Editorial

Karl Koop

In 2025, Anabaptist communities around the world will have an opportunity to commemorate Anabaptism's 500 years of existence. There is much to ponder about commemorating, given the evolving nature of the tradition and its geographical reach. The Anabaptist movement began in Europe but eventually also found footing in the Americas and the Global South. Like many religious traditions, Anabaptism cannot easily be defined by clearly marked boundaries and characteristics. Over the centuries, the tradition has become more like a multi-coloured tapestry shaped by fluid and overlapping religious cultures. Commemorating will mean different things to different people, and these "moments of memory activation" are an occasion for us to consider what narratives are worth telling.[1]

In this issue, Laura Schmidt Roberts notes that a growing body of scholarship has called attention to "the ambiguous, mixed history of the Anabaptist tradition regarding matters of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, power, domination, and abuse." Evidently, Mennonites cannot solely call to mind stories of heroism. If a religious tradition is to have a future, the act of commemorating needs to critically engage with the past.

A recently published pamphlet, *Gewagt!* (Daring!)–produced by German-speaking Mennonites and Baptists in Europe–notes that "for 500 years the Anabaptist movement has been a story of highs and lows, of new awakenings, of decline and renewal of debates, discussions and controversies, of courageous faith and feeble faith." The pamphlet goes on to suggest that such a story has the capacity to inspire ongoing reflection of one's own convictions and to be genuinely curious about the faith of others.[2] Observing the past, then, is not simply about the past but is also always about questions of the present day and the kinds of relationships we have with others.

1 Katherine Hill, "Memories from the Margins? Anniversaries, Anabaptists, and Rethinking Reformations," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 93, no. 4 (October 2019): 531.

2 Leonard Gross, trans., "Daring! The Anabaptist Movement, 1525–2025," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 93, no. 4 (Oct. 2019): 550.

This issue begins with an essay about whether a celebration in our time makes sense at all. Arnold Snyder answers with a qualified yes. Remembering rightly "can never be purely hagiographical," he notes. Rather, it "must include the bad as well as the saintly; otherwise, the story is mere propaganda." Next, Sarah Kathleen Johnson takes aim at the notion of tradition particularly when it is reduced to ethnicity or a list of theological distinctives. She suggests that we should think about the tradition as a "chain of memory," a dynamic that allows for making changes, building on those parts where we want to grow. In a similar vein, Laura Schmidt Roberts suggests that a "tradition lives only as it is refigured and reembodied in the present via the open, intentional, self-critical engagement of situated interpreters." She believes that traditions must be interrogated, accompanied by questions "about how elements of power, interest, and ideology have shaped and misshaped the understanding and practice of Anabaptism as a Christian tradition."

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The next essays address Anabaptism's martyr tradition. Jennifer Otto includes a warning that valorizing martyrs can contribute "to cultures of abuse that silence victims and protect people in power." She addresses the thorny question of who can be classified as a genuine martyr and adds that martyrdom is not something that Anabaptists invented but belongs to the larger history of the Christian church. Similarly, Susanne Guenther Loewen shrinks from seeing the martyrs solely "as unwavering heroes of the faith." She proposes reading the martyr tradition "through the lens of trauma theology," recognizing that the stories can illustrate perseverance and strength but also tragedy and violence. She advocates for an approach that includes "double tellings" and multiple narratives. Finally, Chris Huebner examines the strange incident of a Dutch Roman Catholic priest wanting to create a monument in honour of the radical Anabaptists who, in 1535, were put to death for attempting to take over the Bloemkamp abbey near Bolsward. Huebner provocatively suggests that the priest has given Mennonites a gift of "reconstituting our own memories."

The Mennonite story is complicated, and there is a need for reckoning and coming to terms with the mistakes of the past. From different vantage points, three writers address the problem of past wrongs. Hans Werner provides a thoughtful reflection regarding the way we might come

to terms with the fact that Mennonites participated "in the crimes of Germany against Jews during the Second World War." Sarah Augustine urges Mennonites to decolonize their theology, stand with the marginalized, relinquish control, and find ways of indigenizing their "assumptions, ideas, values, systems, and practices that reflect a colonizer's dominating influence." Drew Hart adds to this discussion by insisting that reparations must be included in the reconciling process. Without reparations, contemporary Anabaptists cannot genuinely claim to be a peace church.

The final contributions turn to Anabaptism's global reality. Doug Klassen recounts his experiences with churches of the Global South and argues that Mennonites of North America have much to learn from these brothers and sisters who, he believes, embody the future of Anabaptism. From an Ethiopian perspective, Henok Mekonin provides an overview of the Meserete Kristos Church, noting the degree to which this burgeoning Christian community is rooted in Anabaptist values and simultaneously reflects a hybrid character that is highly tuned to ecumenical relationships. Finally, Gordon Zerbe gives attention to the apostle Paul, who he sees as both embracing and contesting his own tradition. Zerbe concludes that commemorating the Anabaptist tradition has its place, but like Paul, Anabaptists need to think seriously about reframing their tradition. More origin stories, for example, must be integrated "into the narrative of what is now *global* Anabaptism at 500."

In considering Anabaptism's quincentenary, this issue invites further reflection on what it means to be Anabaptist today and suggests potentially fruitful pathways forward. While the publication marks Anabaptism's 500 years, it also points to this journal's twenty-fifth anniversary. Those of us at AMBS, CMU, and the journal's editorial council—who are responsible for this semi-annual publication—trust that *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology* will continue to be a vital resource for Christians in the Anabaptist tradition and beyond.

About the author

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