

Book Review

Jesse Hofer and Kenny Wollman, editors. *For God's Truth: A Hutterite History Reader*. McGregor, MB: Hutterian Brethren Book Centre, 2024. 487 pp.

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This collection of eighty-six excerpts from Hutterite-related primary sources was originally conceived as a reader for a course in Hutterite history to be used in the schools of the Schmiedeleut colonies. The editors are themselves schoolteachers.

After the brief four-page “Hutterite History in a Nutshell,” an essay by Julian Waldner, “Reading Primary Sources Empathetically and Critically,” gives guidance on how the readers should approach these documents. Given that high school students generally are not used to reading primary sources, this guide has a pedagogical purpose. It encourages them to note the context, authorship, and genre of each excerpt. The students are helped by an introduction that prefaces each selection. The guide then directs readers to do a more analytical reading of the text, by asking these questions: What is the purpose and audience of the selection? What themes and arguments emerge? What key terms are used and what do these terms mean? It also suggests that the readers observe the tone of the selection. Finally, it asks the students to read critically, by asking how reliable the text is and what significance it has in “shaping our understanding of the past” (xx).

The readings are arranged chronologically and are divided into sections. The first section covers “The Pre-Hutterite Period,” with selections from Benedict’s Rule, Kempis, Erasmus, Luther, and Zwingli, as well a pre-Hutterite Anabaptist writings by Grebel, Hubmaier, Hut, and the Schleitheim Articles. Sixteenth-century Hutterite history is covered in two sections, “Hutterite Beginnings” and “The ‘Golden Years’ Period,” totaling twenty-six documents and making that period of history the largest block of readings. It includes excerpts from the *Hutterite Chronicle*, as well as selections from the writings of Jacob Hutter, Peter Reidemann, Jeronimus Käls, Claus Felbinger, Peter Walpot, and Hans Kräl. A lone woman’s voice is heard in the trial testimony of Katharina Prast Hutter.

The remaining sections are grouped by century. The elder Andreas Ehrenpries is heavily represented in the seventeenth century, with three of the five selections coming from his pen. An excerpt from *Simplicius Simplicissimus* provides an outsider’s view of the Hutterite community in Hungary. Most of the selections for the eighteenth century are drawn from Johannes Waldner’s



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Klein-Geschichtsbuch. These include the forced baptism by the Jesuits of Hutterite children in Hungary, the incorporation of the Carinthian Pietists into the community, and the migration into the Russian Empire.

The documents for the nineteenth century deal with the various vicissitudes in Russia that led to the abandonment of community of goods and its reinstitution by the Schmiedeleut in the 1850s. This period concludes with a letter from the Canadian Secretary of Agriculture offering Mennonite migrants from Russia certain privileges. These were later extended to the Hutterites when their first communities in Manitoba were established in 1898. What is missing are any readings concerning the Hutterite migration and settlement in the United States in the 1870s.

The twentieth-century documents open with a compilation of community *Ordnungen* and a very interesting account of Hutterite and Indigenous relations in Canada by Dora and Elsa Maendel. Hutterite conscientious objection during World War I is represented by letters from the Hutterite martyrs Joseph and Michael Hofer to their wives and an excerpt from Michael Stahl's Camp Funston diary. World War II conscientious objection is represented by Mike Kleinsasser's account of his alternative service experience. This is followed by several documents dealing with the Hutterite interactions with the Bruderhof.

The collection closes with two twenty-first-century documents, both focused on the theme of forgiveness and reconciliation. The first is a 2008 letter from the Roman Catholic bishops of Bozen-Brixen and Innsbruck recognizing that the persecution of the Hutterites' "foreparents in the 16th century was a great injustice." The second is Edward Kleinsasser's speech at the opening of the memorial Huttererpark in Innsbruck in 2015. However, there are no documents that address the major rift within the Schmiedeleut or the efforts made to bring reconciliation between the two groups.

The volume is profusely illustrated and includes a helpful selected bibliography that directs the reader to primary and secondary sources for further research. While initially intended as a text for Hutterite students, its editors "hope that it will be useful as further reading for those familiar with the general Hutterite story" who desire "a deeper dive into the primary sources" (ix). As such, it achieves its purposes admirably.