

## IN THIS ISSUE

### . . . AND SOME FINAL REFLECTIONS AS EDITOR OF *MQR*

Revision is the lifeblood of scholarship. What seemed like irrefutable arguments within the dominant interpretation at one moment in time will almost inevitably be challenged, qualified, nuanced, or otherwise revised, when another group of scholars address the same topic from the perspective of new sources, a fresh methodology, or simply a different narrative angle. This issue of *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* features a series of essays that engage established narratives—some only recently constructed—and offer an alternative perspective, thereby continuing a conversation that deepens our understanding, even as it complicates interpretations that seemed settled.

We open the issue with an article on Mennonite environmentalism by **Joseph Wiebe**, associate professor of religion and ecology at the University of Alberta. Wiebe takes as his point of departure a series of essays, published in the January 2020 issue of *MQR*, that mapped the emerging field of Anabaptist-Mennonite environmental ethics. He agrees with the general sentiment expressed in that issue that the field needs to be informed by greater political awareness and engagement. But he takes sharp issue with the way that current scholarship on Mennonite environmentalism has marginalized the story of Mennonite settler-colonialism. Displacement of native peoples, and the cultural genocide that ensued, Wiebe argues, is foundational to any discussion of Mennonite environmental ethics—indeed, it is constitutive to Mennonite identity, theology, and the politics of place. The tendency of current scholarship to treat Indigenous rights and the story of colonialism as merely one issue of social justice among many others, Wiebe insists, is a form of denial. He concludes the article with a series of Indigenous voices, which he claims should become the starting point for subsequent conversations about environmental justice.

**Aileen Friesen**, co-director of the Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg, adds yet another perspective to the lively conversation regarding Mennonite complicity in the racism, antisemitism, and violence associated with the rise of National Socialism in Germany. In her detailed analysis of Mennonite Central Committee's response to refugee resettlement immediately following the end of World War II, Friesen pushes back on arguments suggesting that MCC was a willing participant in schemes that enabled Nazi war criminals to escape postwar justice by appealing to their Mennonite—and sometimes Dutch—identity. Friesen does not dispute that Mennonite war criminals took

advantage of MCC's efforts to resettle refugees; nor does she deny that there were strains of antisemitism among some MCC administrators and volunteers. But recent descriptions of MCC's role in the story, she argues, are far too simplistic. Amid the chaos of postwar Europe, many MCC workers were motivated by a commitment to help all needy people, regardless of ideology; they often trusted, sometimes naively, the testimony of the refugees; when forced to improvise, they sometimes allowed emotions to drive their decisions; and they assumed that refugee women and children would need men to help re-establish their lives. Friesen's work does not absolve MCC from all the moral questions associated with refugee resettlement; but it does invite readers to a more careful consideration of the broader context in which they were working.

Elements of revisionism also inform the final three essays of this issue, albeit in a somewhat less dramatic form. **Geoffrey Dipple**, professor of history at the University of Alberta, revisits a long-standing scholarly debate about how best to categorize the diverse expressions of religious and social reform in the sixteenth century that are often conveniently summarized in the term "Anabaptist." Older frameworks have often posited a sharp distinction between Spiritualists—who tended to emphasize the Inner Word, minimize the visible church, and reject outward rituals of baptism and the Lord's Supper—and Anabaptists, who were Biblical literalists, preoccupied with water baptism, church discipline, and ethical behavior. Yet this distinction, Dipple argues, simply does not hold up in many instances. Indeed, he concludes the essay by suggesting that the term "Spiritualist Anabaptism" may be an oxymoron.

**Stephen Buckwalter**, researcher at the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences, follows with an insightful survey of how Anabaptists and church leaders in Strasbourg perceived each other—and themselves—as conflict over religious reform unfolded and group identities gradually hardened.

We conclude this issue of *MQR* with a Research Note by **Emmy Barth Maendel**, senior archivist at the Bruderhof Historical Archives, focused on recent archival discoveries related to the identity of Katharina Prast, wife of the eponymous Hutterite leader, Jakob Hutter. Maendel provides English translations of all the known sources related to Prast, and concludes with a transcription and translation of a lengthy list of martyrs that includes a reference to Prast's execution by drowning in 1538.

It is a special pleasure to call attention to these essays—evidence of the creative and dynamic nature of Anabaptist-Mennonite studies—in this, my final issue as editor of *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*. At the time I accepted the position in 1994, I could not have imagined just how many of my waking hours *MQR* would occupy for the next twenty-eight years.

In the intervening years, by my calculation, I have edited 112 issues of the journal—somewhere between 16,000 and 17,000 pages—which take up nearly five feet of shelf space. The work has sometimes been lonely, the deadlines often wearisome, and the task of writing rejection letters always painful. But what a gift it has been to serve in this role for such a long time!

Over the past three decades, the work of *MQR* has been sustained by an amazing network of friendships and collaborations that were essential to the production of every issue. Early on, Stuart Showalter served as a gifted managing editor. In 1999 Janet Shoemaker, administrative assistant in the MHL, prepared a detailed index of the journal (1927-2000). Howard Kauffman, John Nyce, Owen Hess, and Andrew Hertzler have all served as treasurers of Mennonite Historical Society, and, by extension, as treasurers of *MQR* as well. Carol Oyer, John Nyce, Owen Hess, and Beth Bontrager have carefully tended to the many details associated with subscription management. I have been blessed with a succession of committed book review editors: Marlin Jeschke, Tom Meyers, Steve Nolt, and now, Philipp Gollner. Members of the *MQR* Publication Committee, currently chaired by Jamie Pitts, and the *MQR* Board of Editors have been stalwart supporters of the journal. And my editorial efforts have been immeasurably improved by the work of two remarkable copy editors, Ervin Beck, and then Duane Stoltzfus, who is also now retiring from that role after twenty-two years of service. Both Beck and Stoltzfus brought exceedingly high standards of professionalism to the journal.

My tenure as editor over the past twenty-eight years has been deeply enriched by a growing network of new friends, spanning continents, languages, and disciplines. Editing a journal also brings with it the gift of continuing education. I have learned so much from the authors whose work has appeared in the pages of *MQR*; it has been a joy to pass along their insights and creativity to our many readers.

Through the years I took great pleasure in helping to shape numerous special issues that highlighted scholarship on themes of particular relevance to contemporary Anabaptist-Mennonite life: special issues on architecture, for example, or institutions, conflict, post-modernity, ecumenism, MCC, World War I, Pilgram Marpeck, and changing perspectives on family. In 1999 we published a special issue that featured prominent theologians and ethicists who were not Mennonites but had been shaped by Anabaptist thought. The somewhat triumphalist tone of that issue, however, prompted me to pull together a second collection of essays by people who had left the Anabaptist-Mennonite church (“why I am no longer a Mennonite”).

At least five special issues have featured essays generated by a series of Mennonite/s Writing conferences, giving new visibility to the emerging genre of Mennonite literary criticism. An article by Gerhard Rempel in October 2010 opened the door to a subsequent flurry of articles and books on Mennonite complicity with National Socialism. And, in January of 2015 a special issue on sexualized violence in the Mennonite church, including a ninety-page essay by Rachel Waltner Goossen on John Howard Yoder, marked a breakthrough in public engagement with this painful legacy and encouraged greater transparency regarding the moral failures of other leaders.

The work was also full of challenges. It was not easy to find my own editorial voice following in the shadow of such giants as Harold S. Bender (who edited the journal from 1927-1962) and John Oyer (editor from 1964-1993). My efforts to widen the scope of authors to include more women, more people of color, and more representatives from the global church were only partially successful. The journal has never been at the cutting edge in terms of layout or design. And, like all print journals, MQR faces the ongoing challenge of controlling costs, maintaining our subscriber base, and adjusting to the realities of digital media.

Yet for all of these challenges, I remain optimistic about the future of Anabaptist-Mennonite studies and the future of The [ital] *Mennonite Quarterly Review*. The journal continues to enjoy strong support from its three institutional owners—Mennonite Historical Society, Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, and Goshen College. C. Arnold Snyder, professor of history emeritus at Conrad Grebel University, has agreed to serve as interim editor, as the MQR Management Committee works to establish a long-term plan for the future of the journal.

Moreover, Anabaptist-Mennonite studies continues to flourish. A recent survey of scholarship, *Handbook of Anabaptism* (T&T Clark, 2021), includes thirty-five chapters on a wide range of themes. The energy and creativity evident in this collection, with contributions by numerous young scholars, bodes well for the future. And the transformation of the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition within the global church today is opening up new fields of study that I hope will merit the careful attention of future MQR editors.

Thank you for your ongoing support of the journal, both in the form of subscriptions and by entrusting your scholarship to us for review and publication. I am confident that another generation of scholars will ensure the continued vitality of MQR!

- John D. Roth