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Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology

Spirituality

Editorial

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With delight we introduce this inaugural issue of *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology*. Coming to fruition is an idea that has been ripening for years on both sides of the border. A shared dream has now taken shape as a cooperative publishing venture. In prosaic terms, the vision for *Vision* is to engender theological reflection on the identity, mission, and practices of the church from an Anabaptist-Mennonite perspective. The journal will take a clear look at the knotty theological and ethical issues pastors and other church leaders face in the hurly-burly of congregational life. To that end, *Vision* seeks a niche somewhere between academic journals and church magazines.

We hope *Vision* will become a vital component of churchly dialogue. We hope it will be present wherever people are thinking hard about the church in the world. We hope it will be a part of whatever people are saying about the life and mission of the church. We anticipate that ideas will flow out of and into its pages to and from those who lead the church.

The theme of this first issue is spirituality. When the editorial council met, this topic emerged as one that unites and divides, is at home in the church and also crosses the boundaries of church and society in ways that are sometimes healing and sometimes disconcerting. How to assess current spirituality movements, how to affirm Christian spirituality, how to nurture a faltering spirituality are all questions that have an impact on our congregations. We intend the articles in this issue not to answer all these questions but to stimulate thinking and invite responses.

We invite you to become a subscriber. The theme of the second issue, to be published in the spring of 2001, is the Eucharist. Is it the Eucharist or communion? What does the observance mean? How should we celebrate it? Do we include children? If so, how? The third issue, in the fall of 2001, will address the topic of transformation—no, not the denominational

merger, but personal transformation. How do people change? How do we become more like Christ? What is the educational mission of the church?

We want the journal to be interactive. We encourage responses—to the authors of the articles, to the editors, to the editorial council. We welcome suggestions for future issues and writers as well. While this publication is a joint project of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, through the Institute of Mennonite Studies, and Canadian Mennonite Bible College (now partner in Canadian Mennonite University), our intent is to involve a broad spectrum of people and ideas. Whatever your interest or role in the church we invite your participation in the discussion of the work and thought of the kingdom of God.

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Credit must go to administrators Gerald Gerbrandt and Harry Huebner of CMBC, and Willard Swartley and Nelson Kraybill of AMBS, for their roles in envisioning, shepherding, and supporting the emergence of the journal. We also express gratitude to the authors who contributed to this issue, who have gone out of their way to complete thought-provoking articles on time. We are also grateful to designer Gwen Miller for giving *Vision* its look. Finally, our thanks to staff—especially Barbara Nelson Gingerich and Mary Klassen of AMBS—who worked energetically to bring this inaugural issue to completion.

Seeking the headwaters of Mennonite spirituality

Nelson Kraybill, President
Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary

Early this year my wife, Ellen, and I made a two-week journey in search of our spiritual headwaters. No, we did not go to Puerto Rico, Pennsylvania, or Switzerland (though part of our spiritual heritage springs from those places). Our trip was to Italy and Tunisia, and we were looking for a spiritual fountainhead in the life and witness of the early church. We were not disappointed.

Like a giant labyrinth, hundreds of miles of largely Christian catacombs spread out under the city of Rome. There we found abundant visual evidence for what we had already learned from early Christian literature: the men and women who first lived and spoke the gospel across the ancient Mediterranean world were people of fervent prayer and utter reliance on God. In scores of examples from third- and fourth-century catacomb art, we saw depictions of people praying with both arms raised in a posture of blessing and supplication. These were people steeped in the Scriptures, and their favorite passages were stories of divine deliverance: Jonah and the great fish, the three lads in the fiery furnace, Lazarus being raised from the dead.

Something quickened in my Anabaptist heart as ancient symbols and liturgies seeped into my soul. I hunger for spirituality. But not just any spirituality.

In Tunisia, we saw fourth- and fifth-century baptisteries, Jacuzzi-like structures with steps leading down one side and up the other. People who passed through the waters of baptism in that era had gone through extensive instruction, including exorcism from the powers of sin and death that pervaded pagan society. Candidates received baptism in a small room, and entered the water with no clothes at all, symbolizing their commitment to leave entirely the old life of sin and enter a new relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Try introducing that method of baptism in your home church!

The symbolism and liturgy of the early church stirred our imaginations. At Christian tombs and early church museums, we found dozens of Christian images, including the anchor, dove, fish, vine, lighthouse, lamb, and shepherd. In early Christian writings we learned about the use of liturgy and symbol in worship, such as offering newly-baptized members milk and honey as a foretaste of the reign of God, and reciting a special prayer as the evening lamp was lit.

Before we simply reinvent or borrow spirituality, we would do well to mine our own tradition.

Something quickened in my Anabaptist heart as ancient symbols and liturgies seeped into my soul. Along with countless others in the Western world, I hunger for spirituality. But not just any spirituality. As a Mennonite Christian, my identity and frame of reference are centered in Jesus Christ and the Scriptures that witness to him. Early Christians understood that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus threw open spiritual doors for mortals to know God in an unprecedented way.

Mennonites have embraced this incarnational understanding of God. Like the early Anabaptists, we have immersed ourselves in the Scriptures. Sometimes we have parted ways with our Anabaptist forebears, though, by failing to appreciate the insights of the early church (and later eras of church renewal). For spiritual disciplines and liturgical inspiration, we either try to go straight from the New Testament to our own application, or we borrow from popular Western Christian culture. Before we simply reinvent or borrow spirituality, we would do well to mine our own tradition.

Sixteenth-century Anabaptism was spiritually diverse. Nevertheless, at least three elements were prominent in the strains that proved to have staying power. These parts of the movement (1) were Jesus-centered and therefore rooted in the Scriptures; (2) vigorously connected inner spiritual disciplines with holy living, justice, truth-telling, and nonviolence; and (3) were committed to communal life and discernment with the people of God.

For guidance in these three areas, sixteenth-century Anabaptists drew from spiritual resources that few twenty-first-century Mennonites know much about. Many early Anabaptists

drew inspiration from the early church, especially from the era before church and state became so intertwined. Although early church writings could never have the authority of the Scriptures, Anabaptists valued the insights on ethics, worship, baptism, and discipleship they found there. So should we.

Although they reacted against Catholic spiritualities that sometimes had turned mechanical or exploitative, early Anabaptists were deeply influenced by medieval monastic movements and other radical renewal efforts (e.g., the Waldensians). In the words of Mennonite historian Arnold Snyder, the "deepest, strongest, and richest taproot of Anabaptism found its nourishment in the subsoil of ascetic, Christian spirituality, even though it was fertilized by Luther's Bible revolution."[1] Anabaptist spirituality relied on the direct movement of the Holy Spirit, informed by the Bible and the example of Jesus. "The negative side of this radical spiritualization of the Christian life," Snyder says, "was that a millennium of liturgy, ceremony, symbolic language, prayer, and ritual [was] thrown away as 'human inventions,' not truly biblical, and not necessary for a truly spiritual life."

By reclaiming classic spiritual disciplines and modalities—including spiritual direction, meditation, liturgy, symbol, pilgrimage, and even exorcism—twenty-first-century Mennonites are recovering some of what was lost. We are celebrating seasons of the church year (I didn't even know what Lent was when I was a child!). From the catacombs to the modern lectionary, we have much to learn from other centuries and other streams of the Christian church.

Let us learn spiritual disciplines from Mennonite sisters and brothers in the two-thirds world—some of whom live in circumstances of suffering that rival the deep waters through which the Anabaptists passed.

Let us be discriminating, though, and retain the best of Anabaptist spirituality: Christ-centered discipleship; communal worship and biblical interpretation; and set-apart lives of mission, service, and peacemaking. Let us learn spiritual disciplines from Mennonite sisters and brothers in the two-thirds world—some of whom live in circumstances of suffering that rival the deep waters through which sixteenth-century Anabaptists passed. We not only have

much to drink in from other Christian traditions, our own Anabaptist tributary has something precious to contribute to spiritual renewal in the wider river of a global Christian church.

Notes

[1] C. Arnold Snyder, "Spiritual Empowerment toward Discipleship," *Mennonite Life* 55, no. 3 (Sept. 2000), on line at http://www.bethelks.edu/mennonitelife/2000sept/snyder%5Fmanifesto.html.

A discriminating spirituality

Gerald Gerbrandt, President
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On the pages of *Time* magazine and *Christianity Today*, among movie stars and pastors, in academic courses and self-help seminars, spirituality is a hot topic. Interest in spiritual matters appears to unite strangely disparate groups. What is the appropriate response of the church to this reality?

The church's first response should be to recognize good news in our contemporary fascination with the spiritual. After all, the church is about spiritual business. For most of the twentieth century, society was dominated by materialistic assumptions that ruled out of order any consideration of the divine, or of anything beyond what could be empirically established. Now, perhaps unexpectedly, our culture exhibits a new openness to talk of a God beyond this world. The intense longing for the spiritual reflects the sense that something is sadly missing in our culture. More and more people are recognizing that there is—or should be—more to life than the material, than today. The truth of Augustine's prayer, "Our hearts are restless until they rest in you," is supported by the experience of those who have tried to live without God. The church should ask how it can most effectively turn this longing into a response to the God who created us, and who wishes to be in relationship with us. Here is an opportunity to present the Christian message. This is good news for the church.

On the other hand, the popularity of spirituality also creates challenges for the Christian church. First of all, the church needs to communicate clearly. It is difficult to think carefully about a topic that people think they understand. Matters become even more complex when the subject is one the church has come to understand in a Christian manner, but which has developed a new set of connotations in popular discourse.

Spirituality certainly fits into this category. Although the terms "spiritual" and "spirituality" are widely used today, there seems to

be little shared understanding of their meaning. Do these words refer to an indomitable human spirit? To some amorphous spiritual power beyond us? Or to the Spirit of the God of Jesus Christ? These meanings are widely divergent. If "spirituality" is used in one of the first two senses, the reference may have little in common with the Christian understanding of the term.

Sometimes people use the term "spirituality" simply to give a statement a certain atmosphere. How is an encounter with God different from a *spiritual* encounter with God?

Sometimes, especially within the church, people use the term "spirituality" simply to give a statement a certain feeling or atmosphere. When I hear the word I frequently ask how the meaning of the sentence would be changed if it were deleted. For example, is an encounter with God different from a *spiritual* encounter with God? The first challenge for the church is to develop a way of using terms related to spirituality that communicates precisely. Understanding and growth become possible only when communication is clear and not clouded with meaningless or ambiguous terms.

A second challenge the church faces is to know how to distinguish between popular spirituality and Christian spirituality, the kind of spirituality it wishes to foster. The church is about spiritual business, but not everything called spiritual in our time is consistent with the church's business. The popularity of spirituality today has made it a profitable enterprise for the unscrupulous. And even the sincere and devout can promote causes and practices that are not constructive or life-giving for the people of God. The church needs to discriminate.

In the process of discrimination the church's theological affirmations and traditions are a valuable resource, and must be used. Here are some questions we may ask in this process.

1. Is the spirituality under consideration human-centred, or God-centred? For the Christian, true spirituality brings a person closer to the spirit of God. Unfortunately, much contemporary spirituality seems to be more focussed on the human spirit than on God's Spirit. To speak about the human spirit is not wrong, but it is not necessarily Christian. Biblical theology teaches

that God invites us to be reconciled with God and the neighbour, not with ourselves. After all, our human and imperfect nature is such that reconciliation with our deeper self still leaves us unsatisfied.

2. Does the spirituality sufficiently recognize the Christian theology of grace? It is possible for an emphasis on spiritual disciplines to become a works righteousness. And yet the biblical affirmation is clear: we are saved by grace. Salvation is a gift of God which cannot be earned through works, be they acts of mercy or spiritual disciplines.
3. Is the spirituality individualistic or communal in its focus? An important theme in Anabaptist theology is the emphasis on the communal nature of the Christian life. One is not a Christian all by oneself, but in fellowship with brothers and sisters. True spirituality should enhance the life of the church and not undermine it.
4. Is the spirituality holistic? Much popular spirituality assumes a dualism of body and spirit, as well as of intellect and emotion. Spirituality is then understood as bound up with the human spirit, or the emotion, and in tension with ethics or intellectual endeavor. True spirituality is holistic, and shapes the total being.
5. Does the spirituality move the person beyond himself or herself into the world? The Christian message is clear: we are called to witness to those around us in word and deed. True spirituality will always move the person or the group beyond self-preoccupation into service of the neighbour and society.

The contemporary interest in the spiritual is good news for the church, but it also challenges the church to think carefully about spirituality, and to use its theological heritage as a valuable resource in the process.

A spirituality shaped by the Psalter

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> *Thus says the LORD: Act with justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place. For if you will indeed obey this word, then through the gates of this house shall enter kings who sit on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they, and their servants, and their people. But if you will not heed these words, I swear by myself, says the LORD, that this house shall become a desolation. (Jer. 22:3–5; all Scriptures are quoted from the NRSV)*

A brave prophet's brave words. But was this the first time Israel had heard this message? By no means! Jeremiah preached what he learned at church, from the Psalter. In the opening words of Psalm 72, we find this plea:

> *Give the king your justice, O God,*
> *and your righteousness to a king's son.*
> *May he judge your people with righteousness,*
> *and your poor with justice.*
> *May the mountains yield prosperity for the people,*
> *and the hills, in righteousness.*
> *May he defend the cause of the poor of the people,*
> *deliverance to the needy,*
> *and crush the oppressor. (Ps. 37:1–4)*

The language of the psalmist's petition is strikingly similar to that of Jeremiah. It is a short, though courageous, step from this petition to Jeremiah's demand. He had the chutzpah to expect what the psalmist pleaded for!

How could the Psalter foster such courage? To understand the power of a spirituality nourished by the Psalms we need to examine its characteristics. We expect to find in the Bible God's words to humanity. But in the Psalms, a book treasured through the millennia, we find words people addressed to God. In this part of the Bible we find human words that matter. What characterizes the spirituality expressed in the words the psalmists address to God? How do these words matter?

Psalms of lament

The words the Psalms address to God are bold words. The psalmist's voice is not shy or pious, by our standards. In the laments, the largest group of psalms in the Psalter, we hear the voice of despair, expressed not meekly but assertively.

> *How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?*
> *How long will you hide your face from me?*
> *How long must I bear pain in my soul,*
> *and have sorrow in my heart all day long?*
> *How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?*
> *Consider and answer me, O LORD my God!*
> *Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,*
> *and my enemy will say, "I have prevailed";*
> *my foes will rejoice because I am shaken. (Ps. 13:1–4)*

This familiar psalm begins with a heartrending plea to a God who is absent. In God's absence the enemy is getting the better of the petitioner. Indeed, the psalmist fears for his life. His plight is not his own fault, but God's. It is God's absence that has led to his decline and possible demise. Here is no pious confession of sin or of wrongdoing but a plea to God to get on with it. Strong words.

Just as God is the problem, so is God the solution. The psalmist does not ask God to give him strength to bear up in difficult times. He does not pray for the courage and power to prevail over his enemy. No, the psalmist leaves the solution to God. This profound trust in God is a dominant characteristic of these psalms. Virtually all of the laments end on a note of confidence and triumph. The conclusion of Psalm 13 is typical:

But I trusted in your steadfast love;
my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.
I will sing to the LORD,
because he has dealt bountifully with me. (Ps. 13:5–6)

First of all, then, if the Psalms shape our spirituality *we will speak boldly to God, but rely completely on God.* A faith nurtured by the Psalter will display trust in God alone, even when we have no apparent reason to trust.

Another significant element in the laments is their frequent mention of enemies. Enemies abound in these psalms, and the psalmist does not hesitate to request their defeat. In Psalm 3, the introductory lament to the first book of the Psalter, we read:

O LORD, *how many are my foes!*
Many are rising against me;
many are saying to me,
"There is no help for you in God." Selah (Ps. 3:1–2)
Rise up, O LORD!
Deliver me, O my God!
For you strike all my enemies on the cheek;
you break the teeth of the wicked. (Ps. 3:7)

These sentiments may shock us. We do not normally identify our troubles or despair with particular individuals. Evil is often faceless for us. Neither do we feel comfortable asking God to defeat and humiliate others. Yet in many places in the world our brothers and sisters in Christ live in fear of what those they can name might do to them. Such psalms express the anguish of Christians in Indonesia who face persecution and the destruction of their churches at the hands of their neighbors. Indian Christians who face persecution and an uncertain future in their homeland might also cry out to God in this way.

The spirituality of these psalms is the spirituality of those who suffer, of those who are set upon by people more powerful than they are. In the midst of suffering they cry out to God for relief and vindication. Yet it is exactly this cry of suffering that we in North America excise from the Psalter! When we use laments in worship, we read only the trust parts, only the positive verses. We

leave out the troubling parts. We seem to have no place in worship for pain, for despair, for suffering. Yet, even in North America, many Christians suffer at the hands of others. Women are abused by husbands, male friends, and employers. Men, too, are abused by employers and fellow employees in their places of work. Children are abused at home and outside the home. When we avoid lamenting, we separate our worship from the worship of many of our brothers and sisters whose spirituality, like the psalmist's, is marked by tears.

In studying our heritage we acknowledge that our personal experience is an inadequate horizon within which to draw conclusions about God and about how we should live.

Secondly, then, if we let the Psalms shape our spirituality, *we will give voice to our pains and fears.* The laments remind us that our prayers are not an escape mechanism, but a channel for acknowledging the suffering in our lives and in the lives of others. When we use the laments we identify with those for whom the presence of enemies is real. We offer to God our plea that the wicked be thwarted in their plans.

Psalms of belief

Although the laments are the most numerous type of psalm, they presuppose the faith that is confessed in the psalms of belief. A significant body of these psalms is found between Psalm 90 and Psalm 100. In these psalms of belief, the reality of God's reign and providence is affirmed. Also in these psalms we find a confession of God's justice, which is the foundation of God's kingdom.

> *The LORD is king! Let the earth rejoice;*
> *let the many coastlands be glad!*
> *Clouds and thick darkness are all around him;*
> *righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.*
> *Fire goes before him,*
> *and consumes his adversaries on every side.*
> *(Ps. 97:1–3)*

Further on in Psalm 97 we find the assertion that God is for the just and lowly:

The LORD loves those who hate evil;
he guards the lives of his faithful;
he rescues them from the hand of the wicked.
Light dawns for the righteous,
and joy for the upright in heart. (Ps. 97:102–11)

The bedrock of faith expressed in these psalms is that God is a just and right-making king, an all-powerful sovereign who will act on behalf of those who are faithful and just. Of course, it is the dissonance between such faith and the experiences of life that sponsors the laments. It is also the certainty of faith expressed in these hymns that leads both to petition and hope.

In the third place, then, if our spirituality is nurtured by the Psalms *we will confess our faith in God's reign and its justice*. This confession of faith will guide us, shape our understanding of the events of our lives, and influence our response to them. The courage to petition and trust is based on the courage to believe and confess the reign of God.

Psalms of wisdom

But how did the psalmist know what to confess? How did the psalmist come to a right belief about God? The first psalm, the introduction to the Psalter as a whole, points to an answer. In this familiar wisdom psalm the way of the right one, as opposed to the way of the wicked, is characterized by immersion in the Torah. All the differences between the right and the wicked mentioned in the rest of the psalm flow from this basic distinction.

At the beginning of a book we associate with public worship, the first psalm teaches the individual practice of learning God's instruction. This instruction transcends the experience of any one individual. It represents a communal trust that is passed on from generation to generation so that each new generation can learn about God and about the intersection of the community and God. Psalm 114, for example, transmits part of the heritage of faith that is available to each individual.

When Israel went out from Egypt,
the house of Jacob from a people of strange language,
Judah became God's sanctuary,

Israel his dominion.
The sea looked and fled;
Jordan turned back.
The mountains skipped like rams,
the hills like lambs.
Why is it, O sea, that you flee?
O Jordan, that you turn back?
O mountains, that you skip like rams?
O hills, like lambs?
Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the LORD,
at the presence of the God of Jacob,
who turns the rock into a pool of water,
the flint into a spring of water.

A fourth characteristic of our spirituality when the Psalms shape it is that *we prepare for speaking to God by listening to the witness of the community about God.* In studying our heritage we acknowledge that our personal experience is an inadequate horizon within which to draw conclusions about God and about how we should live. Rather, in studying the revelation handed on by the community, we find our horizon enlarged and joined together with that of others, past and present, who worship God.

Psalms of praise

But the confessions of the psalmist are not rooted only in the study of God's Torah. The psalmist also participated in public ceremonies and celebration. Psalms of praise give human voice to the presence and action of God in the present life of the community. These psalms of celebration are at the opposite end of the continuum from those of lament. The book of Psalms embodies this continuum. It begins with laments, like Psalm 3, quoted above, and ends with psalms of thanksgiving and praise, Psalms 145–150.

Psalm 150 indicates the celebrative and festive nature of the psalms of God's praise.

Praise him with trumpet sound;
praise him with lute and harp!
Praise him with tambourine and dance;

praise him with strings and pipe!
Praise him with clanging cymbals;
praise him with loud clashing cymbals! (Ps. 150:3–5)

The celebration was noisy. People danced! It was a creative experience. In such performance, membership in the community was affirmed and deepened. Belief was not only intellectual but was also embedded in the whole being through participation.

In the fifth place, when the Psalms nurture our spirituality *we celebrate God in physical ways such as playing musical instruments and dancing.* When we involve our whole body in praise, faith percolates through dimensions of our being that we might otherwise neglect or leave undeveloped. Celebration sustains the life of faith and the community of God's rule.

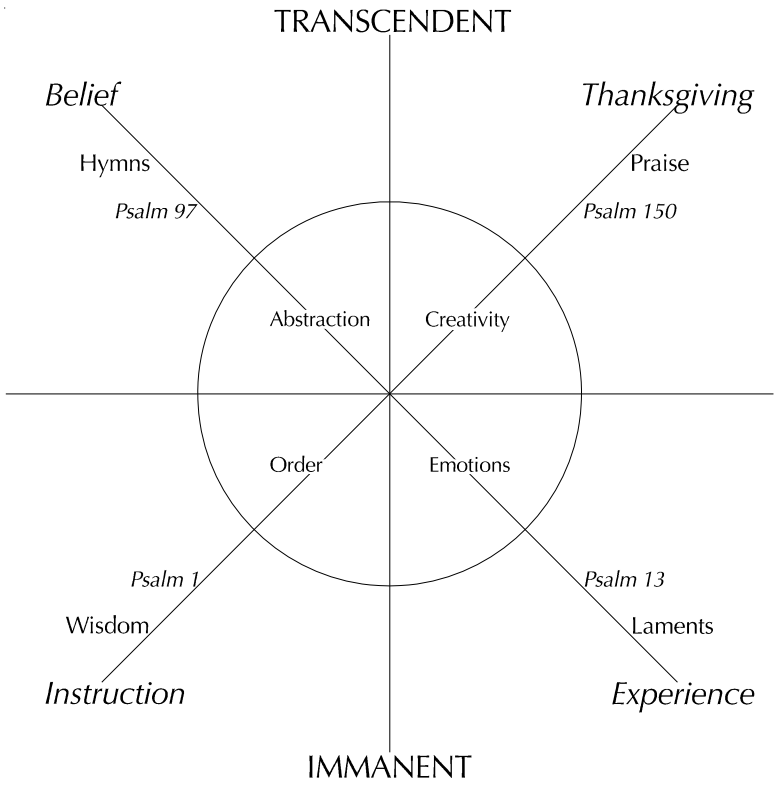
A multifaceted spirituality

A robust spirituality depends on a variety of experiences and expressions. A strong spirituality grows from keeping these facets of the spiritual life together, and is thereby able to encompass them all. An anemic spirituality results from overemphasis on one or two characteristics. It develops a spindly and lopsided form.

One continuum the Psalms contain moves between belief, on the one hand, and what actually happens to the believer, on the other. What we confess often does not fit neatly with what we experience. Neither end of this continuum should be dismissed or ignored. I suggested above that we have neglected the laments and the experience they represent, to our detriment. A vibrant spirituality encompasses our anger and our trust, our doubt and our belief.

When we involve our whole body in praise, faith percolates through dimensions of our being that we might otherwise neglect or leave undeveloped.

Another such continuum moves between the wisdom psalms' emphasis on instruction and achieving the right order, and the emphasis in the psalms of praise on thanksgiving and celebration. A robust spirituality must keep these two aspects of experience in tension as well. We should avoid both a cold adherence to tradition and an ignorant emotionalism. Rather, we must be schooled in Scripture and also join in celebrating the goodness and greatness of our God.



A robust spirituality thus involves all four of these elements. Interestingly, the human brain also has four quadrants or centers: for abstract thought, for orderliness, for emotions, and for creativity. As we, with the psalmist, exercise the whole brain in our spirituality, we also grow and mature as whole, spiritually vigorous persons. When we neglect any of these dimensions, we are less mature, more lopsided, with an increasingly fragile spirituality.

If we follow Jeremiah in letting the Psalter nurture our spirituality, we may find anemic aspects of our own faith growing and developing. We may indeed find ourselves echoing his bold demands for justice, his bold words of challenge addressed to God. We may even find ourselves understanding and accepting his raw, heart-worn anguish as an integral part of our own experience with God:

O LORD, you have enticed me, and I was enticed; you have overpowered me, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all day long; everyone mocks me. For whenever I speak, I must cry out, I must shout, "Violence and destruction!" For the word of the LORD has become for me a reproach and derision all day long. (Jer. 20:7–8)

Facile spirituality, profound love of God

Harry Huebner, Professor of Theology and Philosophy
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> *I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your minds. (Rom. 12:1–2)*

This essay has a double emphasis: reflections on contemporary culture as well as an examination of what makes spirituality Christian. With the proliferation of spiritualities today Christians ought to be quite conscious that spirituality is not their exclusive domain.

When Christians begin with their tradition-shaping text—the Bible—we are presented with two overwhelmingly strong messages: "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof" (Ps. 24:1), in other words, life and history—even our own lives—are not in our control but in God's; and "You, therefore, must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48), that is, we are called to follow after the embodied word of God, Jesus Christ. It has not been easy to keep these two themes together, and the tendency has been to break them apart in either direction—God alone saves us, or work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

Stephen Dintaman has argued that among the more recent adherents to the Anabaptist Vision the direction of the break has been away from reliance on God as primary agent of salvation in favour of following Jesus' ideals and thereby ushering in the kingdom.[1] This, according to Dintaman, represents a spiritual poverty since it conflates our own works with God's grace and mercy in Jesus Christ. The latter, and not the former, is the gospel.

However, this is not necessarily the only way of putting the matter. There is no inherent reason why divine agency and human agency need to be driven apart in this way.[2]

This contrast of primary agents correlates in significant ways with two broad forms of spirituality in contemporary culture—namely, fantasy spiritualities and revenge spiritualities. Following reflections on spiritualities in contemporary culture through these categories, this essay will return to discuss Christian-Anabaptist spirituality, seeking to disentangle it—especially as an *embodied* spirituality—from other expressions of spirituality in our context.

It is impossible to give an adequate definition of spirituality because of its diverse meanings. One might well wonder whether the Christian monk, the Mennonite pastor, the Dalai Lama and Oprah Winfrey are really using the term in the same way at all. But for clarity reasons it is also important to say a few words about the history of the term and to specify how I intend to use it in this essay.

We often think of ours as a culture of chaos. I demur. Chaos admits of little uniformity and meaning. Our society exhibits all too much uniformity of both meaning and practice.

The current use of the term "spirituality" is relatively new. In the past the church has not had much need for the term and has spoken instead of "the Christian life," "imitation of Christ," or simply "the faith." In Catholic tradition one spoke of the spirituality of St. Francis, or St. Ignatius, or St. Theresa, since each gave slightly different expression to the "imago Christi." Nowadays, in contrast, the term is used not to enhance specificity but to generalize, to avoid speaking of particular faith. To have a specific faith with unique texts and traditions sounds sectarian, which is bad, but to practice spirituality is general and good.

Broadly speaking "spirituality" is often used to speak of a person's relationship to Mystery. And since "mystery" is by definition quite vacuous of content, "spirituality" also has little content. Thus theologian Kathleen Fischer writes: "Spirituality is how we express ourselves in relation to that which we designate as the source of ultimate power and meaning in life and how we live out this relationship. It may be a personal system or organized and institutionalized."[3] I begin with this broad understanding of

spirituality not because I take it to be the best definition, but because it is general and allows us to begin with inclusivity. When we begin this way it becomes important to ask what in our society is considered to be "ultimate power" and "meaningful."

Reflections on contemporary culture

We often think of ours as a culture of chaos. I demur. Chaos admits of little uniformity and meaning. Our society exhibits all too much uniformity of both meaning and practice. Although we should resist attempts to reduce complex culture to merely one thing, if we take a look around, plenty of evidence suggests that ours is a culture of rancour, and despair.[4] Mark Edmundson refers to it as a "culture of Gothic."[5] Consider our insatiable appetite for horror and violence, evident in the popularity of these relatively recent movies, many of them award winners: *Silence of the Lambs, Texas Chainsaw Massacre, Halloween, Nightmare on Elm Street, Friday the Thirteenth, Dracula, Mary Shelly's Frankenstein, Godfather, Rocky, Rambo, Witches of Eastwick*. And I list only a few. One could point to the related genre of intergalactic war movies spawned by *Star Wars*, or the more friendly horror flicks such as *Jurassic Park* and *Dinosaur*.

Why stick with movies? The mere mention of the names of their main characters instantly calls to mind "real life" stories that offer as much terror: Karla Holmolka and Paul Bernardo, O. J. Simpson, the Menendez Brothers, Susan Smith, John and Lorena Bobbitt, Nancy Kerrigan and Tonya Harding, Timothy McVeigh, to cite just a few of the most notorious. We are a people who are fed a daily diet of terror by a well-groomed anchorperson in an all-is-as-it-should-be voice. We witness with zoomed-in closeness the molesters, the abusers, the serial killers, the psychopaths, the mad bombers, the massacres, the environmental catastrophes, the local and foreign wars, and the drug busts. This "and that's the way it is" "report" on reality assures us that wherever on earth something terrifying is taking place, the cameras will be there in order never to deprive us of knowing the "real world."

Then when "the news" gets boring (that is, not violent enough), we can always tune in to "true police-stories, true rescue-tales, documentaries about every crime, tragedy, sorrow, disease, mistreatment, humiliation, and loss under the postmodern

sun."[6] And when it's sports we crave, our 100-plus channel TVs supply us with almost continuous coverage of Roller Derby and World Wrestling Federation. Switch to the daytime talk shows and see more of the same, but this time in the lives of "ordinary citizens." We are now looking at ourselves, and we witness lives as dreadful as the newsworthy and Hollywood-produced ones. And I have not even mentioned the Internet yet, with its proliferation of pornography and violence.

Intermixed with all of this violence and rancour is a deep longing for transcendence. Poet Vaclav Havel, president of the Czech Republic, has emphasized the need for transcendence in a world where, he suggests, we know more and more about most things but less and less about ourselves.[7] The yearning for transcendence may seem antithetical to our preoccupation with horror, but it is not. Ironically, violence as entertainment entails its own form of transcendence, redemption, and spirituality. It speaks of power and meaning. Virtually without exception these productions stress deliverance and overcoming. The themes are strongly present, though in a form that may seem warped.

Intermixed with all of the violence and rancour in our culture is a deep longing for transcendence.

Human beings have a hard time living on a single plane, without transcendence. Deep down we seem to know that the ordinary is not final, that what we see is not really what we get. At least we hope not. Yet we are far less clear about what is ultimate, and so we tend to grope toward a facile transcendence. Although this phenomenon is too complex to analyze fully here, I want to look at two expressions of the contemporary quest for transcendence, two common modern approaches to spirituality: fantasy and revenge. These are not opposites; they interrelate in direct ways. Revenge relies on fantasizing new beginnings in which wrongs are righted, and fantasies often entail reliance on higher powers to exact retribution or justice. Neither can cope with reality as it is experienced, so both invoke greater powers. Yet I differentiate between these two modes of spirituality for purposes of contrast with what I will later claim to be appropriate forms of Christian spirituality.

Fantasy spiritualities

Spirituality books adorn our bookstores and libraries in abundance these days. And they are being read perhaps more than any other literature. I am writing this in a public library in Cambridge, U.K. I have searched the computerized catalog for a dozen well-known books on spirituality. All are checked out, and all have waiting lists. Most of these books proceed quickly to a list of "10 easy steps in the spiritual quest." Whether they advocate New Age spirituality or something more traditionally rooted, all promise a life with purpose, design, and meaning.

Spirituality books describe how you can love more, get in touch with the real you or with nature, align yourself with the forces through tarot cards or horoscopes or rituals, rid yourself of cultural conditioning.

Many of these books offer such overcoming through flights from reality; they are fantasies. They help us precisely because they provide a diversion from the real, a holiday from the ordinary, a form of fiction. Great books for summer cottage reading, they belong to the genre of retreat. They remind you of how little time you have taken for God and yourself, how inconsiderate you have been of others, how unloving of your spouse, how inattentive to your children. They suggest how you can become a happier person through meditation. They describe how you can love more, get in touch with the real you or with nature, align yourself with the forces through tarot cards or horoscopes or rituals, rid yourself of cultural conditioning, or whatever the operative imagination and the corresponding spirituality prescribe. Not that these books are without value and should not be read. On the contrary, we need vacations for survival, because they constitute a form of rest and revitalization. Many (but not all) of these books are fantasies and can help us with ordinary life only insofar as they offer us a vacation from it.

It could be argued that fantasy spirituality was the great experiment of the 1960s. The youth of the '60s knew that something was wrong with the status quo. They gave it a name—The Establishment—and placed themselves over against it. They saw the need for transcendence, and had a solution: create an alternative imaginary culture. "Tune in, turn on, and drop out!"

Woodstock, the symbol of their society, emphasized nature, pleasure, love, and overcoming the old rules the youth credited with producing a selfish and violent society. But the "the Age of Aquarius" seemingly could not do more than dawn. Why? Because it remained a fantasy!

I am a product of the '60s and I remember the era with some nostalgia. Yet, truth be told, its value was its critique of what was, not its plan for what could be. It was unable to embody anything socially because it lacked a common vision. What this generation shared was only its condemnation of the establishment. That is, it remained fantasy.

The spirit of Woodstock is not dead; it has taken on a different form. This is seen in part in the popularity of the recent film *Woodstock*. And nature is still high on the agenda of transcendence seekers. Witness, for example, Robert Bly's use of the ancient nature myth "The Story of Iron John" to explain the steps males must go through to become authentically male and to shed the "Blondie and Dagwood" image of the weak and foolish man.[8] Note the varieties of women's spirituality that explore what it means to have a body that changes with the natural lunar cycles, and to be alone among humans to birth new life.[9] Native spirituality as fostered by some aboriginal religious leaders links the richness of their lives to the animal spirits such as the wolf and the bear.[10]

Consider other lingering Woodstock effects. The drug culture is certainly not in decline. Rock music is perhaps even more popular today than it was in the '60s. Now technology lets us hear our favorite rock musicians through our headphones as we walk or ride to and from our places or work and study; we no longer need to gather en masse to hear them. Yet the effect is the same: all who listen to the music are transported from our world into the world of the musician. But these worlds remain fantasies.

Fantasy does have its value. But fantasy alone cannot save us. It can only divert us, and delay the inevitable, and therein lies both its value and its limit. Fantasies cannot deliver on their promise to fulfill, precisely because their promises, when they are not rooted in reality, are lies. Deliverance is embodied in truth, not the truth of empirical observation nor the truth of imagination, but the truth of living God. When fantasy enables us

to see this truth, which it sometimes does, or when fantasy can help us embody this truth in real life forms, it can be saving. But in themselves fantasies cannot save us.

Revenge spiritualities

While fantasy spiritualities deal with life through escape from the empirical world, revenge spiritualities go to the other extreme. Fantasy assumes that since we are not in charge, we must align our lives with the forces that are. The premise of revenge spirituality is that we are in charge and therefore must make the best of it. Here there is no talk of otherworldly realms. Instead there is engagement with this world on its own terms, and total reliance on superior prowess. This approach realizes what spiritual fantasies do not, that evil can be dealt with not through flight into facile transcendence but only by overcoming it with social and political forces that actually change things. Hence while evil may hurt you, even cause death, it can never have the last word. The last word must come in the form of victory exacted by greater powers than were earlier available, and by using them ruthlessly, in the extreme, if necessary.

While fantasy spiritualities deal with life through escape from the empirical world, revenge spiritualities go to the other extreme. Fantasy assumes that since we are not in charge, we must align our lives with the forces that are. The premise of revenge spirituality is that we are in charge and must make the best of it.

Sylvester Stallone has been a Hollywood symbol of revenge-redemption for several decades. His portrayal in the *Rocky* and *Rambo* series of a battle hero with the biceps for the job gives the viewer the immediate assurance that all is well. In the end, though it may take time, Stallone will win the day. Why do we enjoy watching this sort of film? Because it lets us participate in a revenge-redemption fiction. Again, note that revenge and fantasy spiritualities are not mutually exclusive. Every revenge scenario contains within it a redemption fantasy. Revenge is to bring the world back to justice, to a level starting point. Revenge is necessary precisely because we cannot bear to play the game handicapped. So watching Rambo get tortured is tolerable and even enjoyable since we know that it is only temporary, that the tables will turn.

Furthermore, the torture serves to justify the violence Rambo will use against his enemies when payback time comes. The evil that is done sets up revenge. In this framework, revenge, no matter how extreme, is never evil; it is redemptive of evil.

The movie *The Patriot* is but the latest revenge story. The set-up is familiar. War hero Benjamin Martin decides to abandon "the life of principles" (i.e., self-defense, fighting for freedom) for the life of a family man. "A family man cannot afford principles," he boldly announces. But then evil is done to him. The enemy shoots his younger son in cold blood as he tries to keep his older brother from being taken to execution. His house is torched and his family becomes destitute. Eventually he seeks revenge big time. And the audience cheers and feels profound empathy. He single-handedly destroys a militia of twelve men en route to his son's execution. Revenge and counter-revenge continue until the end of the movie. When he finally loses his second son to the enemy, Martin ponders life's bigger questions. "Why," he asks, "do men have to justify death?" Profound question, no answer! But there is another theme in the movie. Revenge does not just reside in human hearts; it is the very order of the world. Repeatedly the movie makes the point that their past sins will revisit the guilty in the form of revenge. It is a spiritual law. And this is Benjamin's struggle as he constantly receives the evil done to him, albeit in manageable doses (because he is the hero of the movie).

Whatever form they take, Christian spiritualities are neither fantasy nor revenge, though they admit of fantasy and revenge in specific ways.

This Hollywood drama also gets played out in real life. The Persian Gulf War in 1990 was a profound spiritual catharsis in North America, especially in the U.S., where the ghost of Vietnam still haunted the nation's psyche. After their humiliation in Vietnam, this war gave the American people back their dignity. It was not enough to know that they were *able* to wreak devastating defeat on a nation like Iraq. That would have been mere fantasy. It had to be concretely demonstrated. Without the demonstration, "America" would not have attained the redemptive bragging rights it so desperately needed to be happy. The display of power in Iraq showed Americans and their enemies that America is the true medium of salvation.

I was in Baghdad some four weeks after the bombing stopped. I was riding down Main Street in a taxi when the driver, who knew I was an "American,"[11] stopped his Toyota Crown, and began lecturing me on what the American smart bombs were able to do. He was awed with the pinpoint accuracy that enabled them to utterly destroy one building while leaving the one beside it intact. He denounced the leadership of his own country not because he was unpatriotic but because, he screamed (to my embarrassment and fear), "Unless my own country becomes like the Americans in its military strength, it deserves the fate it has received." He had learned what this war was intended to teach: the American military is supreme. Under its dominion you can rest safe and secure. If you tangle with it, sooner or later you will pay the price.

But revenge spirituality functions not only in war and overt violence. The movie *Erin Brockovitch* displays it in another form. Here the beautiful Julia Roberts moves from client to client promising compensation for the harm done them by a company guilty of serious pollution. As one victim, Mrs. Jensen, a cancer sufferer, puts it, "We're going to make them pay, aren't we?" When the 30-million-dollar settlement is announced (her portion is 5 million), Mrs. Jensen rejoices that "justice" has been done.

I have chosen fantasy and revenge as two forms of spirituality with which Christians should contend, because they are the most enticing and also because they provide some fertile cross-referencing with the Christian versions. Disentanglement is crucial and it is also so intricate that this essay can only hint at it.

Christians and the spiritual quest

Whatever form they take, Christian spiritualities are neither fantasy nor revenge, though they admit of fantasy and revenge in specific ways. There are clearly revenge-like themes within the biblical language: "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord" (Rom. 12:19). But note that the point of the passage is to emphasize that vengeance is not ours but God's. Likewise, one cannot understand the Christian faith without an active imagination envisioning constructive practices rooted in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. But historically the ways in which fantasy and revenge have found expression in Christian life and

practice have been points of tension and disagreement. To begin to sort this out requires a rereading of crucial parts of the Christian story, especially where the spiritual/physical dichotomy gets formulated.

The debate over how to formulate an appropriate Christian-Anabaptist spirituality has often centred on how one understands the human person, and especially on how one understands the relation of body and spirit. Some interpreters assert that a holistic anthropology must repair what false ideologies have broken apart. They may blame the ancient Greeks for promoting a spiritual flight from the body, resulting in a socially disembodied piety. Whether we attribute our lack of integration of spirit and flesh to the influence of Greek philosophy, Enlightenment thought, or more contemporary logic, we know that our structures of meaning and purpose and even salvation cannot remain abstract if they are to be Christian. Unless we embody our spirituality it will remain theoretical, abstract, and unchristian. The Christian faith is an embodied faith, an incarnational faith. "For God so loved the world" that God in Christ has touched the earth and its people. Hence, as Paul states, how we present our bodies determines our spiritual worship.

Our structures of meaning and purpose and even salvation cannot remain abstract if they are to be Christian. Unless we embody our spirituality it will remain theoretical, abstract, and unchristian.

Characteristically those who make the spiritual/physical distinction have assumed that the spiritual pull is upward to God and the physical pull is downward away from God. Those of us who want to follow the incarnate (enfleshed) Christ should experience some discomfort with this formulation. We need to develop the language of the spirituality of the embodied community of faith. Moving in this direction can help us avoid pitfalls that arise from a dichotomy of the spiritual and the physical. And on this matter our Anabaptist forebears have something to say.

To give Anabaptist tradition its say on spirituality we need to review briefly how it differed from the mainline theological imaginations of both Protestants and Catholics. Luther argued that all of life tended in two directions: upward to God and downward to the devil.[12] In his view, life is a struggle between

these two forces. The Anabaptists agreed. Luther went on to say that in Christ God has called into existence a special people who are to be signs of a kingdom that God intended for all of humankind. But sin has corrupted our world. God has providentially arranged this world of contending powers so as to help us cope with the reality of sin. Until God brings total redemption, Christians therefore live in two realms: the church and the world. Again the Anabaptists agreed with much of this divine cosmology.

For the Anabaptists profound love of God included profound love of the physical.

But from here on their views diverged. Luther claimed that since God had ordained both realms, in each realm Christians should behave according to the norms appropriate to that realm. When acting on behalf of the church, a Christian cannot inflict death on an enemy through capital punishment. Why not? Because in the church forgiveness is the answer to sin. On the other hand, in the world a Christian not only may but sometimes must inflict death on the enemy, because the state has the God-given mandate to maintain order and keep the power of sin in check by using the sword. For Christians to refuse to do what God has mandated for the state is inconsistent and, worse, apostasy.[13] Here the Anabaptists disagreed.

Why the disagreement? The answer impinges directly on how they understood the Christian life. Luther divided the world between the spiritual and the physical in a way the Anabaptists could not accept. For Luther both are God's realms. In the physical world God works in a hidden manner, giving temporal authorities power to curb sin. In the spiritual realm God works through the revelation of Jesus Christ. According to this model, to be spiritual is to maintain a certain inner disposition towards God even as one lives in both arenas, acting in each according to its own norms, forgiving in one and killing in the other. Spirituality does not determine the way Christians "present your bodies" (Rom. 12:1); in the temporal realm it is laudatory for Christians to behave in ways that would be absolutely wrong in the spiritual realm. Spirituality is a private, interior disposition toward God as the body outwardly does what it must do in this sinful world.

Anabaptists in the main were too Catholic and too ascetic to accept this approach. For them profound love of God included

profound love of the physical. To say that the Anabaptists were ascetics in love with the physical is not a careless slip but an intentional juxtaposition. It carries within it a critique of both Protestant and Catholic spirituality. Their Christian faith entailed a new way of ordering life in all its dimensions. All was to be brought under the lordship of Christ. Neither the person nor the world could be carved up in a manner that justified loving enemies spiritually while killing them physically. To love enemies simply meant that you couldn't kill them and if killing had to be done it would need to be done to them.

The heart of the gospel is not commitment to an ideal, not passion for justice, not the benefits of living in community, but the personal experience of God acting in this world transforming individual lives and whole communities.

This holism of body and spirit was not the Anabaptists' invention. They saw it in Jesus Christ, who had the power to destroy his persecutors but nevertheless prayed for their forgiveness and allowed them to kill him. And they saw this unity in the great tradition of Christian monasticism, in which renewal meant an entirely new orientation to the world. When one becomes a Christ-follower one no longer does what the world does. Imitation of Christ, renunciation, and discipline had been watchwords for ascetics such as St. Benedict, Hildegard of Bingen, and St. Francis. Like them, the Anabaptists believed that people become Christian not because of what they believe about God but through the power of God's Spirit. And God's Spirit transforms the whole person. Only people who have been so transformed are able to live the renewed life, of loving enemies, humility, peace, and joy. Spiritual rebirth—the driving force of God's regenerating Spirit—empowers people to live as followers of Jesus Christ and in communion with one another. The heart of the gospel is not commitment to an ideal, not passion for justice, not the benefits of living in community, but the personal experience of God acting in this world transforming individual lives and whole communities. And the invitation is to a set of spiritual disciplines that can sustain such a commitment to renunciation and community.

While they had much in common with the ascetics, the Anabaptists also rejected some aspects of their theology and

practice. They accepted separation from the world, but saw little of Christ in the way anchorite monks cloistered themselves in remote places in an effort to hide from evil. After all, evil follows you wherever you go. And Christ calls us to serve one another. Whom can you serve if you are a desert hermit? They agreed with the cenobites—the monks who lived communally—in their emphasis on the formation of an alternative society as a sign to the world of how Christians ought to live. How can the world know what it means to be Christ-followers unless a community gives concrete expression to discipleship? But the Anabaptists could not accept an ecclesiology that divides the church into two kinds of Christians: serious ones who become ascetics, and everybody else. All Christians are regenerated believers. Also, the monastic embrace of celibacy suggests a diminution of physicality (sexuality) that seems inconsistent with Jesus' love of the world. Sexuality is not antithetical to spirituality; it is a gift from God. Sexuality may have many aberrant distortions, but that's another matter. Physicality is not to be shunned but brought under the lordship of Christ. For related reasons, wealth, power, and forms of governance are all *spiritual* issues within this tradition.

The spirituality of the Anabaptists was more like that of the cenobitic monks, yet they did not limit it to a special class of Christians. It entailed creation of a community of believers who have experienced regeneration and are committed to a life of separation from the world while being in it. Like the monks, theirs was a life of renunciation and discipline. Sin would be with them so they needed to find a way of dealing with it, as Jesus had instructed. And all in the community of saints would work at the common quest of faithful living in the midst of a degenerate world. The understanding of Christian faith advocated here is not a greater spirituality contra physicality but rather a clear holistic communal politic based on servanthood and an openness to God's transforming spirit in all areas of life. In this Jesus Christ was their model.[14]

Defining spirituality through politics, through ecclesiology, has implications for Mennonite practice to this day. For example, the spirituality of the church of my upbringing conceived of sin as a matter between God and us, and among us. Hence, forgiveness and reconciliation were matters between God and us and also

among us. We practiced communion not every Sunday but four or five times per year, because celebrating the Lord's Supper required an elaborate communal process of repentance and healing. Preceding every communion Sunday was a Sunday of preparation, on which preachers invited and admonished the congregation to make things right with God and with each other. The week before communion was a time of confession and making things right. Individuals sought out those they had sinned against to repent and ask for forgiveness. Communion was the healing of the body; it was a social activity and embodied a unique spirituality of the whole community.

As Mennonites struggle with how to embody community, especially in the cities, the pressure is on to shift to alternative practices, away from the communal asceticism of our tradition and toward a dichotomized spirituality. We are tempted to break apart what we have been taught belongs together in one body politic—the spiritual and the physical.

In mainline Catholic and Protestant churches the politics of communion is different. Every Sunday morning worshipers confess their sins and celebrate God's love in the feast of the Eucharist. The act is fundamentally between God and the individual. God alone forgives their sin and redeems their souls, and no one needs to confess anything to another person. There is no talk of the healing of the body.

These two different spiritualities are grounded in two different ecclesiologies. As North American Mennonites struggle with how to embody community, especially in the cities, the pressure is on to shift to alternative practices, away from the communal asceticism of our tradition and toward a dichotomized spirituality. We are tempted to break apart what we have been taught belongs together in one body politic—the spiritual and the physical. We need to resist moving toward a spirituality that is directed to God on the basis of one dimension and to humankind on the basis of another. Because the church as a whole is an alternative body politic it must work at presenting itself to the world and under God as one whole body. How one acts in the world is a matter of church discipline. Christians have but one norm, Jesus Christ.

Conclusion: Back to Fantasy and Revenge

The communal asceticism/spirituality that I am suggesting is integral to the Mennonite/Anabaptist tradition interrelates with fantasy and revenge in direct ways. This communal spirituality acknowledges that a higher power than we can see is at work in the world—living God. In this way it is similar to many of the fantasy spiritualities discussed earlier. We are not alone. Living God is among us. Such a view does not advocate retreat from the world, leaving it to its own self-destruction (fantasy/asceticism). It is interested in changing the world. Yet the strategy of change is participatory with God, unlike the revenge spiritualities in which one takes matters into one's own hands. God is the primary agent of redemption, the world's and ours. We are but secondary agents. Our task is to point to the power of God's redemptive activity and to embody it as best we can. It is not our task to accommodate ourselves to the best available strategies, given our realistic assessment. The imagination we embrace is the story of the cross and resurrection.

What does the cross/resurrection story teach us about Christian spirituality? The cross comes about as a result of evil. There is real death, unjust death. Is there revenge? No. Jesus accepts death without inflicting any violence on his enemies. Enemies are loved. Not destroyed. But Jesus is victorious. How? Not through retribution, but through openness to God's action. God raised Jesus from the dead. This is actual resurrection, not fantasy. Unless we comprehend that God still acts in this world transforming individual people as well as whole communities into bodies of Christ, we cannot properly understand the spirituality of the biblical faith. We need to re-imagine how we can discipline ourselves to be open to God acting in our lives. How can we resist the temptation to read the world otherwise?

Unless we comprehend that God still acts in this world transforming individual people as well as whole communities into bodies of Christ, we cannot properly understand the spirituality of the biblical faith.

The invitation of the gospel is to become profound lovers of God. Yet this is but a response to God's profound love of us. This love does not take us out of this world; it puts us into the world in a particular way. Immanuel Kant once said, "Out of the crooked timber of

humanity, nothing straight can be made." He was wrong. Perhaps Enlightenment logic prevented him from seeing the transforming power of God. Perhaps rationalism prevented him from experiencing divine mystery. He may have been right in his implicit critique of a facile transcendence, but the love of God, which passes all understanding, is able to do abundantly more than Kant's comment suggests. Profound love of God can overcome facile spirituality, but only if we discipline ourselves to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. That is our spiritual worship.

Notes

[1] Stephen Dintaman, "The Spiritual Poverty of Anabaptism," *Conrad Grebel Review* 10, no. 2 (1992): 205–208.

[2] For a fuller discussion of divine and human agency see my essay, "Moral Agency as Embodiment: How the Church Acts," in Stanley Hauerwas, Chris K. Huebner, Harry J. Huebner, Mark Thiessen Nation, eds., *The Wisdom of the Cross: Essays in Honor of John Howard Yoder* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 189–212.

[3] Quoted from Thomas Hart, *Spiritual Quest: A Guide to the Changing Landscape* (New York: Paulist Pr., 1999), 39.

[4] We might well wonder whether society has not always been rancorous. Consider, for example, the Roman gladiators. (For a current Hollywood rendition, see the recent movie *Gladiator*.) But my interest here is not in a comparative analysis.

[5] Mark Edmundson, *Nightmare on Main Street* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Pr., 1997). Edmundson uses "Gothic" in the literary sense made popular in the eighteen and nineteenth centuries by the "Gothic novel" with its complex plot of horrifying supernatural drama.

[6] Ibid, 30.

[7] See Vaclav Havel, "The Need for Transcendence In the Post-Modern World," from the website magna.com.au/~prfbrown/v_havel.html.

[8] Robert Bly, *Iron Man: A Book about Men* (New York: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1990).

[9] See for example, Rev. Frodo Okulam, "Why Women's Spirituality?" *Spirited Women Magazine* (May 1998), on line at http://www.teleport.com/community/nonprofit/sister-spirit/magazine.html.

[10] These three examples are, of course, not the only way of speaking of these spiritualities—male, women's, and native. There is a vast body of literature in each of these areas. I list these three forms because they are all varieties of nature-based spirituality.

[11] Arabs tend to call all North Americans "Americans" though they are well aware of the U.S./Canadian distinction, and will invoke it whenever it suits them.

[12] For a helpful analysis of Luther's doctrine of the two realms see Jürgen Moltmann, *Following Jesus in the World Today: Responsibility for the World and Christian Discipleship*, Occasional Papers, no. 4 (Elkhart: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1983).

[13] See Martin Luther, "On Governmental Authority (1523)": "You ask whether a Christian too may bear the temporal sword and punish the wicked. Answer: You have

now heard two propositions. One is that the sword can have no place among the Christians…[and the other] that you are under obligation to serve and assist the sword by whichever means you can…. Therefore, if you see that there is a lack of hangmen [and] constables…you should offer your services and seek the position." Quoted from Hans J. Hillerbrand, ed., *The Protestant Reformation* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 51.

[14] Two helpful resources on Anabaptist spirituality are Cornelius J. Dyck, trans. and ed., *Spiritual Life in Anabaptism: Classic Devotional Resources* (Scottdale: Herald Pr., 1995), and Daniel Liechty, trans. and ed., *Early Anabaptist Spirituality: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Pr., 1994). See John J. Friesen's review and discussion of these books in this issue, pages 87–91.

Spirituality according to Oprah

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Oprah bounds in, giving high-fives to her studio audience. Today's guest is Gary Zukav, author of *The Seat of the Soul*, *Soul Stories*, and *The Dancing Wu-Li Masters*. I smile as I watch them interact. Despite their distinctly different personalities—Oprah is outgoing and gregarious while Zukav is quiet and thoughtful—their mutual respect and affection for one another is obvious. Their collaboration as host and guest began a few years ago when she sought him out, like a student seeking a spiritual master, after she read *Seat of the Soul* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989). Their relationship has evolved to friendship, and Oprah often translates Zukav's more obscure statements into plain language for the viewing audience. They laugh easily with one another.

In a medium that prefers small white women who keep their minds to themselves, Oprah has succeeded as a large African-American woman with a mind of her own and the will to speak it.

I began watching The Oprah Winfrey Show a few years ago, when I was struggling with depression and fighting to keep from drowning in feelings of uncertainty and powerlessness. I found solace in Oprah. She comes across as best girlfriend, someone with whom one can both cry and laugh. Plus, I admire Oprah. In a medium that prefers small white women who keep their minds to themselves, she has succeeded as a large African-American woman with a mind of her own and the will to speak it.

Clearly I am not the only who admires Oprah. Her program is broadcast to 119 countries, including Japan, Norway, Israel, China, the Netherlands, and South Africa. In 1998, *Time* magazine proclaimed Oprah one of the most influential people in the twentieth century. Every week viewers send nearly 25,000 letters and e-mail messages to the show offices. Her web-site, www.oprah.com, receives nearly 3,000 visits a day. This past

spring she branched into other media with the publication of her own magazine, O. She also is CEO of Harpo Productions, a television and film production company, which recently won an Emmy for "Tuesdays with Morrie," a made-for-television movie based on the non-fiction book by the same title.

Ah, yes. Oprah and books. In 1996 Oprah decided to begin an on-air book club to encourage people to read contemporary books. Each month she announces a new title, and instantly the selection becomes a bestseller. The National Book Association recently honored Oprah because of her impact on the publishing world through her book club.

As I moved through the turbulent waters of depression I watched Oprah regularly and often read the books she suggested as a way to find comfort. My prayers had become ruminations on my depression, and my Scripture reading provided little solace. Perhaps watching Oprah consoled me because she talks so openly about her own struggles and triumphs. She seems like a kindred spirit in the quest to live a meaningful life, with integrity. Because Oprah grew up within the black church, she is intimately acquainted with the rich tradition of religious language and imagery.

In my years of Oprah-watching I have discovered others in churches who are also touched by her. Just last week a church member told me she had discovered Oprah's web-site and really enjoys it. "I'm keeping a daily gratitude journal on it," she said happily. Later she e-mailed me that, as recommended on the web-site, she is beginning to try meditation in addition to her regular intercessory prayer practice.

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Oprah uses a blend of psychology and spirituality in her media ventures. In 1996, she changed the focus of her television program to reflect the current blend. On her web page, Oprah describes the mission statement of the program: "'I am guided by the vision of what I believe this show can be,' explains Oprah Winfrey. 'Originally our goal was to uplift, enlighten, encourage and entertain through the medium of television. Now, our mission statement for The Oprah

Winfrey Show is to use television to transform peoples' lives, to make viewers see themselves differently and to bring happiness and a sense of fulfillment into every home.'"

While Oprah does not promote a particular religious faith, she uses language that can fit into the lexicon of a specific religion. Her own religious history gives her language a certain authority. For example, she uses the word "transcend" to describe an effort toward self-improvement: "She is trying to transcend her bad habits."

Another word Oprah uses frequently is "soul." She works from the definition of soul provided by Zukav in *The Seat of the Soul*. Zukav distinguishes between soul and personality, believing that our personality serves our soul. He writes, "Your soul is that part of you that is immortal. Every person has a soul, but a personality that is limited in its perception to the five senses is not aware of its soul, and, therefore, cannot recognize the influences of its soul." Zukav believes our souls make up the universe, exist outside of time, and are therefore simultaneously incarnated. "The perspective of the soul is immense, and the perception of the soul is without the limitations of the personality. Souls that have chosen the physical experience of life as we know it as a path of evolution, have, in general, incarnated their energies many times into many psychological and physical forms. For each incarnation, the soul creates a different personality and body." In addition to being a frequent guest on her program, Zukav has a column in Oprah's magazine, and a web-page (www.zukav.com) that her staff helped him create.

Oprah also uses the word "spirit" in all of her media. Included in every episode of her talk show is the "Remembering Our Spirit" segment. In taped testimonials guests or viewers reflect on how they are remembering their spirit. Some segments deal with clear disciplines or spiritual practices such as prayer or meditation or journal writing, while others may involve "finding time for myself to take a bubble bath with aromatherapy candles." On "About Spirit" on the Oprah web page one reads, "Your Spirit is at the core of who you truly are. We often forget to connect to this part of ourselves because of our busy schedules and full lives. But it is important to take the time to Remember Your Spirit to keep yourself centered and open to all the possibilities and joy you can

bring into your life… How Do You Remember Your Spirit? Everyone has an activity or process that they do to restore their sense of spirit, peace and well-being. And often, it's something simple that may not take a lot of time." Spirit for Oprah is self-referential. On her web-site she is quoted as describing spirit as "being reminded about the best part of who you are."

The spiritual practices Oprah encourages are numerous and remarkably similar to some classic spiritual disciplines. Oprah routinely urges viewers, and now readers, to practice reflection. She believes in the benefits of journal writing and often refers to her own practice of it. She includes a "gratitude journal," every evening noting five things from that day for which she is grateful.

My gratitude journal was a lifeline during my bleak days, disciplining me each day to identify five things to be grateful for. Recently I re-read those entries and was moved to recall the simple things I thanked God for, like the delightful faces of daffodils pushing through the snow. In the summer of that time I took a small group of youth to a mission work-camp in Harlan, Kentucky. Each night, after the lights were out, I asked the girls in my room to name three things from that day for which they were grateful. This practice became meaningful for us as we shared the things that had touched us, or laughed hard at a funny incident. At the end of the week, when I fell asleep as soon as I crawled into bed, they took the initiative to observe the ritual of gratitude, with my snoring providing a backdrop. Six months later, one of the girls told me she was continuing the practice in her own journal.

Another practice Oprah advocates is giving back to the community. She personally donates millions of dollars to various causes. As a way to help viewers give back to the community, she began Oprah's Angel Network in 1997. During its first year the program raised more than $3.5 million through spare change and private donations, and provided college scholarships for 150 students in need. Also, the Angel Network has built nearly 200 houses across the United States with Habitat for Humanity. Oprah likes to call this "Giving away our lives."

And reading. Oprah passionately believes in the spiritual practice of soulful reading. In addition to the fiction she selects for the book club, she also recommends other books for her viewers

and readers. One book she has recommended for four years is *Simple Abundance: A Daybook of Comfort and Joy,* by Sarah Ban Breathnach (New York: Warner Bks., 1995).

Simple Abundance is a daily guide for women, about finding their authentic selves. This book also became a lifeline for me. In the early pages of the book Ban Breathnach writes, "At the heart of *Simple Abundance* is an authentic awakening, one that resonates within your soul: you already possess all you need to be genuinely happy. The way you reach that awareness is through an inner journey that brings about an emotional, psychological, and spiritual transformation. A deep inner shift in your reality occurs, aligning you with the creative energy of the Universe. Such change is possible when you invite Spirit to open up the eyes of your awareness to the abundance that is already yours." A few days later she continues: "There are six principles that will act as guides as we make our inner journey over the next year. These are the six threads of abundant living which, when woven together, produce a tapestry of contentment that wraps us in inner peace, well-being, happiness, and a sense of security. First there is *gratitude*. When we do a mental and spiritual inventory of all that we have, we realize that we are very rich indeed. Gratitude gives way to *simplicity*–the desire to clear, pare down, and realize the essentials of what we need to live truly well. Simplicity brings with it *order*, both internally and externally. A sense of order in our life brings us *harmony*. Harmony provides us with the inner peace we need to appreciate the *beauty* that surrounds us each day, and beauty opens us to *joy*."

My gratitude journal was a lifeline during my bleak days, disciplining me each day to identify five things to be grateful for. Recently I re-read those entries and was moved to recall the simple things I thanked God for.

Simple Abundance has sold millions since it was published in 1995. And it has influenced scores of women, among them women in our churches. About a year and a half ago, I saw a woman sitting near the back of a sanctuary reading *Simple Abundance* during the worship service! Afterward I gently teased her about it. She lowered her voice and confessed, "I get more out of this than I do the sermon or the church service." I sighed inwardly. I knew this woman was struggling with the worship style

of the congregation but I had no idea how to create a bridge for her between what she was finding in *Simple Abundance* and the congregation's worship.

The spiritual philosophy Oprah promotes is empowering (a favorite Oprah word) for women. She routinely tells women that they have value, that their words, their stories are important. She gives women a voice and encourages them to trust their voice. What saddens me is that this empowerment for women comes from popular culture and not from the church. The church's history of empowering women is brief, sporadic, and ambivalent, at best. Although women are filling many pulpits across North America, their voices are still sometimes regarded as suspect. Furthermore, women affirming other women occurs much more in structured settings such as women's retreats, rather than within our congregations—in worship, in Sunday school, even in church meetings. Pastors and spiritual directors ought to pay attention to what Oprah is teaching, to better understand her influence on the women in our churches. Pastors and church leaders would do well to take lessons from Oprah on creating a safe environment in which women can share their experiences of God. As a pastor, I wonder: How can I communicate to the women in my congregation that they are valued? How can I create places in our worship and community life where women can articulate their stories and learn to trust their wisdom?

Oprah tells women they have value, that their words, their stories, are important. By contrast, the church's history of empowering women is brief, sporadic, and ambivalent, at best.

I think pastors need to reframe the spiritual disciplines not as "oughts" but as sources of life. Over and over, the testimonies from Oprah's viewers about their daily journal writing and daily meditating underscore the life-giving nature of these spiritual disciplines. I'm convinced that pastors who practice these disciplines will also find that they give us life to minister.

Oprah shows us that people are longing for meaning and significance in their lives. They want to know they have a reason to be, a purpose for existing. And they seek practical help in living out that purpose. In some ways, Oprah addresses our existential dilemmas. How, as pastors, can we follow her lead?

Perhaps one approach would be to return to the question of "call": What is God calling each of us to do? What gifts do I have, and how can those gifts be used in fulfilling my call? There is something refreshing in the simplicity with which Oprah encourages us to discover our purpose and then just do it.

I don't watch Oprah so much anymore. I've passed through the depression and have energy to relate more deeply with friends. Also, I don't need Oprah's affirmation, as I've discovered other ways of being affirmed. But I do read her magazine and I am intrigued with the novels she chooses for her book discussions. I continue to admire her and watch, from a distance, her impact on women in our churches and in the rest of the world.

Christian spirituality
Following the way of Jesus

April Yamasaki, Pastor
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This text was originally presented as a sermon.

Last year, while on my way to a conference in another city, I fell into conversation with the man seated next to me on the airplane. After the usual introductory comments—where are you going, where are you from—and after the usual polite inquiries—what do you do, how long have you worked there—our conversation turned to more serious matters of faith. "I do believe in a Higher Power," the man said to me. "I'm a spiritual person."

Not long ago, I read an item in the newspaper about a Women of Faith rally held in Spokane, Washington. Twelve thousand women came together for the inspirational weekend of worship, prayer, and special speakers. One woman, who had flown in from Oregon to take part in the rally, said, "I'm very interested in things spiritual, as opposed to things religious."

Spirituality seems to be everywhere these days. Books on spirituality line the shelves of our bookstores. Christian radio stations and interfaith television networks offer a host of programs on religious and spiritual themes. A search for spirituality on the Internet yields 399 categories, 711 web-sites, 250,000 web pages.

What's more, there seem to be as many different definitions of spirituality as there are different people and different sources of information. To the man on the plane, spirituality meant a personal belief. To the woman at the rally, spirituality was something different from religion. One book promotes spiritual growth through meditation. Another book describes how to find your spirit guide. One TV program is devoted to Islam, another to Hinduism, another to Orthodox Christianity. One web page is devoted to spirituality in the workplace. Another is all about spirituality and humour.

So how are we to understand spirituality? Is it whatever we want to make of it? Is it religious? Is it Christian? Is there a Mennonite spirituality? If so, what does it mean for you and me?

Perhaps one way to answer these questions would simply be to read Article 18 of our confession of faith, which is titled "Christian Spirituality." This article talks about our relationship with God, about discipleship, about various spiritual disciplines, including prayer, study of Scripture, reflection on God, corporate worship. I read through all of that again as I thought about this theme. As I continued reading through the article and through the commentary that follows it, I came across this line: "Christian spirituality is defined by Christ and his way, in accordance with the Scriptures." Christian spirituality is defined *by Christ and his way*, in accordance with the Scriptures. So perhaps another way of answering our questions about spirituality is to look at the life of Jesus. How did Jesus experience and express spirituality? What spiritual disciplines were part of Jesus' life?

Jesus' spirituality

From the Gospel accounts, it is clear that for Jesus, all of life was Spirit-led and Spirit-filled. Matt. 1:20 tells us that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit. In Matt. 4:1, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. In Luke 4:18, Jesus announced the start of his public ministry with the words of the prophet Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me." Even on the cross Jesus cried out to God, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46). And three days after his death, the Spirit of God raised Jesus from the dead (Rom. 8:11). All of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection was marked by a spiritual awareness and a spiritual depth.

Jesus could see the kingdom of God in a farmer sowing seed or in a woman baking bread. He could draw spiritual truth from the lilies of the field, the birds of the air, or a cup of well water.

In fact, during his earthly life, Jesus' relationship with God was so close and so personal that he often talked about God—and often talked to God—as "my Father" (e.g., Matt. 10:32, 26:39; John 5:17, 15:1). Jesus could say, "The Father and I are one" (John 10:30). Jesus could see the kingdom of God in a farmer sowing seed or in a woman baking bread. He could draw spiritual truth from the lilies

of the field, the birds of the air, or a cup of well water. Even at a wedding or a funeral or a dinner party, Jesus was aware of God's presence and engaged in God's work. All of Jesus' life was spiritual, because he lived it all in a constant, personal relationship with God.

For Jesus, spirituality was more than just the latest fad. It was a way of life. Spirituality was more than a weekend retreat of contemplation or a daily hour of meditation. It was an ongoing communion with God. Spirituality was more than belief in a supernatural power, more than an impersonal sense of oneness with nature. It was a personal relationship with a living God.

One of the ways Jesus expressed this ongoing, living relationship with God was through prayer: "In the morning, while it was still very dark, [Jesus] got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed" (Mark 1:35). During the day, when Jesus had just fed a huge crowd of people with the five loaves and two fish, he dismissed them, sent his disciples off in a boat, and "after saying farewell to them, he went up on the mountain to pray" (Mark 6:46). After the Last Supper with his disciples, while even his closest followers were falling asleep, Jesus "threw himself on the ground and prayed" (Mark 14:35). According to the Gospel record, Jesus prayed in the morning, in the daytime, at night.

In addition to prayer, Jesus' spirituality also expressed itself in reading and reflecting on the Scriptures. In Matthew 4, when he was tempted by the devil in the wilderness, Jesus answered each temptation with the words of Scripture. In Luke 4:18, Jesus announced his public ministry by quoting from the scroll of Isaiah. In John 7:14–24 and in other portions of the Gospels, Jesus could talk with the religious authorities on their own terms and on their own topics and still astonish them with his teaching.

Jesus' spirituality also found expression in ethical action and good works. His prayer life and his understanding of Scripture were not practiced in otherworldly isolation. Instead, Jesus welcomed the outcast, fed the hungry, healed the sick, even raised the dead. Jesus called others to a personal relationship with God (John 17:3) and to holy living (Matt. 5:48). He taught them how to pray (Matt. 6:5–15). He taught them the truth of the Scriptures (Matt. 5:21–48; Luke 24:45). He sent them also to

share the good news of God's kingdom and to continue his kingdom work (Luke 10:1–16; Matt. 28:18–20).

These quick snapshots of Jesus' own experience and practice of spirituality don't give us a complete definition or discussion of his spirituality. But from the Gospels we have these glimpses of Jesus that demonstrate his personal relationship with God. We know that he spent time in prayer, in the study of Scripture, and in serving others. At times he withdrew from others to spend time alone (Mark 1:35). At times he fasted (Matt. 4:2). At times he worshiped with others and sang hymns (Matt. 26:30).

These were all deliberate, concrete expressions of Jesus' spiritual life as recorded in the Gospels. His spirituality was religious in the best sense of the word—godly, devout, worshipful. But it was not religious in the sense of being rigid or legalistic. In fact, Jesus criticized the religious establishment for its legalism. Matt. 23:23: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others." In turn, the religious establishment criticized Jesus for being too liberal. He did not keep the Sabbath in the expected manner (Mark 2:23–28; John 9:13–16). At one point, Jesus is even described as "a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Luke 7:34).

In the religious smorgasbord of contemporary life, it may seem as if spirituality is whatever we want to make of it. But for Jesus, spirituality was not a matter of "anything goes."

In the spiritual smorgasbord of contemporary life, it may seem as if anything goes, as if spirituality is whatever we want to make of it. And perhaps that's what the religious establishment of Jesus' day thought about Jesus' way of life—that instead of following their tradition of spirituality based on the law, Jesus was making up his own brand of spirituality with his own rules.

But for Jesus, spirituality was not a matter of "anything goes." When asked about the greatest commandment in the Law, he said, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your

neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matt. 22:37–40).

In the same way, Jesus' life of spirituality was also grounded in these two commandments, in loving God and in loving neighbour. His personal relationship with God, his prayer life, his study of Scripture, his times of worship, solitude, and fasting were all part of loving God. And in loving his neighbour as himself, Jesus called others to the same way of life through his preaching, teaching, and miraculous works. Jesus' spirituality was a spirituality of loving both God and neighbour.

Spirituality today

During a study leave from my congregation, I've been visiting different churches to experience and explore different ways of worship. Or, in the terms of this sermon, I could say I've been visiting different churches to experience and explore different expressions of spirituality.

One Sunday, I worshiped in a Roman Catholic church. At the front of the sanctuary was a large altar, and behind the altar were two sets of benches placed facing one another. The worship service began with a processional of priests and assistants—all men and boys—who took their places at the two sets of benches. There were books with several different orders of service, but no one provided verbal instructions about which page to start on. That hardly seemed to matter. All of the men and boys on the front benches, and most of the congregation, seemed to know what to do—which page to turn to, when to kneel, when to stand, when to cross themselves. At certain points, there was the smell of incense, the sound of bells, and chanting from those who sat at the front.

I was struck by the otherworldliness of it all. There was a sense of mystery, of holiness, of an orderliness understood only by those who had been given special knowledge. I felt as if the worship in that place would have carried on whether or not I had been there that morning—as if those on the benches at the front of the sanctuary would have continued their chants and prayers even if no one else had been in the congregation.

Another Sunday, I worshiped at a United Church late afternoon jazz vespers service. The service began with a welcome

to the congregation and to the guest musicians—in this case, a jazz band of about 20 men and women. There was a printed order of service, but each musician and each piece of music was also verbally introduced by name. Between each piece of music was a prayer or a Scripture reading with a brief reflection provided by the minister. The service ended with a few brief announcements, more introductions, and an invitation to coffee with the musicians in the church foyer.

The worship service seemed part concert, part fireside chat. Instead of mystery, there were clear introductions and clear instructions. Instead of separation between leaders and congregation, there was a sense of participation in a common experience. The worship was inviting but not pushy, informal and personal, a thoughtful service that encouraged reflection.

One Saturday evening, I worshiped at a contemporary-style Mennonite Brethren church. The worship began with congregational singing led by a music team, composed of a lead singer-guitarist, four backup singers, and several other musicians with guitars, drums, and saxophone. The music team and the words for each song were projected on two large screens at the front of the sanctuary. Later, the theme for the worship service was introduced on one of the screens with a clip from the movie *Toy Story*. About half of the service was singing, with the other half devoted to the pastor's sermon.

Here, the worship felt almost like an evening at the theatre. Instead of mystery and otherworldliness, there was a sense of familiarity and informality. It was the middle of summer, and the pastor and many in the congregation were dressed in shorts. The sermon was down-to-earth and practical. The music, sound system, and movie clip were professionally done. The worship was casual, personal, with an emphasis on participation.

Three different churches, three different spiritualities. Or were they really different? I'm still thinking them over in light of Jesus' spirituality. We don't have a comprehensive checklist of spirituality dos and don'ts. Perhaps Jesus felt that would be too legalistic to leave with his disciples. But we can set these experiences—and any other spiritual experience or spiritual practice—in the context of Scripture, in the light of Jesus' own experience and expression of spirituality. We can ask ourselves:

1. Does this experience or practice draw us into a deeper and more personal relationship with God?
2. Does it draw us to prayer and to Scripture?
3. Does it result in a life of ethical action and good works?
4. Is this experience or practice grounded in love for God and neighbour?
5. Does it lead us to Christ and his way in accordance with the Scriptures?

In our world today, we are faced with many different definitions of spirituality, many different ways of expressing spirituality. But Christian spirituality, Mennonite spirituality, is defined by Christ and his way, in accordance with the Scriptures. So let us follow Jesus in faith, in life, in a spirituality that comes from a personal relationship of love for God and love for others.

Anastatic Anabaptists
Made alive and empowered to preach peace

Texts: Col. 2:9–15; Acts 10:34–43
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A sermon delivered at AMBS Pastors' Week, January 26, 2000, immediately preceding the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

I invite you to engage your imaginations and join me at a great baptismal celebration as it might have happened in the early church. Some of us arrive in tattered and stained rags, spotted and wrinkled (to use the biblical jargon), others in the ostentatious glitter of self-indulgence—both uniforms of our old way of living. We have encountered Jesus, and have heard God preaching peace through him, as Peter says to Cornelius in Acts 10. We have accepted the offer of peace, and now come to be baptized.

We strip off our old clothes and enter the water, immersing ourselves or being dunked by a baptizer. In entering the watery grave we become one with Jesus in his death, and he with us in ours. We are then raised up out of this tomb of water, sputtering for air, gasping for the wind of God, eagerly inhaling the oxygen of new life. To signify our birth to new life we now put on brand new clothes, the uniform of the new creation in which we now participate with our newfound brothers and sisters. With them we have now become part of the Messiah. We are "in Christ," or, as Col. 3:10 puts it, we have "put on" Christ, the new human created in the image of God. But let's note carefully: in doing so we now not only identify with Christ's death, we identify also with his resurrection. Hear Paul's unforgettable words from an earlier letter: "So if anyone is in Christ, creation is new! Everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" (2 Cor. 5:17).

In this baptismal celebration we participate in the birthing of new creation, in the bringing into existence of a people who were

once "no people," without hope and without God (1 Pet. 2:9–10; Eph. 2:11–22). This is an event far more momentous than a calendar shift from one millennium to the next. It is nothing less than the future breaking into the present, the new humanity taking shape in and around us. But there is more: this new humanity has been drawn into the messianic peacemaking activity of God. To be in Christ, to share in his resurrection, is to be empowered by God to be witnesses to and participants in God's preaching of peace (Acts 10:36; Eph. 2:13–18).

I

Let me invite you to shift your focus from then to now. Baptism is a core ritual among us Anabaptists. Of course not many of us here have had the great privilege of experiencing baptism as a messy, wet, and sometimes clumsy dunking, followed by trying to catch our breath and groping for a firm footing while not looking too silly. I have. And I have come to cherish not least the clumsiness and messiness of it all. Birth is like that. But I suspect not one of us was baptized, even if by immersion, stripped of all our clothing. Yet we can imagine it. And we can imagine how such a ritual would have imprinted itself on the minds of early believers who went through this dramatic ritual. Baptism is a drama about going from death to life—from the old way of living to a new way of living, from the culture of death to the culture of life, from the lordship of evil to the lordship of Christ, from powerlessness to powerfulness.

Not many of us have had the privilege of experiencing baptism as a messy, clumsy dunking. I have. And I have come to cherish not least the clumsiness and messiness of it all. Birth is like that.

As I said, baptism is a core ritual for Anabaptists. I think it would be fair to say that for us baptism has become chiefly a rite of entry into the body of the church, a rite of induction into a community of worship and service. It is also understood to be, second, a step of obedience to Christ, an expression of willingness to take on the life of discipleship, peacemaking, and service.

All this is true, and warrants being emphasized again and again. But underemphasized, if not often entirely absent from our

celebrations of baptism, is the sense that baptism is a moment of deep identification with Christ. It is an enactment of dying with Christ. It is also—and this is of critical importance—a moment of identification with his resurrection! Being baptized means being raised with Christ through the life-giving energy of God, as Colossians has it (2:12). Not only did God raise Jesus. We have been raised together with Christ! Easter has become a reality for us, too. We who were once the walking dead are not only alive, but we have now found new footing as human beings being remade in God's image. We are standing!—standing with power to be witnesses to the resurrection, fully implicated in the messianic task of preaching peace.

How to capture this in words that speak directly to us as Anabaptists? You might think it whimsical, but why not "Anastatic Anabaptists?" Anastatic? What on earth does that mean? Why not "ecstatic Anabaptists"? We know what that means, even if it is a bit of an oxymoron. Are you sure you don't mean "antistatic" Anabaptists—"*die Stillen im Lande*," the "quiet in the land"? Or why not just leave it at "static" Anabaptists? We also know what that means, even if it hardly makes for a sermon topic—unless, of course, we mean Anabaptists who create static, troublers of the peace. Did not Jesus say something like that? "Think not that we have come to bring peace! We have come to create static!" (cf. Matt. 10:34).

It turns out that that is, in fact, one of the meanings of "anastatic." "Anastatic" is simply an adaptation of the Greek verb *anistēmi*, which means "to rise" or "stand up," or "to raise," or "raise up," and in the extreme case, "to bring to life." And it can even mean "to rise up" or "rebel against." Easter should have a bit of that edge to it, don't you think? The noun *anastasis* means "rising," "awakening," or "resurrection." I think we should add "uprising."

It's true, I could just as well have used "resurrectionist Anabaptists." Next to Conrad Grebel College on the campus of the University of Waterloo is a college founded by an order of priests known as Resurrectionists. Wonderful name, isn't it? What if, during this time of Mennonite restructuring, merging, and dividing, we had called ourselves "Resurrectionists North" and "Resurrectionists South"? Such a name you can live towards.

For today, I like "anastatic" better. It goes together with Anabaptists. Besides, I didn't make it up. James McClendon speaks in his *Systematic Theology* of ethics in the "sphere of the *anastatic*," ethics informed by Easter (*Ethics,* vol. 1, *Systematic Theology* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1986], 242–75). Anastatic Anabaptists are people who are "standing again," who have been awakened from sleep, raised to new life, who in life and word are witnesses to the reality of Easter, and, finally, whose confidence and power derives from Easter and the one who made it happen. I am reminded of a fragment of what appears to be a baptismal challenge in Eph. 5:14. It may just as well be a choice bit of peace preaching—the evangel in a nutshell:

> *"Sleeper, wake up!*
> *Rise from the dead,*
> *and Christ will shine on you."*

II

I suspect some of you are restless with this emphasis on resurrection. You will rightly remind me that the church struggled mightily in the early decades and centuries of its life with those who insisted that the resurrection had already taken place, whose life and faith were therefore in mortal danger of losing touch with reality. Furthermore, you will remind me that as Anabaptists we are more familiar with humble service, with suffering—with the cross—as the categories of faithful life between our baptism and our anticipated resurrection. We are wary of too enthusiastic an assessment of the Christian life, too idealistic a view of the church. We keep trying to figure out whether spots and wrinkles are a fashion statement reflective of our humanity or something to be removed in the interests of it.

I do not disagree with Paul and others in the early church who were decisive in their rejection of an over-enthusiastic interpretation of Easter. If only that were our problem! If many early believers had a hard time keeping their feet on the ground, *our* problem is more likely to be having a hard time getting up off the ground, learning to stand again, and then knowing what it is to walk in the light of the resurrection of Christ and the certainty

of the great uprising to come. Our problem, I fear, is not so much that we need to be reminded that we are to wear the new uniform in a still dirty world. Our problem is that we're not sure we want to hand in the old uniform for a new one at all.

III

Brothers and sisters, we need to come to terms with Easter, with what Easter means for us, now. Our witness to Christ is at stake. The force of our witness depends on it. The confidence with which we engage in the costly task of peacemaking is based on it. Our ability to stand up to the powers depends on it. Our ability to rise up against the powers is premised on our being raised up with Christ. Our courage to face the cross depends on our knowing in our very gut the reality of new life. In short, the great uprising in God's future is meant already now to inform our uprising in the present.

Forgiveness is not the offer of impunity. To be forgiven is not to walk out of court with the sheepish grin of those who got off scot-free. To be forgiven is to be released in order to become full participants in God's reclaiming and mending of the world.

If we are not anastatic, if we are not resurrectionist, discipleship and peacemaking will be chiefly a matter of obligation, discipline, and servitude, performed with the requisite amount of self-denial. In other words, discipleship and peacemaking will be a task we undertake on our own steam. That may look very Mennonite, very Anabaptist, but it is not informed by Easter, and thus betrays our baptism. How ironic!

Yes, without doubt the cross awaits us who have been raised with Christ in baptism. Yes, Good Friday surely looms on our horizon if we are truly preachers of peace cut from the same cloth as was Jesus. But what we learn from texts such as Colossians is that Easter precedes Good Friday for those who have been brought to life with Christ. Only so can we participate in the sufferings of our Lord with confidence and hope. Only so can we participate in the conflictual preaching of peace with joy and hope. Listen to the sequence in Paul's words in Phil. 3:10–11: "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if

somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead." Do you notice the sequence? Resurrection→Suffering→Resurrection. With Paul we look to the holy task of preaching and making peace, to the cross, with the power of the resurrection on our minds and in our guts, even as we still await the coming day, the resurrection of the dead.

First, we need Easter on our minds because we need to be able to view our world from the vantage point of Easter. We need to see ourselves, each other, the church, church institutions, our enemies, and the structures of our society in light of the knowledge that death will not have the last word. We need to think and reflect on our world with the premise that the energy of the resurrecting God who raised Christ from the dead is giving us and the world around us new life. The savior is the creator! The creator is the savior! Learning to think with such radical hope and openness to divine surprises does not come easily. Such Easter-consciousness will give us a witness that is rich and profound, a gospel that encompasses the fate of each individual as well as the very rudiments of culture, a gospel that speaks to and engages the world in its complex brokenness. That is why we need Easter on our minds.

To be raised up is to become part of the uprising against the powers that resist the creator's loving attempts to recreate the cosmos.

Second, we need Easter in our gut because the witness to Easter and the peace it proclaims is costly. It takes guts, it takes courage to make and preach peace. We need to know in our gut that the God who raised Christ from the dead has raised us with him. We need to know the power of his resurrection in our gut in order to proclaim the good news.

IV

Our Colossians text identifies two dimensions of this good news: one relates to sin and forgiveness, the other to the powers.

In Christ we have each been offered forgiveness. As our text tells us, God has nailed the charge against us on the cross. To translate literally, we have been "graced," a term broader in scope than forgiveness. A central element in evangelism, not? Forgiveness is, according to our text, one of God's powerful practices.

But Easter reminds us that forgiveness is *not* the centre of the good news we preach. Being graced with respect to our trespasses and our trespassing means having God clear the decks so we can stand again as individuals and, most especially, as the people of God. God forgives us so we can rise up and learn to walk as sons and daughters of God. Forgiveness is not the offer of impunity. To be forgiven is not to walk out of court with the sheepish grin of those who got off scot-free. To be forgiven is to be released in order to become full participants in God's reclaiming and mending of the world. As Paul reminds us in that other great baptism text, Romans 6, in baptism we have not only become members of Christ in his death and resurrection, but we have thereby put our members wholly at God's disposal, as "weapons of justice" (6:13). To be raised up is to become part of the uprising against the powers that resist the creator's loving attempts to recreate the cosmos (cf. Eph 6:10–20).

In that last comment lies finally a hint of the extent of the gospel as envisioned in our Colossians text. To witness to the resurrection is to witness to the fact that God is bringing the new creation into existence in us, in the church, and indeed in the world. That is why the powers emerge necessarily at this point in the text. "Powers" is mega-language; it is meant to signify that God's love for the world extends beyond you and me and our puny sins to the very structures and forces that govern our culture of destructive and dehumanizing "-isms." Our gospel, if it is rooted in Easter, will necessarily reflect such comprehensiveness and engage the world accordingly (cf. 1 Cor. 15:23–27; Eph. 6:10–20).

We must be careful here: our being raised up with Christ in baptism is not yet all there is. If this is all we have hoped for, we are fools, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 (see especially vv. 12–19). Paul and his associates were not stupid. They were realistic about the conflictual nature of preaching peace in this still broken world. They were realistic also about the preachers of peace. Realism means being realistic about what we're up against and also about ourselves as preachers of peace. Our uniforms, however new, are often tarnished and stained; there is no denying it.

But, and this is a very big "but," realism in light of Easter means assessing reality in light of God's victory over death, and it

means living with faith in the energy of the God who raised Jesus, as Col. 2:12 puts it. We turn our back on Easter and we betray our baptism if we do not already now rise up in the power of God, if we do not already now stand against the powers of darkness. Yes, Colossians claims the powers have already been paraded as the vanquished in a great victory procession (2:15). But as Ephesians 6 reminds us, the life of those who have been raised with Christ is marked by intense struggle against precisely those same powers. We should not mistake the vision of a victory parade in Col. 2:15 as something other than what we read over and over again in the Bible in other conflicts, before the battle commences: "Behold, I have given them into your hands!"

Colossians represents precisely such assurance to us who have been raised to participate in the messianic task. We enter the costly and often messy struggle for peace with Easter behind us and before us.

V

I want to conclude with the words of the risen Lord to Paul as recorded in Acts 26. Echoing much of what I have been saying, they are a fitting challenge to all Anastatics: "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But get up and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and testify to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you. I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."

Let me recall the words of Paul from Philippians 3, which I read earlier, and invite you to share his yearning: "We want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow we may attain the resurrection from the dead."

So I invite you to be Anastatic Anabaptists, Resurrectionist Anabaptists, powerful witnesses, joining the risen Christ in preaching peace to the far and near (Eph. 2:13–18). Our baptism calls us and prepares us for the task.

But baptism is not our only dramatic moment of identification with the risen Lord. Peter tells Cornelius in Acts 10 that not everyone has been entrusted with the task of witnessing, but only those "who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead" (10:41). Mennonites are people of food. That should predispose us to a deep appreciation for communion. It is not only the death of Christ we recall at the Lord's Supper. We recall that death this side of Easter. We commune with the *risen* Lord. Nothing binds us closer to that risen Lord than to have eaten and drunk with him. Nothing binds us closer to his mission than to dine and drink with him over and over again. So, I invite you as hungry Anastatics to come and "break the bread of new creation" and "drink the wine of resurrection" (*Hymnal: A Worship Book*, #272). Amen.

What is healthy congregational spirituality?
A guide to resources

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Although most of what is crowding the shelves in the spirituality section of bookstores and on web-sites today focuses on personal spirituality, a growing body of literature is emerging that examines and defines healthy communal spirituality. And since our own Anabaptist/Mennonite tradition was born in an attempt to restore a vital communal spirituality, we would do well to pay attention to this literature and discern what is wheat and what may be chaff.

It may be a dangerous undertaking, however, to try to define healthy congregational spirituality. In *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer observes, "God hates visionary dreaming: it makes the dreamer proud and pretentious. [Those] who fashion a visionary ideal of community demand that it be realized by God, by others, and by [themselves]" ([New York: Harper & Row, 1954], 27). Despite such risks, current writers and church leaders persist in the effort to identify the origin and character of vibrant spiritual communities.

What is being written today falls into two broad categories: one group of books focuses on the role of the pastor as spiritual leader; the second group gives attention to practices and patterns that shape healthy congregational life. Within each group I will highlight one or two especially important titles and make briefer reference to a variety of other useful titles.

The pastor's role in healthy congregational spirituality

No one disagrees with the assumption that pastoral leaders play a key role in the spiritual health of congregations. What is up for discussion is how that happens best.

The church has always known that pastors lead by example. If pastors tend their own spiritual health, they provide a model for those they lead. When they make prayer a priority, seek out

spiritually nourishing relationships, and express their faith daily in ordinary ways in their own neighborhood, they show what it means to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and your neighbor as yourself—Jesus' own definition of healthy spirituality (Mark 12:30–31).

Eugene Peterson, pastor-turned-author, emphasizes this theme in *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987). "I don't know of any other profession in which it is quite as easy to fake it as in ours," he confesses. "It doesn't take many years in this business to realize that we can conduct a fairly respectable pastoral ministry without giving much more than ceremonial attention to God" (3–4). And even when ecclesiastical hierarchies and the congregation itself conspire to support public success at the expense of inner vitality, Peterson challenges pastors to examine their lives and ministry and take responsibility for the integrity of their vocation.

Peterson compares the work of ministry to the angles of a triangle: preaching, teaching, and administration are the visible, public lines of pastoral work, while prayer, Scripture, and spiritual direction are the three small, less noticed angles. Working these angles is what gives shape and integrity to the daily work of pastors—the acts of attention to God in relation to one's own self as pastor (prayer), the acts of attention to the biblical communities of Israel and the church (Scripture), and the acts of attention directed to another person (spiritual direction). "If we get the angles right," says Peterson, "it is a simple matter to draw in the lines" (4).

A number of other books also address the significant role of the pastor's own spirituality. *Leading the Congregation: Caring for Yourself While Serving Others*, written by Norman Shawchuck and Roger Heuser (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), explores the relationship between spiritual integrity and the demands of administrative leadership. The authors' three-dimensional vision of healthy spiritual leadership includes an upward view of God, an inward view of the self, and an outward view of the wider context of pastoral ministry.

Spiritual Wholeness for Clergy: A New Psychology of Intimacy with God, Self, and Others, by Donald R. Hands and Wayne L. Fehr ([Washington, D.C.]: Alban Inst., 1993), grew out of the healing

ministry of Saint Barnabas Center (Wisconsin), and emphasizes the intimate relationship between psychological and spiritual health. In her foreword, novelist Susan Howatch acknowledges the dangers inherent in a clerical career and notes that this book would have been enormously valuable to the characters in her Church of England series.

In another Alban Institute book, *How Prayer Shapes Ministry* (1992), John E. Biersdorf explores the relationship between prayer and ministry. He suggests that prayer is not just a resource for ministry; instead ministry is an expression of prayer. Biersdorf draws from systems theory as well as Myers-Briggs terminology to provide guidance for enriched personal and public prayer.

Peterson confesses, "It doesn't take many years in this business to realize that we can conduct a fairly respectable pastoral ministry without giving much more than ceremonial attention to God."

Three other recent titles that provide guidance from a biblical perspective for the spiritual health of leaders are E. Glenn Hinson, *Spiritual Preparation for Christian Leadership* (Nashville: Upper Room Bks., 1999); Reggie McNeal, *A Work of Heart: Understanding How God Shapes Spiritual Leaders* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000); and Marva J. Dawn and Eugene H. Peterson, *The Unnecessary Pastor: Rediscovering the Call* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, and Vancouver: Regent College, 2000). In his review of the last book (*Canadian Mennonite*, May 1, 2000), Henry Paetkau comments that judging by the speed with which the book sold out at a recent gathering of Mennonite ministers, the discussion of pastoral messiah complexes touches a particularly sensitive nerve among clergy (11). What Dawn and Peterson do is encourage pastors to withstand destructive cultural and religious forces that attempt to domesticate their ministry and to live instead out of an identity that derives from the crucified and risen Jesus (which, of course, is the call for all Christians—clergy or not).

Finally, a book that agrees with the above emphasis on the pastor's own spirituality but goes an important step further to make explicit the connection with congregational spirituality is Howard Rice's *The Pastor as Spiritual Guide* (Nashville: Upper Room Bks., 1998). Rice states flatly, "The principal tool for the work of pastoral ministry is one's own faith" (35). When people

turn to a pastor, he says, they are looking for "a model of being in the world that is anchored in God…, someone who can point them toward depth and meaning" (34).

But beyond being models of faithfulness, pastors are also called to be spiritual guides for their congregations. In fact, Rice asserts that spiritual guidance is the most appropriate lens—the organizing principle—for viewing all of pastoral ministry. He defines spiritual guidance as "a sacramental quality of seeing the work of God in the ordinary. This guidance takes place in the way a leader assists a person, a group, or a congregation to pay attention to the ways God is at work in their lives, individually and corporately" (62). In other words, the central call of pastoral ministry is to assist people in the process of discerning and responding to God's presence in their lives.

The most enlightening chapter in the book, in my opinion, is the first chapter, "A Calling Seeking Definition," in which Rice examines the history of ministerial leadership and identifies a succession of historical and current images: pastor as evangelist, as mediator of sacramental grace, as preacher (and resident theologian), as teacher, as pastoral counselor, as agent of social change, and as manager of an institution. Although each of these images has its place within an overall understanding of ministry, none is adequate as a central vision. Having cleared the way for his thesis, Rice then identifies the unique calling of the pastor as spiritual guide to the entire congregation and proceeds to explore implications for leadership of worship, education, social change, and management. Unfortunately the second half of the book is less captivating than the first half, but these topics are better treated by the specialist writers of books dealt with in the next section of this essay.

When pastors faithfully tend their own spiritual health and view all of pastoral ministry through the lens of spiritual guidance, they will have done the most important work they can do to foster vital spiritual life in their congregations.

Practices and patterns for healthy congregational spirituality

When pastors faithfully tend their own spiritual health and view all of pastoral ministry through the lens of spiritual guidance, they will have done the most important work they can do to foster

vital spiritual life in their congregations. The next set of titles offers specific guidance for the practice of pastoral ministry as seen with the renewed vision of ministry as spiritual guidance. These books begin to provide answers for ordinary everyday tasks: How does one preach or lead a worship service as a spiritual guide? How does one lead a committee or congregational meeting? Prepare candidates for baptism? Teach parents? Care for the grieving? Train evangelists or peacemakers?

Though the last decade has produced a small but sturdy collection of books that provide overall guidance for such a vision,[1] the most relevant for Mennonite churches is *Congregational Discipling: A Threefold Vision for Worship, Community, and Mission,* sponsored by Mennonite Board of Congregational Ministries, Herald Press Congregational Publishing, and Commission on Education (Scottdale: Herald Pr., 1997). Rooted in more than a decade of intensive testing, writing, and teaching (in North America and beyond) and based on biblical teachings and Anabaptist understandings of the nature of the church, the Congregational Discipling Vision provides a practical framework for seeing all of congregational life as spiritually formative.

Individual chapters describe the discipling process (or, one could say, the spiritual guidance process) in three broad arenas of congregational life: worship (both corporate and personal), community (relationships within the body of Christ), and mission (the church's weekday work of witness, service, peacemaking, and stewardship in the world). Attention is also given to the needs for guidance within specific age groups: children, youth, young adults, middle adults, older adults. A chapter on church architecture spells out the formative potential of the spaces where congregations worship. Another chapter, on money, includes a useful chart for analyzing how the congregation's budget supports discipling priorities. A chapter on the pastor-as-discipler and another on organizational structures provide leaders with theological foundations and practical tools for spiritual guidance in the nitty-gritty situations of congregational life. In each chapter, the focus is on the heart of the matter: how the discipling or spiritual formation process leads to love of God, self, neighbor, and the world.

In the following section, a variety of resources are noted for the ministries of spiritual guidance taking place in these three major arenas—the vertical arena of worship and spirituality, the horizontal arena of community and family life, and the outward arena of mission and peace.

Spiritual guidance for the congregation's life of worship

Because public worship is a central opportunity for communal encounter with God, a priority for healthy congregational spirituality is worship leaders (musicians, Scripture readers, preachers, pray-ers, offering takers, visual artists, etc.) who understand their priestly and prophetic roles. However, in a tradition with under-developed sacramental understandings, our lay leaders (and sometimes even pastors) may struggle to function as spiritual guides who create space for God's presence and help worshipers hear and receive God's transforming word for their lives. Because no written resource alone can provide adequate guidance or training, pastors must offer individual mentoring for those who are learning to lead worship. Worship leaders need formal instruction as well as modeling in the role of silence, language, posture, pacing, responsiveness to the congregation, prayerfulness, awareness of Scripture and tradition, and many other dimensions of this ministry.

Two books by Philip H. Pfatteicher provide a foundation for understanding worship as formation: *The School of the Church: Worship and Christian Formation* (Valley Forge: TPI PA, 1995), and *Liturgical Spirituality* (Valley Forge: TPI PA, 1997). More scholarly than some of the titles previously mentioned, these books offer theological and historical depth and repay careful reading.

A particular area in need of attention is the role of ritual in worship. Three books provide indispensable guidance for planning and leading rituals that open the way for God's transforming work. Tom F. Driver, *Liberating Rites: Understanding the Transformative Power of Ritual* (Boulder: Westview, 1998), and Eleanor Kreider, *Communion Shapes Character* (Scottdale: Herald Pr., 1997), both offer useful theoretical discussions as well as helpful examples of effective rituals. The *Minister's Manual*, edited by John Rempel (Newton and Winnipeg: Faith & Life, and Scottdale and Waterloo: Herald Pr., 1998), which should be in every church and

pastor's library, contains a fine set of essays illuminating the history, theology, and practice of the church's rituals, along with rubrics for use.

Many congregations are discovering that regularly offering healing rituals within the context of Sunday morning worship is a potent means of restoring and maintaining healthy spirituality. Two useful guides for such ministry are Avery Brooke, *Healing in the Landscape of Prayer* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cowley Pubns., 1996), and Ian Cowie, *Prayer and Ideas for Healing Services* (Glasgow: Wild Goose Pubns., 1995).[2]

A spiritually deforming experience in some congregations is "worship wars"—conflicts over competing visions of styles of worship. Several of the most useful books for helping leaders think through these issues are Paul B. Brown, *In and for the World: Bringing the Contemporary into Christian Worship* (Minneapolis: Fortress Pr., 1992); Marva J. Dawn, *Is It a Lost Cause? Having the Heart of God for the Church's Children* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997); Pamela Ann Moeller, *Exploring Worship Anew: Dreams and Visions* (St. Louis: Chalice Pr., 1998); and Carol Doran and Thomas Troeger, *Trouble at the Table: Gathering the Tribes for Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992). In the latter book, a helpful set of maps provides vocabulary for people to talk about their differences in ways that create understanding rather than erect barriers.

As part of the work of spiritual guidance, leaders must introduce people to spiritual disciplines—practices intended not to manipulate God but rather to put us in the place where grace can reach us.

As part of the work of spiritual guidance, pastors and leaders must introduce people to spiritual disciplines—those practices, which, as Richard Foster reminds us, do not manipulate God but rather put us in the place where grace can reach us. Many, many resources are available for teaching or mentoring. Among the best are: Marjorie J. Thompson, *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995); Dorothy C. Bass, ed., *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997); and a brand-new gem of a book, Joan Chittister, *Illuminated Life: Monastic Wisdom for Seekers of Light* (New York: Orbis Bks., 2000). We are

fortunate to have excellent resources written by Mennonite authors as well: Wendy Miller, *Invitation to Presence: A Guide to Spiritual Disciplines* (Nashville: Upper Room Bks., 1995); Arthur Paul Boers, *Lord, Teach Us to Pray: A New Look at the Lord's Prayer* (Scottdale: Herald Pr., 1992); and Marlene Kropf and Eddy Hall, *Praying With the Anabaptists: The Secret of Bearing Fruit* (Newton and Winnipeg: Faith & Life, 1994).

A particular spiritual practice—praying the daily office—has not formally been part of our faith tradition. Although families may engage in family worship and small groups often include prayer together as part of their agenda, a regular gathering for liturgical prayer is less often practiced. In recent years, however, the practice of morning or evening prayer has become more common in Mennonite institutions or at special events such as weekend conferences or retreats. C. W. McPherson, *Grace at This Time: Praying the Daily Office* (Harrisburg: Morehouse Pub., 1999), offers an introduction to the theology and spirituality of the daily office and also provides rubrics for the office. Other often-used daily prayer books include J. Philip Newell, *Celtic Prayers from Iona* (New York: Paulist Pr., 1997); *Praise God: Common Prayer at Taizé* (New York: OUP, 1997); and Rueben P. Job and Norman Shawchuck, *A Guide to Prayer for All God's People* (Nashville: Upper Room Bks., 1990).

Spiritual guidance for the congregation's life together as the body of Christ

Several temptations can divert or distort the ministry of spiritual guidance in the communal arena. One is the temptation of therapy (to apply psychological understandings to group life); another is the temptation of organization (to apply managerial wisdom); and a third is the temptation of teaching (to apply educational theories). While each of these areas of knowledge enriches the formation of healthy communal life, none is the center. To provide spiritual guidance for the common life means that in every relationship leaders focus on assisting people or groups to respond to the mystery of God's grace in their lives. In pastoral care, for example, people may indeed be loved, supported, encouraged, counseled, confronted, or mentored, but the major task is tending their relationship with God. A book that

treats this theme is M. Simone Roach, *Caring from the Heart: The Convergence of Caring and Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Pr., 1997).

One of the most significant arenas of communal spirituality is small groups. While an abundance of how-to books is available for groups, two essential practices for groups that desire healthy spirituality are prayer and Scripture meditation. Two books that speak to the heart of the matter are Norvene Vest, *Gathered in the Word: Praying the Scripture in Small Groups* (Nashville: Upper Room Bks., 1996), and M. Robert Mulholland, Jr., *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation* (Nashville: Upper Room, 1985). Even mature Christians can confuse study of the Bible with a living relationship with God. Both Vest and Mulholland offer wisdom from the church's tradition for encountering the living Word. I can personally testify to the sustaining and enriching gifts gained from the practice of praying Scripture in a group. The small group with which I meet weekly has used Vest's adaptation of *lectio divina*[3] with much profit for several years.

Related to small group spirituality are the practices of spiritual direction and spiritual friendship. More often occurring in one-to-one settings, these practices provide individual guidance for Christians seeking more vital spirituality. Two classics in the field of spiritual direction are William A. Barry and William J. Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction* (New York: Seabury Pr., 1982), and Margaret Guenther, *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cowley Pubns., 1992). To introduce spiritual friendship, two books provide practical guidance: Wendy Miller, *Learning to Listen: A Guide for Spiritual Friends* (Nashville: Upper Room Bks., 1993), and Timothy Jones, *Finding a Spiritual Friend: How Friends and Mentors Can Make Your Faith Grow* (Nashville: Upper Room Bks., 1998).[4]

A growing arena of individual and group spiritual formation in Mennonite churches is retreats. Although retreats may have multiple purposes (fellowship, study, recreation, or rest, for example), many Mennonites today are seeking contemplative retreats where silence, solitude, prayer, and Scripture meditation are the primary focus. Two resources for such retreats are Rueben P. Job, *Spiritual Life in the Congregation: A Guide for Retreats* (Nashville: Upper Room Bks., 1997), and Jane E. Vennard, *Be*

Still: Designing and Leading Contemplative Retreats (Bethesda, Md.: Alban Inst., 2000).

The temptation to diverge from the spiritual guidance vision may be especially strong in the business and committee life of the congregation. Because of time pressures and the strong influence of corporate managerial practices, congregations may forget that the real goal of all our decision-making structures is nurturing faith and advancing the reign of God. Only a simpleton would pretend that transforming business meetings into faith-building experiences is easy, but several courageous writers are pointing the way. Perhaps the most influential is Charles M. Olsen with an approach called Worshipful Work. His book, *Transforming Church Boards into Communities of Spiritual Leaders* ([Washington, D.C]: Alban Inst., 1995), is a creative application of biblical and historical discernment traditions to the ordinary business of church councils and committees. In *Discerning God's Will Together: A Spiritual Practice for the Church* (Bethesda, Md.: Alban Inst., 1997), a book written with Danny E. Morris, Olsen carries the creative vision further and offers a model for discerning God's way in the midst of confusing or polarized situations.[5]

Probably the single most significant communal arena for nourishing healthy spirituality is the catechetical process. Instead of seeing this primarily as a time for imparting information, recent efforts in the church emphasize a broader spiritual formation approach.

Because spiritual awareness begins in the family, a significant arena for spiritual formation (which certainly affects congregational life) is the home. Again, a multitude of titles is available, but the single most useful work, in my opinion, is Marjorie J. Thompson, *Family—The Forming Center: A Vision of the Role of Family in Spiritual Formation* (Nashville: Upper Room Bks., 1989). Another important Mennonite resource for family life is not a book but the Opening Doors initiative sponsored by the Commission on Education (Newton, Kansas), a new conceptual model for integrating family spirituality and congregational life.[6]

Probably the single most significant communal arena for nourishing healthy spirituality is the baptismal and church membership preparation process. Here the congregation has the

opportunity to provide nourishing spiritual food for infant Christians and initiate them into healthy spiritual practices which will sustain their faith and send them out into the world as Spirit-directed disciples. Instead of seeing the catechetical process primarily as a time for imparting information, recent efforts in the church emphasize a broader spiritual formation approach. Two Mennonite guides are based on this vision: *Making Disciples: A Guide for Youth Catechism Leaders*, a group writing effort under the editorial direction of Susan E. Janzen (Newton: Faith & Life, and Scottdale: Mennonite Pub. House, 1992); and Jane Hoober Peifer and John Stahl-Wert, *Welcoming New Christians: A Guide for the Christian Initiation of Adults* (Newton: Faith & Life, and Scottdale: Mennonite Pub. House, 1995). Both of these works draw on the ancient church practice of the catechumenate as a four-part process of initiation: evangelization, inquiry and exploration, preparation for baptism, and post-baptismal formation.

Spiritual guidance for the congregation's life of mission and ministry in the world

Before exploring the implications of a spiritual guidance vision for specific congregational ministries in the world, an important stopping place is the everyday work life of Christians. Our Anabaptist tradition highlights the important role of daily discipleship, whether that occurs in the home, neighborhood, or workplace. And since many people today spend a majority of their waking hours at work, this arena deserves careful attention as a place where the Spirit is bringing new life.

Perhaps the most creative, integrative writing on this theme in recent years is Parker J. Palmer, *The Active Life: A Spirituality of Work, Creativity, and Caring* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990). As a doing-oriented person who experienced a tug-of-war between the active and contemplative life, Palmer eventually came to see that his call was to hold together a paradoxical vision in which both contemplation and action are honored and integrated at the root. He says, "Action becomes more than a matter of getting from here to there, but a contemplative affair as well, a path by which we may discover inner truth. Contemplation becomes more than a luxury to be indulged when the worries of the world are behind us, but a way of changing

consciousness that may have more impact on the world than strategic action can have" (17).

Several other titles that amplify this discussion are Elizabeth A. Dreyer, *Earth Crammed with Heaven: A Spirituality of Everyday Life* (New York: Paulist Pr., 1994); Steve Jacobsen, *Hearts to God, Hands to Work: Connecting Spirituality and Work* (Bethesda, Md.: Alban Inst., 1997); and Barbara Smith-Moran, *Soul at Work: Reflections on a Spirituality of Working* (Winona, Minn.: St. Mary's, 1997).

The two temptations Christians face in the life of the Spirit in the world are related to the active-contemplative paradox described above. Some Christians burn themselves out by working too hard in ministries of justice, service, peacemaking, and witness, acting as though human effort alone will fulfill the reign of God. Others are overly passive, waiting for God to make all the effort and not contributing their energy and gifts to God's dream. Whatever ministry of action one is called to in the world, a faithful response both waits on God and moves in faithful obedience to God's call.

Probably the book that has done most to transform the vision and practice of people I know with regard to the church's ministry of evangelism is Ben Campbell Johnson, *Speaking of God: Evangelism as Initial Spiritual Guidance* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991). For Mennonites who may find it difficult to speak of faith in secular contexts, Johnson's vision is liberating. He describes a crisis of major proportions in North America: God's people lack art and passion in sharing their faith. Differentiating between God-talk (making references to God in every conversation) and God-speech (candid, natural conversation about what is most important in our lives), he uses the image of spiritual guide as central for this ministry. Noticing where God is already at work in another's life, encouraging conversation about what is happening, and supporting another in the path of faithfulness are critical ingredients. When this happens, he says, "the repulsive image of the rude, intrusive soul saver gives way to an intelligent, sensitive, caring, compassionate human being helping persons find the meaning of their lives" (28).

The congregation's ministries of justice, service, and peacemaking demand a particularly resilient spirituality. Often

taking place in oppressive or violent situations, these ministries sooner or later breed discouragement, cynicism, or despair. James McGinnis, *Journey into Compassion: A Spirituality for the Long Haul* (Bloomington, Ind.: Meyer Stone Bks., 1989), emphasizes that our own experience of being loved by God is the sustaining source of ongoing creativity and loving service in the world.

Spirituality for the future

In a sense, healthy congregational spirituality must be re-invented in every generation. Because our faith is shaped and lived out in specific environments, leaders must always be attentive to what God is doing in the world, in the church, and within our own hearts. While certain classic practices remain essential for healthy spiritual growth (God-centered worship, loving relationships within Christ's body, and Spirit-filled witness and ministry in the world), our particular response of faithfulness requires not only an appreciation and understanding of our own spiritual tradition but a lively engagement with the world to which God calls us.

Ministries of justice, service, and peacemaking demand a particularly resilient spirituality. Our experience of being loved by God is the sustaining source of ongoing creativity and loving service in the world.

To better understand our own Anabaptist spiritual heritage, I recommend three valuable introductory essays found in the following books: Daniel Liechty, trans. and ed., *Early Anabaptist Spirituality: Selected Writings*, (New York: Paulist Pr., 1994); J. Craig Haas, *Readings from Mennonite Writings, New & Old* (Intercourse, Pa.: Good Bks. PA, 1992), and Cornelius J. Dyck, trans. and ed., *Spiritual Life in Anabaptism: Classic Devotional Resources* (Scottdale: Herald Pr., 1995). For a more thorough discussion of early Anabaptist spirituality, and particularly its corporate expressions, see chapters 20–27 of C. Arnold Snyder's *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction* (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 1995).

A challenging look at spirituality in the postmodern world is provided by Thomas Hart, *Spiritual Quest: A Guide to the Changing Landscape* (New York: Paulist Pr., 1999), or Leonard Sweet, *FaithQuakes* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994). Even better, the autobiographical conversion stories of such gifted contemporary writers as Kathleen Norris, in *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography*

(Boston: HM, 1993) and *The Cloister Walk* (New York: Riverhead Bks., 1996), or Anne Lamott, in *Traveling Mercies: Some Thoughts on Faith* (New York: Pantheon, 1999), give fascinating glimpses into the Spirit's creative work in drawing people to Christ and also into the role of ordinary faithful congregations in providing a welcoming home for such seekers.

What we can count on is that "God who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1.6). Though we often use this verse to declare our personal confidence in God's enduring good purposes, it was originally addressed to a congregation. Fragile or graceless or impotent as the church sometimes seems to be, God still promises to use us to bring glory to Christ. Thanks be to God!

Notes

[1] Among the best are Susanne Johnson, *Christian Spiritual Formation in the Church and Classroom* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989); Maria Harris, *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church* (Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989); Clark M. Williamson and Ronald J. Allen, *The Vital Church: Teaching, Worship, Community Service* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1998); and John Ackerman, *Spiritual Awakening: A Guide to Spiritual Life in Congregations* ([Bethesda, Md.]: Alban Inst., 1994). Another book some Mennonite congregations have benefited from is Christian A. Schwarz, *Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches* (Carol Stream: ChurchSmart Resources, 1996).

[2] Additional titles are Theodore W. Jennings, *The Liturgy of Liberation: The Confession and Forgiveness of Sins* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988); Leo Thomas and Jan Alkire, *Healing Ministry: A Practical Guide* (Kansas City, Mo.: Sheed & Ward, 1994); and Flora Slosson Wuellner, *Prayer and Our Bodies* (Nashville: Upper Room, 1987), as well as *Prayer, Stress & Our Inner Wounds* by the same author (Nashville: Upper Room, 1985).

[3] *Lectio divina*, or sacred reading, is a practice from early Christian fathers and mothers that teaches a disciplined approach to hearing a word from God in a specific text and responding to it in obedience.

[4] A helpful book on group spiritual direction is Rose Mary Dougherty, *Group Spiritual Direction: Community for Discernment* (New York: Paulist Pr., 1995). An accompanying video is also available.

[5] Also useful are these titles: Suzanne G. Farnham, Joseph P. Gill, R. Taylor McLean, and Susan M. Ward, *Listening Hearts: Discerning Call in Community* (Harrisburg: Morehouse Pub., 1991; Luke Timothy Johnson, *Scripture & Discernment: Decision Making in the Church*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996); and George D. McClain, *Claiming All Things for God: Prayer, Discernment, and Ritual for Social Change* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998).

[6] Several other important titles are Ernest Boyer, Jr., *Finding God at Home: Family Life as Spiritual Discipline* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988); Anne Broyles, *Growing Together in Love: God Known through Family Life* (Nashville: Upper Room Bks., 1993); Mary Anne McPherson Oliver, *Conjugal Spirituality: The Primacy of Mutual Love in*

Christian Tradition (Kansas City, Mo.: Sheed & Ward, 1994); Sara Wenger Shenk, *Coming Home: A Thoughtful Resource for Fathers, Mothers, and the Rebirth of the Family* (Intercourse, Pa.: Good Bks. PA, 1992); and Wendy Wright, *Sacred Dwelling: A Spirituality of Family Life* (New York: Crossroad NY, 1989).

For the reading table
Reclaiming ancient Christianity

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This past summer as I visited ecumenical communities in Scotland (Iona), England (Northumbria), and France (Taizé), I was astounded to find that these places of impressive renewal could not be neatly categorized using the labels with which we North Americans are so familiar: charismatic, liturgical, orthodox, evangelical, catholic. They blended riches from all of those streams.

Here in North America, we see hints that the dividing walls of the Reformation are breaking down. More and more, people look to theologies and spiritualities (Celtic, Benedictine, Franciscan, Desert Fathers and Mothers) or theologians and mystics (Julian of Norwich, Hildegard of Bingen, Meister Eckhart) that predated the Reformation. One interesting development is the reclaiming of "ancient Christianity," the patristic era of the church fathers, i.e., the early centuries of the church.

We see hints that the dividing walls of the Reformation are breaking down. More and more, people look to theologies and spiritualities or theologians and mystics that predated the Reformation.

Thomas C. Oden began this trend in the 1980s with a series of books on pastoral care based largely on classical resources: *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983); *Crisis Ministries* (New York: Crossroad, 1986); *Pastoral Counsel* (New York: Crossroad, 1989); and *Ministry through Word and Sacrament* (New York: Crossroad, 1989). I lack space to review them here, except to note that all are worthy introductions to both classical Christian literature and practical pastoral theology. (I particularly like the way Oden quotes Menno Simons as a classic theologian.)

Oden's long-standing interest in classical Christianity is also shown in his editing of the stunning Ancient Christian

Commentary on Scripture series (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Pr.). Volumes to date include: *Mark*, edited by Oden and Christopher A. Hall (1998); *Romans*, edited by Gerald Bray (2000); *1-2 Corinthians*, edited by Bray (1999); *Galatians*, *Ephesians*, *Philippians*, edited by Mark J. Edwards (1999); *Colossians*, *1-2 Thessalonians*, *1-2 Timothy*, *Titus*, *Philemon*, edited by Peter Gorday (2000); *James*, *1-2 Peter*, *1-3 John*, *Jude*, edited by Bray (2000). Commentaries are projected for all the books of the Bible, including the Original Testament.

These commentaries are welcome supplementary sources for preaching. The editors divide the text into sections. Then they excerpt pithy quotes and paragraphs from a host of ancient commentators—Augustine, Gregory Nazianzen, Cassiodorus, and John Chrysostom, for example—to display how ancient Christians understood this text. The range and variety of insights gives this a Midrash feel. This approach makes texts accessible that might otherwise be difficult to wade through or even locate. I like the offbeat and unexpected insights into familiar Scripture texts.

Theology and biblical study must be done in a context of worship and prayer: exegesis is related to spiritual formation and character development. Then Scripture study becomes spiritual discernment and we approach the Scriptures with a sense of wonder.

But this approach is limited. We may be ready to concede that ancient Christian hermeneutics are different from ours, but can we embrace this way of studying Scripture? Since the commentaries give us excerpts, we cannot be sure that the selections do justice to the early texts. Most importantly, one lacks a sense of flow as one works through the commentaries. At times, it may feel as though we are being given pithy quotes to make us sound more scholarly. So we must use these with sensible caution.

To learn more about how church fathers read and studied Scriptures in the first seven centuries, consult *Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998), by commentary co-editor Christopher A. Hall. While this book is not easy reading, it shows that our modern assumptions about individual and objective interpretation are recent understandings and did not characterize early readings of Scripture. Hall's reading

of the church fathers confirms an important Anabaptist insight: biblical interpretation needs to be communal. Furthermore, he shows that theology and biblical study must be done in a context of worship and prayer: exegesis is related to spiritual formation and character development. If we take this seriously, Scripture study becomes spiritual discernment and we approach the Scriptures with a sense of wonder. Hall also shows us that the ancient fathers addressed many current problems. One reason to take these ancient writers seriously is the simple fact that they were closer in time to the writing of Scriptures and thus had insights into the context and intent of the Scriptures that we do not easily attain. Hall makes a good case that "Protestants need to stop acting as if they are a traditionless community within Christendom."

Robert E. Webber is an anomaly: a popular evangelical speaker and writer, he is an unabashed promoter of high church worship and liturgy. Raised as a fundamentalist (with a degree from Bob Jones University), at some point he became enamored of ancient Christianity. In *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Bks., 1999), Webber contends that the ancient Christian worldview has much to offer a postmodern age: subjective experiences of mystery and beauty; metanarratives beyond relativity; and transcendence, symbolism, and beauty in the midst of life's complexities. He reminds us that most Reformers wanted to return to what he calls "classical Christianity."

I enjoyed Webber's book, although in his haste to make summaries and draw conclusions his generalizations sometimes become too sweeping. In teaching in the congregation one can draw on his helpful explications of many Christian doctrines and ideas: Christus Victor, the power of evil, the incarnation, among others. I appreciated Webber's rejection both of a narrowly sacrificial view of the atonement and of speaking of Christ only in terms of individual salvation. He spells out the implications of his patristic reading for worship, the area of expertise for which he is best known. This readable book would make a rewarding study for church groups.

A book that speaks most directly to Anabaptists is D. H. Williams' *Retrieving the Tradition and Renewing Evangelicalism: A*

Primer for Suspicious Protestants (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999). Williams is an evangelical (an ordained Baptist minister) who teaches in a Catholic university. He addresses the problem of many Free Church believers (including Anabaptists) who suspect tradition but fail to recognize their own connections to classical Christianity.

Williams notes the current developing interest in classical Christianity and the amazing availability of resources to fuel that interest. The time is right to overcome our theological amnesia and resist succumbing to "the tyranny of the new." Williams does not argue that we should abandon our churches. He believes one can be both Free Church and respectful of ancient Christian traditions. In fact, tradition itself is a blend of continuity and change. Williams often specifically cites and challenges Anabaptist views, reflecting at times on the thought of H. S. Bender and John H. Yoder.

Williams is most concerned about what Philip Schaff once called the "poisonous plant of sectarianism," an elevation of individual conscience that constantly divides the church into more and more schismatic groups. I share his grief at the continued divisions and welcome this volume as a guide to new directions.

Williams makes a compelling case for re-engaging history in a serious fashion and asserts that God's sovereignty also means trusting church history. Like Webber, he argues against privatizing and ahistorical tendencies in the belief systems of evangelicals and other Protestants.

While I welcome all these introductions to ancient Christianity, I am wary of idealizing that time as one of idyllic unity. The battles waged among various church factions and theologians then make current Mennonite ecclesiastical troubles look like kittens frolicking. And, as we well know, not all the fruit of ancient Christianity was good. Nevertheless, this new interest in ancient times dispels the illusion that true Christian history ended shortly after Christ and did not resume until the sixteenth century.

Review and discussion

Recent studies on Anabaptist spirituality

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The recent interest in spirituality has resulted in a number of publications that focus on the spirituality of sixteenth-century Anabaptists. This review article looks at three books, produced to serve different purposes, all published in 1994 and 1995.

Marlene Kropf and Eddy Hall. *Praying with the Anabaptists, The Secret of Bearing Fruit*. Newton and Winnipeg: Faith & Life, 1994.

Cornelius J. Dyck, trans. and ed. *Spiritual Life in Anabaptism: Classic Devotional Resources*. Scottdale: Herald Pr., 1995.

Daniel Liechty, trans. and ed. *Early Anabaptist Spirituality: Selected Writings*. New York: Paulist Pr., 1994.

Praying with the Anabaptists, by Marlene Kropf and Eddy Hall, was commissioned by a joint Mennonite Church and General Conference Mennonite Church committee. The aim was to produce a book that would promote prayer and spiritual growth. The book "revisits the writings of the sixteenth-century martyrs and leaders of the Anabaptist movement to discover time-honored and yet refreshing ways to deepen our practice of prayer" (5).

The book is divided into three sections: "Abiding in the Vine," "Joined in Love," and "Bearing Fruit." The intent of "Abiding in the Vine" is to help people through personal prayer and devotion come into intimate and personal relationship to God. "Joined in Love" looks at the fruits of prayer, and focuses on aspects of relating to other people in building community, service, and mission. "Bearing Fruit" deals with further fruits of prayer, specifically service, peacemaking, and witness.

In the authors' view, spirituality, including Anabaptist spirituality, begins with a deeply personal prayer relationship to God, and proceeds into community, service, mission, and ethics.

Though the focus of the book is not on sixteenth-century Anabaptism but rather on helping people further their personal devotion to God, the book does reflect a spirituality that is informed by an immersion in Anabaptist writings.

Spiritual Life in Anabaptism, translated and edited by C. J. Dyck, has a twofold purpose. One purpose is practical: to foster spiritual life. Dyck writes that the book is intended for "the use, enjoyment, and spiritual growth of students, retreat participants, congregational study groups, individual spiritual exercises, and others" (9). Second, the book is designed to add to the literature of spirituality readings from the Anabaptist tradition.

After a brief chapter introducing the reader to sixteenth-century Anabaptism, the book continues with two longer selections from single writers (with introductions by Dyck): "The Apostles' Creed: An Interpretation," by Leonhard Schiemer, and "The Conversion of Menno Simons," by Menno. Nine chapters follow, each consisting of short selections from many sixteenth-century writers. These selections are grouped according to nine themes: "The New Birth—Regeneration," "Word and Spirit," "Discipleship," "Peace and Justice," "Lifestyle," "Letters of Faith and Encouragement," "The Body of Christ, the Church," "Prayers of the Heart," and "Meditations for Spiritual Discernment." The book concludes with a lengthy article, "The Way to the City of Peace," by Pieter Pietersz. from Alkmaar, The Netherlands, written about 1625.

Anabaptist spirituality is not merely medieval monastic spirituality extended to the laity, but is a redefinition of spirituality. In monasticism, the focus of community was on the interior life. In Anabaptism, community is faith active in love as a life of obedience to God.

The Anabaptist writers quoted include Michael Sattler, Felix Manz, Hans Hut, Hans Denck, Balthasar Hubmaier, Hans Schlaffer, Pilgram Marpeck, Jacob Hutter, Peter Riedemann, Ulrich Stadler, Hans Schnell, Melchior Hoffman, Dirk Philips, David Joris, Hans de Ries, Anna Jansz, Margarete Endris, plus a number of others less well known. Andreas Ehrenpreis, a seventeenth-century Hutterite, is also included.

In the first chapter, Dyck addresses the question, "What is spirituality?" After briefly surveying various understandings of

spirituality in the history of the church, he concludes that it is best not to define spirituality too narrowly or precisely, but to allow the rich tapestry of views of spirituality to stand. At the end of this introductory chapter, Dyck attempts a general, inclusive description of spiritual life as being "nourished through an intimate commitment to Jesus Christ, individually and in community" (26).

What then is Anabaptist spirituality? What are its distinguishing characteristics? Dyck suggests that the sixteenth-century texts indicate several. First, for Anabaptist spirituality community is important. Anabaptist spirituality is not merely medieval monastic spirituality extended to the laity, but is a redefinition of spirituality. In monasticism, the focus of community was on the interior life of the soul. In Anabaptism, community is faith active in love as a life of obedience to God. Second, Anabaptist spirituality includes the restoration of ethics into personal and communal spiritual life. Third, for the Anabaptists of the first and second generation suffering was central. All Anabaptists knew that arrest, imprisonment, and death were possible consequences of their decision to be faithful to God. Dyck sees a fourth characteristic of Anabaptist spirituality as holiness-sanctification, "an indictment of evil in all its forms—personal, social, communal, political," a living out of the new covenant alone and in community (23).

Dyck's book is helpful in beginning to develop the outlines of an Anabaptist spirituality. The organization of the book does not allow him to analyse regional differences in the way Anabaptists viewed spirituality. Recent scholarship has pointed out that within Anabaptism there were significant regional differences on other issues. Was this also true of their spirituality?

A third book is *Early Anabaptist Spirituality: Selected Writings*, translated and edited by Daniel Liechty, with a preface by Hans J. Hillerbrand. The book, published in the series Classics of Western Spirituality, is designed to present sixteenth-century Anabaptist spirituality alongside the spiritualities of other traditions. These other spiritualities are dealt with in other volumes and are not referred to in this volume.

In the introduction, Liechty clarifies that he will limit himself to the first generation of Anabaptist writers, and include

selections from those who "are recognized leaders in Anabaptist groups" (xiii). The only writer not from the first generation is Peter Walpot, who is included because Liechty feels that he reflects the spirituality of the early Hutterites.

Each selection is lengthy, in order "to avoid a feeling of choppiness," as Liechty explains. The selections are taken from the major regions where Anabaptists were active. The Swiss selections come from Felix Manz, Balthasar Hubmaier, and the *Ausbund*. For South German and Austrian Anabaptism, the selections are taken from Hans Hut, Leonhard Schiemer, Hans Schlaffer, and Hans Denck. Hutterian Anabaptism is represented by a selection from Peter Walpot, and Dutch Anabaptism by selections from Dirk Philips and Menno Simons.

The topics covered in these selections include baptism, grace, suffering, the Lord's Prayer, the true Christian life, true love, free will and predestination, the Trinity, yieldedness, Christian community of goods, new birth and the new creature, spiritual restitution, and the Twenty-fifth Psalm. In other words, most of the major themes the Anabaptists addressed in their writings are included in the extracts chosen.

Some themes are left out, however. There is no selection about peace, despite the fact that a number of Anabaptist leaders spoke to this issue (e.g., Sattler, Manz, Conrad Grebel, Riedemann, and Menno). On the subject of baptism, Hans Hut's lengthy article highlights his views, and Schiemer's "Three Kinds of Baptism" reflects Hut's influence. Articles on baptism reflecting other perspectives, for example Hubmaier's and Menno's, are not included.

In contrast to Dyck, Liechty organizes his articles geographically, and gives the reader a feel for the spiritualities in the various regions. However, since Liechty's selections are long, the number of writings from a particular area is limited, and the tone and character of the spirituality reflected depends heavily on these few selections. In the end, because of the small number of selections made, one can best gain from this book a general view of Anabaptist spirituality, rather than a view of the spiritualities of the various Anabaptist groups.

The articles in Liechty's collection present a view of Anabaptist spirituality that in its broad outlines is similar to that

of Dyck's study. Anabaptist spirituality is again seen as embodying community, suffering, ethics, and discipleship. In addition, the articles Liechty chose include the themes of the new birth, yieldedness, and spiritual restitution.

What do these three publications contribute to an understanding of Anabaptist spirituality? First, each writer attempts to make the case that Anabaptist spirituality has its own character. The general outline of this spirituality in the three studies, despite their different purposes and outlines, is remarkably similar.

Each writer attempts to make the case that Anabaptist spirituality has its own character. The general outline of this spirituality is remarkably similar in all three books, despite their different purposes.

Second, these studies do not make comparisons with either Catholic or Protestant understandings of spirituality. In order to make comparisons further studies will need to be undertaken.

Third, the three studies present only a general description of Anabaptist spirituality or spiritualities. It may be helpful to define Anabaptist spirituality more precisely.

Fourth, developing a more nuanced view of Anabaptist spiritualities would be helpful for understanding present-day spiritualities. As in other areas of research in Anabaptist history, acknowledging the plurality of views present in the sixteenth century is more accurate, and also allows for a plurality of views in the present.

In conclusion, these three studies present a helpful introduction to an understanding of Anabaptist spirituality. They provide a general direction in which other studies can proceed.