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Few topics have generated more debate among historians of the Radical Reformation than the quest to identify the origins and distinguishing characteristics of the Anabaptist movement in the sixteenth century. Clearly, no historical tradition enters the world fully formed. When Luther nailed his Ninety-Five Thesis to the church door at Wittenberg on October 31, 1517, he had no inkling that he was putting into motion events that would define an epoch in the history of Christianity that we now confidently label "the Reformation." Moreover, every movement is inextricably connected to the context out of which it emerged, even—or perhaps especially—if its leaders claim to reject all ties to what came before.

The same is true of Anabaptism. Most scholars of the Radical Reformation historiography would agree that the Anabaptist movement is incomprehensible apart from an understanding of late medieval Catholicism; similarly, its early leaders were all supporters of the evangelical reform movement closely associated with Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli. So at what point did something that we know today as "Anabaptism" definitively take form? And, to push the question one step further, how are we to understand the process of "identity formation" *within* the Anabaptist movement, as various sub-groups emerged, each with their distinctive character?

The answers depend, in part at least, on how one chooses to define "Anabaptism" or the various groups that formed within Anabaptism. Identity, after all, is always contested; always in process; always an argument. The act of naming a movement—whether by the protagonists themselves or by the historians who come after them—is an exercise of power. Names not only describe boundaries; they also create them.

This issue of *MQR* takes up these questions in a lengthy essay by **C. Arnold Snyder** on the process of identity formation within the Swiss Brethren—one branch of the Anabaptist movement in the sixteenth century with representatives in Switzerland, Moravia, and the territories of South Germany. Snyder, who has spent a lifetime immersed in the primary and secondary sources of Swiss Anabaptism, takes as his point of departure a short article on the "Swiss Brethren," written by Martin Rothkegel, that appeared in the online version of the *Mennonitische Lexikon*. In that essay, Rothkegel overturns a century of scholarship on the Swiss Brethren by arguing that the group came into being in the 1540s (not the 1520s) in the Palatinate (not in Switzerland), and that they derived their name from a certain Hans Schweitzer (rather than the geographic location of Switzerland).

Snyder takes Rothkegel's argument seriously, and he refutes it in a systematic way, first by identifying theological markers characteristic of the Swiss Brethren that the group consciously claimed around the middle of the sixteenth century, and then by tracing the origins of these same distinctive themes to Anabaptists in Switzerland several decades earlier. Returning to an older tradition in Anabaptist historiography, Snyder identifies the Schleitheim Confession of 1527 as a crucial crystallization point of Swiss Brethren theological convictions. He then painstakingly traces the process by which a distinctive Swiss Brethren identity coalesced within the larger context of other Anabaptist groups also forming at the same time, among them the Austerlitzer Brethren, the Gabrielites, the Philippites, and the Hutterites. Snyder's lengthy narrative provides the first draft of a true *history* of the Swiss Brethren through the middle decades of the sixteenth century, tracing their theological origins and geographical dispersal, and the influence of the Swiss Brethren on other communal Anabaptist groups.

Because the story of Swiss Brethren origins has been so contested in the past, we invited ten scholars to respond to Snyder's essay, including Martin Rothkegel. Unfortunately, only three were able to do so, due largely to the pressures of time. Nonetheless, I am very grateful to **Troy Osborne**, **David Yoder Neufeld**, and **Gerald Mast** for their constructive and critical engagements with Snyder's arguments. Rothkegel has promised a fuller response within the coming year.

We close the issue with an essay by **Emily Welty**, director of peace and justice studies at Pace University, on Mennonite Central Committee's commitment to peacebuilding. Welty first summarizes M.C.C.'s stated commitments to peace, within the larger context of the Mennonite tradition, and then explores how these convictions have found expression in specific programs supported by M.C.C. in East Africa. Based on extensive interviews and fieldwork in Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda, her essay argues that M.C.C.'s work in East Africa has consistently reflected distinctively Mennonite understandings of peacemaking.

From sixteenth-century Europe to contemporary Africa, the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition continues to find dynamic expression in a host of diverse settings. Help *MQR* sustain its exploration of this on-going tradition by renewing your subscription today. Thank you for your support!

– John D. Roth, editor