

IN THIS ISSUE

In one of his first publications on the Amish nearly twenty years ago ("The Mennonite Eclipse," *Festival Quarterly* [Summer 1992], 8-12), the historian Steven Nolt called attention to a remarkable demographic reality that had hitherto gone scarcely noticed. During the course of the twentieth century, the population of the Amish had doubled nearly every two decades, far exceeding the growth rate of the Mennonites and making the Amish one of the fastest-growing religious groups in the United States. In this issue of *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, **Joseph F. Donnermeyer** and **Elizabeth C. Cooksey**, sociologists at Ohio State University, provide a careful quantitative analysis of this dynamic transformation. Drawing heavily on Amish directories, reports in Amish newspapers and census data, they focus on the number and location of Amish settlements established between 1990 and 2009. Their conclusions confirm the trends that Nolt noted in 1992: during the past twenty years, the Amish population has doubled once again. During that same period the Amish established settlements in nearly 170 new counties; today, more than half of all Amish settlements are less than two decades old! Donnermeyer and Cooksey also note that the Amish tend to establish settlements in counties with declining population density and in locations where the median value of housing was below the state average. They conclude their essay with a description of the critical economic, social and religious elements that will determine whether or not the new community is likely to be successful.

Antonio González, a publisher and pastor of a Brethren in Christ congregation in Spain, follows with an essay on biblical hermeneutics and its relation to Anabaptist-Mennonite theological education. The Anabaptists of the sixteenth century, he argues, understood the Scriptures less as a source of information about God—or a topic for debate over theories of inspiration, inerrancy or linguistic analysis—than as a means for knowing Jesus. As a text that mediates a personal relationship, the Bible is rightly understood only in a communal context of disciples committed to following Jesus in daily life. In this setting, the primary task of the trained pastor is less one of translating divine messages than of encouraging the community in its love for Jesus and helping the congregation become more engaged as interpreters of Scripture and followers of Christ. This challenge is especially relevant for the global Anabaptist fellowship as information and theological training are becoming accessible in more decentralized ways.

The historiography of the Mennonite sojourn in South Russia during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—recounting a remarkably rich

drama of economic and cultural flourishing, internal divisions, complex relations with civil authorities, the upheaval of emigration, and the trauma of revolution and war—has been understandably fraught with controversy. One expression of the larger debate has focused on the appropriate conceptual description of the colony experience: to what degree were Mennonite colonies self-sufficient entities—a “state within a state”—until the painful encounter with the Bolshevik Revolution, and to what degree were the colonies always defined by an organic, fluid and dynamic relationship with the broader Russian context? In this issue, **James Urry**, who has devoted a lifetime of study to the Russian Mennonite story, defends the use of the term “commonwealth” as an appropriate description of the colony experience. Introduced into the scholarly literature by the sociologist E. K. Francis, the idea of a “Mennonite commonwealth” was subsequently picked up by the renowned historian David G. Rempel and later by Urry himself. Here Urry traces the intellectual history of the term and makes a case for its ongoing utility, not only for Mennonites in Russia prior to the revolution, but also for those emigrant groups who would go on to establish new colonies elsewhere in the world.

In the next essay, **Nathan Colborne** tracks the intellectual history of another much-debated theme in Anabaptist-Mennonite discourse: namely, the relevance of just war and pacifist arguments as they relate to policing. Colborne frames his essay as a response to recent proposals that Mennonites and Catholics might find common ground in their mutual affirmation of the ordering function of police and, in a related fashion, that the logic of justifiable force in police actions might be a framework for bringing greater restraint to the violence often associated with just war arguments. Drawing first on the theory of the French social critic Michel Foucault and then on biblical texts, Colborne argues that the political identity formed by the theory and practice of policing ultimately cannot be reconciled with the practices of forgiveness and reconciliation basic to the political identity of the Christian community.

We conclude this issue with a review essay by **Ann Hostetler**, a professor of English at Goshen College, featuring several recent books of Mennonite poetry. By locating these works within the broader flourishing of Mennonite literature, Hostetler reminds us of the impressive range of voices and disciplines that are keeping the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition alive and vibrant. We hope that you will add your voice to that living tradition.

– John D. Roth, editor