

## IN THIS ISSUE

All religious groups struggle, to one degree or another, with the gap that so often persists between theory and practice, ideal and reality, intentions and outcomes. That gap is particularly painful for groups in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition who place such a high value on consistency between word and deed. And it is even more painful when self-perceptions of virtue turn out, in retrospect, to have been misguided or even harmful.

In this issue of *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* we feature several stories where the actions, outcomes, or perceptions of Anabaptist-Mennonites seem to have been in clear tension with the identity these groups wished to claim. Thus, **Anthony Siegrist** opens the issue with a long essay detailing Mennonite involvement with several indigenous residential schools in Canada. Between 1960 and 1991 two Mennonite mission agencies ran three Indian residential schools in northwestern Ontario. Mennonite leaders in these initiatives regarded their efforts to be a service to indigenous communities, consistent with their understanding of Christian witness. Yet a recent official report by the Canadian government has cited each of these schools as contributing to a pattern of “cultural genocide.” In his detailed narrative of the history of these Mennonite institutions, Siegrist clarifies the reasons why the schools appeared in the report—clearly administrators and staff members were complicit in this painful chapter of Canadian history. At the same time, Siegrist also seeks to contextualize the actions of the schools’ founders and takes note of the apologies issued by various former staff members.

**Berit Jany**, faculty member in the German department at the University of Colorado, traces a dramatic shift in public attitudes toward Swiss Anabaptists through a close examination of two popular novels—separated by a century—within the context of Swiss political culture. Gottfried Keller’s 1877 novella, *Ursula*, depicted Swiss Anabaptists as a fanatical, even demon-possessed, separatist movement that impeded the formation of a unified Swiss state. In 1989, Katharina Zimmermann’s novel, *Die Furgge*, presented the Swiss Anabaptists in a deeply sympathetic light as earnest Christians who upheld Swiss virtues by following the ethical teachings of Christ. Though they came to dramatically different conclusions, both authors, Jany argues, used the Anabaptists a foil for addressing critical questions regarding Swiss national identity.

**James Urry**, a widely-recognized authority on the history of Mennonites in South Russia in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, adds his voice to a lively conversation currently underway regarding Mennonite complicity with the racism, violence, and genocide associated with National Socialism in the 1940s. Urry reminds readers that the context of South Russia was different from that of Mennonites in Imperial Germany. Russian Mennonites were *Volksdeutsche*—German-speaking minorities outside of Germany—yet also citizens of the newly-created Soviet Union. Many had experienced extreme hardships under Stalin’s communist rule, and some clearly welcomed the advance of the German army into Russia as “liberators.” Urry refuses to exonerate Mennonites from moral responsibility in the face of the atrocities that followed; but he also argues that the story needs to stay closely rooted in the sources and must be attentive to larger political contexts.

Even after Henry VIII became aware of the presence of Anabaptists in his realm, his attitude toward the movement was surprisingly tolerant. According to **Kirk MacGregor**, professor of philosophy and religion at McPherson College, when Henry did finally expel the Anabaptists from England in March of 1535, his primary concern was not their heretical teachings on baptism, nor a fear of sedition inspired by the unfolding debacle at Münster. Instead, MacGregor argues, Henry’s policy was driven by large-scale diplomatic interests. Fearing a Franco-Spanish invasion, Henry sought an alliance with the Lutheran-dominated Schmalkaldic League. A clear proclamation against the Anabaptists—even one that he was not prepared to enforce—was the price needed to secure their political support.

Finally, **Andrew Pankratz** concludes this issue of *MQR* with a Research Note that summarizes popular attitudes toward Kansas Mennonites during the patriotic fervor of World War I. Focusing largely on the editorial pages of two local newspapers, Pankratz traces a deep tension between public pressure on German immigrants to aggressively support the war effort and a somewhat more muted defense of the freedom of speech that civic leaders regarded as essential to American democracy. One hundred years later, those same tensions are still relevant.

If you have not already done so, please be sure to renew your subscription to *MQR* in the coming weeks; we could not exist without your support!

– John D. Roth, editor