

IN THIS ISSUE

Ongoing reports in the news about identity theft, data hacks, compromised emails, and other breaches of internet security remind us that expectations regarding individual privacy are often naïve. Yet most of us do not assume that these invasions of privacy will be orchestrated by our own government. During the tumultuous years of the 1960s, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, under the leadership of J. Edgar Hoover, oversaw a massive secret initiative to spy on American citizens, often on the thin pretext that public opposition to the war in Vietnam constituted a threat to national security. Known as COINTELPRO, this covert FBI operation infiltrated numerous campus organizations for nearly two decades, summarizing their findings in regular reports to Hoover.

In this issue of *MQR*, historians **Keith Sprunger** and **Mary Sprunger** summarize the surveillance activities of the FBI on the Mennonite campus of Bethel College between 1965 and 1975. Drawing heavily on access to files obtained through the Freedom of Information Act, they draw back the curtain on the FBI's efforts to assess the antiwar activities of Bethel College's Peace Club, along with the actions of several specific students and professors. The results of the study are fascinating and unsettling, both in terms of the extent of FBI infiltration into the life of a Mennonite campus, and in their conclusions. In the end, according to the Sprungers, the FBI concluded that the antiwar activities on Bethel's campus did not pose a threat to national security, in part because they were consistent with a long tradition of peace witness by the Mennonite church. Ironically, however, college administrators, various church leaders, and many Mennonite supporters of Bethel College were sharply critical of the student protests against the war. The essay offers a window into the complexity of the North American Mennonite peace witness in the twentieth century, as well as a troubling, perhaps timely, reminder that legal guarantees of free speech and privacy are never absolute, even in constitutional democracies.

As the last echoes of the Reformation celebrations of the 500th anniversary of Luther's 95 Theses begin to fade, we would do well to recall that Luther was not the only sixteenth-century reformer. In an elegant essay on the spirit and meaning of the Reformation, historian **Peter Matheson** contrasts the rhetorical style of Luther with one of his most ardent enemies, Thomas Müntzer. Both reformers faced the challenge of translating the dynamic, ineffable presence of God into the medium of human language; both reflected the apocalyptic spirit of the times; and both were gifted communicators. In his analysis Matheson seeks to recreate a sense of Luther's charged language—its passion, energy,

urgency, and color, along with its profound limitations. Though both reformers were gifted rhetoricians, in the end, Matheson claims, it is Müntzer's biblical hermeneutic that offers greater resources to the modern believer.

For Luther, along with most of the magisterial reformers, the lines connecting the Anabaptists with Thomas Müntzer and the Peasants' War of 1525, and then with the debacle in the north German city of Münster a decade later, were obvious. Yet in both instances, most Anabaptists—along with the Mennonite tradition that emerged out of the Anabaptist movement—strenuously sought to disassociate themselves from these apocalyptic movements. In traditional Mennonite historiography, for example, the true origins of Anabaptism in the Netherlands date to the conversion of Menno Simons in 1536 and his efforts to establish a nonresistant church that explicitly rejected the crazed, violence of the Münsterites. Yet as **Willem de Bakker** and **Gary Waite** demonstrate in a lengthy, dialogical essay, the story of the Dutch Anabaptist movement in the years between the collapse of Münster in 1535 and the final violent repression of Münster survivors who had aligned with David Joris at Delft in late 1538 is far from clear. De Bakker boldly reinterprets several crucial sources to argue, among other things, that David Joris and his followers did not abandon apocalyptic expectations or strategies of violence until their defeat in early 1539. He also suggests that Menno himself was more closely associated with these lingering apocalyptic sentiments than generally thought. Waite challenges de Bakker on a number of his key conclusions; but the exchange is a model of respectful disagreement that should elicit more attention—and, ultimately, greater understanding—of this crucial period in the Anabaptist story.

In that spirit, we conclude this issue of *MQR* with two research notes that are more suggestive than conclusive. **Rebecca Janzen**, assistant professor at the University of South Carolina, poses the question of how Low German Mennonites, especially children, who live in colonies scattered across at least eight countries and experience great mobility, have nevertheless maintained a strong sense of shared community. One key element, she argues, is the existence of a newspaper, *Die Mennonitische Post*, and especially a feature known as "The Children's Corner." Finally, **Carol Wert**, a graduate student in the Centre for Anabaptist Studies in Bristol, England, draws on the writings of Pilgrim Marpeck to weave together a composite picture of the ideal Anabaptist leader. The research of both Wert and Janzen is still in progress; but their work points to a new generation of promising scholarship in Anabaptist-Mennonite studies.

– John D. Roth, editor