

**Urbane Peachey, *Making Wars Cease: A Survey of MCC Peace Section 1940–1990*, Mastof, Morgantown, Pennsylvania, 2022. 312 pp. \$20.00. ISBN: 978-1-60126-792-4.**

We always read with the double awareness of our own experiences and the world of the author. In Urbane Peachey's *Making Wars Cease*, regular synchronicities emerged between my life and the world Peachey evokes in his questions about ecumenism, justice, higher education, and politics against the backdrop of one particular part of the larger MCC apparatus—the Peace Section<sup>5</sup>—between 1940 and 1990. My own biography, three decades later, feels woven around many of the institutions and themes Peachey addresses. For example, I worked one summer as an intern in the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Washington Office, my PhD examined the peacebuilding and development work of MCC in East Africa, I currently serve as Vice Moderator of the World Council of Churches' Commission on International Affairs, and I teach Peace and Justice Studies at a university in New York City. In addition, I come to these positions as a Mennonite wrestling with what it means to live faithfully in the world.

Peachey sets out two tasks for himself: (1) to preserve the fifty-year work and witness of the MCC Peace Section and (2) to interpret it. In this particular moment in which the United States Congress is again considering changes to the Selective Service System and global conflicts loom large in our collective consciousness, the relevance of the Section's work feels more germane than ever.

Much of the first two-thirds of the book summarizes the statements, conference proceedings, and decisions undertaken by the Peace Section, with little analysis from Peachey. On one hand, this lack of argument or analysis left me unsatisfied. On the other hand, it provides a comprehensive summary of the considerable archives of the institution. And, given the lack of digitalization of many Mennonite archives, these summaries may serve a broader audience of scholars who are unable to travel to MCC headquarters to review the documents themselves.

*Making Wars Cease* is at its best when Peachey brings the full weight of his personal experience and considerable analysis to the history. Chapters 14 and 15 are outstanding and deserve a much wider reading and audience. Many of the questions that most troubled me earlier in the book are resolved in these two chapters. It is here that Peachey makes clear his driving research question that has motivated this project and that continues to be relevant today—Can an

---

<sup>5</sup> The MCC Peace Section was established in 1942 as the “direct successor” to the Mennonite Central Peace Committee organized in 1939. See Mennonite Archival Information Database, “Mennonite Central Committee Peace Section” (International and U.S.), accessed September 23, 2022, <https://archives.mhsc.ca/index.php/mennonite-central-committee-peace-section-international-and-u-s>.

institution forged under certain pressures and a particular moment in history translate its mission and expertise into something more expansive over time?

Peachey interprets this question through the work of the Peace Section, which was semi-autonomously organized to support the conscientious objections of Mennonites. Over time, the Peace Section attempted to broaden its scope and take on even more complex issues of disarmament, apartheid, the war in Vietnam, and structural violence—both domestic and international. Peachey charts these changes primarily through summarizing the Peace Sections’ many conferences, statements, and study groups on them.

Chapter 14 takes a serious and critical look at the shortcomings of the Section and doesn’t shy away from announcing ways in which a Mennonite tendency toward conflict avoidance may have hampered more prophetic advocacy. Peachey is unafraid to assert, “On some grand scale, perhaps Peace Section failed. On the other hand, the Peace Section network, including the arduous efforts of conference peace committees and leaders, was transforming and life-giving for many” (263). This articulation between the intentions of the Section and its impact in the world is an important distinction that meaningfully applies to many contemporary crisis points now, including the struggle for racial justice. Peachey writes, “But at no point did the Section or MCC shift in its statement of principles and theology, from its reactive mode to events to a full-throated vocation of advocacy for equality, ethics for public life, and human rights in the world—taken as seriously as we took a vision for service and defense of our own positions” (262). I believe this analysis is crucial, and, as I kept underlining and annotating sentence after sentence in these two chapters, I found myself wishing I had read this book when I was writing my PhD dissertation.

Peachey quotes a statement by Frank Epp and Edgar Metzler about MCC’s rationale for action in Southeast Asia with the phrase “We found ourselves saying at almost every juncture: why not sooner? Why so cautious?” (273). These questions resonate both throughout the work of the Section and within Peachey’s book itself. The powerful analysis and insight that Peachey offers us is withheld until the end. Tellingly, it is in these two chapters that Peachey switches from an authorial third person to first person.

Several aspects of *Making Wars Cease* left me longing for a stronger editorial hand in the book’s formatting. The chapters range greatly in length from fewer than five pages to more than fifty pages, and sometimes Peachey resorts to dictionary definitions or Wikipedia references to make a point. Also, the book would become more accessible to scholars if it provided an index as well as a list of acronyms particularly for a non-Anabaptist audience.

Nonetheless, through careful excavation and interpretation of the past, Peachey offers us a way to understand dynamics that continue to shape Mennonite self-understanding now. I found myself reconsidering some of the outcomes of the “New Wine, New Wineskins” review and restructuring that MCC undertook

and the wider reckonings that the Mennonite world continues to experience as we wrestle with what to do with this very particular heritage and tradition.

The final chapters of the book are a gentle call for us to go even further in dismantling structural violence, healing trauma, and working for racial justice and decolonization. In a culture that often wants to discard the past entirely, this book is a reminder of the shoulders that we stand on and the longer arc of the social change we might commit ourselves to continue.

*EMILY WELTY is an artist, activist, and academic based in Rockaway Beach, New York City.*