IN THIS ISSUE

The history of the North American Mennonite Church in the twentieth century is frequently seen through the lens of its dominant institutions. In virtually every area of church life—missions, education, relief and service, mutual aid—new structures emerged to give organizational form to theological ideals. By the end of the century, two institutions in particular had come to shape the church's identity. Mennonite Central Committee (M.C.C.), created in the 1920s to channel relief aid to famine-stricken Russia, served as the highly-visible relief and service arm of the denomination. Its counterpart, Mennonite Mutual Aid (MMA), began in the mid-1940s as a program offering loans to young people returning from Civilian Public Service assignments. By the end of the century, MMA had expanded to a full-service fraternal benefit society, offering church members a wide range of insurance and financial products. The two institutions had much in common: both emerged as a response to specific needs in the church; both were dynamic organizations that continued to adapt their programs to changing circumstances; both enjoyed deep support among church members; and both represented the Mennonite Church to a broader public. Nonetheless, in the early 1990s these two institutions unexpectedly found themselves on opposing sides of a national debate on health care reform that took leaders by surprise.

According to **Jonny Gerig Meyer**, whose essay on the conflict opens this issue of *MQR*, both agencies defended the basic principle of universal health care coverage. But as the debate unfolded, the Washington Office of M.C.C. framed its recommendations explicitly in terms of the "common good," with particular concern for the interests of the poor. MMA, by contrast, focused more narrowly on its mandate to serve the Anabaptist-Mennonite community. The details of the story—framed in the larger context of the Clinton presidency and the national debate over the proposed Health Security Act of 1992—offers a fascinating insight into competing institutional identities, both in service to the church. Like the national debate over health care reform, these tensions, have still not been fully resolved.

Colin Neufeldt, professor of history at Concordia University College of Alberta, focuses on another story of tensions within a Mennonite community triggered by an encounter with national politics—albeit one with much more sobering consequences. In the late 1920s, Joseph Stalin sought to consolidate his own power and forge national unity in the newly-created Soviet Union by eradicating all "enemies of the state." One such initiative targeted a particular class of wealthy, landowning

peasants—the so-called "kulaks." Drawing on extensive archival research, Neufeldt traces the impact of this "dekulakization" campaign on Mennonites in the Khortitsa colony between 1928 and 1930. With encyclopedic precision, Neufeldt describes the bewildering variety of local, regional and national political institutions created by the new communist government; the profusion of decrees—both petty and draconian—that pulled Mennonites into the whirlwind of Stalin's reforms; and the pervasive sense of fear and confusion evoked by these purges. The fact that Mennonites, already suspect for their religious commitments and their German identity, were clearly overrepresented among the kulaks made them easy targets as enemies of the state. But whereas traditional historiography has generally depicted Mennonites as passive victims of Stalin's purges, Neufeldt's research suggests that Mennonites were involved in every aspect of the story, not only as victims but also as active participants in the machinery of repression. His findings further complicate an already complicated story, and hint at the pathos of survival in violent and confusing times.

Timothy Reardon contributes to the lively contemporary discussion on the theology of Pilgram Marpeck with an analysis of Marpeck's 1532 Confession to the Strasbourg City Council. In his close reading of the confession, Reardon describes Marpeck's sacramental theology as a nuanced via media between Catholic theories of transubstantiation and Reformed memorialism. Rooted in the Incarnation, Marpeck's understanding of the sacraments extended beyond the rituals of baptism and the Lord's Supper to the embodied actions of the Christian believer, particularly the transformed life of discipleship. In Marpeck's view, the church as the Body of Christ is a kind of living sacrament—an ongoing expression of the Word made flesh.

We conclude this issue of *MQR* with an essay by **J. Denny Weaver**. In the past decade, Weaver has vigorously and persistently challenged any theology of the atonement that implicates God in the violence of the cross. In this essay, Weaver offers another iteration of his basic argument, focused now on the theme of forgiveness. Weaver critiques recent interpretations of Christian forgiveness by L. Gregory Jones and Miroslav Volf for their reliance—however indirectly—on divinely sanctioned violence, and suggests instead that the work of the psychologist Robert Enright may offer a more helpful model, even though Enright claims no explicit religious foundation for his work.

As with every issue, these essays offer ample material for discussion and debate. Let the conversations begin!

– John D. Roth, editor