

Study Guide Questions for
Through Fire and Water

by Elwood Yoder

Chapters 11 -15

Chapter 11, "The Mennonite Commonwealth," 1850-1917

1. Why does Harry Loewen describe the Mennonite colonies in Russia as a state within a state?
2. Read the section on Johann Cornies and the sidebar on "Trees planted upside-down." Why did some people criticize Cornies?
3. Name two developments in the 1870s that eased the problem of Mennonites without land.
4. Name the three concerns Klaas Reimer and the Kleine Gemeinde had towards the Mennonites in Russia.
5. In what year was the Mennonite Brethren denomination founded? Who appears to be the primary founder of the group?
6. Analyze the radical Apocalypticism of Class Epp. What were at least three factors that led into Epp's fanaticism? What were some of the reasons why some 600 Mennonites left for Asia under Epp's leadership?
7. Name two internal "sicknesses" that the Mennonites in Russia faced by the end of the 1800s and at least two external threats to their way of life.

Chapter 12, "Migration and Loss," 1874-1945

1. Read the dialogue between the Russian officials and the Mennonites in 1871. What does the first comment by the Russians about language tell you about the involvement of the Mennonites with their neighbors?

2. Why do you think the Canadian and American governments did all they could to attract the Russian Mennonites to North America in the late 1800s?
3. Why did some 18,000 Russian Mennonites move to the North America in the 1870s and 1880s?
4. Why did the Slavophiles view the Russian Mennonites with suspicion and hatred? Judging by the Russian Mennonite welcome to the German armies during WWI, do you think the Slavophiles were justified in their criticisms?
5. What appear to be some of the reasons why Nestor Makhno and his men were so eager to pillage and plunder the Russian Mennonite communities?
6. How do you evaluate the Self-Defense (Selbstschutz) units among the Russian Mennonites? Do you feel there was justification for young Russian Mennonites to take up arms during the Bolshevik Revolution? Do you feel Dietrich Neufeld's statement is too critical? Explain.
7. What organization was organized in 1920 by North American Mennonites to assist Mennonites in Russia?
8. How did Communist religious and economic goals for the Soviet Union threaten the Russian Mennonite way of life?
9. While the majority of the first wave of Russian Mennonites to North America (1870s-1880s) came to the United States, where did the second wave of Russian Mennonite emigrants end up? Why was this country receptive to the Mennonites? Identify these waves of migration on your unit map.
10. Read the section on the escape of 217 Russian Mennonites into China and to America. Think up a creative (and perhaps humorous) title to take the place of "Fleeing across a frozen river," and write it down here.
11. Why were many kulaks shot and exiled during the 1930s? The story of Nicholas and Anna Loewen is one of the most sensitive and touching stories in Through Fire and Water. Where do you think that Harry Loewen got this story (see "The Authors" on p. 349)?
12. Where did the third major wave of Russian Mennonite emigrants, (mid 1940s) end up?
13. What are the three factors that Harry Loewen judges are the reasons for the failure of the Russian Mennonites to live up to their Anabaptist Heritage?
14. In spite of difficult circumstances under the Soviet Union (1917-1991) what are some

positive outcomes for Mennonites during these years?

15. How did Mennonites help to make the American Mid-west the "Breadbasket of the world."

Chapter 13 - Mission, migration, and mutual aid, 1890-1940

1. What impact did the 1910 missionary conference in Scotland seem to have on Mennonite missions activity?
2. What do you think the Indian Christian meant when he asked for "friends"?
3. Where were European, Russian, and North American Mennonites first involved in missions work?
4. What is Annie Funk's legacy in mission and witness?
5. Why was a Mennonite Central Committee organized in the 1920s?
6. Why did some Canadian Mennonites move to Mexico and Paraguay during the 1920s?
7. Why did Christian Neff organize a Mennonite World Conference in 1925?
8. Cite at least two examples of how Mennonites worked together in mission with other Christians during the early decades of the twentieth century.
9. What did Stephen Wang mean when he said that he had no faith in "the Jesus of Christendom with its economic and military might"?

Chapter 14 study questions: "Learning to serve together, 1940-1970"

1. Why was Jacob Janzen fearless in front of the Canadian Major General during W.W.II?
2. How did American and Canadian Mennonite draftees respond in World War II?
3. What did Siegfried Bartel "hear" on Christmas Eve 1941 that changed his outlook on

W.W.II?

4. How did nationalistic movements in many countries after W.W.II and Mennonite mission efforts after the War intersect?
5. What are at least four ways Mennonites reached out in North America from the 1940s to the 1960s?
6. Where were the service groups PAX and TAP aimed?
7. How did the Isaak family "love their enemies"?
8. Why did Mennonite missionaries have a difficult time in Japan during the late 1940s and 1950s?
9. What effects did the independence movement of the 1940s-1970s have on the Mennonite church in Africa and Asia?
10. In what way is the ordination of Jonathan Larson a "significant" event?
11. In what way are the Mennonite secondary schools in North America a "mission" outreach of the church?

Chapter 15 - Becoming partners in a global community

1. What features of historic Anabaptism were attractive to Raymond Affouka Eba in the Ivory Coast?
2. What are three ways Mennonite have cooperated with other Christians in recent decades?
3. How is the witness of Amor Viviente an example of North American missions moving full circle?
4. How did political violence in Central America affect the Honduran Mennonite Church?
5. What conflicts faced North American Mennonites living in Vietnam during the Vietnam War?
6. The early church leader Tertullian said "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." How does the story of the Meserete Kristos Church give evidence of the truth of

Tertullian's statement?

7. Do you approve of the Ausseidler's emigration out of Russia in recent years? Should they stay in Russia as a Christian witness?

8. What kind of unique Central American perspectives might Maria Leonor de Mendez bring to Mennonites around the world through Mennonite World Conference?

9. In what way do Christians who join across national, racial, and cultural barriers testify to God?

Focus Essay

10. Look up Romans 12:5. How do the stories of Luis Lumibao and Naka Gininda give evidence that many members, from many races and cultures, are making up the worldwide body of Mennonites in Christ?