

IN THIS ISSUE

According to the Gospel of John, before his final meal with the disciples, Jesus instructed his followers to wash each others' feet in keeping with his own example. Although the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition has been somewhat ambivalent about formal rituals of worship, most groups in North America incorporated footwashing as a normative component of their celebration of the Lord's Supper. In this issue of *MQR*, **Robert Brenneman** explores attitudes within the (Old) Mennonite Church regarding footwashing, drawing heavily on recent survey data. Brenneman offers several explanations for the decline in the practice during the second half of the twentieth century, while posing the question as to why Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder—who otherwise devoted significant attention to ritual practices of the church—did not express any particular interest in this biblical ordinance. He concludes with a vigorous defense of footwashing as an embodied enactment of reconciliation, service and humility—all Christian virtues central to Anabaptist-Mennonite understandings of faith.

Keith Graber Miller, an ethicist teaching at Goshen College, follows with an exploration of Christian vocation, or calling, in the Anabaptist tradition. In contrast to medieval Catholic associations of vocation with monastic vows—or the tendency of mainline Protestant reformers to define vocation as those occupations (or “stations”) that contributed to social order—sixteenth-century Anabaptists understood vocation more expansively as the calling of all Christians to a life of daily discipleship, and they explicitly rejected some occupations as inappropriate for Christians. In later centuries, as Mennonites moved increasingly into the professions, understandings of vocation have become much more ambivalent. Graber Miller concludes his survey with a series of theses regarding an Anabaptist-Mennonite theology of vocation that could provide a framework for further conversation.

In the late 1570s, Hutterites in Moravia under the leadership of Peter Walpot also engaged the question of the Christian calling. Among the central theological themes addressed in the Hutterian *Great Article Book* of 1577, the fourth article—“On the Sword”—offered one of the most thoroughgoing arguments for biblical nonresistance to be found in all of Anabaptist writings. In language reminiscent of the Schleithem Confession, “On the Sword” describes the Christian life in stark and uncompromising language. In sharp contrast to the fallen world, dominated by a logic of coercion and violence, the Christian church is made visible in the world through its practices of vulnerability, defenselessness, compassion and patience. The text's anonymous editors

draw on dozens of biblical texts, from Genesis to Revelation, to make their case, responding along the way to numerous arguments against Christian pacifism, and vigorously challenging the notion that a Christian could conscientiously serve in the office of the magistracy. At a time when members of the peace church traditions are increasingly attracted to just war arguments against the threat of terrorism, this statement of faith makes for compelling reading. I am delighted to continue a long-standing *MQR* tradition of occasionally publishing primary sources, thereby making this text available in English for the first time.

It is fitting that we follow “On the Sword” with a contemporary essay on Christian pacifism. **Kenneth Obiewke**, a Nigerian Catholic priest currently studying in Belgium, offers a close analysis of John Howard Yoder’s use of such terms as “pacifism,” “nonresistance” and “nonviolent resistance.” Even though Yoder sometimes used language that sounded as if it supported passive withdrawal in the face of tyranny or oppression, Obiewke argues that Yoder consistently defended the principle of active “nonviolent resistance.” albeit within a clear Christological commitment and the context of the gathered church. The argument itself is not necessarily new; but Obiewke’s essay offers further evidence of ecumenical interest in the gospel of peace, and an engagement with Yoder’s theology that goes well beyond the cultural, theological and geographical borders of the North American peace church tradition.

During the past fifty years, the historiography of the Radical Reformation has generated numerous biographies of leading Anabaptist reformers. By contrast, studies of second tier leaders—or biographies of individuals who recanted or did not remain Anabaptist—are much more rare. Thus, we are pleased to conclude this issue with a biographical sketch of Gerhard Westerburg by **Russell S. Woodbridge**, professor of theology and church history at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Westerburg—a brother-in-law to Andreas Karlstadt—served as Karlstadt’s emissary to the Zurich radicals in 1524, was baptized at Münster in 1534 and soon thereafter founded an Anabaptist congregation in Cologne. But his understandings of baptism remained ambiguous throughout his life and he ended his career as a Reformed preacher and apologist. In contrast to some interpretations of Westerburg as a “crypto-Anabaptist,” Woodbridge concludes that his sojourn in Anabaptist circles was only a temporary phase in a peripatetic theological career.

– John D. Roth, editor

IN MEMORIAM
GOTTFRIED SEEBAB (1937-2008)

The passing of Gottfried Seebaß in the night from September 6 to 7, 2008, is a painful loss for Anabaptist scholarship. This recognition is all the more significant considering that Seebaß's personal and scholarly roots clearly lay in Lutheranism and in state academic institutions with no formal ties to the believer's church tradition. Yet few professors of church history and Reformation studies in German universities brought to the field of Anabaptist studies the level of sincere interest, personal commitment, academic rigor and fairness that Gottfried Seebaß embodied. He will be particularly remembered for his monumental 1972 study *Müntzers Erbe: Werke, Leben und Theologie des Hans Hut*, which together with two other works published that same year (James Stayer's *Anabaptists and the Sword* and Claus P. Clasen's *Anabaptism: A Social History*), ushered in a new era in Anabaptist scholarship. Seebaß's interpretation of Hans Hut as an apocalyptic mystic clearly willing to use violence—and thus a true "heir of Thomas Müntzer"—stood in stark contrast to the traditional view of Hut as a former revolutionary won over to nonresistant evangelical Anabaptism by Hans Denck.

Seebaß's vigorous excoriation, in this 1972 study, of what he believed to be a monolithic Mennonite historiographical school was rightly perceived as unduly harsh, but it issued from an unconditional commitment to historical truth and was carried out in good faith. Seebaß's personal impressions of modern Mennonite and Amish church life and piety, with which he became acquainted on a visit to the Goshen area in 1980, were unreservedly positive, as he recounted to me admiringly in many private conversations. And his unquestioned commitment to the Lutheran tradition never prevented him from candidly acknowledging the suffering that sixteenth-century reformers brought upon the dissenting voices whom they persecuted, a point he poignantly acknowledged in his 1970 essay "An sint persequendi haeretici?" His most important essays on Anabaptism were reprinted in 1997, conveniently gathered in the volume *Die Reformation und ihre Außenseiter*.

Gottfried Seebaß not only invested his capacious energy in research and teaching (former students of his are now professors of church history at the universities of Heidelberg, Jena and Mainz), but he was also what Germans call a *Wissenschaftsorganisator* in the full sense of the term: he had a gift for getting scholarly projects started and seeing them

through to the end. He played a central role in editing the internationally renowned *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, the final volume of which appeared in 2004. From 1988 to 2006 he headed the commission responsible for editing the Strasbourg reformer Martin Bucer's works and was influential in significantly improving the quality of this edition. His completion, together with Gerhard Müller, of the 7,117-page critical edition of the works of Nuremberg reformer Andreas Osiander in the span of just twenty-two years remains an inimitable feat, as anyone acquainted with the painstakingly slow progress of most text-critical editions can confirm. This is even more impressive when one considers Seebaß's simultaneous involvement in countless educational committees and scholarly boards. Parallel to his tenure as professor of church history at the University of Heidelberg from 1978 to 2002, he served as president of the union of Protestant theological faculties in Germany from 1988 to 1992, also playing a crucial role in reorganizing the theological faculties of the universities of Berlin and Leipzig after German reunification. From 1996 to 2000 he served as president of the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities. Readers of *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* and Anabaptist scholars are particularly indebted to him as president of the *Täuferaktenkommission* from 1999 to 2008, the joint committee of the Verein für Reformationsgeschichte and the Mennonite Historical Society responsible for publishing the edition of Anabaptist sources known as *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer*. It was through Seebaß's alert intervention that funds could be found for the speedy completion and printing in 2007 of the most recent volume in this series, Jörg Maler's *Kunstabuch* (reviewed in this issue of *MQR*). A forthcoming catalog of Hutterite manuscripts and prints extant in Europe, projected as volume 18 of the *Täuferakten*, is also the fruit of Seebaß's tireless efforts.

Those who had the privilege of working under Gottfried Seebaß will remember him for his unfailing cheerfulness, his exceedingly high expectations coupled with warm encouragement, and his contagious enthusiasm for Reformation history—all qualities that he continued to embody during the last two years of his life though faced with the verdict of a fatal illness.

– Stephen E. Buckwalter