

IN THIS ISSUE

A century from now, when historians assess our times within the grand sweep of the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition, without question one of the most compelling themes will be the globalization of the church. According to figures from Mennonite World Conference, in 1978 there were approximately 600,000 Anabaptist-Mennonites in the world, with the great majority living in Europe and North America. Today, slightly more than three decades later, that figure has nearly tripled, reaching 1,700,000, with the church's center of gravity shifting decisively to the Southern Hemisphere.

Not surprisingly, those living in the midst of these seismic changes sometimes find it difficult to know how to interpret the transformation. Some have simply ignored the global church. Others, confident that the real center of theological and ecclesial identity remains firmly rooted in West, look on the rapid growth of the Anabaptist-Mennonite church in the Global South with skepticism, doubtful whether the beliefs, practices, and worship forms expressed in such divergent and alien cultures truly align with the normative convictions of "the Anabaptist Vision" or some other standard of Mennonite orthodoxy. Still others might be inclined to an uncritical embrace of every expression of indigenous theology and church life—if the legacy of Western missions was compromised by colonialism and cultural arrogance, then native forms of faith must, by definition, be superior.

Clearly we are still too close to the events themselves to interpret the story with confidence. But in this issue of *MQR* I offer an initial survey of attitudes and practices in the global Anabaptist-Mennonite fellowship regarding one particular marker of ecclesiological identity—a commitment to the gospel of peace in its many and varied expressions. After tracing significant developments during the past fifty years within the European and North American church regarding peacemaking and reconciliation, I then offer a broad description of the ways in which various groups and networks in the global church are expressing the peace witness as a significant part of their identity. In general, I argue, the Anabaptist churches of the Global South do identify as "peace churches," even as they—like the churches of Europe and North America—struggle to connect their theology with practices in the complex contexts of their specific cultures.

Andrew Suderman, who has served as a mission worker in South Africa since 2009 and has been active in the formation of the Anabaptist Network there, follows with a concrete illustration of how a Mennonite-infused peace witness has found expression in South Africa. During the

decades-long struggle against apartheid, a theology and lived witness of peacemaking nourished by Mennonite writers and service workers fed into an emerging alternative ecclesial imagination—a view of the church that was not bound to political power or structures of racial injustice. That ecclesiology, Suderman argues, served South African theologians well in their struggle against the oppressive power of apartheid and helped foster a vision of a post-apartheid South African church rooted in an active witness to the gospel of peace and reconciliation.

Paul Doerksen, associate professor of theology and Anabaptist studies at Canadian Mennonite University, further develops the theme of Anabaptist-Mennonite ecclesiology with an exploration of the relationship between theology and the discourse around human rights. Doerksen accepts the validity of recent theological critiques of the presuppositions behind much of the conversation surrounding human rights—the tendency, for example, to minimize theological content and ecclesiological concerns—but he resists the subsequent impulse to withdraw from the conversation. Instead, he argues, theological engagement with human rights discourse should be shaped by a robust ecclesiology, one that recognizes the church as a body that transcends political boundaries and can subvert the violence inherent in the law.

Finally, we conclude this issue of *MQR* with an essay by **Ervin Beck** on the tradition of “transgressive literature” within Mennonite writing. Beck, professor of English emeritus at Goshen College and a pioneering figure in the renaissance of Mennonite creative writing and literary criticism, focuses on the texts of seven Mennonite authors in the U.S. and Canada, each of whom generated controversy for their critical depiction of Mennonite communities or the broader Mennonite tradition. After describing in detail the context surrounding the production and reception of these texts, Beck concludes his analysis with a deep appreciation for transgressive literature, while also suggesting that the time may be ripe to acknowledge alternative motifs.

Each of the essays in this issue suggests ways in which the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition—once regarded as ethnically insular, theologically narrow, and ecclesologically sectarian—is being transformed through an engagement with broader contexts. Such engagements are ultimately essential if traditions are to be renewed and enlivened. We are pleased at *MQR* to offer a window into this ongoing reality, even as we continue our traditional focus on the history and theology of the Anabaptist movement in earlier times.

– John D. Roth, editor