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In April of 1525, only a few months after the first adult baptisms that had given birth to the Anabaptist movement, Zurich authorities arrested a young woman named Elsy Boumgartner on the charge of “rebaptism.” But when they offered to release her if she would promise never to return to the area, Boumgartner steadfastly refused. Instead, she quoted the first verse from Psalms 24:1: “The earth is the Lord’s,” saying that “God had made the earth for her as well as for the rulers.”

Boumgartner was not alone among the early Anabaptists in her defiance of political and religious conventions. By its very nature the Anabaptist movement challenged religious norms, violated long-established cultural customs, and offended political sensibilities. And from the beginning, women like Elsy Boumgartner participated fully in the Radical Reformation as missionaries, prophets, and martyrs.

Very quickly, however, traditional gender distinctions reasserted themselves. By the end of the century, the voices of Anabaptist women in the records had nearly been silenced. Nevertheless, the radical impulse always latent in Anabaptism has been a potent resource for challenging social and religious conventions within the tradition itself.

The essays in this issue of *MQR* all had their origin in a conference, “Crossing the Line: Women of Anabaptist Traditions Encounter Borders and Boundaries,” held at Eastern Mennonite University in June 2017. We open with an article by **Wendy Urban-Mead** that contrasts the complex life histories of two women from Zimbabwe—Sitshokupi Sibanda and Ngcathu Ncube—and the borders they navigated in the early twentieth century between the Christian faith, as mediated by the Brethren in Christ Church, and rites associated with the shrine of a regional deity named Mwali. The BICC-Mwali rivalry, as it unfolded in the context of Zimbabwe’s colonial past, were both gendered and complex—the boundaries these women crossed, each in her own way, were often blurred. **Benjamin Goossen** follows with a similarly complex narrative. Antje Brons, the most widely read Mennonite woman of the nineteenth century, was a north German Mennonite historian, philanthropist, and church leader whose life combined traditionalist expectations regarding gender roles with pioneering scholarship. Her groundbreaking history of Anabaptism in 1884, Goossen argues, played a crucial role in the flourishing of Mennonite historiography; yet her life and the narrative she told also reflected the nationalist assumptions and gender conventions of her day.

Although scholars have sometimes regarded genealogy as inferior to the discipline of history, archivist **Laureen Harder-Gissing** argues that

family history can open significant new lines of inquiry into the lives of Mennonite women. Drawing on the research of two noted Canadian Mennonite genealogists, Lorraine Roth and Lucy Braun, Harder-Gissing demonstrates how their work served to construct and reconstruct family identity. Along the way she also raises a provocative question about the limitations of the family tree as a useful representation of family history.

Emily Ralph Servant, a Mennonite pastor and conference leader, explores another dimension of the complexity of borders in her sharp critique of the impulse among Mennonite scholars to confuse their chosen identity as “persecuted victims” on the religious margin with those people or groups who experience actual oppression. In so doing, she argues, Mennonites have a tendency to “gentrify the margins.” A more authentic way of living at the margins would call on Mennonite theologians to open themselves up to transformation through their encounters with those who are truly disenfranchised, and to use their power to amplify those voices that often go unheard.

In a creative exercise of literary analysis, **Jeff Gundy**, professor of English at Bluffton University, brings into conversation the work of three women—philosopher Grace Janzen, poet and essayist Julia Kasdorf, and novelist Sofia Samatar. At first glance, these writers are profoundly different in style and genre; and much of their work might be regarded as being in tension with traditional expressions of Mennonite piety. Yet Gundy makes the case that the work of all three writers is actually in deep continuity with the Mennonite tradition, particularly in their challenge of patriarchy and the way they imagine new possibilities for human flourishing.

Finally, we conclude this issue of *MQR* with a Research Note by **Linda Huebert Hecht** and **Hanns-Paul Ties** that introduces readers to a hitherto-unknown sixteenth-century Anabaptist artist. Working primarily with civil and criminal court records, Huebert Hecht and Ties bring to light the story of Bartlme Dill Riemenschneider, a painter from Tyrol. These sources make it clear that Riemenschneider, along with at least three women from his various households, all women of status and wealth, were closely associated with the Anabaptist movement. They also suggest that hints of Riemenschneider’s Anabaptist convictions are evident in several of his paintings.

Clearly, a movement born in a context of “boundary crossing” has been continuously renewed by those willing to cross the boundaries within the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition itself. These stories—and others yet untold—are the lifeblood of a living tradition.

– John D. Roth, editor