In This Issue

This special issue of *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* engages Anabaptist environmental theologies and ethics. Like so many other Christians, Anabaptists in North America have seen moral and spiritual challenges lodged within an ever-worsening environmental crisis. Theological reflection on the human relationship to creation is an enduring feature of the Christian tradition, but Anabaptist inquiry into issues of ecology has proliferated and flourished in the past few decades because environmental concerns raise thorny theological questions and unsettle inherited ways of living.

When Anabaptists confront how human behavior is impacting the environment, and worry about how those impacts diminish life or defile God's creation, they find themselves asking bedrock questions of Christian faith: What is God's will for creation, and what is humanity's role within it? How does human sin relate to the suffering of creation, and how does God's grace heal such wounds and restore right relationships? How may the church bear witness to the restorative work God has accomplished in Jesus Christ, and what does discipleship demand in a broken, violent world? Asking these classical questions anew in contexts of fragile, degraded, often dangerous environments has stimulated a lively field of reflection and spawned new patterns of lived faith among North American Anabaptists.

The essays collected in this special issue interpret, challenge, and expand upon these important conversations, sometimes pointing in new directions, but in every case aiming to enrich and renew the agenda of Anabaptist environmental theology and ethics.

As **Peter Dula's** survey of the literature indicates, North American Anabaptist thinkers already answer the questions raised by environmental problems in a wide variety of ways. To organize a diverse and complex field, Dula, who is a professor of religion and culture at Eastern Mennonite University, uses a typology developed by Laurel Kearns and Willis Jenkins, mapping Anabaptist environmental theologies according to three categories: eco-justice, stewardship, and ecological spirituality. Jenkins had argued that Anabaptist environmentalism represents an exemplary form of Christian stewardship, but Dula finds Anabaptists increasingly working within all three theological types, most notably in ecological spirituality. That conceptual diversity is only a problem, he suggests, if it distracts from the practical, *political* challenges of deliberating together about how to do justice and sustain love amid environmental crisis. For all their earthy pretensions, environmental ethicists—Anabaptists included—tend toward abstraction, toward

cosmological musings, rather than the practical questions of how to confront our common problems. For Dula, the future of Anabaptist environmental ethics looks most hopeful where it takes shape within embodied social movements, where the church endeavors to discern through concerted, creative environmental action what God is doing and what discipleship means in a fragile, fractured world.

Dula's review draws in part on my own essay, which identifies three main varieties of contemporary Anabaptist environmental ethics: agrarian virtue, bio-regionalist (or "watershed") discipleship, and eschatological eco-pacifism. In the essay I describe, criticize, and partially reconstruct each type in terms of how it addresses environmental racism and environmental justice. *Environmental racism* describes the ways ingrained systems of racial inequality conspire to distribute environmental hazards and costs disproportionately to communities of color, while securing comparatively safe and ecologically attractive environments for white communities. Broadly speaking, *environmental justice* is the term for movements (and the moral frameworks they developed) to combat environmental racism and similar forms of environmental injustice. Anabaptist environmental ethics center on efforts to bear witness to God's peace within creation, but environmental racism perpetuates ecologies of violence. Anabaptist scholars and practitioners should therefore take environmental racism as a central concern. The essay suggests how all three varieties of Anabaptist environmental ethics could deepen their core insights and sharpen their defining practices by learning from environmental justice movements.

Both Dula and I discuss how the Anabaptist *watershed discipleship* movement formed in dialogue with other forms of North American environmentalism, including environmental justice and bio-regionalist movements. **Laura Schmidt Roberts,** a professor of biblical and theological studies at Fresno Pacific University, provides a lucid overview of the theological ethics of watershed discipleship and deepens them by developing a sacramental and theocentric theology of land in conversation with two Mennonite scholars, Duane Friesen and Bradley Guhr. Schmidt Roberts suggests how engaging theological themes of creation and humanity in an Anabaptist key can strengthen practices of spiritual attention and moral commitment to the church's many local environments. The essay contributes to an emerging emphasis in Anabaptist thought on the importance of *place* for Christian faith and life.

Regina Shands Stoltzfus, a professor of peace studies at Goshen College, amplifies the moral and theological significance of place by pointing out how America's history of racial segregation shapes the

identities and ideologies of U.S. Christians. Her essay recounts a troubling history of the country's racialized ways of regulating how communities relate to the environment. Practices of slavery, colonial settlement, and segregation involved the violent displacement and coercive emplacement of black, indigenous, and other communities of color. Such race-based land practices shaped the lived geography of the nation, naturalizing racial hierarchy and acculturating Americans to racial inequalities and enduring divisions. Anabaptist approaches to creation care should pay close attention to these dynamics, Shands Stoltzfus argues, because they continue to impact how Christians see their environments, understand themselves, and engage their neighbors. Where theology attends to place, it must also attend to race, lest the church continue to conform itself unreflectively to the racist ideologies that have done so much to degrade our local environments.

Environmental issues have a tendency to shed light on deeply rooted problems that many people would rather ignore. Few issues exhibit this pattern more clearly than global climate change—a problem that elicits widespread and recalcitrant patterns of denial. **Doug Kaufman,** a pastor and director of pastoral ecology for the Center for Sustainable Climate Solutions and the Mennonite Creation Care Network, examines recent research on the social psychology of climate denial in order to develop a pastoral theology of climate change. A key finding is that the urge to deny not only the facts but also the moral significance and practical implications of climate change stems from socially reinforced psychological efforts to protect against potentially overwhelming feelings of fear, helplessness, complicity, and despair. So a pastoral response to climate denial, Kaufman suggests, needs an account of how God communes with creatures in their suffering, and calls for practices that transform feelings of futility and despair into shared practices of hope and change. Toward that end, Kaufman draws on the sixteenth-century Anabaptist reformer Hans Hut's "gospel of all creatures" and recommends collective practices of conversation and engagement, as well as communal rituals of grief and lament.

The issue concludes with a Research Note from **Sarah Nahar,** a Ph.D. student in religion and environmental science, who introduces new research into a chronically underexamined issue in North American moral and theological literature on the environment: sanitation. One reason the ethical dimensions of the disposal of human waste get little attention in either Anabaptist environmental thought or in mainstream environmentalism is that the endangered landscapes that arguably inspired both movements—the family farm and the wilderness—seem far

removed from the ecological and public health problems associated with inadequate sanitation. But sanitation issues span all our environments and have consequences at local, regional, and global scales. Most urgently, poor sanitation is a leading cause of child mortality worldwide; locally, our sewage disposal systems frequently fail, polluting waterways and toxifying our immediate environments. Nahar calls her approach to the ethics of sanitation "defecatory justice," an arresting term that captures how inequalities in safe sanitation intersect with other social and environmental issues, while challenging the taboos around "potty language" that help to keep sanitation problems out of public or theological discourses on justice. The developed world's resource-intensive reliance on freshwater for waste disposal is neither sustainable nor just, she argues; the search for solutions should look instead toward the innovations happening in politically and economically marginal communities, with special attention to approaches that return the nutrients in "humanure" back to the soil.

This special issue on Anabaptist environmental theologies and ethics was made possible by the diligence, patience, and skill of *MQR's* steadfast editor, John D. Roth, as well as the careful work of the journal's editorial team. If you value the journal's ongoing commitment to host thought-provoking conversations in Anabaptist thought, history, and life, be sure to renew your subscription to *MQR* in the coming months!

– Luke Beck Kreider (Ph.D. candidate in religious studies at the University of Virginia), guest editor