

a turn for the serious, although Janzen is reluctant to let it make the turn. Determined not to be self-pitying, she insists on breezy optimism throughout this illness. Some readers will be uneasy about the fun she insists on having throughout the cancer treatments, but Janzen's irreverence is an indissoluble part of her character. There is beauty and strength amidst the occasionally strained humour of the latter part of the book; these aspects sometimes work together, sometimes not.

The book ends with an account of Janzen's rebaptism, having passed through discussions of varying seriousness about the Holy Spirit, tithing, diarrhea, faith healing, abstinence, friendship, and padded underpants. Despite Janzen's jaunty tone, many of the subjects and events she treats are difficult, and on occasion I seem to have found them more moving than she did. Her tone and themes can be at odds, rather like the way many of her characters have voices that sound like hers and thus seem at odds with themselves. Yes, I did say "characters." Although Janzen's book is a memoir, the deliberately shaped and selective nature of this story moves it, at times, close to fiction. Janzen's style is reminiscent of Anne Lamott's work, which gives a similar impression of both fiction and memoir, but she does not have Lamott's theological depth or ability to communicate suffering. The rebaptism in the final chapter is accompanied by a quick overview of Mennonite understandings of baptismal commitment, but (although I am not a Mennonite myself) I found her treatment of baptism thin and rather self-absorbed. Self-absorption is a sin from which Janzen is aware she needs to be liberated, but at the end of this book I was not convinced she had arrived where she needed to go. Although this memoir is uneven, the author is a clever woman with worthy things to tell about her lively, unpredictable journey toward a firmer faith.

Sue Sorensen
Canadian Mennonite University

Reviews of History and Social Sciences

John N. Klassen, *Jesus Christus leben und verkündigen. 150 Jahre Mennoniten Brüdergemeinden*. Lage, Germany: Licht-Zeichen Verlag, 2010. Pp. 238. Softcover.

This book, written in German by John N. Klassen, a long-time Canadian church worker, pastor, and Bible teacher in Germany, deals with 150 years of Mennonite Brethren (MB) history, but with a focus

on MB evangelistic outreach in Germany and Austria after the Second World War. The title in English translation, "To live and to proclaim Jesus Christ," is an apt title, for the MBs from their early beginnings in mid-nineteenth century Russia emphasized evangelism and missions at home and abroad. The book joins other MB publications (e.g. *The Mennonite Brethren Church Around the World. Celebrating 150 Years*, ed. Abe J. Dueck, 2010) that celebrated 150 years of the Mennonite Brethren as a Church.

The book begins with a summary of the history of the Anabaptist-Mennonite movement from the first adult baptism in Switzerland (1525), to the life and work of Menno Simons (1496-1561), written by the late missiologist Hans Kasdorf (13-34). The second chapter, written by historian Abe J. Dueck and author John Klassen, deals briefly with the spiritual renewal among the Mennonites in Russia that culminated in the establishment of the MB Church in 1860 (35-43). Chapters 3 to 5, which form the main body of the book, deal in considerable detail with the formation of smaller and larger church groups in Germany and Austria through the work of both North American and native German church planters. The work began among the *Aussiedler* (re-settlers) who came to Germany from Russia, beginning in the 1970s, and then extended to the native German and Austrian people. Chapter 6 and 7 reflect on what MBs believe and what they consider their mission, namely to proclaim and live Jesus Christ and to found new congregations. The success of this mission and church planting activity has been most successful. As of 2008, there were in Germany 130 new congregations with a total of 26,314 members and in Austria there were six congregations with a total of 420 members. The new churches are ministered by pastors called *Aeltester* (elders); they are not remunerated financially for their service. A few congregations, however, receive some financial support from North America and elsewhere.

When reading about the history and the work of the congregations and conferences, called *Arbeitsgemeinschaften*, one is struck by the great variety of names and titles for the individual churches and associations. The differences in naming are not so much of a theological nature, but largely with regard to their lifestyle. All groups claim to be evangelical and biblical in their religious faith, but to differentiate themselves from each other they call their churches and associations by names such as Mennonite Brethren, Christian Mennonite Brethren, Evangelical Christians, Evangelical Christian-Baptists, Mennonite Free-Churches, and Mennonite Free Church of Austria. Then there are several conferences with names such as Conference of Mennonite Brethren, Conference of Evangelical Free Churches, Conference of Baptism-minded Churches, and Conference of Free-Church Pentecostal Churches. While most congregations belong to a *Bund* or

conference, some remain independent and self-sufficient. There are even two groups of close to 700 members (around Frankenthal, near Worms, Germany), who, in the words of the author, “see themselves even more than independent and self-sufficient” (122). While the Frankenthal congregations have not joined any conference, they nevertheless conduct successful programs, including their own biblical training for work in the church, and even have religious teaching in the public schools.

What these German-Russian Mennonite Christians have in common is that they took the Bible seriously, however they understand their faith as separate groups, and their zeal to spread the gospel. While the older, established Mennonite churches in Germany (which have existed there from the time of the sixteenth century Anabaptists) are declining numerically, the *Aussiedler* congregations are increasing in memberships. Interestingly, native Germans, who accept the MB faith and then join these “Russian-German” congregations, are quite willing to adapt to the Russian-Mennonites’ conservative lifestyle, including the practice of women wearing kerchiefs (head coverings), rejection of television, and non-attendance of movie theatres. Their churches, with their rich programming that includes congregational and choral singing and music making, seek to provide for their members’ spiritual nourishment and social and cultural entertainment. However, some of their church regulations and rules, seen as legalism by some, especially among the young people, at times create tension and perpetuate the divisions among them. When the first re-settlers from Russia came to Germany some forty years ago, the existing Mennonite churches hoped that the newcomers would join them and cooperate in their church work. While some Russian Mennonites did join German Mennonite churches, many did not, which disappointed the German churches (see *Mennonitisches Jahrbuch* 1990). The cultural and social gap between the two groups seemed too wide to bridge.

Disappointing is also the fact that among the MBs and the so-called General Conference Mennonites (GCs), both of which came from Russia, there is hardly any cooperation in the areas of church and mission work. But the book does express some hope in a “Statement of Reconciliation” (229) that MBs and GCs, who from the beginning in 1860 have gone their separate ways, might at last forgive and accept each other as brothers and sisters. As a laudable example, the Statement cites the formal reconciliation among North American MBs and GCs that took place in 1960 in Reedley, California. The book concludes with some answers to the question of how Mennonite Brethren respond to God’s intentions (*Gottes Absicht*) for them: the MBs are a people (*Volk*) of the Bible; a people of a new life; a people of a new covenant; a people of reconciliation; and a people of hope (234-236).

This is John Klassen's second book on the "free churches" in Germany. His earlier publication, *Russlanddeutsche Freikirchen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Grundlinien ihrer Geschichte, ihrer Entwicklung und Theologie* (Bonn, 2009), was his doctoral dissertation from South Africa. The two books are required reading for anyone who wishes to know about the mission work the Mennonite Brethren are doing in Germany and Austria.

The book includes numerous black and white photographs of the new churches and their leaders, a map of Germany with the places where new churches have been planted, helpful tables, and a useful bibliography.

Harry Loewen
Kelowna, British Columbia

Johann E. Pritzkau, *German Baptists in South Russia*. trans. Walter Regehr. Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2013. Pp. 185. Softcover.

In 1914, Johann Pritzkau's German-language history of the German Baptist movement in South Russia (current-day Ukraine) was published. As a minister and an active participant from the mid-nineteenth century beginnings of the church, Pritzkau viewed it as his duty to produce an account of the German Baptists' past history and present circumstances. This English translation of Pritzkau's original work opens the door for new readers to explore the factors shaping the development of the Baptist movement in Russia. Pritzkau offers important insights into how the confessional system in the Russian empire influenced interactions between the Baptists and other groups, such as the Mennonite Brethren, Lutherans, Catholics, Russian Baptists, and state officials in the region.

Pritzkau organizes his book into three parts: an early history of German Baptists in South Russia; historical sketches of various church congregations; and an assessment of the German Baptists at the beginning of the twentieth century. The first section follows the Baptists from their early beginnings through to their legal recognition by the Russian state. Covering the religious revivals inspired by Pietism, which spread through German-speaking communities, Pritzkau provides insight into the relationships that sustained the movement from its beginnings. He acknowledges the importance of Mennonite Brethren believers in supporting and inspiring German Baptists; yet, he also illustrates how the confessional system of the Russian empire,