

Book Review

Clare Stober. *Another Life is Possible: Insights from 100 Years of Life Together*. New York: Plough Publishing House, 2020. Pp. 300.

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A picture may be worth a thousand words, but Clare Stober, author of *Another Life is Possible: Insights from 100 Years of Life Together*, tells readers that if you really want know how members of the Bruderhof communities relate to each other, “you’ll just have to come to see for yourself” (xiii). Even with about 200 photographs by acclaimed photojournalist Danny Burrows and 300 pages of text, the book awakens curiosity to learn more about the communal Bruderhof and may prompt some people to visit. Stober carefully selected 100 stories of members to commemorate the 100 years of the movement in 2020. Not a history nor a theological account, the book introduces the community through its people.

The book is organized in ten chapters around major themes important to the Bruderhof, and each chapter includes stories of various members. Among the chapter topics are work, justice, peace, faith, children and family life, health care, and the place of technology. Most of the stories are firsthand accounts, although Stober wrote some of the accounts about people who have died. The personal narratives reflect the diversity of the members. People from South Korea, Iraq, Germany, Paraguay, Mexico, England, the United States, and other countries populate the book. Adherents come from varied backgrounds, including professional businesswomen, military veterans, nurses, social activists, tradespeople, engineers, investment managers, former hippies, professors, and ministers. Some informants grew up in Bruderhof families. Others come from various spiritual journeys. Some contributors recount times of leaving the community and returning. Others have never left after joining. This amazing diversity of stories lends a powerful strength to the book.

Equally amazing are the photographs that Danny Burrows shot for the project. From over 3,000 submitted photos, Stober and her editorial staff selected about 200 for the book. Burrows has a professional, yet very personal, talent for portraying people of varying ages, physical conditions, and expressions, all conveying part of the character of the Bruderhof. The photographer shows exterior views of the settlements or fields and woods where the members play, explore, or reflect.



Some images depict the interiors of dwellings, workplaces, schools, dining and worship spaces. In combining text and photographs, the author and the photographer have created a richly textured portrait of the Bruderhof and its people.

With about 3,000 members worldwide in twenty-six communities, the movement grew from the tiny beginnings of its founders, Eberhard and Emmy Arnold and Emmy's sister, Else von Hollander. Eberhard had studied theology and was active in the German Youth Movement in the late 1910s, before the infiltration of National Socialism. Disqualified from a career in ministry with the state church because he had received adult baptism, Arnold turned to doctoral studies in philosophy. However, the consuming question for Eberhard, Emmy, Else, and some friends was how to live a Christian faith taking seriously Jesus's teachings in the Sermon on the Mount and the early church in Acts 2 and Acts 4. Finding no help in existing church structures, the tiny group launched a communal life in 1920 in Sannerz, a small village in rural Hesse.

Along with the Bible, other sources inspired Eberhard Arnold. The Pietistic writings of Johann Christoph Blumhardt influenced him. The legacy of the sixteenth-century, communal Hutterites likewise shaped Arnold. He eventually discovered that Hutterites lived in the United States. After corresponding with some Hutterite leaders, Arnold traveled to the United States in 1930–1931. A Hutterite elder, Elias Walter, ordained Arnold to ministry.

Reflections of these influences appear in the narratives and photos in the book. The intense love for children, fondness for music, and appreciation for being outdoors illustrate the best of the German Youth Movement. Adult baptism, a communal economy, and even some aspects of women's clothing in the Bruderhof evidence Hutterite influences. Personal accounts of life-altering conversions in the narratives reveal traces of Blumhardt's emphasis on spiritual transformation.

The Bruderhof is an Anabaptist group through the influences of some Hutterite theology and, at times in the past, direct relationships with the Hutterites. The Bruderhof is not exactly plain, although women's dress is simple and at times male members wear an outer coat reminiscent of Hutterite men's coats. While the Bruderhof limits some use of the internet, the group does not oppose modern technology. Indeed, some members with very savvy marketing and internet skills publicize the Bruderhof through its website, YouTube videos, and other internet outlets. Besides readers interested in Plain Anabaptist groups, students and scholars of communal studies will find in this book an attractive introduction to the Bruderhof. However, there is little information about how the community is structured for leadership, or about administration of the communal economy and labor.

While the book achieves its stated goal of giving a glimpse of the diverse members of the Bruderhof, some aspects of the story are underplayed. The connection with the Hutterites is a prime example. In the story of Eberhard Arnold, the first one in the book, the word *Hutterite* appears nowhere. The narrative refers to Arnold's interest in the sixteenth-century Anabaptist movement, then mentions Jacob Hutter, who started "one branch of this movement" (8). Although Hutter was not the founder, his name became attached to the communal Hutterites. Arnold's

ordination by the Hutterites is not mentioned. Two quotations from sixteenth-century Hutterite leaders Peter Riedemann (117) and Kaspar Braitmichel (39) appear in the book, but they are credited as “Anabaptist leader” and “Anabaptist chronicler,” respectively. Perhaps the Bruderhof’s desire to focus on the present and the future, and the on-again, off-again nature of their past relationship with the Hutterites (it has been “off” since the 1990s), partly explain the reluctance to refer to the Hutterites by name.

Another Life Is Possible is an attractive, inviting coffee table book, focused on the present, filled with intriguing accounts by Bruderhof members and engaging photographs of them. In this case, pictures are worth more than thousands of words. Clare Stober has presented 100 carefully selected stories, a concise timeline, and a map of the community locations to celebrate 100 years of the Bruderhof, along with an invitation to come and “see for yourself.”