IN THIS ISSUE

Forty years ago, as I was growing up at the edge of a large Amish settlement in north-central Ohio, I vividly recall my elementary school classmates speaking of their Amish neighbors with scornful derision. In the popular imagination of the time, the Amish were boorish peasants—unwashed rustics who were irrelevant to the modern world. Today, those attitudes have dramatically changed. Though skeptics remain, the Amish are now the focus of widespread public admiration and nostalgia, the embodiment of virtues that seem to be disappearing elsewhere in American culture.

Nowhere is the apotheosis of the Amish more evident than in the recent explosion of Amish romance novels. In 2002, two Amish-themed romance novels appeared; thus far in 2012, no fewer than eighty new books have been published, a figure that does not include self-published titles or those released by vanity presses. In 2011 and 2012 a new Amish romance novel appeared at a rate of more than one per week. In this issue of *MQR*, **Valerie Weaver-Zercher**, a writer and editor from Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, traces the backstory behind this astounding cultural phenomenon. Her analysis begins with a historical overview of the genre, dating to 1905, and demonstrates how three distinctive motifs—regional fiction set in rural contexts; the growing popularity of Harlequin romances; and the rise of evangelical piety—have all merged in the Amish romance novel to create a genre that is simultaneously pastoral, passionate, and pious.

During the decade of the 1970s, Spanish-speaking Mennonites began to engage the institutions of the (Old) Mennonite Church with new vigor and visibility. The groundwork for this Hispanic Mennonite renaissance had been prepared by Anglo Mennonite missionaries and service workers in Puerto Rico and south Texas in the years following World War II. But during the 1970s, Latino Mennonites came into their own, organizing the *Concilio Nacional de Iglesias Menonitas Hispanas* (National Council of Hispanic Mennonite Churches) and promoting a host of consultations, women's groups, and publication projects. **Felipe Hinojosa**, an assistant professor of history at Texas A&M University, traces the emergence of this phenomenon within the larger context of the civil rights movement and the growing engagement of Hispanic religious leaders in public life. Among Mennonites these impulses found expression in the Hispanic Ministries Program, established at Goshen College in 1979 to promote theological education among Latino church leaders. Hinojosa analyzes reasons behind the demise of the program in 2005, and describes the birth of a new era of educational opportunities

for Hispanic students with the establishment in 2006 of the Center for Intercultural Teaching and Learning at Goshen College.

The Mennonite tradition has always been ambivalent in its understanding of culture. On the one hand, separatist impulses anchored in the church/world dualism of the Schleitheim Confession have associated "culture" with the fallen world, as something to be avoided. At the same time, however, Mennonite congregations are inevitably embedded in a social, economic, and linguistic context and have always expressed their witness in a culturally-specific way—which is say that culture is inescapable. Drawing on the theological insights of Kathryn Tanner, **Luke Beck Kreider** outlines an alternative perspective on the church's relationship to culture—rather than seeking to regulate the principles of cultural separation, he argues, the church's witness is best expressed by engaging culture in critical, innovative, and transformative ways. Beck Kreider illustrates his argument by reflecting on two recent public controversies: a debate over the playing of the national anthem at a Mennonite college and ongoing conversations about Mennonite participation in presidential election campaigns.

Jonny Gerig Meyer, an adjunct professor of philosophy at Goshen College, introduces another illustration of this same question by asking how church-related institutions are—or should be—distinct from their secular counterparts. Specifically, he wonders whether the compensation policies at Mennonite institutions of higher education adequately reflect biblical principles. Do biblical understandings of justice suggest that employees should be compensated primarily on the basis of their financial needs (or the needs of their families)? Or should the wages instead be linked to the skills of each employee and responsibilities of each position? Should a church-related institution be attentive to the ratio between the highest and lowest earnings of its employees? If so, what should that ratio be? Gerig Meyer traces the history of the debate over compensation policies within Mennonite colleges, laments the powerful impulse to define wages by market forces or in comparison with secular institutions, and offers several alternative proposals.

The richness and complexity of the themes addressed in this issue—on topics as diverse as Amish fiction, ethnic identity, theologies of culture, and equitable wages—are evidence of a living tradition in which faithful witness emerges out of vigorous debate, attentiveness to the Spirit, and the embodied reality of lived practices.

Enjoy the issue; and encourage your friends to subscribe to *MQR* so that they can be part of the conversation as well.

– John D. Roth, editor