

IN THIS ISSUE

In the fall of 1517 Martin Luther's challenge to the authority of the papacy and church tradition—along with his appeal to *Sola Scriptura*—inspired various reformers to read Scripture and to understand the liberating power of the Holy Spirit in new ways. But what started as a renewal movement within the Catholic Church soon led to a host of divisions, giving rise to Protestant, Anabaptist, and other traditions, including those groups known as the Believers' Church. In the 500 years since then, the church—including the Believers' Church movement—has further expanded globally in a great diversity of forms.

On September 15-17, 2017, nearly 200 people, representing a diversity of groups within the Believers' Church tradition, gathered on the campus of Goshen College to explore the gifts and tensions of the Reformation legacy, with a view toward its ecumenical and global dimensions. The conference—"Word, Spirit, and the Renewal of the Church"—was the 18th gathering of the Believers' Church conference series; and the presentations focused especially on the debates around biblical authority, the leading of the Spirit, and various renewal movements that have animated the Believers' Church tradition since its inception. The essays that follow in this issue of *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* represent only a small sampling of the dozens of insightful papers presented at the gathering.

Nancy Bedford, professor of applied theology at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, opens the issue with a poignant reflection on the various ways that the Protestant tradition in North America has been coopted by the idols of Mammon, Moloch, and especially the toxic impulses of white supremacy. In such a context, she argues, Jesus continues to invite his followers through the narrow gate of costly discipleship into the paradoxical wideness of God's mercy, justice, and grace.

Andrew Suderman, assistant professor of theology, peace, and mission at Eastern Mennonite University, follows with a reminder that the seductions of nationalism and racism are not unique to North American churches. Drawing on his recent experience as a church worker in South Africa, Suderman describes the way in which white Baptist and Pentecostal churches in South Africa willingly embraced the logic and theology of apartheid during the course of the twentieth century. Although there are only a few Mennonite churches in the region, the theological legacy of the Anabaptist tradition, he argues, has provided significant resources for groups who continue to resist these impulses.

Embedded deeply within the Believers' Church tradition is a tension between adherence to the literal word of Scripture and a principled

openness to the living word, or Spirit. Drawing on an early seventeenth-century debate in the Dutch Waterlander church over the “twofold” interpretation of Scripture, **Karl Koop**, professor of history and theology at Canadian Mennonite University, offers insights relevant to contemporary debates regarding theological hermeneutics and the nature of biblical authority.

Thomas Yoder Neufeld, retired professor of New Testament and Peace Studies at Conrad Grebel University College, extends these reflections on biblical hermeneutics with a creative argument regarding the “unity of the spirit.” Focusing especially on texts from Ephesians, Yoder Neufeld argues that the peace of Christ is inevitably transformative and therefore inevitably turbulent, even conflict-laden. In this tempestuous biblical context of former enemies seeking reconciliation, followers of Jesus are called to “suffer each other” with patience, humility, and hope-filled love.

The complexities of biblical hermeneutics have prompted divisions not only within the Christian church, but also between Christians and people of other faiths. **John Kampen**, an eminent scholar of the Dead Sea Scrolls, reflects on how the Gospel of Matthew—so central to the polity and ethics of Believers’ Church tradition—has also contributed directly to the development of antisemitism. Kampen explores the historical trajectory of anti-Semitic readings of Matthew and argues that the Gospel emerged in the context of a Jewish sectarian movement intent on defining itself over against the majority Jewish culture and power structure. Modern interpreters of Matthew should be attentive to this context as a caution against an overly literal acceptance of the anti-Semitic motifs, and also as an opportunity of self-reflection in light of our own sectarian impulses.

Finally, we are pleased to include an essay by renowned public theologian **Miroslav Volf**. In his keynote address, Volf turned his attention to the complex theological and ethical question of Christian humility. Drawing especially on the work of the young Luther—which he critiques and extends with references to Max Scheler—Volf argues that true Christian humility opens the believer to possibility of joy even as it conveys social implications.

Each of these essays—and many others that we were not able to include in this issue—suggests ways in which the Believers’ Church tradition has been shaped by the reforming, renewing impulse of the Reformation, and ways that the tradition has critiqued and enriched that legacy.

Readers should watch for renewal notices in the coming months; if you enjoy what you find in *MQR*, please extend your support!

– John D. Roth, editor