

Foreword

When searching for a cover photograph for this issue that depicted ‘diversity’ and ‘pluralism’, my colleague Jim Penner reminded me that I didn’t need to look much further than the neighbourhoods of my local community. So he gathered together the children that play daily in his own back yard and posed them for the front cover of *The Conrad Grebel Review*. They were thrilled! The group assembled on the climber is a microcosm for the multicultural diversity that exists in my city, and indeed, is increasingly evident in most urban areas of the world. The households of each child are also representative of family diversity, some being raised in single parent families, others living in extended family groups.

Mennonite scholars and others are grappling with issues of historic and theological identity as the ‘face’ of global Mennonitism is increasingly pluralistic and diverse. The international picture reflects the fact that the majority of Mennonites in the world today do not have ancestral links with sixteenth-century European origins, even while they may hold closely to the beliefs of Anabaptist radicals. Mennonite World Conference statistics suggest that it may not be long before there are more Mennonite church members in Africa than in North America. The Mennonite church that I attend has members whose backgrounds vary widely in terms of ethnicity and religious upbringing, a scenario that is increasingly familiar, but very unlike the solidly Russian Mennonite churches that both my parents grew up in. All of this demands new and creative theological and sociological paradigms of Mennonite identities.

This issue’s lead article by John Kampen, and the four responses to him, were originally part of a forum at the 1999 annual meetings of the American Academy of Religion and the Society for Biblical Literature. Drawing on comparisons with Jews and African-Americans, Kampen utilizes Joel Kotkin’s notion of a ‘global tribe’ that possesses a sense of shared mission, culture and peoplehood amongst its members. He suggests that stories of suffering and survival, whether rooted in mythologies of origin or part of an ongoing global liberation struggle, might provide the basis for a shared identity in the global Mennonite church movement. The four different responses to Kampen’s essay demonstrate how much an individual’s subjectivity and **personal location** shapes

his or her perspective on issues of identity. Similar issues are addressed by Fernando Enns but from a German Mennonite perspective. He raises the question whether the Mennonites, as a pluralistic minority church with polygenetic origins, might not be well prepared to be a positive presence within a pluralistic society like Germany is today.

A pluralism of origin and ethnic identity is complicated today by diversity in family forms and structures. As a historian, I know that laments over the crisis in the contemporary nuclear family mask ideas and realities of family life that have shifted and evolved greatly according to time and place. This is aptly shown in Rosemary Radford Ruether's engaging and sweeping survey of Christian notions of the family through the ages. We are delighted to include Ruether's recent public address at the University of Waterloo as a Reflection in the *CGR*. Sociologist Peter Blum takes a theoretical approach to similar issues, drawing on Peter L. Berger's idea of family as a social construction and observing the dialectic between 'official' definitions of family and families themselves.

Finally, in addition to a collection of book reviews, this issues contains a Reflection by Valerie Weaver-Zercher, whose essay reveals that identity is also about generation. According to the historical canon, Mennonite educator and church leader Harold S. Bender shaped Mennonite identity in a decisive manner for the latter half of the twentieth century. Yet, as Weaver-Zercher points out, many of her twentysomething generation don't know 'who' Bender was. She goes on to reflect on his pivotal ideas about 'righteousness', juxtaposed against more contemporary language of doing 'what's right'.

Marlene Epp, *Editor*

Cover photo: Photography by Jim Penner of children in his neighbourhood.