able to establish that Kornelius Bergen and Anna Eitzen were married 2 February 1931 and that by March they were divorced.

Initially, it appears that there was some mutual hesitation about marriage. While Kornelius suggested they might be too old, Anna appears to have had no interest in marriage: "One day he said he didn't think we could ever marry; that we were too far along in age. I said it wasn't worth it. I said I would rather die than get married; he said it was the same with him, but he wasn't going to die; and so on it went."

Kornelius, however, was persistent, which ultimately led to Anna's agreement to marry, but not before she was assured of the support of his children. She writes, "One evening, Mrs. Driedger [Anna's youngest sister] and I were alone. After a while he came near me, put his arm around me and said, 'Don't we want to get engaged this week?' I said, 'As long as your children have nothing

against it, then yes. But I won't relocate into your house.' He said he had nothing against it."

Anna's decision to enter this marriage relationship may not have been only, if at all, for love. She was a 59-year-old trying to survive on her own in a world turned upside-down by Stalin's collectivization. Furthermore, it appears that she may also have felt the "call" to minister to the spiritual needs of Kornelius' children:

I knew that the children didn't believe in anything [a reference to the status of their faith]; but since he believed, I thought the Lord had a work for me in leading them to Him. Then I took the step with much prayer. The next evening he came. I said yes; he hugged and kissed me. Then he talked, among other things, about his children, and his first wife.

It didn't take long, and he asked, "Where is your money?" It caused me to wonder a bit that on the very first evening he would ask about money. Then we had a very small wedding on February 2.

Their marriage lasted only about one month. But then family dynamics began to undermine their bond.

For the first month it went well, and I was happy. They [Kornelius' children] were all friendly to me. Then, through gossip in the village, much antagonism developed in our home. I soon saw that the children were not happy with their father. I discovered the reason only later. In addition, a letter arrived for Kornelius, from Isaak's wife [Isaak was Kornelius' son]. He had his wife write that he was very dissatisfied with his father for remarrying. He was old and the children were adults; they didn't need a mother. Apparently, the letter was filled with such sentiments. Now the children became angry with me.

Maria [Kornelius' daughter] told me that they didn't need me. Now my misery began. He [Kornelius] saw that it was beginning to drag us down and he felt sorry. He didn't say anything to me, but I could see it in his face.

But now things got even worse. I wanted to stay so badly because he liked me. But I regret to say, he had a stronger attachment

to his children. I had no attachment to the children because they were his children, and he loved them. After much prayer and with serious commitment, I tried to build a relationship with the children. But it didn't help.

Within days, the situation went from bad to worse. Not only did the children disagree with their father's decision to marry and resent Anna's presence in their lives, but they also began to ostracize her in their own home. Anna writes, "Finally they said they wouldn't eat together with me. And they didn't. Then I said to Bergen [Kornelius], 'What should I do?' He said he didn't know. I said, 'You have to know because you're my husband.' He said he didn't know. If I stayed, then the children would leave. Kornelius believed the issue centred around inheritance issues."

There does not appear to have been a pathway forward for Anna. The bond between Kornelius and his adult children was stronger than any love he may have had for her. Faced with this dilemma, Anna looked for advice and found it in a German judge who happened to be living with her sister Margaretha Driedger:

The judge said that Bergen would have to find me accommodation. I went to tell Bergen. He immediately sent Tina to the judge. He said he couldn't provide accommodation. I went back with my sister to ask what I was supposed to do. He said I could stay in the Soviet house for now.



Helena Eitzen funeral, 1914. L-R: Maria (Eitzen) Loewen, Anna Eitzen, Margaretha (Eitzen) Driedger, Johann D. Eitzen, Daniel Eitzen, Abraham J. Loewen, Abram Driedger.

"You brought me here. Now you have to take me away." He said that next morning he would get an escort order and take me away. It was threshing time for them, so the next day, my personal things were returned.

While Anna's letter of March 1931 indicates that they had already divorced, this letter refers to a final closure to their marriage in October. Perhaps this was a reference to a final financial settlement.⁶

Two weeks passed from the time of our separation and on the 18th of October he paid back my money in the Soviet. It was 306 rubles and we signed that we were free from each other. Then I said to Bergen, "Before the world we are divorced but not before God." There were quite a few people there.

I think the main reason was that on May 1, 1,000 rubles were supposed to arrive. But nothing came and they said I wouldn't get anything from them either and so they would like to be rid of me. But they didn't say it. But that's what most thought. But what I suffered cannot be described. Oh, I don't know why the Lord is taking me along this path.

How am I to understand this last paragraph, except to say that it appears to suggest that the strength of the marriage may have been dependent on financial resources that Anna could bring to the union. Given the economic conditions of that time, Anna was vulnerable and fell victim to their financial scheming. Anna signs off with the following words:

Why must we take these paths? How often I was at the point of despair. Even now I don't know what I should ask. May the Lord alone help us each in his own part. Enough for now, otherwise it will be too much.

Greetings and kisses to you all.

Your sister and aunt, Anna

Anna Eitzen Bergen continued to struggle and survive on her own, leaning on friends and neighbours when she needed to. Her letters suggest a quiet resignation to the conditions imposed on her by collectivization. Only a few more letters were received before all communication with the West stopped, due to the war. In a letter dated 12 September 1937, Anna writes,

In our village a month ago, Dueckmann, J. Janzsche's brother, and Jacob Froese were arrested, and last night Franz Froese was arrested again. In village 14 others were also arrested, but I don't know who. We are living in a very serious time. Will the Lord soon come to free his own? I think I'm old, it's not worth buying for me. But you don't know how long the Lord will leave me here.

In a letter dated 19 November 1939, Anna writes that she had not received a letter from her sister, Maria, in Canada for two years (most likely because of Soviet censorship). She reports that she has been living in the Wilhelm Janzen family's place for two years and that she has experienced some eye problems for which she was able to obtain medication:

And please write back when you receive this letter. Because we won't be writing to each other for a long time, because we are already quite old. I am already keenly aware that my strength is becoming less and less.

May the Lord be with you.

I remain in love your sister and aunt Anna

Her letter of 7 April 1940 is filled with updates on family members and relatives, as well as a description of her daily life. She appears to be enjoying relatively good health; however, both of her last two letters appear to suggest that she sees her life journey soon ending.

Age-wise my health is good and for that, many thanks to the Lord. But my strength has greatly diminished. But I don't have heavy work; only my room to look after. Preparing meals and knitting for friends is now what works best for me.

Yes, dear sister, we are close to the end. Am also ready for the journey. Am already older than brother Johann [oldest sibling]. Give greetings to all the children and friends.

Greetings and will close with Psalm 90.

Remain in love,
Your sister Anna

To my knowledge, this was her final letter to my grandmother Maria Loewen. Anna Eitzen Bergen died on 8 August 1946 at the age of 74.

Endnotes

1. An account of her family's struggle to survive following their failed attempt to emigrate in 1929 can be found in: "A Survival Story: Abram and Margaretha (Eitzen) Driedger Family," *Roots & Branches*, Vol. 29, No. 3, p. 16.
2. Johann Eitzen owned a *khutor* and was also a lay minister. Attempting to flee, his family were turned back at Moscow in the late fall of 1929. He relocated to Zentral where he was arrested in 1933. Johann was imprisoned and tortured but released within months of arrest due to poor health and advancing age. He died at home shortly thereafter.
3. Thanks again to my grandparents' collection of family correspondence, I've been able to deduce from a return address label that Abram and Katharina (Eitzen) Paetkau lived in Lesnoye, Barnaul Settlement. Prior to 1914, Lesnoye was known as Rosenwald, where my mother (Heinrich D. Neumann family) spent her childhood.
4. This is a reference to the failed attempt by thousands of Mennonites to flee Russia in the late fall of 1929. This is also the first evidence I have that Anna Eitzen attempted to emigrate in 1929; all other correspondence from her suggests she only hoped to emigrate, but never attempted to do so. Only one-third of those assembled in Moscow succeeded. The others were either sent home or arrested and sent to work camps and often an early death. This was the case for the Abram Driedger family (my grandmother's younger sister). Margaretha Driedger and children were sent home and the next year sent to a work camp in the Ural Mtns. Her husband, Abram, was first sentenced to death, but the judgment was commuted to a 10-year sentence. He died within three years of pneumonia.
5. Isaac Loewen was my paternal grandfather's older brother who served as a long-time minister in the Orenburg Settlement. He was known for blessing others with poems he had written.
6. Prior to their marriage, Kornelius had made enquiries about Anna's money. Perhaps there was a transfer of money from the bride to the groom upon marriage, which was then returned following the divorce.

On Grandpa's Homestead (July 11, 1982)

■ By Judith Dianne Rempel, with introduction by Robert Martens

Judith Dianne Rempel died suddenly at the age of fifty-nine in 2011. Many of her friends and acquaintances had not known that she lived with a heart defect. She was a force at the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta (MHSA), and her death was a shock and a great loss to all who knew her. Judith was born in the Fraser Valley to Ben and Irene Rempel and attended Mennonite Educational Institute. When she was eighteen, she volunteered to work for MCC in Akron, Pennsylvania, then continued her MCC work in Winnipeg. Judith earned a Masters degree in sociology at the University of Western Ontario. She went on to work in health in Manitoba, then social planning in Calgary.

Judith found herself alienated from organized religion and yet was devoted to her work at MHSA in Calgary. Genealogy was a love of hers. I met her on the Ukraine

Heritage Cruise and was quickly drawn to her smile, her get-things-done attitude, and the twinkle in her eye. Linda Klassen, archival worker and board member at MHSBC, found the following poem among Judith's documents. Linda writes, "I love it! ... It's not signed but I believe it's her handwriting and I'm guessing it's original."



Judith Dianne Rempel.

Photo source: <https://findagrave.com>.

I walked today as in a dream,
And saw the forms of those I know
Pursue their humble, daily tasks
These many years ago!

I walked and saw them in the fields
Turning the pungent, fragrant loam;
I saw them in the fields of grain,
Bringing the harvest home.

I walked in barns among the stock;
I watched the daily rounds;
I listened to the raucous tones
Of nature's minor sounds.

I heard the music of the saw—
The noises of repair.
I felt the rush of many things
That took them here and there.

And when a neighbour in distress
Came with an urgent speed,
I heard the anvil's rhythmic ring,
To fill the pressing need.

And then, at dusk, when all was still,
Except the song of bird,
And all domestic chores were done,
A restful sigh I heard.

I stole within and saw them sit
Around one family board.
I heard the high priest of the house
Give thanks unto the Lord.

I saw them when the skies were clear,
I saw them in the storm:
When everything was going right,
And when it all went wrong.

And when my reverie gave way,
I sensed a sudden glow,
To think I placed these feet of mine
Where theirs fell years ago.

The breezes round me seemed to bear
The ghosts of yesteryear,
And bring their faces back to me,
Their voices on the air.

I looked across the distant fields,
At earth and sky and tree,
And thanked the God that gave them life—
A rich heritage to me.

Honouring British Columbia Mennonites

Life in the 80s: Interview with Mabel and Walter Paetkau

FROM CANADIAN MENNONITE, 21 NOV. 2024

■ By Amy Ridder Waddell

Mabel and Walter Paetkau of Abbotsford, ages 91 and 89 respectively, met as university students in Edmonton. They were married in 1960 and raised two sons. At different points, Mabel was a registered nurse, homemaker, director of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) B.C. Refugee Program and a Government of Canada Refugee Board member. Walter did service work with the General Conference Mennonite Church and MCC out of Abbotsford. He was founder and executive director of Abbotsford Community Service (now Archway Community Service) from its inception in 1968 until his retirement in 2000. The Paetkaus were founding members of Abbotsford Mennonite Fellowship, which disbanded in 2010, and now attend Langley Mennonite Fellowship.



Walter & Mabel Paetkau relaxing at one of the tables in their garden.

Photo credit: Julia M. Toews.

What is your earliest memory of church?

WALTER A plain building in the farming village of Rosemary, Alberta, where going to church was part of the family lifestyle. It was a vibrant community, and everybody just went [to church]. If you didn't go, you were noticed.

MABEL A large white building across the street from our family's favourite friends, and Sunday school in the small town of Duchess, Alberta.

What is your best memory of church?

WALTER Young people's activities in the early years. We sang, had choir night, played games. We went on outings to the Badlands and had Sunday school picnics and worship services in the evolving years.

MABEL Seeing friends. Singing out of a big black hymnal—an "Old" Mennonite church, so a cappella singing with shape notes.

What is your most difficult memory of church?

WALTER Leaving a former congregation—Olivet Mennonite Church. It took me over a year to adjust to the idea of starting our own house church, and we had a nice nucleus of people to start.

Tell us about the people who have influenced you the most.

WALTER Reverend David P. Neufeld, a Rosemary farmer who was lay pastor and conference leader

(and later pastored Olivet). He inspired my interest in conference. [Also,] John Unrau, University of Alberta professor, for opening his home to student discussions and giving leadership to the fledgling Edmonton congregation. And Maurits Vanderveen, welfare supervisor in Abbotsford, providing community development insights and leadership. That led me from [church] conference service work to community service work.

Can you share a favourite book, passage, poem or song?

WALTER "The Love of God," a favourite song from when I grew up.

What do young people not understand about old age?

WALTER The gradual slowing down of physical and mental health.

MABEL I have lots of good experiences in life but little memory. It kind of sank in our mid-eighties. It's all supposed to happen, but you're not necessarily told about this.

What is the hardest thing about getting old?

WALTER A loss of energy. As we get older, we have to adjust to a new reality in terms of pace and stamina. I'm not as vibrant as I was.

MABEL A poor memory, weaker sight and weaker hearing.

What is the best?

WALTER Being able to live in our own home, doing yard work, enjoying basically good health, having a network of family and friends and people willing to help care for us as needed.

MABEL A lovely family, a place to call home and have friends visit. We've gotten to know many international people. We feel good about the community and have lots of good friends and neighbours, many international.

What do you wish someone would have told you about aging earlier in life?

WALTER The stages, realities and challenges of growing older. With most of us who age, we now pay less attention to dogma and creeds. This is why, for me, living the Jesus way is a way to simplify life. I would no longer argue at length about the creeds; we can discuss things and not take offence. Everybody's responsible for their own self; we don't have to be right.

MABEL And we don't have to be wrong!

If you had one chance at a sermon, what would it be about?

WALTER "Love as you are loved." Right now, the world is in such turmoil; I would address the subject of [everyone] living together.

FROM A LANGLEY MENNONITE FELLOWSHIP PRESENTATION, AUGUST 26, 2018

My Garden Is a Sacred Place

■ By Mabel Paetkau

(All photos courtesy of Julia M. Toews)

My garden is a sacred place. How did it come to be? My father in 1916, at 23 years of age, together with others, left the beautiful, lush Pennsylvania valley of fruit, flowers and vegetables, a land flowing with milk and honey to accept the opportunities of a new land. The Canadian Pacific Railway was calling settlers to tame and farm the irrigated and dry desolate farmlands of Southern Alberta. My father was a businessman, and a lover of the good earth. We lived in the village of Duchess, east of Calgary, in a modest house set on a large lot. I grew up surrounded by my father's handiwork of beautiful flowers, vegetables, apples, cherries and many berries.

After growing up in a lush garden, I dreamed of having one too. Upon moving to Abbotsford in 1966 and settling down with family and work, I and Walter had a modest yard of grass, vegetables, shrubs and trees. That changed upon my retirement in the mid-nineties.

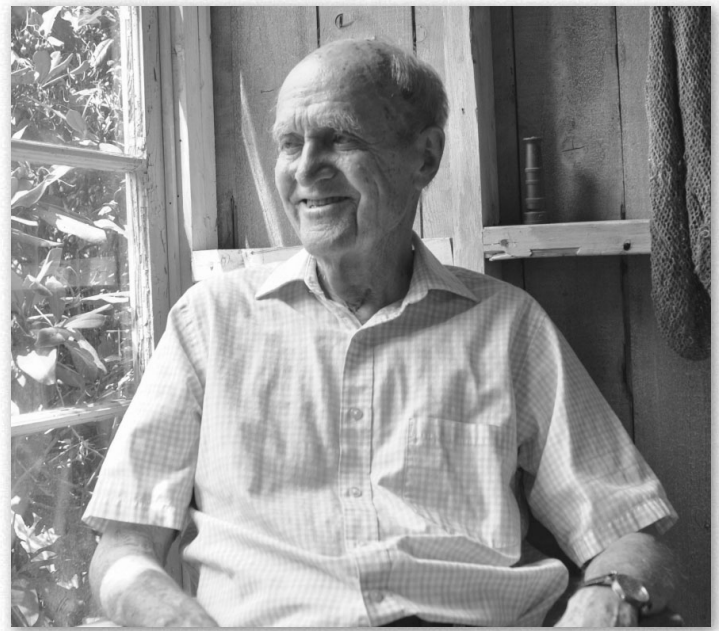
What do I do now, I thought. Why, garden, of course. My dream can become a reality: I will rip out the grass in our front yard and



The garden house.



Mabel enjoying her rocking chair in the garden house.



Walter reflecting with gratitude in the garden house.

around the house and plant flowers and shrubs and enjoy the outdoors. It will be an English Country Garden, the kind we have seen in England in a recent visit. A place for meditation, re-creation, feasting, work: an informal garden without terracing or straight lines. There we could relax in nature for the pure pleasure of being there! The front and back yard brightened with flowers and anchored by shrubs and trees and flowing with curved paths to secret places from the front yard to the lower back yard and to the terrace below.

My garden is a seasonal garden. Jasmine is out by December, followed by yellow witch-hazel and snowdrops in January and then the front yard is greeted with a full array of purple crocuses. Next are daffodils, camellia, then the tulips, soon followed by the rhododendrons, weigela, and other flowering spring shrubs. The roses are in full bloom by June nestling into the front garden's wide arbour together with the climbing clematis. The flowering annuals and perennials spread their show. The bright colours give way to the subdued fall oranges of mountain ash and beauty bush. Ferns growing along the fence lines in dips and banks greet us year-round as does the ground cover.

Inviting tables and chairs are set near the pathways and on the front and back decks. Pleasant for tea or meals and visits with friends. Lunchtime is a spot outside and for the feeding of the birds: blue jays and crows and also the squirrels. Hummingbirds also make their home here. The sound of the waterfall in the backyard beckons one to the pond surrounded by ivy that crawls

the back wall and by tall green shrubs and a pyracantha hedge on the south fence. Pesky raccoons come for their annual visits. They ate the fish so we no longer stock fish. We had water plants but the raccoons destroyed them. While this is very annoying, Walter doesn't have the heart to trap the raccoons as it means separating the young from their mother.

A path follows the pond and leads to the garden house: a place for the grandchildren's tea parties and adventures like climbing through a window down a ladder to the shrubs below. I have my rocking chair there and a magazine.

Come, explore the garden. Curved pathways will lead you here and there, in shade and sun. Come, sit a while. My garden is a sacred place!

My garden is a sacred place
Of ferns and shrubs and fairy lace;
Of flowers, butterflies and grass,
And colours hid along the path.
Tables set in sheltered groves
With tea and jam and fancy loaves;
Grasses stirred by friendly breeze
And sun light dancing through the leaves.
My garden is a sacred place;
All nature held in God's embrace.
A place to sit in solitude
And be renewed with gratitude.

Poem by Walter Paetkau

Foarmaworscht (or, in the modern lingo, farmer sausage)

■ By Robert Martens

Schwien jeschlacht, Een Worscht jemacht.

(Hog butchered, a sausage made.)

(Jost Voth 250)

He hellt fäl fonn en kortet Jebäd onn ne lange Worscht.

(He highly esteems short prayers and long sausages.)

(Jost Voth 243)

Farmer sausage: a Mennonite “delicacy” that, for once, doesn’t trace back to Ukraine. Mennonites, apparently, have long had a love affair with pork. It was already a major part of the West Prussian diet when Mennonites moved there from the Netherlands, and they adopted this local custom with ruthless abandon. When Napoleon’s forces plundered their way eastward, they called the Vistula Delta, where Mennonites resided, a “lard pot” (*pot de saindoux*? perhaps someone can correct me on that). Then, when Mennonites migrated to Russia after 1789, they brought pigs with them. Cheap, easy to fatten, filling.

Almost every Mennonite home in Russia had a smokehouse, reports Norma Jost Voth. Perhaps the most common “smokehouse” was connected to the built-in central oven in Mennonite dwellings. Smoke drifted from the oven upwards through a winding flue and into a large chimney chamber, where hams and sausages would slowly be smoked. Simple? Care was required. “If there was too much fire when smoking hams,” reported a witness, “there would literally be ‘flying hams.’ We used to watch the roofs to see if someone’s smoked ham would be flying over the roof” (qtd. in Jost Voth 249). So pigs do fly.

“Sausage began,” writes humourist SL Klassen, “on a particularly festive day in the late fall or early winter when friends and neighbours gathered for the pig butchering. It took a village to kill a pig in those days, or at least, a good segment of it” (3). A communal celebration. (On one occasion, after scholar Marlene Epp had lectured on Mennonite pig butchering, I avowed that in my growing-up years in the Mennonite village of Yarrow, I had never seen one. Scholar Royden Loewen pointed out to me that pig butchering was one of the first ethnic customs to vanish as Mennonites assimilated. A crumbling heritage? And the pig’s fate has not improved, meeting its demise, instead, in a slaughterhouse.) And when the slaughtering was done, writes Klassen, the



Butchering pigs. Sausages go into smoke chamber.

Source: *The Molotschna Colony* by Henry B. Thiessen, p49.

vodka materialized. Even teetotalers took a drink—and this, she says, is documented. The Mennonite Brethren, however, broke ranks with tradition and abstained. What a church split will do!

Today, farmer sausage appears rather commonly on North American tables (even consumed by people who haven’t a clue what a Mennonite is—or what a farmer does). Back in 2007, after Miriam Toews had published her first novel, she protested, “I’ve always wondered why kolbassa gets all the love.... Maybe it’s the name ... farmer sausage. Not sexy! ... Farmer sausage sounds like it’s made out of farmers” (qtd. in Redekop 1). Well, since then, to use a terrible pun, the skids have been greased. Farmer sausage is now high on the grocery list for many non-Mennos. For one thing, it’s simple: ground pork, salt, pepper. And easily prepared by working parents. “Throw it in the oven for half an hour and you’re done” (qtd. in Arnason 2).

Currently, of course, there are many “non-ethnic” foods that would qualify as Mennonite or Anabaptist. Curry, injera, phở, nasi goreng, nshima, green papaya salad, mole de pollo, bandeja paisa, feijoada, and so on, ad infinitum. Still, we can celebrate our European traditions, as long as we acknowledge we’re not the only ones in the room. After all, Mennonite farmer sausage, writes SL Klassen, is delicious (to non-vegetarians): “This sausage is nothing like the insipid wursts found on British and North American breakfast tables” (3). Klassen theorizes that we can trace the movements of Mennonites “by the suitcases full of sausages that have criss-crossed North America...” (3). Mennonites lugging farmer sausage home, where it may not be available—the passion

is unmistakable. As Glen Ediger posted on Facebook in 2017, “My dad was well known for a ... saying that was even included by the minister at his funeral.... ‘The longer the sermon ... the shorter the sausage for the minister.’”

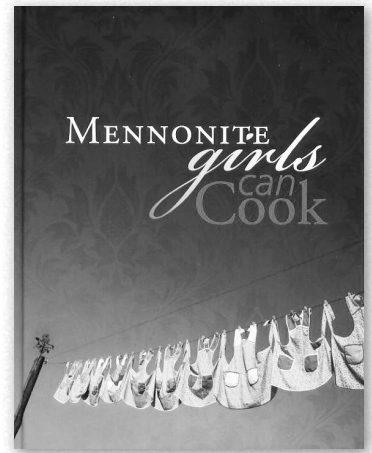
Farmer sausage soup:

1 pound raw farmer sausage (or any similar smoked sausage)
 1 large onion, chopped
 4-5 cups water
 3 medium potatoes, cubed
 3-4 carrots, sliced
 2 stalks celery, chopped
 3 cups corn (frozen or canned, kernels or cream corn)
 1 teaspoon salt
 1/4 teaspoon pepper
 1 teaspoon dried basil
 1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper
 1/4 cup flour
 2 cups milk
 1 cup grated cheese

Slit casing of raw farmer sausage and remove the meat by scraping it out with a tablespoon. (If the sausage is not “raw meat,” finely chop before sautéing.) In a Dutch oven or soup pot, sauté sausage and onion over medium

heat until meat is no longer pink; drain. Add the water, potatoes, carrots, celery, salt, pepper, basil and cayenne. Bring to a boil; reduce heat and simmer until vegetables are tender. Add the corn and heat through. Using a wire whip, combine flour and milk and stir mixture into soup. Add grated cheese and cook, stirring constantly, until soup returns to a boil. Cook several minutes longer to melt cheese and thicken slightly.

(<http://www.mennonitegirlscancook.ca/2017/04/farmer-sausage-soup.html>)



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Anabaptists in Action

Homelessness and Toxic Drugs: In the Midst of Death-Dealing Systems, Love Is the Only Way to Flourishing

■ By Brett Van Bergen

Housing costs have been skyrocketing, and the number of people experiencing homelessness has risen alongside them. The drug supply continues to become increasingly toxic, and people who use drugs (PWUD) are being decimated. These are intersecting crises that are devastating and killing thousands across Canada. Yet neither is being treated as a crisis by our governing bodies or communities, and the stigma, misinformation, and hate heaped on the victims of these crises remain ever-present.



Homeless Jesus, located at Regis College, a theological college federated with the University of Toronto. The “Homeless Jesus” statue was created by Canadian sculptor Timothy Schmalz and depicts Jesus huddled under a blanket on a bench. His head is covered and his bare feet are sticking out—displaying the wounds from his crucifixion.

As someone who has worked with PWUD (People Who Use Drugs) throughout my Biblical Studies degree at Columbia Bible College, my time ministering to youth at Highland Community Church, and now in a full-time role advocating with and for the drug using community, I hope to use my unique positionality to help Anabaptists understand what our friends facing these unimaginable oppressions are going through—and to cultivate a spirit of love that leads to justice and liberation.

What we are seeing across Canada is not the result of individual failures—it is systemic oppression. It is the product of decades of policy decisions that have led us here. It is state apathy that keeps us here.

Housing

Canada was once a world leader in building affordable housing, constructing 40,000–50,000 units of non-market housing each year. Non-market housing is housing not built for private profit. It is government-built or -funded and drastically cheaper than market housing. It is designed specifically for low-income people, with rents capped at an affordable rate. Nonprofit-run supportive housing sites—almost always government-funded—are one example of non-market housing. Others include housing co-ops and low-income apartment buildings.

In the 1980s and '90s, Canada chose to drastically slow (rarely exceeding 2,000 units a year until the last few years) the construction of this kind of housing, in favour of a more neoliberal, capitalist housing framework that pushed the federal government out and let the private market take over. This was great if you were a housing investor, but disastrous if you were a low-income person. We chose to prioritize profits over people—and now, people are paying the price through suffering.

As a teenager, I remember my low-income family being unable to pay our rent. I remember listing my dog for sale and giving my parent what I could from my weekend job in desperate attempts to make ends meet. Luckily, we had privileges—friends, churches, and grandparents who provided aid to keep us housed. Not everyone has those privileges. And further, we should not *need* them in order to afford rent. What we needed was an available supply of non-market housing options to turn to when the private market priced us out.

This kind of housing system is a reality in countries like Finland, which has spent decades building a robust non-market housing system—cutting homelessness from 20,000 in the 1980s to 3,500 in 2023.

Toxic Drugs

Approximately 22 people die each day in Canada from toxic drug poisonings and overdoses. Since the beginning of the toxic drug crisis in 2016, over 51,000 people have died.

It's hard to make progress when we don't understand what this crisis is. Why are so many more people dying from drugs? Why did things get so much worse so suddenly?

The answer is fentanyl.

A note on terminology is necessary. We are in a *toxic drug crisis*, not an addiction crisis. In 2016, we didn't suddenly see thousands more people become addicted to drugs—the drugs themselves became significantly more deadly because fentanyl replaced heroin and took over the street supply. This happened because, under prohibition, high-level dealers switch to stronger products (easier to smuggle in smaller amounts) that are easier to manufacture (fentanyl is synthetic; heroin is plant-based).

The vast majority of deaths are toxic drug poisonings—not overdoses.

An overdose happens when someone uses too much of a drug—say, heroin—and it shuts down the brain, causing them to stop breathing. A toxic drug poisoning happens when someone unknowingly consumes deadly contaminants or dangerously high concentrations of substances such as fentanyl.

Before 2016, Canada averaged 1–2 drug-related deaths per day, mostly involving heroin (known on the street as “down”). Now, if someone is dependent on the street supply for down, they will no longer find heroin. What they'll find is fentanyl, of unknown potency, very likely contaminated with other dangerous substances like benzodiazepines (which don't respond to naloxone) and tranquilizers like xylazine, which can cause flesh-eating wounds and lead to amputations.

Someone who once used heroin with a relatively low risk of death is now playing Russian roulette. Their down might contain 10% fentanyl with no benzos or tranq (and they will likely survive), or it could be 80% fentanyl with both benzo and tranq (and they very likely

won't). Increasingly, carfentanil—100 times more potent than fentanyl—is also showing up.

This is not to say addiction isn't a serious issue or that heroin was ever safe—but it does help us understand why deaths have spiked, and how we might respond more compassionately and effectively. Dead people do not recover. Treatment access remains deeply limited, and data shows it often takes 7+ treatment attempts to achieve abstinence-based recovery.

We need to expand both treatment and harm reduction initiatives to keep people alive. Sadly, there is little political cost to letting drug users die, but a huge political cost to supporting harm reduction. Since it's government decisions that fund or block these initiatives, it's up to communities to shift the narrative and declare that keeping drug users alive is both compassionate and popular.

Barriers to Wellness

As a society, we have failed our most vulnerable neighbours. The barriers to wellness for people experiencing homelessness and/or drug use are a condemnation of our collective apathy.

If someone using down wants to access treatment, they will likely first need a medicated detox, especially if their down contains benzos. If someone who has developed a physical dependency on benzos suddenly quits, they are at risk of fatal seizures. Cold turkey withdrawal is not only unimaginably painful—it can be deadly.

Even if someone is ready for treatment, there's often a long waitlist for detox—especially if they are unhoused. Then there's likely another long waitlist for a treatment

program. And if they manage to complete treatment, they face yet another long wait—this time for housing.

It is nearly impossible to achieve wellness while living on the streets. Homelessness is terrifying, traumatizing, and dehumanizing—conditions that can lead people to begin using drugs. I've heard many times that someone didn't start using until they were unhoused, and that drug use felt “like a warm blanket of love”—a substitute for comfort and care that society had denied them.

We must understand: drug use is almost always someone's answer to a different problem—often trauma, mental health challenges, or the lack of belonging and love that seems prevalent in our culture.

Love Is the Only Way to Flourishing

Love. We need a revolution of love in our society. We need love to guide our policies, shape our communities, and transform our personal attitudes and actions.

In terms of resources, we're receiving a trickle when we need a flood. Whether it's detox or treatment, access to housing, or harm reduction services, we are *severely* lacking.

In our communities, those without housing are repeatedly told to “move along”—with nowhere to go. Municipalities demand invisibility from the unhoused. If they're too visible, their belongings are often taken. People who have already been denied their right to housing are then also denied access to basic sanitation, drinking water, and garbage disposal. They are stripped of their dignity.

Too often, our systems try to sweep our neighbours under the rug instead of confronting the brokenness of the current way of doing things.

So—we need love. Bring food, water, tarps, tents, blankets, and kindness. It matters. Speak about unhoused people in humanizing ways. Cultivate empathy. Encourage your political representatives to support non-market housing and life-saving resources for drug users.

Let us remember: what we do—or fail to do—for the vulnerable, we are doing—or failing to do—for Christ. Every drug user is made in the image of God and deserves to live. Let us hold to the hope that we follow the great reconciler—that all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well—and that we have a role to play in that story.



Mobile shower.

Photo source: Refresh Mobile Ministry.

Sarah Augustine: The Land Is Not Empty

■ By Robert Martens

“I am so angry all the time,” Sarah Augustine told a friend in 2012, “I don’t know how to deal with this work on the Doctrine of Discovery. I feel it burning inside me. I don’t like it, but I don’t know how to make it stop” (Augustine 95).

Augustine, of Pueblo (Tewa) descent, was feeling battered by her daily battle with the Doctrine of Discovery: the notion that the land is empty if only Indigenous People live there. She managed to recover by returning to her ancient homeland in the American Southwest and rediscovering her roots—and then resuming her relentless activism on behalf of dispossessed Native Peoples. She is a tough fighter, and yet, perhaps surprisingly, a good mediator: “Sarah Augustine has brought together people on opposite sides of an issue with patience and gentle guidance” (Ayer 1).

Augustine has worked as an activist with the help, and sometimes despite the indifference, of fellow-members of Mennonite Church USA. Her home congregation is Seattle Mennonite. Augustine lives in Yakima Valley in Washington State, and so her perspectives are American-based, but she has worked globally, particularly in Suriname, and has closely watched the proceedings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada.

After a childhood and youth marked by racial discrimination, Sarah Augustine achieved a high level of education and could easily have spent her life as an academic. She sacrificed all that for a life of social, political and theological work alongside her husband Dan Peplow, fellow-activists, and supporters from the Mennonite Church. Augustine wrote a statement on the Indigenous and the Doctrine of Discovery for the World Council of Churches in 2013. She was dismayed when it was essentially ignored.

Undeterred, she continued her work on behalf of the dispossessed, both in the West and in Suriname, a tiny South American country whose people are largely descended from slaves and labourers brought to the continent by the Dutch Empire. Widespread mining there has displaced the Wayana from their hunting and fishing lands, and the mercury used in river gold mining has affected the health of these Native People. The land,



Sarah Augustine.

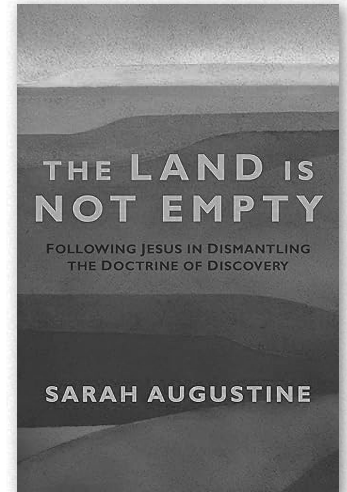


Photo source: Facebook.

from the point of view of international banking, says Augustine, was “empty” and open to exploitation.

When Europeans arrived in North America, the Indigenous were, writes Augustine, simply an impediment to progress. And, she insists, this mindset continues: “Like gluttony, our inordinate desire for security is so strong that we will throw other people—and indeed our planet—under the bus in order to satisfy it” (Augustine 176). In response, Augustine helped found the Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery Coalition and served as its executive director. She accomplished this with the help of Mennonite pastors Sheri Hostetler and Anita Amstutz, from San Francisco and Albuquerque respectively. The Coalition was made possible when a member of First Mennonite Church in San Francisco read Augustine’s writings and urged that the church fund her work. Two fundraisers and a few months later, their goals were achieved. “She has been really doing so much activism around the world,” said Hostetler, “and she’s been doing it all as a volunteer” (Ayer 4).

Augustine has been forced to step back from some of her work when she began to lose her vision and was subsequently diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. “She’s careful, but it’s also personally important for her to do everything she can,” writes a reporter for the *Yakima Herald-Republic*.

In 2021, Sarah Augustine published a book with Herald Press: *The Land Is Not Empty: Following Jesus in Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery*. A few excerpts

follow. Make no mistake: this book will provoke controversy. In the preface, Pastor Sheri Hostetler writes, “[Augustine’s] prophetic voice may sometimes sound harsh or ‘one-sided’ to you.... You may find yourself wanting to complexify or nuance some of what Sarah says, to tone it down. I want to challenge folks ... to bracket that response for a while and really listen to Sarah’s voice.... In fact, it is Sarah’s deep connection to Jesus and the Spirit of Life that has most changed my life” (16).

Suriname’s policy ... is based on the principles defined by *terra nullius*, a Latin phrase meaning ‘empty land,’ a theological and legal doctrine that gave land title to Christian European states who would assume sovereignty over ‘discovered lands.’ Under *terra nullius*, ‘discovered’ lands were considered devoid of human beings if the original people who had lived there—defined as ‘heathens, pagans, and infidels’—were not ruled by a ‘Christian prince’ (26).

My faith defines me. I am a Christian woman, a devoted follower of Jesus. Learning that the Christian church originated the Doctrine of Discovery sent my life spinning sideways—my understanding of the world and my place in it (39).

Throughout my years in school, I felt a deep sense of shame. I was insecure about my family’s poverty and about my shyness and social awkwardness. As a small child, I was often teased for my dark skin and Native facial features (74).

A tiny number of Indigenous People survive the battering of generations and the loss of their birthright, and many choose assimilation as though it is their own idea. Like I did (87).

What is the good news? To learn this, we must explore

it *together*. Salvation must be mutual, and entangled. My salvation is tied to yours. Yours is tied to mine (114).

Many churches, including my own in the peace tradition, want to ask victims of colonization to try to solve their conflict with words and diplomacy rather than taking up arms. This is offensive. If we want Indigenous Peoples to live without violence, we need to tear down the structures that cause death and disease, the war of attrition, that some Indigenous and vulnerable people oppose with force to save the very lives of their loved ones (162).

The ... understanding that we are all relations obligates us as a church to move beyond our obsession with individualism and personal piety, to collective repentance and seeking justice (209).

praise. praise. praise. Slowly, the one note I cling to is joined by a constellation of others. Harmonizing, discordant. Each note singular and clear. Together they pulse, filling the sky in my mind as they sound together Praise. Praise. Praise. Praise. I can hold them each, and as one. And I know that whatever happens, all is and was and will be well (37).

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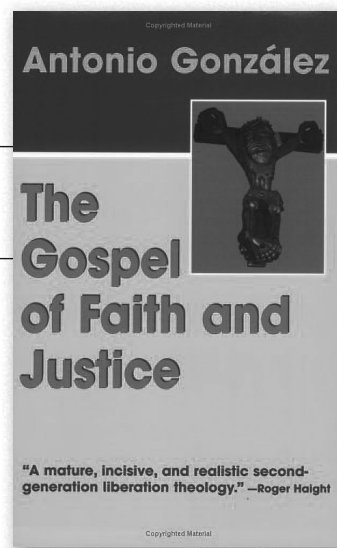
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BOOK NOTICE

Antonio González. *The Gospel of Faith and Justice*. Trans. Joseph Owens. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005. 179 pp.

■ by Robert Martens

The Spanish scholar Antonio González, a current member of the Faith and Life Commission of Mennonite World Conference, represents the “progressive” wing of the strange and diverse global Anabaptist-Mennonite movement. In his brilliant book, *The Gospel of Faith and Justice*, he argues that the liberation theology of the twentieth century needs to be updated, or revived. Theology, González



argues, must *begin* with the poor. God's reign—faith and justice—can't be simply handed down as a gift from the prosperous elite to the poor.

The church, he writes, must establish new communities where violence and injustice are absent. A theology of good works—the more “conservative” notion that we will receive judgment according to what we have done—merely confirms our self-indulgent egos. On the other hand, a “liberal” theology of some possible utopia in the future means nothing to the poor. God's reign exists, lives, in the here and now, in our human story that is constantly developing.

The Gospel of Faith and Justice is really a series of essays in which similar points are made from different perspectives. Some chapters are very exegetical: Abraham as the chosen one who will build a new community; the tower of Babel as empire and violence; Exodus as the journey we live from day to day. Other chapters are rather academic, with references to theologians such as Jürgen Moltmann. But every section underlines the need for a faith that is both individual and communitarian: the reign of Jesus where we live together as “sisters and brothers.”

BOOK REVIEW

Ralph Friesen. *Prosperity Ever, Depression Never: Steinbach in the 1930s*. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 2024. 238 pp.

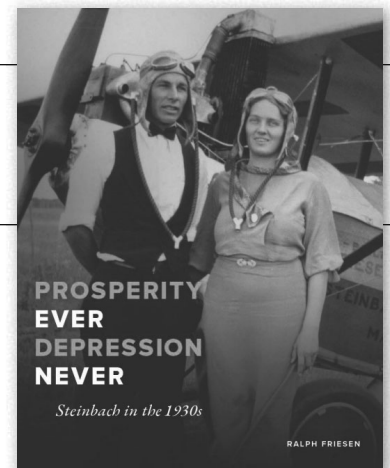
■ Reviewed by Robert Martens

Steinbach in the 1930s, writes Ralph Friesen, was a town in conflict: old/new, aged/young, traditionalist/metropolitan. The virtue of humility, nurtured among Mennonites for hundreds of years, was in danger of acceding to a “crass boosterism” (7). A can-do, independent attitude was replacing the former Mennonite ideal of community. The “stony creek”—Steinbach—might serve as a symbol: the vegetation on its banks was stripped away in favour of profit and efficiency, and eventually, in the 1950s, it was confined within a concrete culvert. But in his book, Friesen himself seems to reflect the conflicted nature of Steinbach during the Depression years. Despite his tough critique, he remembers the town with nostalgia, and describes almost cinematically a village that was bursting with life.

Steinbach, writes Friesen, could be described as

Later in the book, González ponders the “neo-Pentecostalist” movement in the so-called “third world.” The poor, he writes, have already initiated a new way of living, but their methods, speaking in tongues and faith healing, for example, have triggered some unease among Western theologians. And these neo-Pentecostalist churches frequently support an unjust political status quo. Still, González contends, we in the West must concede to the initiatives of the poor. Liberation theology depended too much on external political reform or revolution, often with unjust consequences. González supports non-violent communitarian activity, not necessarily because non-violence works, but because violence simply replaces one unjust structure with another.

Individualism, González writes, is on the rise. State-sponsored churches, “Constantinianism,” are in steep decline. Consolation for the poor is far from adequate. New faith communities, declares González, must be homes for “the least of these.” “God reigns wherever, by faith, the consequences of Adam's sin disappear and a reconciled community appears, one in which goods are shared, social differences fade away and poverty is overcome.”



Depression-resistant.

Grain prices had collapsed, and Canadian farmers were going under, but the soil in the

Steinbach area was rocky and bushy, not suitable for growing wheat, and its residents practised mixed market farming. And the stony environment had another benefit: it prevented the topsoil from blowing away.

Steinbach residents in any case were turning to business. Friesen describes its Main Street as a kaleidoscopic and lively place. Shopping and trading, even under the worst economic conditions, continued unabated. The businesses on Main Street included a flour mill, a lawyer's office, a cobbler, photographer, barber, several garages, automobile dealerships—presaging the

move away from horse-and-buggy—a bookstore, a second-hand store, the printing office of writer and journalist Arnold Dyck, and even a beer parlour. (After a hard day's work for limited earnings, men gathered for a smoke and a beer while their wives waited for them to emerge at 10 pm closing time.) Because Mennonites were so ingrown and their surnames so limited, it seems that nearly everyone in the community had a nickname: Schmaunt (cream) Frieze, for example, who ran a creamery. There were “outsiders” as well, such as the Jewish businessman Schwartz who owned a drygoods store. Racism was not extreme, but prejudice was sometimes flagrant.

Steinbach may have been Depression-resistant, but it wasn't Depression-proof. Many were deeply in debt, and at times, when bills were mailed out, the response was “How dare you?” (37) Businessman C. T. Loewen, kinder than some, often overlooked debts, since he was intimately familiar with the struggles of the townsfolk. Even those in debt, however, considered it shameful not to pay back what they owed. In Steinbach, independence was primary. Living on government relief, it was thought, might weaken the work ethic. And so town planning was slipshod: since it was believed that everyone should take care of their own affairs, development “had been left to chance” (92).

No one was left absolutely destitute in Steinbach. The churches took care of their own, but their influence was fading fast. Steinbach was founded in 1874 by Kanadier, Russian Mennonite immigrants, and at first the village was uniformly *Kleine Gemeinde* (later the Evangelical Mennonite Conference). Others, however, moved in: primarily Bruderthaler, Holdeman and Mennonite Brethren, and in the 1930s, Russian Mennonite refugees appeared in Steinbach as well. Consequently, if individuals were not comfortable in their church, they could simply walk down the street to another.

Even during the dark days of the Great Depression, business leaders and their wives (there was a handful of female entrepreneurs in Steinbach as well) were making road trips to California, Florida, or World's Fairs in Chicago and New York. Steinbach was doing relatively well: apparently, “in 1935, Arnold Dyck made the startling claim that there was ‘no unemployment in Steinbach, and no one is on relief’” (107). Friesen contends that there was some truth to this. Businessman G. G. Kornelson was able to brag about Steinbach:

“Prosperity ever, Depression never” (115). An optimism prevailed that was directly contrary to the traditional Mennonite attitude that the world is a hard place, and this optimism tended to be individualistic. Still, when the town's flour mill burned down, the locals rushed to rebuild it together. Clearly, writes Friesen, it was not always the case that business people were forever at each other's throats (79).

Religion still prevailed. “You could say,” Friesen writes, “that it was a God-soaked community” (119). But American fundamentalism and evangelicalism were invading Steinbach, despite the resistance of conservatives such as the *Kleine Gemeinde*. And “progress” was unstoppable. Two men, for example, built a light aircraft, a *Pietenpol*, and became temporary celebrities in the town. A high school was built in which the language of education was English rather than the traditional High German, and Low German, the traditional colloquial Mennonite dialect, was at the beginnings of being forgotten altogether. Hockey teams were formed, and even young girls started a team. (The men's team was called the Flying Dutchmen initially, and then the Huskies.) Rabid fans congregated to cheer them on. But the town's most monumental achievement may have been the building of a hospital through volunteer labour and fundraising. “If the prevailing ethos in Steinbach was self-sufficiency,” writes Friesen, “this was tempered by the recognition (at least on the part of some) that poverty could also be a matter of bad luck” (186). Uninsured families would be cared for; Mennonite communitarianism prevailed in this instance.

Overseas politics then infiltrated Steinbach. Support for pan-Germanism—and for the rising National Socialist regime in Germany—found a place in the village, even among individuals as brilliant as Arnold Dyck. But fascist support was defeated, in a sense, because the new generation was moving on. The young often felt shame about their ethnicity, regarding it as “unnecessary baggage” (204), and across Manitoba, nearly half of Mennonite youth enlisted during the Second World War. This evolution in attitude, Friesen writes, was not unique to Steinbach but was characteristic of North America as a whole. Assimilation, and with it individualist freedom, came to predominate.

Friesen concludes, “Being *in* the world while not *of* the world was a delicate balancing act between humility and practicality” (202). In the end, traditionalism

inevitably failed. “An almost reverential enthusiasm” for mobility won the day: mobility of every kind, social, economic, religious. But here as well, a kind of ambivalence is embedded both in the story of Steinbach and in Friesen’s historical recollection. A spirit of community cooperation endured. Arnold Dyck described the building of the hospital as “mission work.” “Whether

Peter Neudorf, Translator

■ Introduced by Robert Martens

At the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Winnipeg, a fonds, or collection of documents, tells the story of Anna Janzen Neufeld: her birth to an industrialist, her marriage to Kornelius Neufeld who managed a farm implement factory in Sergejejewka, Fuerstenland colony, her flight to Canada in 1922. It’s a rich life, perhaps representative of those Russian Mennonite women who did far more than just survive. A life of faith and caring.

Janzen Neufeld’s story, along with that of her family, has been vividly told in Harold Neufeld’s novel, *Every Season Under Heaven*. (A review will appear in the February issue.) It is based on family documents, some of which are currently held in the Anna Janzen Neufeld fonds in Winnipeg. Before the novel could be written, though, Janzen Neufeld’s diaries and letters needed to be translated. Peter Neudorf was the man for the job. He took on the enormous task of translation, working on it for nine years. Peter, with his keen interest in Mennonite history—and in world affairs in general—served for years on the MHSBC board.

Peter has written about his translation:

I began the translation project with about 70 letters, the first one written by Kornelius in 1890 to his brother Herman in Nikolayevka. Starting in 1916, his wife, Anna Janzen, kept a diary, writing almost daily. She produced eight journal books in total; two were destroyed. For the first diary (321 pages) and the letters, I transcribed the text from Gothic script to English script and then translated the transcription into English. Eventually, I translated directly from Gothic to English. I started the project in 2009 and sent the first letter translations for the family—Helga’s siblings—to read on 28

in religion, business, politics, education, health care, or recreation,” Friesen writes, “Steinbachers were united in their ability to get things done, and, to quote a line from the hymn they sang, ‘work, for the night is coming’” (205).

It should be added that this a beautifully designed book, glossy and rich with photographs.



Peter Neudorf making a point at MHSBC.

Photo source: MHSBC files.

December 2009 and the last one on 11 August 2018.

Having been a technician with IBM for over 30 years, the word ‘can’t’ was rarely in my vocabulary. On occasion, I would spend up to three days on a particularly difficult word, that is, a couple of hours a day, and then I typically came up with an English translation. Some Ukrainian words I could not transpose and I left them as Ukrainian. I want to give credit to my wife, who, as long as she was able, proofread and corrected my grammar. I thank Helmut Peters, her brother, for taking over after her passing.

Anna’s diary accounts give evidence of enjoying incredible wealth and then of experiencing the total loss of everything following the Russian Revolution. There is the narration of her husband’s appendicitis operations and ultimate death in 1917. The family, minus father, managed to flee to Germany on 23 November 1918 from their large

home on the factory compound, travelling by train with the retreating German soldiers following the end of the First World War. Then there is her daughter's death—also of appendicitis—after needing to be left in Halifax as they immigrated to Canada in January 1922 following a three-year stay in Germany. Also moving is the humbling experience of having to live by gifts from kind-hearted

Germans when the family's money ran out and Germany faced massive inflation.

Anna was clearly a person that always needed people around her. Her diary describes many visits with friends, and yet there are regular expressions of loneliness. Still, the message that comes through almost daily in the entries is her conviction that God cares and will provide.

Peter Neudorf, Friend and Helper

■ By Janet E Boldt

I first met Peter and his wife Helga in the early 1990s at a little church in Vancouver which I came to adopt as my “home.” They welcomed me and regaled me with stories of homemade wine experiments (Peter) and interesting books (Helga). They were kind and welcomed me into the church, and into their home.

I only recently discovered that during the years I attended church with them, Peter was very active in the Mennonite Historical Society, serving as director and member of the board for over seventeen years. He was a much-valued contributor, deeply passionate and knowledgeable about Mennonite history.

My own interest in Mennonite history was fairly limited, periodically peaked by a seminary course or two, and my mother's keen interest in all things genealogical related to our Mennonite roots. When my mother and I began transcribing my grandmother's diaries set in the Ukraine from 1914-1923, I naturally began to be more curious about the context for my grandmother's writings, and the history that had impacted her.

In 2017, following the death of my mother and my own retirement, I returned to the task of working on my grandmother's diaries. Now the challenge was to translate them into English, with the hope of publishing them for the sake of my family. In the meantime, Peter's dear wife Helga had passed away. I missed her, and I knew that Peter must have been devastated.

One day, while I visited with Richard Thiessen, my friend and previous colleague, at the newly opened Mennonite Heritage Museum, I noticed Peter leaning over pages scribbled in Gothic text. There he was, so soon after his own loss, driving from North Vancouver one day each week to assist those whose family history needed translation. He was working on a significant



Peter Neudorf, left, with Janet Boldt, center, and Laurel Stronstadt visiting the exhibit *Unearthing the Vanished* at MHM.

Photo source: MHSBC files.

translation project of over seventy letters and six diaries written by his wife's grandmother, Anna Janzen Neufeld. He had begun this project with his wife in 2009. When his wife passed away in 2017, Peter began periodically coming to the Museum. He loved helping others, loved the intersection of his own passion for history with the art of translating the lived experiences of Mennonites from the past.

“Peter!” I was thrilled to see him there. “Peter, would you have interest and time to help me translate my grandmother's diaries?” Without hesitation, he said “Yes.”

Thus began a year's journey into my grandmother's past, and into Peter's keen and inquisitive mind. Each Thursday I would drive the fifteen minutes from my home, and Peter would drive the ninety minutes from his. We would meet upstairs in the Museum alcove overlooking the balcony, aware of all the other lively voices from below, but keenly present to my grandmother's

words and heartbeat as we painstakingly translated. I say “painstakingly” because my grandmother’s writing was often illegible, and the words she used no longer familiar, and the places she mentioned sometimes unidentifiable. But always, Peter was persistent, and he was adept at locating names and places on the internet. Bit by bit we pieced together a story that was tender to me because of my love for my grandmother. He was respectful and curious and hardworking. And we laughed a lot.

Peter hung in there with me for over a year. The book entitled *The Diary of Emma Moellmann* was completed in early 2019. Peter was there at the book launch to celebrate with me. Several months later he suffered a debilitating stroke.

I continue to connect with Peter, periodically enjoying visits and still learning about Mennonite history through his ongoing passion and inquisitive mind. Peter turned ninety in 2025.

A Visit to a Swiss Anabaptist Hideout

■ By Lorna Goertz

Lorna attended the Zurich 500 gathering

One of the places our tour group (and likely all the others) visited was to what is known as the Anabaptist cave near Bäretswil. It is not certain that Anabaptists used this cave, but it can be accessed from three directions, and utensils were found in it, indicating that some likely stayed there in hiding. We North American Anabaptist tourists have been visiting it since at least the 1980s (my parents were there in 1989). In this century the Swiss Reformed Church and the civic governments have apologized for their persecution of the Anabaptists and erected plaques, monuments and markers documenting it. There are no Anabaptists living in the locality of this cave. The Swiss did a thorough job of getting rid of them.

Since I was last at the cave in 1992, the locals have improved the path leading to the cave, installing handrails, etc., where helpful. They have also placed an outhouse along the path. (A local farmer came on his tractor to clean it when we were leaving.) They were very aware of the Zurich service. Some of them had watched it. They knew we were coming. Part way along, we were greeted by a beautiful bouquet of welcome by the local Catholic and Reformed church people. They were standing behind a table laden with pears, apples, bananas, strawberries and chocolates, and had water and

glasses ready to serve us. They also had walking poles to lend to those they thought might benefit from them. They were still there with more water and food when we returned. A gentleman from the Reformed Church who had been involved in the earlier Anabaptist/Reformed conversations met us at the cave and gave us a bit of local history. Then he rushed back to his church to make sure it was ready to receive us for a bathroom break before we drove back to Zurich. We were the second TourMagination tour group through that afternoon, and in between another group came through that the hosts hadn’t known was coming. There were at least four other tour groups that will have gone there. We will have been one of the last, and there they were with beautiful smiles of greeting waiting for us. Such amazing hospitality!

Lorna Goertz has been a volunteer with MHSBC for 6 years. She enjoys travel and learning about Anabaptist history.



Table with refreshments to welcome Anabaptist visitors to the Bäretswil cavern.

Photo credit: Lorna Goertz.



Welcoming bouquet of flowers along the path to the cave. Placed by members of Reformed and Catholic residents.

Photo credit: Lorna Goertz.



Anabaptists visitors explore the caves near Bäretswil, where early Anabaptists met to worship in secret—a stark contrast to the Grossmünster church with ornate spires shown on the front cover.

Photo credit: Lorna Goertz.

Roots & Branches

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