

Witness in Many Lands: Leadership and Outreach among the Brethren

Tim Grass (ed.)

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Witness in Many Lands is the inaugural volume in a new series, *Studies in Brethren History*, if one does not include the reprint of Grass's *Gathering to His Name: The Story of Brethren in Britain and Ireland* (2006). Quite appropriately, *Witness* is dedicated to the memory of F. Roy Coad, as his book, *History of the Brethren Movement* (1968), was the standard, modern, general history of the Open Brethren until Grass's *Gathering to His Name*. *Witness* contains nineteen essays, seventeen of which are not available elsewhere. Of the seventeen unique contributions, those by Afflerbach, Herm, Holthaus, Liese, Reimer, and Schwartz are available in English only due to the good work of translator Brian Davies, since many of the authors presented their papers at the 2005 centenary celebration of what was then Missionhaus-Bibelschule Wiedenest. One cannot but be pleased with the breadth of this volume as well as the helpful categorization of the essays into three sections: 1) Thought and Action in the Nineteenth Century; 2) Pillars of Twentieth Century Consolidation; and 3) Brethren in Many Lands: Some Snapshots. While the breadth of topics is wide, what all but one of the chapters have in common is to act as examples of carefully researched, well-written essays on matters pertaining to the Brethren. Even the one well-written essay which, sadly, lacks full citations holds its own as it traces the significant and widely spread influences of Missionhaus-Bibelschule Wiedenest as its author looks backward and looks outward for that ministry's influence during its hundred years of existence.

Witness begins by acquainting the reader with significant nineteenth-century Brethren figures, theology, and connections which often are not considered. For example, Berthold Schwartz's essay on Darby's understanding of the relation of law and grace considers Darby as theologian, a term, he notes, that is seldom

applied to this seminal Brethren writer and preacher. Schwartz also challenges the ‘professional theologians’ to consider Darby’s thought in this area, thought which ‘challenges in equal measure both traditional Lutheran thought and Reformed federal theology’ (57). Ian Randall insightfully traces the positive and at times prickly relationship between the Brethren and Britain’s nineteenth-century prince of preachers, C. H. Spurgeon.

The second section ably traces the significance and contributions of men such as E. H. Broadbent, Eric Sauer, and W. E. Vine among others. While many may know Broadbent as the author of *The Pilgrim Church*, Grass’s essay on Broadbent also rehearses a seldom heard major objective of Broadbent’s life, ‘to contact, encourage and teach isolated groups of believers... [so] they could be shown fellowship and support, and enabled to testify more effectively where they lived’ (137). Horst Afflerbach’s chapter on Erich Sauer is a focused essay on the lessons one can learn from Sauer’s life and written works. Afflerbach paints a complete picture of this significant Brethren figure including both Sauer’s positive contributions and failures. The balance is well done. Many in the wider evangelical world may have used W. E. Vine’s *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, but how many know anything of its author? Neil Dickson’s essay not only centers on Vine’s method of biblical interpretation, but also tells some about the man himself. Dickson even relates Vine’s ideal missiology as one which did not ‘exalt any human culture, but the teaching of the New Testament,’ and his ideal theology as one which did not ‘exalt any ecclesiastical tradition, but the meaning of the New Testament.’

Witness’ final section covers Brethren work in lands as widely cast as Europe, Central Asia, and Africa. For example, Johannes Reimer’s essay is on the connection of the Allianzbibelschule in Berlin (subsequently Missionhaus-Bibelschule Wiedenest) and mission work in Turkestan. He notes the beginnings, obstacles, and results of the early twentieth century missions’ work among the Muslims—the primary population of this area. Reimer posits that this outreach to Turkestan was ‘the first great pioneer project of the Alliance Bible School in Berlin’ (270). This essay provides a good

overview and ends with a challenge to today's Wiedener graduates to follow in their forebears' footsteps as missionaries to the Muslims of Central Asia. A helpful addition to this essay would have been a couple of explanatory footnotes at critical points such as the identity of Turkestan, an area which includes present-day Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Xinjiang; and the Stundists, a Russian evangelical sect whose students may have had a significant impact on the direction of the Allianzbibelschule. Danielle Pasquale's chapter on the history and positive impact of Italian Brethren Bible camps on the Italian assemblies should both remind and encourage the readers of the importance of summertime children's work commonly seen among the Brethren. Pasquale describes the formation, struggles, and significance of the camps in Italy, a description which likely parallels that of the Brethren in other lands. Particularly impressive was Pasquale's ability to get a survey sampling of over 600 respondents as he conducted his research (303), impressive when one considers the tendency to avoid any semblance of cohesion often found among the Brethren in other countries. He respondents included former campers, staff members, and elders of the Italian assemblies.

A final observation is in order since this is the first volume which has been produced entirely in-house by the Brethren Archivists and Historians Network for the series *Studies in Brethren History*. Grass should be praised for setting a very high editorial standard to which the editors of the subsequent volumes should aim. His consummate editorial skills have produced a volume which is nearly free of any typos or formatting errors and one which is both valuable to the reader and pleasing to the eye. For any who might have an interest in the Brethren, this volume is well worth the read and the buy.

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