

## IN THIS ISSUE

From the very beginning of the movement, Christians have understood the Gospel to be a message of universal truth, transcending the racial, cultural, political, economic, and linguistic divisions that separate humanity. But at the same time, Christians have also recognized that the Gospel is always, necessarily, embedded within a particular cultural context. This is the mystery of the Incarnation—the “Word made Flesh.”

Discerning exactly which aspects of a given culture authentically bear witness to the faith and which are in need of transformation is the ongoing task of every Christian community. But that challenge becomes even more pressing in cross-cultural or mission contexts, where received traditions of Christian doctrine and practice must be translated into new idioms, metaphors, and cultural worldviews.

The opening essays of this issue of *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* offer a poignant window into these timeless questions. In the mid-1960s, groups of plain Anabaptists—particularly Amish-Mennonites and Beachy Amish—began to explore the possibility of relocating their communities to Central and South America. Their motives were complex. On the one hand, they were eager to preserve their distinctive forms of Christian life that seemed increasingly threatened by the encroachments of American culture. At the same time, many of these groups were also undergoing a spiritual renewal, heavily influenced by American evangelicalism, that introduced a strong emphasis on evangelism. The result was the emergence of a distinctive model of mission that many plain Anabaptists at the time described as “evangelization by colonization.” Yet, as **Cory** and **Jennifer Anderson** describe in their account of plain Anabaptist migrations to Costa Rica, holding together the two goals of “evangelization” and “colonization” proved to be very difficult. Today, several hundred plain Anabaptists continue to live and worship in Costa Rica, where many of the distinctive aspects of their faith and practice have endured. But that same commitment to preserving a distinctive identity—which has also replicated ongoing church divisions unfolding in the U.S.—has made it very difficult to fully realize the goal of evangelization. The essay, told from the perspective of the North American migrants, invites further reflection on the relationship of faith to culture, and additional research on mission efforts among plain Anabaptists.

In the article that follows, **Hyung Jin (Pablo) Kim Sun**, deepens the conversation on “ethnoreligion” by offering a personal perspective. Born and raised in Asunción, Paraguay, the child of a Korean immigrant family, Kim Sun joined the Mennonite church while attending seminary in

California. His essay explores the difficulty he and others have experienced in seeking a sense of identity and belonging within so-called “ethnic” Mennonite communities—that is, traditional Mennonite communities in North America that are closely associated with German cultural traditions and folkways. At stake in this discussion are fundamental questions regarding the intersection of specific ethnic identities with faith, power, and ecclesial norms. Kim Sun makes a strong argument in favor of a church that is truly intercultural.

Questions of power, albeit in a very different context, are also at the heart of **Theo Brok’s** exploration of the life of a little-known sixteenth-century Dutch Anabaptist leader named Adam Pastor. Ordained by Menno Simons in 1542, Pastor became the focus of controversy in the following decade when he spoke out against Menno’s Melchiorite doctrine of the Incarnation. In the following years, Pastor also came under suspicion for allegedly heterodox views on the Trinity. Brok’s recent discovery of a hither-to unknown text by Pastor has opened the door to a fresh examination of Pastor’s life and work, and the consequences of his eventual excommunication by Menno Simons and Dirk Philips.

Finally, this issue concludes with a lengthy research note by **Andrew Ste. Marie** that revisits nineteenth-century Mennonite understandings of divorce and remarriage, particularly as they found expression in the pages of the *Herald of Truth*. In his essay, Ste. Marie challenges the conclusions reached by historian J. C. Wenger that suggested Mennonites in the late nineteenth century generally accepted divorced and remarried persons into church membership following a confession. Ste. Marie’s research identifies some instances where this may have indeed been the case; but he concludes that this was far from a consensus view. Indeed, Ste. Marie identifies at least four distinct positions on divorce, remarriage, and church membership that can be found among individual ministers and regional conferences in the late nineteenth century. The general shift toward a stricter position in the first half of the twentieth century was not, as Wenger argued, the result of a new view introduced by the theologian Daniel Kauffman, but rather the victory of one nineteenth-century view over competing positions.

Each of these essays captures some aspect of the enduring challenge of how faith convictions find expression in a visible community. If you value *MQR’s* ongoing commitment to host thought-provoking conversations on these and other themes, encourage your colleagues to subscribe to the journal!

– John D. Roth, editor