

## IN THIS ISSUE

From its very beginnings in the religious turmoil of the early sixteenth century, the Anabaptist-Mennonite movement has been blessed with an unusual cast of colorful characters—visionaries, preachers and prophets—often at the very edges of the movement, who have blurred the boundaries, provoked the pious and unsettled established orthodoxies. Although Mennonite historians and theologians have often debated, sometimes fiercely, about the status of these provocateurs (Are they “in” or “out” of the Anabaptist family? Are their teachings a new call to faithfulness or simply heretical?), such individuals have almost always helped the church be more attentive to aspects of the Christian faith that had gone out of focus—either forgotten or suppressed—and have created opportunities for the Spirit to find expression in new and surprising ways.

This issue of *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* pays tribute to Stanley Hauerwas on the occasion of his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. For more than forty years, Hauerwas has been a friend and conversation partner of Mennonites—a visionary, preacher, prophet and provocateur of the first order. For the most part, modern Mennonites have been flattered by the attention Hauerwas has paid to their tradition. We are pleased by his obvious respect for John Howard Yoder and his positive references to Mennonite communal practices. His highly-visible profile (Hauerwas was once labeled by *Time* magazine as the “best theologian in America”) has brought greater attention to themes like pacifism and discipleship that have often made Mennonites feel apologetic and marginalized, especially in times of war. A generation of Mennonite graduate students has benefited from his tutelage and friendship; and Hauerwas has been a tireless promoter—in forewords, book blurbs and reviews—of Mennonite publications.

Yet Hauerwas is a complicated friend. His rough-hewn, frequently salty, language often offends Mennonite decorous sensibilities. His preference for declarative forms of speech and his evident delight in argumentative confrontation is at odds with a Mennonite tendency toward the subjunctive and our predilection for avoiding verbal sparring. His raucous humor seems in tension with the sober-minded earnestness we bring to Christian thought and practice. And Mennonites are often confused by his persistent infatuation with Catholic theology, ecclesiology and liturgical practices.

Nor has Hauerwas been reluctant to express his own deep concerns about Mennonites. Though clearly sympathetic with Anabaptist-Mennonite theology, Hauerwas has registered strong reservations about

the absence of a formal episcopacy or teaching office in the Anabaptist tradition; he is bewildered by the fact that Mennonites celebrate the Lord's Supper so infrequently; and, perhaps most significantly, he is troubled by the way in which the Mennonite commitment to "voluntary" baptism can easily be reduced to a modern, individualistic variation on the freedom of choice, devoid of any sacramental understanding.

Yet no tradition could ever hope for a better friend or a more loving critic. Along with his mentor and debating partner, John Howard Yoder, Hauerwas has been a powerful source of renewal within the Mennonite church. In addition to his cogent critique of modern liberalism—with its tendency to reduce Christian faith to ethics and to confuse Christian worship with universal reason—Hauerwas has consistently reminded Mennonites of how deeply the themes of pacifism, reconciliation, mutual aid and daily discipleship are anchored in the biblical story, and especially in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. For Mennonites caught up in the process of cultural assimilation, Hauerwas has offered a compelling argument for the formative power of tradition, community and worship practices. And he has consistently challenged Mennonites to relax their anxious preoccupation with identity by engaging more vigorously in conversations with the broader church, both ecumenical and universal.

This issue of *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* seeks to honor Stanley Hauerwas and the complicated gift that he has been to the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition. We begin by offering readers a comprehensive bibliography of his writings. Compiled by **Angus Paddison** and **Darren Sarisky**, the bibliography offers a window into the depth and breadth of Hauerwas's publications over the span of four decades. In addition to the sheer volume of his output—some three dozen books and over 400 articles—readers will be struck by the amazing range of Hauerwas's interests. Throughout his career, Hauerwas has engaged topics related to the body (disease, suffering, disabilities, death), sexuality (abortion, marriage, homosexuality, procreation), Christian formation (education, family, worship, liturgy, friendship), the Christian witness in the public square (pacifism, just war, democracy, capital punishment), biblical exegesis (preaching, hermeneutics, biblical authority), and ecumenical engagements (especially with Catholics and Jews). The remarkable number of collaborative publications appearing in the bibliography—along with the numerous forewords to books and essays contributed to *Festschriften*—attests to the wide range of Hauerwas's friendships. One is also struck by the rich variety of publication venues—from obscure journals to the most prestigious forums—and by the fact that so few of

his essays are published only once. Indeed, Hauerwas is one of few authors whose anthologies have themselves been anthologized.<sup>1</sup>

What does not appear in the bibliography are the many notes of encouragement, the dozens of book blurbs, the thousands of letters and the countless comments on students' papers and colleagues' manuscripts—all of which bear further testimony to his remarkable creativity and work ethic.

Several of Hauerwas's Mennonite colleagues follow the bibliography with essays reflecting on his theological contributions. **Chris Huebner**, an associate professor of theology and philosophy at Canadian Mennonite University, opens with an exploration of laughter in Hauerwas's personal life and his public theology. Hauerwas has been attracted to Mennonites in part because of their very oddness and eccentricity—they make him laugh! But sober-minded Mennonites have not always got the joke. For Hauerwas, the gift of laughter—with its accompanying surprise, release of control and delight in an unanticipated punchline—is a recognition that we are not as fully in control of ourselves or our world as we like to think. Laughter is a gesture of resistance to our inclination to put our hope in false gods, especially ourselves. Mennonites, Huebner suggests, could learn from Hauerwas to not take themselves so seriously. Theological laughter may be an antidote to the prideful tendencies of Mennonite theology.

**Peter Dula**, an assistant professor of religion and culture at Eastern Mennonite University, follows with a probing exploration of Hauerwas's ecclesiology. Although many Mennonites like to claim Hauerwas as one of their own, his insistence that he is a "high church" Mennonite carries within it a critique of Mennonite theology that has often gone overlooked. The Mennonite preoccupation with ethical rigor, voluntary baptism and an identity of difference, Hauerwas has suggested, can easily leave them vulnerable to the liberal tendency of reducing theology to "peace and justice" and turning worship into a form of self-idolatry. Dula cogently summarizes Hauerwas's critique and then, drawing on the theology of Karl Barth, counters with several questions of his own: How much of Hauerwas's concern, for example, is driven by his cultural critique of modernity rather than a theology of the church? Exactly how is God present in the church that Hauerwas is looking for? Is the church's survival, ultimately, dependent on human initiatives?

Unlike the other contributors, **Mark Thiessen Nation** was not a graduate student of Hauerwas. But he has been a longtime friend and

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1. Cf. Stanley Hauerwas, *The Hauerwas Reader*, ed. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001).

collaborator, and is one of the foremost Mennonite interpreters of both John Howard Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas to a broader public. In his essay, Nation joins one of Hauerwas's central concerns—that an active awareness of the living presence of God is necessary to make our lives intelligible—with a central emphasis in sixteenth-century Anabaptism on the “fear of the Lord.” Nation traces the theme of the “fear of the Lord” through the Proverbs, the double-love command of Jesus and the theology of Karl Barth, and he challenges the “incipient atheism” of many modern Christians for whom the notion of the “fear of the Lord” is increasingly archaic, offensive or simply irrelevant to their daily lives.

Much has been written about the interdependencies between Hauerwas and his close friend and colleague, John Howard Yoder. **Alex Sider**, an assistant professor of religion at Bluffton University, explores the complicated themes of alienation, friendship and love in the thought of these two theologians. Although Hauerwas appears to draw on Yoder in a way that reframes questions of individual happiness or personal subjectivity primarily within the context of the church, Sider also notes that friendship emerges as a central theme for Hauerwas, both in his theology and in his personal life. Sider's essay explores the nuances and tensions between Hauerwas's theology of friendship and his understanding of the mission of the church drawn from Yoder.

It is fitting that we conclude this special issue with an essay by **Stanley Hauerwas** himself. Through the years, Hauerwas has frequently made himself available as a speaker at Mennonite church assemblies and academic conferences. In this recent commencement address delivered at Eastern Mennonite Seminary, Hauerwas begins with a sharp critique of the contemporary impulse to define pastors primarily as administrators, social workers or therapists. Then, in characteristic fashion, he admonishes graduates to remember their first vocation, namely, to cultivate the practice of speaking the language of Christian faith into every setting—to keep learning how to “speak Christian.”

For nearly forty years, Stanley Hauerwas has been a complicated friend of the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition. He has entered deeply and empathetically into our struggles—both laughing at us and with us; critiquing us in private while honoring us in public. He has challenged Mennonites to recognize their theological blindspots, even as he has encouraged us to reaffirm our deepest theological commitments. Most of all, he has helped us understand anew what it means to “speak Christian.” For that, Mennonites, along with the fellowship of Christian believers around the world, are profoundly grateful.

– John D. Roth, editor