power has functioned within the Mennonite Church and the failure of white Mennonites to include an analysis of power and privilege in their peace position. Members of other religious movements that have constructed identity along ethnic-racial lines, civil rights historians, Latino religious studies scholars, and scholars of North American evangelicalism will also find this study to be useful.

Elizabeth Miller, Goshen College

Path of Thorns: Soviet Mennonite Life under Communist and Nazi Rule.
By Jacob A. Neufeld. Edited by Harvey L. Dyck. Trans. by Harvey L. Dyck and Sarah Dyck. University of Toronto Press, 2014. x + 444 pages. $85.00 cloth; $37.95 paper; ebook available.

Transnational histories of the Second World War have recently generated new interest in Eastern Europe’s so-called “ethnic Germans.” As German speakers who did not hold German citizenship, these populations inhabited uncertain positions in the geopolitical struggles that engulfed their homelands. Path of Thorns is a collection of writings by Jacob Neufeld (1895–1960), a Mennonite leader and self-identified “ethnic German.” Following his childhood in a large Mennonite settlement in Imperial Russia, Neufeld witnessed and participated in the dramatic, often tragic events that marked the mid-twentieth century as an age of totalitarianism.

Organized chronologically, Neufeld’s book provides a detailed narrative of his experiences under Soviet, and later Nazi, rule. Through memoirs, letters, and diary entries, the reader encounters a bright, pious young man, a former army medic who during the 1920s worked for a prominent Mennonite organization. With the arrival of Stalin’s “Revolution from Above,” Neufeld, like many other Mennonites, experienced “dekulakization” (the expropriation of wealthy farmers and other “class enemies”) and collectivization. Following a false accusation of espionage, Soviet agents forced Neufeld to sign a confession and shipped him to a Siberian gulag. In 1939, after six years of hard labor, the author returned to his home, which he considered, like his own body, to have become crippled by the ravages of Bolshevism. Two years later, when Hitler’s armies invaded Ukraine, he greeted them as liberators, eventually accompanying the retreating Wehrmacht into occupied Poland. During the volume’s final chapters, Neufeld tells of his postwar efforts to help thousands of Mennonite refugees, including his own family, avoid repatriation to the USSR by immigrating to Paraguay and Canada.

Path of Thorns will be of particular interest to Mennonites and other general readers. Neufeld’s texts, which have been masterfully translated
for English-speaking audiences, are fascinating. Historian Harvey L. Dyck has provided an interpretative introduction that, like his source material, is lively and well-crafted. Several maps, in addition to twenty-eight photographs, illustrate the volume. Readers attempting to keep straight the many Mennonite characters—whose common family names sometimes make this a difficult task—will be helped by an extensive index.

As a historical work, however, the book should be used with caution. While Neufeld’s writings are of value for scholars and students of Mennonitism, Soviet minority policies, “ethnic Germans” during World War II, and “ethno-religious” (10) communities generally, the volume’s memoir format renders it frequently unreliable. The basic facts are mostly correct, but Neufeld nonetheless selected them for Mennonite readers in 1950s Canada; all the pieces included were composed or heavily edited in this context. His gulag account, for example—presented as a saga of Christian trial and redemption—better conforms to Cold War conventions in democratic North America than to the possibilities and impossibilities of personal narration in the USSR’s Depression-era labor camps.

Unfortunately, the editor has done little to clarify which sections were written when or for whom. One chapter, first drafted in 1941—probably as a village report for Nazi welfare officials—references the “deleterious influence” (227) of these same individuals, a critique clearly added later. Especially uncertain is the degree to which Neufeld may have covered up his wartime anti-Semitism or complicity in the Holocaust; he never mentions the mass murder of the tens of thousands of Jews living in or near Ukraine’s Mennonite settlements. While Dyck’s commentary is well integrated into current scholarship on Mennonites, it virtually ignores vast literatures on communism, “ethnic Germans,” genocide, and Nazism. The endnotes cite only sixteen sources not centrally focused on Mennonites.

Nevertheless, Path of Thorns is a welcome contribution. It is easily the most substantial published first-person account of Soviet Mennonite life from the 1920s through the Second World War.

Benjamin W. Goossen, Harvard University


Robert Geraci, author of the well-received Apocalyptic AI: Visions of Heaven in Robotics, Artificial Intelligence and Virtual Reality (Oxford University, 2010), has produced another excellent study, this time about how virtual worlds are “rearranging or replacing religious practice” (1).