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Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology

Worship

Editorial

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The overarching purpose of this issue of *Vision* is to take a reading of how mainstream North American Mennonites think about and practice worship. Two specific goals include placing our diverse ways of worship side by side, to see what light they shed on one another, and testing whether shared convictions about worship emerge. We hope that readers from other traditions will also find this issue worth studying. They will discover a paradox: as we seek ways of worshiping that are authentically Mennonite, we find ourselves turning to the larger Christian tradition for help.

Kevin Drudge's "Living by the Sign of the Sabbath" lays the groundwork for sustainable communal worship. A day of rest is the last remaining practice of premodern, communal culture, in which a rhythm of days given by God and nature determines our use of time. In the capitalist West today, time has become a succession of indistinguishable units which individuals use as they see fit. Drudge recaptures the Jewish insight that a collective weekly rhythm that blesses work but also sets limits to it is indispensable for the well-being of humanity and nature.

As in the sixteenth century, our challenge is to embrace the new ways God's Spirit is working, while continuing to cherish the worship forms in which she spoke to us in the past.

The pieces by Pam Driedger and Scott Brubaker Zehr complement each other. Driedger finds fresh language to describe how "ritual and symbols allow the experiences of our everyday lives to draw us into the mystery of God." Jesus, the original sacrament, is the model of how divinity and humanity meet. Driedger's christocentrism provides not a limit but the interpretive key, the human face of the unfathomable.

Some have said that Anabaptism was a form of practical Christianity with a tin ear for the mystery of God, the extreme expression of Protestantism, a movement that began the unravel-

ing of the sacramental universe. This assessment is a half-truth that overlooks the sense of the holy evident across the spectrum of Anabaptism from Conrad Grebel to Dirk Philips. Brubaker-Zehr helps us enter that liminal space in which we recognize a divine presence and surrender to it. What is distinctive about Brubaker Zehr's approach to this subject is his communal orientation. He offers practices of public worship that free us from the iron cage (Max Weber) of linear time and rational knowledge.

Rebecca Slough offers us clear-eyed advice for making judgments about what constitutes good worship music. Her criteria apply equally to traditional and contemporary modes; they give us resources for choosing worship music based not on its style but on its ability to lead us to praise and obey God.

Marlene Kropf steps back from two decades of the practice of worship to reflect on its theology. She offers the profound simplicity of a Trinitarian model. After centuries of worship forms prescribed by oral tradition, Mennonites found freedom to experiment. But for communities to thrive, they also need patterns that shape and channel experiments.

The next three articles take on their fullest meaning when read side by side. Without John Ruth's reflection, the articles by Betty Kennedy and Rod Stafford would lack a historical reference point; without Kennedy's and Stafford's descriptions of living worship in and for our time, Ruth's article would be an exercise in nostalgia.

Ruth's evocative and affectionate description reminds us that behind recent decades of experimenting and borrowing in Mennonite worship lay a liturgical tradition that had changed little since 1700. It displayed a communal piety, a suppressed (but not repressed) emotionality, a humility of spirit that can guide our judgments as we create forms different from those historical ones.

Kennedy's writing makes palpable the yearning and praising of her band of pilgrims. Here is a community whose worship has an affinity for the experience of exile and brokenness in scripture and Anabaptism. For these people, the service of Word and Table is literally the bread of life. The raw experience of life is gently given forms that are pliable enough to be inhabited by people from astonishingly diverse pilgrimages and cultures.

Stafford enters our narrative as a prophet, offering those east of the Rockies an image of the future of religious community and

expression in North America. He confronts us with an account of being church in a setting where almost nothing favors Christian identity. This is a starker world by far than that of the sixteenth century, where the question was how—not whether—to worship God. Stafford reports on the ingenuity with which congregations are finding ways of meeting God that are authentic for their settings. He leaves unanswered the question of whether there remains a recognizable core to Mennonite worship.

Pieter Post in the Netherlands writes out of a setting similar to Stafford's, that of Europe's most secular country. Urban Christians there assume that they are strangers in a strange land. He makes a fascinating and heartening case for literally and metaphorically renewing the practice of foot-washing, to build congregations of integrity and invitation.

Eleanor Kreider describes the rediscovery and adaptation of the daily office to Mennonite church life. Her summary of the process—considering theological and liturgical principles and casting them into Spirit-filled forms—offers a model for the shaping of worship in our day.

The sermon by Eugene Harder speaks out of a deep vulnerability to the physical and spiritual ravages of suffering. It dares to follow Job in recognizing the limit of human understanding and the time after which arguing with God gains no ground. That opens the door to trusting surrender. We hear in Harder's words echoes of the psalmists and of Jesus.

Allan Rudy-Froese, a preacher and student of preaching, introduces us to the first book-length examination of Mennonite homiletics and sets it within the larger frame of Mennonite approaches to preaching as well as homiletical trends in the larger church.

There is as much ferment in the church's worship today as there was in the sixteenth century. Then there was a bursting of the wineskins—Karlstadt's presiding in the people's language at the Lord's Table in the middle of the congregation without vestments, Grebel's baptism of his companions with a dipper in a farmhouse kitchen. We lack such epoch-marking events, but we witness a similar disenchantment with old forms and discovery of new ones. And as then, our challenge is to embrace the new ways God's Spirit is working, while continuing to cherish the forms in which she spoke to us in the past.

Living by the sign of the Sabbath

Kevin R. Drudge

> *"Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the* LORD *your God; you shall not do any work. . . . For in six days the* LORD *made heaven and earth . . ., but rested the seventh day. Therefore the* LORD *blessed the seventh day and consecrated it."*
> *(Exod. 20:8–11)*

Few texts in the Bible carry greater moral weight than the Ten Commandments. Certainly for ancient Jews, and even for Christians of the twenty-first century, these direct commands of God prescribe human conduct with unique authority. It is not surprising then that many Christians step directly from the fourth commandment to a set of practices that set Sunday apart from the other days of the week. On the farm of my childhood, Sunday had a special feel about it, as we did only the essential work (feeding and milking the dairy herd), worshiped at our little country church, and enjoyed special meals and afternoon leisure. My father, always weary from the milking schedule, savoured the opportunity to nap, and we all understood that even harvest-ready crops would wait until the resumption of labour on Monday.

What is it that the church ought to claim and practice as we consider the biblical command to remember the Sabbath, and as we observe Jewish and Christian history pertaining to Sabbath?

I do not recall ever discussing our Sunday routines, yet we knew that the hallowing of the seventh day by God set in place an ordinance that presided over the weekly rhythm of life. Neither do I recall anyone disturbing our piety in those days by pointing out that it was the seventh day that God hallowed, and nowhere does the Bible declare a definitive shift to a first-day Christian

Sabbath. We probably assumed that such a shift happened because of the resurrection of Jesus "on the first day of the week" (Mark 16:2); we supposed the hallowed day had naturally migrated twenty-four hours in celebration of the risen Lord.

That logic may work nicely for many Christians, but biblical scholars and historians are not satisfied with this simple answer. Tracing the movement from Jewish Sabbath to Christian worship on the Lord's Day is complex indeed. Some scholars insist that Sunday worship constituted a radical new practice in the early church and was a celebration of the resurrection of Jesus, not an attempt to Christianize the Sabbath or make any connection to the fourth commandment. In that case, rest was probably not part of the practice, especially where Christians had to work on the first day of the week like other labourers. Other scholars see much clearer continuity between the Jewish Sabbath practices and the Christian day of worship; they envision Sunday as the Christian Sabbath.[1]

Anyone familiar with Jewish Shabbat will quickly recognize that Sunday worship is not simply a Christianized Shabbat. Yet we can also affirm important continuity between the two, including the ordering of time into a seven-day week, and the recognition of one day in seven as set apart for particular religious devotion.

Whatever side of the scholarly debate we find convincing, we cannot deny that Protestant Christianity has bequeathed to us a strong Sabbatarian piety, one that formed the special Sunday atmosphere on our farm and one that is currently getting a lot of attention in devotional literature, especially as Sabbath practice vanishes among Christians in contemporary society.[2] What is it that the church ought to claim and practice as we consider the biblical command to remember the Sabbath, and as we observe Jewish and Christian history pertaining to Sabbath keeping?

Remembering rest, redemption, resurrection

R. T. Beckwith provides an apt point of entry in describing the Old Testament Sabbath as a *sign*. He notes that as the rainbow had been the sign of the covenant between God and Noah, and circumcision a sign of the covenant between God and Abraham, "so also the Sabbath becomes a 'sign' of the covenant between God and Israel."[3] As a sign, the Sabbath pointed to two powerful

community-forming realities. First, as the fourth commandment in Exodus 20 states, Sabbath rest commemorated God's act of creating and the cycle of labour and rest that God established. Second, according to the Deuteronomy 6 version of the commandments, Sabbath rest recalled God's great act of liberation in freeing the people from slavery in Egypt. Pausing one day in seven to remember who they were—a people created and redeemed by God—formed a community with a unique identity among the nations. The Sabbath served as a continual sign of this experience and awareness of life in relation to the creating and redeeming God. It reoriented them on a weekly basis to the foundational truth about their very being as God's people.

If it is to be a sign, the practice of rest and worship must be a corporate practice. Corporate practices must be intentional in order to foster corporate identity.

Herein lies a vital precedent for the church. Although Sunday worship is not the result of a direct and simple step from Old Testament Sabbath practice to the life of the church, the corporate practice of weekly rest and worship has the potential to be a powerful sign for us today.[4] In our culture, which so readily defines people (usually individually) according to worldly categories, the church needs to be regularly reoriented to the truth that we are God's people. We need to be reoriented from our workplace identities as makers to the truth that all life is created and sustained by God. We need to be reoriented from our identity as consumers to the truth that we are called to a way of life that fulfills God's purposes in us. And we must continually be reoriented from the compulsion to control and manage outcomes in every area of life, from personal matters to national agendas, to the truth that God is in control of history, and we are called to be partners, not managers, in God's work in the world.

In light of our need to regularly return to the essence of life as God's people, resting from our routine of labour and gathering for worship as a community of believers functions as a sign of our identity and destiny as God's people. Robert Webber has said that "worship finds us in our dislocation and relocates us in God."[5] What a gift Sabbath keeping becomes when we catch a vision of our need and then perceive how graciously God has provided for this need from the beginning.

If it is to be a sign, the practice of rest and worship must be a corporate practice. "Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people," proclaims 1 Peter 2:10. Being a people is truly remarkable in an individualistic society, but corporate practices must be intentional in order to foster corporate identity. Just as the ancient Sabbath formed a community who recalled and proclaimed that God had created and redeemed them, the church is formed today as a new community when we regularly remember and proclaim together.

Of course we remember and proclaim not just original creation and the liberation of Israel from Egypt but new creation and redemption for all through the resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord. On the first day of the week, the church remembers this pivotal event in history, and proclaims the good news that "if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17). In a world that screams myriad alternate messages, the church is continually reoriented to this foundational truth through the practice of withdrawing from the marketplace every seven days to gather for corporate worship.

Just as the ancient Sabbath formed a community who recalled and proclaimed that God had created and redeemed them, the church is formed today as a new community when we regularly remember and proclaim together.

A practice with this potential as a reorienting sign dare not be left to the whim of individuals to choose participation as a matter of convenience or personal lifestyle. There is perhaps little that causes a pastor to cringe more than the cheery announcement from church members that they will be absent from worship for several Sundays because of coaching at baseball tournaments or taking advantage of the opening of fishing season. I vividly recall working all week to prepare for worship and preaching, only to discover (especially in summer) that other events had left only a remnant to gather for Sunday worship. Worship seemed somehow cheapened for everyone when it was chosen as one activity among many options.

Further reflection has confirmed that, indeed, practices that locate us at the core of who we are as God's people must be engaged on the basis of covenant, not convenience or personal preference. The essential reorienting power of Sabbath keeping is

preserved only when it is a practice, not a choice. Choice means it can be supplanted by more important matters, which renders it void of power to form identity and define meaning. As a weekly practice of the church, Sabbath rest and worship form the community and set it apart before God, our creator and redeemer. Nothing can supplant this identity when nothing supplants the practices that form it.[6]

How Sabbath observance transforms all days

Moreover, Sabbath keeping as a corporate practice reaches far beyond the designation of one day in seven for special observance. Sabbath transforms all days, for as Abraham Heschel has said, "the Sabbath cannot survive in exile, a lonely stranger among days of profanity."[7] When Israel paused on the seventh day to remember her creator and redeemer, a holy community was in formation. Sabbath keeping recalled and affirmed the goodness of a world created by God, and it brought to awareness the calling of all people to meaningful labour in God's world (Gen. 1:27–28).

In the social and economic systems of a community formed by this story, no justification can be given for pushing anyone aside. And none may be forced to work without respite. The fourth commandment in Deuteronomy bases Sabbath observance on remembering that Israel had been a slave nation and was redeemed by God's hand. Therefore, no one was to work on the Sabbath, or to require someone else to work for them. Children, slaves, and even animals were to receive the gift of Sabbath rest. Thus the Sabbath had an equalizing function in the community. Because of what we remember and proclaim on the seventh day, keeping the Sabbath transforms the socioeconomic activity of the other six days.

The church can hardly proclaim God's new order on the first day of the week while wilfully living in the old broken order for the next six days.

These observations have compelling implications for the practice of Christian rest and worship on the Lord's Day. Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God's new order has broken into history, and the church is called to remember and proclaim this truth. The church can hardly proclaim God's new order on the first day of the week while wilfully living in the old

broken order for the next six days. As Dorothy Bass notes, "A Sabbath-keeping community . . . would be a community in which injustice would not occur."[8] A community that proclaims God's new creation in Christ must be a community that lives in the reality of its proclamation. A weekly day of rest and worship can only have integrity when all days are shaped by what is proclaimed on the Lord's Day.

A Sabbath-keeping community is also freed from the tyranny of a culture of materialism and consumerism. North American society desperately needs the good news that we are more than producers and consumers of goods and services. A Sabbath day is a day to rest from nonessential work, to refrain from buying and selling, and to resolve not to worry about these things. When this rest and restraint becomes a practice, not subject to the interruption of circumstances, the church participates in and is itself a sign of life lived in relation to God who loves, provides, and orders all of life.[9]

Sabbath keeping for pastors

If this view of Sabbath keeping is accepted in the church, a matter of particular practical concern arises for those who plan and lead worship, and particularly for pastors. Many are the pastors who lament that they have no Sabbath—that is, no day of rest—because Sunday is their busiest day. Those who have high regard for Sabbath keeping often compensate by designating another day, perhaps Monday, as their personal Sabbath. Although it may be valuable for pastors to have another day for rest and rejuvenation, the case being made here hardly allows for this alternate day of rest to be considered a Sabbath. If Sabbath keeping is a corporate practice, it must include all who are part of the community, including pastors and worship leaders.

Of course, pastors have a special role in presiding over the practice of corporate worship, providing leadership to the remembering and proclamation that forms the community. Yet pastors and other leaders are also members of the church, participants who are themselves being shaped by these corporate practices. Therefore churches would do well to ensure that pastors do not have their busiest day on Sunday. It is not a day for quick church council meetings after worship to discuss pressing budget agenda.

It is not a day for people to expect pastoral attention for personal needs in the foyer before the service. Nor is it a day for afternoon committee meetings or pastoral visitation. In other words, even given their role of leading the gathered community in worship, pastors are members of the community that lives by the sign of Sabbath. It will be possible for pastors to be full participants in the practice of Sabbath keeping if congregations covenant to do their part, and if pastors plan well for Sunday worship, especially fostering collaboration with other worship leaders so that the task is truly corporate rather than a burdensome solo effort.

A Sabbath-keeping community is freed from the tyranny of a culture of materialism and consumerism. North American society desperately needs the good news that we are more than producers and consumers of goods and services.

In a world that tempts us to view time as a commodity to be exploited for personal gain, the church has before it the opportunity to recover an ancient practice based in God's own rhythm of labour and rest. Although distinctively Christian, corporate rest and worship on the Lord's Day has rich precedent in biblical Sabbath keeping. May we take hold of this gift and rejoice in being formed as a new community, a sign to the nations of who we are as God's own people.

Notes

[1] For a sample of the debate, compare D. A. Carson, ed., *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982); and Roger T. Beckwith and Wilfrid Stott, *This is the Day: The Biblical Doctrine of the Christian Sunday in Its Jewish and Early Church Setting* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1978).

[2] For example, see Marva Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989); or Dorothy C. Bass, ed., *Practicing our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997).

[3] Beckwith and Stott, *This is the Day*, 13.

[4] While the Sabbath commandment calls for rest, without any explicit command to worship, it seems a small step from remembering God's acts of creating and redeeming to worship. In time, synagogue worship arose in Jewish practice, and of course worship has always been central to Christian activity on the Lord's Day. Thus we make the clear connection of worship to Sabbath keeping.

[5] Comment during a public address (Winnipeg, MB).

[6] Of course, some church members do essential work such as health care during worship time. The point here is not to be rigidly legalistic but to grasp the potential of corporate practices for the church. I would encourage creativity, on a corporate level, in providing times of rest and worship for these people.

[7] Quoted by Dorothy Bass in *Practicing our Faith*, 77.
[8] Ibid., 76.
[9] As seminary students, my wife and I practiced complete rest from all academic work each Sunday, even refraining from discussing or thinking about our assignments. It was not difficult to treasure this respite from the pressure and stress of our studies, not to mention the delight of our children when Sunday arrived. I only lamented that this was a practice of personal choice, not a truly corporate practice as I am envisioning here.

About the author

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Receiving before responding

Scott Brubaker-Zehr

Getting out into the natural environment is a ritual that rejuvenates our family. Each summer, we load up our tent-trailer and head off to do some camping. Getting everything ready takes time and effort, and packing involves an inevitable grumpiness. But when we finally arrive and settle in among the trees, we remember why we go to all the effort. Camping gives us life. We are nourished by fresh air and lakes, by the absence of phone and e-mail. My wife and I notice that our children learn to slow down and enjoy one another again, and we are all reminded of the simple gift of being alive together on God's good earth.

Worship is about attending to the graceful presence of God: we notice God's presence, and we respond with praise, confession, and commitment. But we need to receive God's presence before we can respond to it.

Like camping, worship for our family of faith marks a coming back to the place that gives us life; through it we return to the source of our joy and sustenance. But we still don't always find it easy to get there. Preparing takes work, and some of us have been known to experience bad moods as we try to get to church on time. But when we've arrived and settled in, we remember why we make the effort.

The practice of noticing

This year, I have been praying with the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola, and one of the gifts I have received is a greater awareness of the currents of grace in my life. I've been learning to pay attention to the presence of God and to give thanks. God is indeed present and has always been present in the world and in my life. Spirituality is simply the practice of noticing. There is no magic formula or secret knowledge. The main thing is making the time to be still.

The whispers of the Holy Spirit become recognizable when we regularly set aside time to be quiet and listen. Letting all the extraneous thoughts die down takes patience. A large part of prayer for me has been learning to let go of my many thoughts. They seem so important at first, so serious and even holy, but I'm discovering that they are mostly a projection of the ego. They are a way of trying to hold onto myself. More often than not, they create interference for the still small voice of God's Spirit, who beckons me beyond my small self into a more gracious and expansive self in Christ.

Worship, like prayer, is about attending to the graceful presence of God. In worship we notice God's presence and we respond with praise, confession, and commitment. *But we need to receive the presence of God before we can respond to it.*

Jesus is not a Swiss Mennonite

The biggest challenge in my own prayer life has been to simply receive. I always seem to need to do something. I can still doubt whether God will be present to me in the absence of my appropriate response. During one session of prayer, I entered into a conversation with Jesus and said to him, "Suppose I decided not to do anything. Would you still love me? Would you still choose to be with me?" The response I received was an overwhelming Yes!

To my Swiss-Mennonite ears, such an unconditional response sounds irresponsible. But my spiritual director reminds me that Jesus is not a Swiss Mennonite and that it would be a good idea to trust his voice and receive his company. It has been a deep learning to allow myself to simply sit and receive in prayer, apart from any effort on my own. I am coming to see that to be able to respond genuinely and freely, I must first of all receive.

For Anabaptists, a central theological contribution has been an insistence on the role of human response in the life of faith. We have always maintained that for faith to be real, it needs to be expressed outwardly, in our behaviour. Radical reformers such as Balthasar Hubmaier liked to quote the book of James, which notes that faith without works is dead. It is not enough to say we believe in certain doctrines. Menno Simons taught us that true evangelical faith is demonstrated in action; it feeds the hungry and clothes the naked. If we heirs of Menno are known for any-

thing, it is for our practical acts of service through agencies such as Mennonite Central Committee and Mennonite Disaster Service.

Theologically, we maintain that God saves us by grace, but in practice we spend most of our time and reflection paying attention to our response. What should we be doing? How should we be living? What would Jesus do, and what does that mean for us? Faith for Mennonites is generally summarized as following Jesus. We baptize adults, because only adults can respond with authenticity to the call to follow. Baptism is commonly described as the commitment that we make to God and to the church.

Likewise, the Lord's Supper is often framed in terms of our response. We have traditionally celebrated it as a pledge of our communal accountability and commitment. Menno Simons reminds us, "If you would be a proper guest at the Lord's table, and would rightly partake of his bread and wine, then you must also be his true disciple, that is, you must be an upright, pious and godly Christian. Therefore prove yourself. . . ."[1]

Worship is a welcome time to take a break from our own agendas and ideas. We are invited to recede into the background, to intentionally move out of the way and allow God to meet us anew.

This theological conviction about the role of our response in the life of faith may constitute our greatest strength, but it is also our greatest weakness. For faith is only secondarily human response; it is first of all receptivity to what God is doing. When we focus so heavily on our response, we tend to minimize God's activity, even if we don't intend to. We pay too much attention to ourselves and ironically end up responding more to our own egos and insecurities than to God. If we are not careful (and we are not always careful), our life of faith is reduced to a rationally based ethical program, or to a generic experience of human community. We lose sight of what God intends faith to be: an ongoing relationship with a living and gracious Spirit.

Worship saves us from self-preoccupation

Good worship is crucial for helping us avoid the pitfalls of our tradition. Good worship opens opportunities for us to consciously receive the presence of God. It saves us from our preoccupation

with ourselves and brings us back to the source of our life together. Worship is a welcome time each week to take a break from our own agendas and ideas. We are invited to recede into the background, to intentionally move out of the way and allow God to meet us anew.

What follows are a few simple suggestions for how we might experience this kind of worship more often.

Proclamation of the Word. In Mennonite tradition, we have reacted against a sacramental understanding of the faith that sees divine presence conveyed through substance and ritual. We have agreed that God is present in the preaching of the Word, in the moving of the Holy Spirit within the human heart, and in our communal reflection on and response to the Word. As a result, our worship has been constructed more around the sermon than the Eucharist.

Recognizing that God speaks to us through the Word, we do well to ask ourselves how we are paying attention to this part of the service. How do we celebrate the intervention of the Word? How do we prepare for it? How do we receive it? On a recent sabbatical, I was impressed by the rubrics around the readings and the homily in more liturgical traditions. Dramatic signals and responses—processions, gestures, changes in posture—help people pay attention. They hear invitations to prepare and respond.

In my congregation, I have begun to introduce the scripture readings with a silent prayer which invites the congregation to be still and await the reading. We are reminded to anticipate God's presence in the Word. This silence creates a small space of emptiness in which we remember that we are not the source of grace: it does not come from us. Then we hear the readings, which are best received when they have been rehearsed beforehand and are conveyed with loving clarity. After the reading of the scripture, we generally sing an Alleluia or a Gloria. Through these observances, we prepare and give thanks for the good news that comes to us as a gift. Again after the sermon we spend a few moments in silence before responding by singing a hymn.

The point of these rituals is encounter with God's presence through the Word. This part of worship is our weekly corporate meeting with the divine! Although early Anabaptists stressed human response, they also emphasized the grace of God that is

present in the reading and preaching of the Word. It is the Spirit that illuminates the scripture and grants the gift of faith. "It is the Spirit that makes us alive," says Balthasar Hubmaier, "and the Spirit comes with the Word."[2] Menno describes the "preaching of the word in the power of the Spirit as the only right and proper Seed from which truly believing and obedient children of God are born."[33] Our very existence as a community of faith and any response we offer to God flow from God's initiative toward us through Christ. We love one another only because God has first loved us.

Although the Word is theologically central for Mennonites, in our common worship practice it is often lost in understatement and stumbling. We experience the readers' proclamation as routine or boring; there is little drama in it. Some people peruse the bulletin during this time. But if the readings are handled carefully; if there are gestures, preparation, and response; and if the sermon follows with an orientation toward the text and God's initiative, then this time in the service can become sacramental in the best sense of the word. It can open a space for the Spirit to touch and transform us.

In our congregation, we have been following the readings from the Revised Common Lectionary, for a couple reasons. First, the fact that the texts are given offers the discipline of focusing on something other than our own favourite themes. Second, the readings connect us with the wider body of Christ, reminding us that we are part of a larger whole. We need all the help we can get in being drawn beyond our limited perspectives.

Introducing scripture reading in worship with a silent prayer creates a small space of emptiness in which we remember that we are not the source of grace.

Sharing joys and concerns. Too often in Mennonite worship, the communal sharing time rivals scripture reading and preaching for the place of greatest importance. What is the center of gravity in your congregation's worship? Which elements of the service radiate the greatest energy and attention? When are people most alert and engaged? If we answer that it is during sharing, we must ask—from a theological perspective—how this time helps us attend to God's presence. How does it serve the purpose of worship?

Such sharing has value, and we certainly experience God in the events of our lives, but sharing time can also have a way of subtly drawing attention away from God and onto ourselves. Once again, we are wrapped up in our own concerns and worries, the very things that constitute the greatest obstacles to contemplative prayer. It's not that such concerns are wrong, but of noticing where they focus our attention.

In our congregation, we invite people to bring joys and concerns just before the congregational prayer, placing these matters within the setting of a communal prayer addressed to God. When sharing is disconnected from prayer, it becomes an exercise in catching up on community news. If we are to thrive and grow as communities of faith, the focus in worship will be on God and not on us. We must keep this basic issue of focus before us as we plan and lead worship.

Sharing time has a way of drawing attention away from God and onto ourselves. Once again, we are wrapped up in our own worries, the very things that constitute the greatest obstacles to contemplative prayer.

Baptisms and funerals. Sometimes our baptismal services spend more time reflecting on the candidates and their response to God than on the gracious movement of the Spirit in their lives. Testimonies may recount activities and achievements, as if to vouch for the candidate's worthiness. When this happens, we let our response to God eclipse the gracious activity of God in our lifes.

Funerals may also slide in this direction. Instead of celebrating the currents of grace in the life of the deceased, instead of proclaiming the hope we share in Christ, funerals can become celebrations of the departed sister or brother, complete with a listing of all their achievements. The activity and purposes of God are unwittingly marginalized.

How worship begins. Whenever we gather to worship, a call to worship or an invocation enables us to begin most effectively, by signalling the appropriate focus. Because we live most of the time in a culture preoccupied with the ego and the small self, we all need to be reminded of how the culture of Christian faith is different. Each week, we need to hear once again why we have come. We need words that are direct and concrete to usher us into an alternative time and space.

In worship we come not to succeed or to be noticed, not to achieve or to prove ourselves. We come rather to lose ourselves. We come to die to all our petty concerns and fears and to be submerged once again into the being and the story of God, so that we may rise to new life in Christ. We come to return to the source of true joy and sustenance. The call to worship is a weekly ritual reminder. It is the bell that beckons us home again, to our true selves and to the eternal kingdom, which is present but still hidden. A simple and sincere prayer—addressed to God, accompanied with music or silence—is most appropriate. The resonant tones of a bell may also move us to the appropriate focus.

Conclusion

Christian worship is a counter-cultural activity, and it requires clear signals and rituals if it is to draw us out of the culture of narcissism. Preparing ourselves for worship requires disciplined work. To the outsider, it may seem a strange and unnecessary activity. Like packing up for camping, it sometimes gets laborious. We may even feel grumpy about it, when it asks us to make an effort to step out of ourselves and our ordinary activities. But when we finally arrive and settle in, we will surely remember why we have come.

Notes

[1] Walter Klaassen, ed., *Anabaptism in Outline* (Kitchener, ON, and Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1981), 209–210).
[2] C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: Revised Student Edition* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 1997), 231.
[3] Russell L. Mast, *Preach the Word* (Newton, KS: Faith & Life Press, 1968), 2.

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What shall we sing?

Rebecca Slough

The compilers of the sixteenth-century Anabaptist hymn collection known as the Ausbund[1] displayed remarkable openness to borrowing from other traditions. This text-only book suggests many good tunes for the hymns, demonstrating no prejudice against musical styles as diverse as folk melodies, chorale tunes, or Latin plain chant. The book's title page describes it as a collection of hymns by right-believing Christians.

Until recently, North American Mennonites have invested little in creating our own songs for congregational singing, but we continue the Anabaptists' pattern of drawing from a variety of musical sources. And right belief remains important in evaluating what we sing. But we no longer think right belief is just a matter of the words. Many leaders also feel pressed to determine the *right music* for Mennonite worship. This preoccupation obscures important issues that lie below the surface of the debates about musical styles. This article examines a few of these issues and distills a few general principles for evaluating songs for congregational worship.

The music

Few worshipers can say why or how music helps them praise, pray, or offer themselves to God. They lack language to describe how melody, rhythm, and harmony work together to heighten the emotional expression of words. Without basic understanding of these elements, those who select music for worship will find it hard to bring the necessary wisdom and generosity to their task.

A *melody* sets tones or pitches in singable patterns or phrases. Melodies are created by the arrangement of short phrases. Some melodies, such as chants, use only two or three tones; others use many tones with breathtaking leaps. In the West, minor melodies express our yearnings, loss, and pain. Major tunes convey a sense of fulfillment, restoration, joy, and peace.

A song may combine two or more melodies, one for the verses and one for the refrain. Some contemporary[2] worship songs, such as "Open the Eyes of My Heart," use up to three short melodies that can be interchanged to extend the singing. A melody with repeating phrases, such as HYMN TO JOY, is easier to learn.

Rhythm is the driving force of melody, creating energy and heightened drama. Through rhythm, the whole body joins in the feeling of the melody. A basic beat invites people to move and make music together.

Harmony supports melody by adding layers of tones. Master harmonists know how to heighten the drama in a melody, which can shape our interpretation of the words we sing.

All songs need a melody. In most songs, the melody is the primary element. In many African and some contemporary worship songs, melody may be secondary to a driving rhythmic pulse. When sung or played by an instrument, harmony adds color and richness.

Regardless of style, an interesting, durable, accessible, versatile, and memorable melody is essential for congregational singing. Rhythm and harmony energize the expression of praise, prayer, and affirmations but should not overpower melody.

The words

Hymns and songs encapsulate basic biblical truth. To inspire trust, hope, and commitment, words must be strong, vivid, direct, and imaginative.

A song with more words is not inherently better than one with few words. The sparse words of a spiritual, chorus, scripture song, or Taizé ostinato can be supported by a durable melody. These musical genres share characteristics with songs from oral cultures around the world. Combined with a well-crafted melody, rhythmic momentum, and a simple—not simplistic—harmonic structure, the words of these songs etch themselves on the soul.

Songs using more words—typical of traditional hymnody—develop a theme. They serve as meditations that move directly into prayer, affirmations of faith, or lessons revolving around a central idea.[3] Melodies successfully used with these complex word structures are themselves more complex and benefit from well-crafted harmonies.

Words for congregational singing should have strong images, active verbs, clear intention, and a recognizable structure. They should call forth deep emotional and intellectual responses, as they resonate with scripture.

The brain

Robert Jourdain's fascinating book, *Music, the Brain, and Ecstasy*,[4] draws on psychological and neurological studies to demonstrate how music is made by the brain but sounds and resounds in the body. Humans understand music because the brain is able to remember and interpret the series of tones that make up melodies. As we gain musical experience, we anticipate the shape a melody may take. In western music, we find it deeply satisfying to anticipate the melody, as it is controlled, attenuated, and satisfied through climactic tensions and resolutions. This satisfaction accounts for much of our pleasure in singing familiar tunes.

But the brain is easily bored. Although we thrive on the familiar, the brain also seeks novelty.[5] We enjoy the surprises of unexpected but artful leaps, the variations on a theme, the inversion of a sequence. Our brains perk up when something new is introduced. People with more musical experience—more capacity to anticipate a melody's structure and follow the unexpected changes—appreciate music that is more complex and surprising.

Our enjoyment of interesting, nuanced, and complex music is tied directly to our capacity to anticipate how the music is moving. We cultivate this capacity through formal and informal education and repeated exposure to a wide variety of musical examples. Classical music, jazz, blues, country, and rock styles are all acquired tastes.[6]

The above analysis holds true for western music that uses conventional scales, rhythms, and harmonies that strive for completeness. But many African, Asian, and aboriginal peoples use repetitious, circular, open patterns with no clear endings. Because the brain is always on the lookout for change, singers or instrumentalists naturally begin to improvise additional rhythms, harmonies, and counter-melodies to add layers of sound.

Repetitive melodies can lull the mind and the spirit to quietness. With less musical information, the melody and words can

penetrate the mind and the heart, opening the soul to meditation and contemplation in ways that complex melodies cannot. Repeating melodies with faster tempo open the spirit to greater physical expressiveness, deeper vibrations in the body, and possibilities for dance.

For congregational singing, more complex musical structures are not better than simpler, repetitive structures; they work differently. A melody of either type must be worth the effort to sing it. If our singing of more complex melodies lacks energy, it may be a result of the congregation's failure of desire or a product of the music leader's unwillingness to ride the climaxes and resolutions of musical thought. If our singing of repetitive melodies becomes dull, it may be a product of the congregation's failure of imagination or of the leader's inability to invent complementary improvisations.

The social environment

The music we know best, that speaks most deeply to our hearts, we learned in the company of our family and friends. We imitate what the people around us sing or play. We may come to love other types of music, but we are usually introduced to them through contact with people outside our normal social circles.

Leaders often make assumptions about what worshipers know and understand musically, and leaders committed to standard hymnody tend to evaluate the worship music independently of the people who will be singing it.

A "sound pool" holds in our minds the variety of songs and music styles we like and understand.[7] Here we know how to anticipate the musical structure and how to improvise appropriately. In my congregational song class, I ask students to identify the types of music they enjoy making or listening to. They also identify the kinds of music they exclude from their sound pools. Responses are always swift and intense. In our ensuing discussions, we discover how adamantly some of us love and others detest the same kind of music.

I then ask the students what is in the sound pools of worshipers in their congregation. They make guesses, but often they do not know what other worshipers listen to or sing. This realization is sobering. Music leaders often make assumptions about what

worshipers know and understand musically, and leaders committed to standard hymnody tend to evaluate the worship music independently of the people who will be singing it. These leaders may not know the depth of the congregation's knowledge and understanding. Leaders committed to contemporary worship music tend to assess whom the music will reach independently of the quality of music—the integrity of the melody, the uses of rhythm or harmony.

Who is singing? That's the essential question. What do they know? What can they respond to? Everyone's sound pool can be expanded through education and systematic plans for making new music accessible. But leaders must start by learning about what is in the sound pools of the majority of worshipers; with care and persistence, these pools can then be enlarged.

The style of expression

In *Discover Your Spiritual Type*, Corinne Ware describes four spiritual types found among Christians.[8] The majority of North Americans reflect two of Ware's types; we embrace either *a head spirituality* shaped by the reasoning mind or a *heart spirituality* shaped by our feelings. A person with an exclusively mindful spirituality will find it difficult to be moved by the mysterious experiences of love and grace. The person of heartfelt faith will find it difficult to focus into disciplined action the energy released by emotional expression. Christians who seek to grow in faith must cultivate both mindful and heartfelt dispositions.

Although some songs appeal to both heart and head, these dispositional differences show up sharply in preferences for congregational song. Mindful singers tend to prefer hymns, whose themes unfold over the course of several verses. Singing the words with a fitting tune allows the singer's mind to give its assent, which then shapes the heart's response. Favorite hymns rehearse the works of God, make affirmations of faith, or move the mind toward prayer. Mindful worshipers are stimulated by more complex music and thoughts, and they grow impatient with repetition.

Heartfelt singers tend to prefer simpler songs with more repetition and fewer words. These songs give voice to the passions of their hearts. Particular words, especially if they are repeated often, can eventually give rise to reflection. The songs, if they are led

well, familiar, and of sufficient musical substance, help these worshipers give themselves to the moment with abandon.

Wise music leaders recognize and value what different types of music do for worshipers' capacities to encounter the living God. Using a wide variety of musical styles honors the need for the two dispositions to temper each other. Many contemporary worship songs have a place in congregational worship for those who are seeking, for new believers, and for those whose faith is revitalized by uncomplicated—again, not simplistic—and overtly passionate songs. But worshipers of all stages of maturity must also sing songs that refine their faith through more challenging words and musical forms, the kind of song on which mindful Christians thrive.

White Mennonites in North America have tended to lean toward the mindful disposition, doubting the authenticity of music—such as gospel songs, contemporary worship songs, Taizé melodies, or repetitive African songs—that appeals to immediate and individual feeling. But rather than automatically raising our defenses, we might ask what the music and words are doing. What is freed or challenged in us as we sing? What responses to God do the new songs give us? Do they appeal primarily to our hearts and the immediate moment, or to our minds, working on us in the hours, days, and weeks to come?

Wise music leaders value what different types of music do for worshipers' capacities to encounter the living God. Using a wide variety of musical styles honors the need for mindful and heartfelt dispositions to temper each other.

The aim of the song

If our congregations had more opportunity to sing recreationally or devotionally, our distress about music would be eased. When Sunday worship is the only time the congregation sings together, the pressure to get it right is intense.

Music leaders must understand the overall flow of the worship event and make selections based on the momentum of the service at different points. One song may accomplish a worship action effectively and fail in accomplishing another. Many contemporary worship songs bring about adoration, personal offering, and prayer. Gospel songs rely on sturdy music with a strong beat to affirm faith. Many chorales also affirm faith and offer fervent

prayers. Folk songs and English or Genevan psalm tunes proclaim scripture in poetic paraphrases. Simple songs can move the congregation's worship along effectively. "Seek ye first" gently encourages us to seek, ask, and knock in order to receive the kingdom of God.

"Holy God, we praise they name" adores God with a stately waltz and draws the congregation into the endless procession of the church's worship. "Open the eyes of my heart" prays with fervor for the certainty of faith. "God loves all his many people" proclaims and affirms the gospel with a catchy tune and infectious rhythm that invites everyone to join the gospel way of life. Each song or hymn, regardless of style, must be evaluated in terms of what (besides the obvious action of singing) it helps the congregation do. All music styles can find a home in services that have clear direction and momentum. Music leaders carry responsibility to know the gifts of melody, structure, rhythm, harmony, and words that a song offers and to use them to the fullest. Leaders must cultivate the musical skills that will enable the worshipers to sing a wide variety of songs.

What shall we sing?

It is impossible to define the right music for congregational singing in all places for all times. Music making is primarily a social activity that reflects the cultural realities of our particular congregations. I propose the following as some general principles for evaluating music for congregational singing. The right hymns and songs have:

- singable, durable, and memorable melodies;
- rhythms and harmonies that support the melody;
- strong words that resonate biblical truth and engage singers in the actions of worship;
- simple and complex musical structures that are accessible to most worshipers present and can be adapted or improvised on;
- a home in the congregation's sound pool or new qualities that will quickly be recognized as something familiar;
- mindful and heartfelt qualities; and
- purposes that express specific actions of worship and contribute fittingly to the movement and flow of the worship event.

When it comes to music, right belief is forged in particular congregations as we sing our way to faithfulness.

Notes

[1] Printed in 1564 and enlarged in 1583, the Ausbund is the oldest Protestant hymnal in continuous use; the Amish in North America continue to sing from it.

[2] The word *contemporary* in this article refers to songs for congregational singing that: (1) are in a rock music–based idiom with instrumental accompaniment (often a band), (2) use or require a group of singers for leading songs, and (3) presume a worship structure that includes at least one large block of congregational singing. Permission to copy many contemporary Protestant worship songs of this type for use in worship is covered by agreements obtained through Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI). Other new hymn texts and tunes, psalm settings, and international songs are not "contemporary" in this sense, and are not covered by CCLI licenses.

[3] See, for example, "Love divine, all loves excelling," "Amazing grace," "Joyful, joyful we adore thee."

[4] Robert Jourdain, *Music the Brain, and Ecstasy: How Music Captures Our Imagination* (New York: Avon Books, 1998).

[5] Ibid, 54.

[6] Church growth advocates who contend that using contemporary worship music will ensure congregational growth make a point with which Jourdain would agree: People whose steady musical diet is rock music will be able to understand rock-based contemporary worship music most easily, given how the brain learns to understand music. The problem lies in the exclusiveness of the claim that youth and the unchurched are only adept at understanding rock music. For example, many young people listen to hip-hop far more than to rock, yet the hip-hop style is not reflected in the contemporary worship music recorded and published for congregational singing.

[7] Lawrence A. Hoffman borrows the term *sound pool* from his colleague Don Gurney. See "On Swimming, Sound, and Canon," in *Sacred Sound and Social Change: Liturgical Music in Jewish and Christian Experience*, ed. Lawrence A. Hoffman and Janet R. Walton (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 327.

[8] Corinne Ware, *Discover Your Spiritual Type: A Guide to Individual and Congregational Growth* ([Bethesda, MD]: Alban Institute, 1995).

About the author

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How do we know when it's good worship?

Marlene Kropf

How do you know when you've participated in a good worship service? Is it when everything happens decently and in order? Or is it when something surprising and unexpected happens? Is it when a new insight from scripture captures your attention or when the congregation weeps together as someone shares from the heart? Is it when the children's time takes less than five minutes, the singing is especially powerful, the sense of God's presence is vivid, the unity of the body of Christ is keenly felt, or worshipers leave with a passion to join the work of Christ in the world?

If you asked any ten Mennonite worshipers on Sunday morning whether they had attended a good service, you would likely hear a variety of answers. Then if you probed further and asked them the reasons for their answers, you'd hear even more diversity. What makes a worship service good seems to be a subjective matter, one that varies considerably from one individual or congregation to another.

Because the most complete Christian understanding of God is signified in the image we call Trinity, our worship must reflect that image in both form and content.

An entertaining website regularly reports the worship evaluations of an intrepid team of mystery worshipers who travel incognito in the British Isles and beyond. The team reflects on the comfort of the pews, the warmth of the welcome, and the length of the sermon. They comment on how full the sanctuary was, which part of the service was like being in heaven (and which wasn't), the quality of after-service coffee, and whether the service made them glad to be Christian. At the end of the service, according to the website, "the only clue the mystery worshipers leave behind is a calling card, dropped discreetly into the offering plate." Then they post their reviews—sometimes scathing, sometimes genuinely affirming—on the Internet.[1]

In certain ecclesial traditions, what makes a good worship service seems fairly objective. If the rubrics have been accurately followed, authentic worship has occurred. Whether people like or understand what has happened is somewhat irrelevant; what matters is faithfulness to a traditional structure. In the free churches, where uniformity is not as highly prized, identifying what makes a good or bad service can be much more difficult.

A shift in understanding and practice

Prior to the publication of *Hymnal: A Worship Book* in 1992, Mennonites in North America who were represented in the hymnal project had no formal, agreed-on structure for the order of worship. Though strikingly similar worship patterns would have been found in places as far-flung as Ontario and Oregon, these similarities were more the result of migration patterns and oral tradition than systematic or central decision-making.[2]

In the intense upheavals of community life that occurred in the 1960s and '70s, many of these traditional practices fell by the way. By 1978, *Planning Congregational Worship*, a joint publication of General Conference Mennonites and (old) Mennonites, said simply, "There is no prescribed order of worship that must be followed." The booklet goes on to list some common components of worship, such as hymns and songs, personal greetings, Bible readings, pastoral prayers, children's time, sharing of concerns, sermons, offerings, and announcements. One of the sample orders of worship suggests dividing the service into three parts: "A time for praise, a time to share, and a time to serve." Apart from this example, the publication provides no evidence that worship leaders were thinking in terms of essential actions of worship or a basic structure into which the earlier laundry list of items might be arranged.[3]

What changed with the emergence of *Hymnal: A Worship Book* was a suggested order of worship. As the worship committee of the joint hymnal council did its work, they examined worship bulletins from General Conference Mennonite churches, Mennonite churches, and Church of the Brethren congregations to find what actions of worship were regularly included. From that survey they developed an order of worship organized loosely on the structure of Isaiah 6:1–8, a text frequently used to describe the

essential actions of biblical worship: (1) gathering and praising God, (2) confession and reconciliation, and (3) hearing God's Word and responding in obedience. Though the outline in *Hymnal: A Worship Book* is more detailed (it includes gathering, praising/adoring, confessing/reconciling, proclaiming, affirming faith, praying, offering, witnessing, and sending),[4] it is merely an expansion of the underlying structure of Isaiah 6:1–8.

During the years since 1992, many Mennonite Church USA and Canada congregations have begun to use the order of worship described in our denominational hymnal. The church-wide worship resources developed by volunteer teams of writers from area conferences (which were first published in *Builder* and now in *Leader* magazine) tend to follow this order, although variations are occasionally suggested. The result is that a firmer consensus regarding what is essential in worship has developed among users of the hymnal. Any guide to Mennonite worship published today would likely not claim there is no prescribed order of worship.

Worship patterns that were once more fluid and locally designed have become more standardized. But when leaders follow a prescribed outline, they may begin to think of worship as accomplishing an agenda and lose sight of its purpose.

At the same time, congregations that do not use the hymnal or other denominational music resources typically draw from a variety of other sources for the structure of their worship. Among users of praise-and-worship music, a typical order might include two parts: an opening song service followed by preaching. Along the way, worship would incorporate such elements as thanksgiving, praise, adoration, silent or spoken or sung prayer, scripture reading, and dismissal.[5]

The net effect is that what was once more fluid and locally designed has become more standardized—whether churches use denominational guides or draw from other resources. Today Mennonites aren't as likely as we once were to experience a worship service without any acts of praise (though we still get confused and sing didactic songs during the time of praise). While standardization has value, it also creates potential dangers. When leaders follow a prescribed outline, they may begin to think of worship as accomplishing an agenda and lose sight of its purpose.

Filling in slots can become a substitute for deeper engagement and discernment regarding the actions required for worship to be authentic and transforming in a particular time and place.

Although a common order of worship may provide some protection from overly subjective evaluation and can certainly help focus on what is essential, it still doesn't give us all we need. More is required if we want to develop criteria for Mennonite worship that will enable us to plan worship that sustains us and molds us into Christ's beloved community.

Reliable framework for evaluating worship

What needs to form the bedrock of criteria for Mennonite worship is an understanding of the character and mission of the Trinity. Because the image of the Trinity reveals who God is and what God is doing in the world, it is our most reliable guide for shaping and developing all the ministries of the church, including the ministry of worship. Thus, we will know what constitutes good Mennonite worship when our worship reflects the character and mission of the Trinity.

Many years ago, as a fairly inexperienced worship leader, I planned and led one of the services for a major festival of Mennonite worship in our area. Because this event was a training opportunity for pastors and worship leaders, evaluations took place immediately after each worship service. Participants reflected on what had helped or hindered their worship. They also raised questions for further conversation. Among the many helpful responses offered that day was one I've never forgotten. A participant remarked, "I heard much about God and Jesus today but nothing about the Holy Spirit." That comment set me on a journey of exploring why the Trinity is important in worship. What is gained by giving careful attention to this fundamental theological conviction of the Christian church? What kind of imbalance or distortion emerges if we disregard the Trinity?

Although a common order can help focus on what is essential, more is required to develop criteria that will enable us to plan worship that sustains us and molds us into Christ's beloved community.

At first I found myself carefully checking prayer and song texts to make sure references were made to all three members of the

Trinity. Then I became aware that something much deeper was going on. Because worship is the primary setting in which the congregation is corporately formed in faith, the fullest possible understanding of God needs to be expressed and experienced in that context. And because the most complete Christian understanding of God is signified in the image we call Trinity, our worship must reflect that image in both form and content.[6]

In the Trinity we come to know God as creator and source, the one whom we love and praise with heart, mind, body, and soul. We come to know God as Christ, our brother and redeemer, the one we follow as disciples through death to resurrection. We come to know God as Spirit and energy, animator of our world, the one who empowers us to witness and serve with joy. The three-in-one, joined in perfect love and harmony, invite us to join their communion, and thus we become a community that is a visible sign of God's presence and power in the world.[7]

At its heart, worship is a response to the love and grace of the triune God. Three ordinary yet essential movements of worship—encounter, engagement, and empowerment—invite us into relationship and union with the Trinity.[8] Together, these movements create a dynamic rhythm that pulses through our lives, forming and transforming us individually and corporately into the body of Christ.

The difference made by Trinitarian theology

As the focus of worship, the Trinity not only becomes the theological center of worship, it also provides the criteria and rationale for evaluation of worship. While preferences such as styles of preaching, praying, or singing inevitably affect our participation in worship, these preferences are not the heart of the matter. What matters is whether a full-bodied understanding and experience of the triune God is made manifest.

The following definition offers a simple but sturdy foundation for understanding worship and suggests a framework of three central questions that can guide our evaluation of worship practices: *Christian worship is an encounter with the triune God experienced in the midst of community, which transforms and empowers members of Christ's body for loving witness and service in the world.*[9] The three questions that emerge from such a foundation are:

Have we encountered the triune God in worship? Has the community experienced itself as the body of Christ? Have worshipers been empowered to love and witness and serve Christ in the world?[10]

Have we encountered the triune God? Worship begins with meeting the living God—Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit. No other reason for gathering is adequate—not even our well-intentioned desire for Christian fellowship or our need for instruction or encouragement. Unless we encounter God, we have not worshiped and will not be shaped into God's people.

The implications of this question are immediately observable in the actions of worship. Do we greet worshipers with folksy comments about the weather or weekend sports events, or do we guide people into awareness of the true and living God? Do we assure ample time for prayer and praise, or do we skimp on adoration of God and spend more time in sharing or announcements? Does our music proclaim God's glory and grace? Are sermons biblically centered? Do they have theological integrity? Does the congregation receive an adequate and nourishing diet of scripture? Are the arts trusted to help us touch the hem of mystery? Can we wait in silence before God? Do we meet regularly at the Lord's Table? Is a rich array of biblical images of God offered for reflection and instruction? Do leaders prepare prayerfully? Do they communicate their own faith with passion?

While preferences regarding styles of preaching, praying, or singing affect our participation in worship, what matters is whether a full-bodied understanding and experience of the triune God is made manifest.

Have we experienced the community as the body of Christ? Worship recreates the body of Christ as we gather each week. In worship we come to see and know ourselves as members of one another, sisters and brothers who incarnate and reflect Christ's love, reaching out to one another in healing, strengthening ways. We also know one another as frail and fallible human beings. Some of us struggle to believe and follow Christ. Some are longing for forgiveness or the renewing touch of the Spirit. Some are in despair.

The implications of this question require persistent and loving attention to hospitality. Does everyone—all ages, genders, social

classes, racial-ethnic identities, and political persuasions—receive a warm welcome? Does our worship invite us to be real, earthy, and human? Do we regularly engage in confession, naming our sins with bold honesty? Do we speak the truth in love? Is grace abundant? Is the Christian story proclaimed with creativity and power? Does it inhabit our imaginations and shape our behavior and relationships? Is the community engaged in interpretation of the Word? Do we love to sing together? Do we respect one another's preferences and tastes in worship? Do we pray together? Suffer together? Share our fondest hopes and joys? Are those who stir up division called to repentance? Do leaders identify with their people? Can they both comfort and confront?

Have we been empowered to love and witness and serve Christ in the world? Though the vertical and horizontal dimensions of worship are essential, they do not yet constitute the whole of worship. Worship is finally evaluated by its fruit in daily life. Worship equips people, through the power of the Spirit, for participation in the new world of God's gracious reign. As our vision of God's purposes in the world is clarified and renewed in worship, we are transformed for faithful witness and loving service.

Answering this question requires us to look both at what happens within worship and what happens beyond worship. Is the Word preached faithfully and with the conviction that it will transform individuals and the community? Are rituals of response thoughtfully designed? Do we pray fervently for the world? Do we lament injustice, violence, and greed? Do we intercede for God's people at home and around the world? Do we anoint for healing? Are offerings a dull moment in worship, or do they become acts of commitment? Do our songs lull us into torpor, or do they agitate, inspire, and empower us? Does our joy abound? Are our baptismal services hearty celebrations? Is there a lively traffic between what happens during the week and what happens on Sunday morning? Are we clear about whose kingdom receives our allegiance? Can leaders function both as prophets and as priests? Do they inspire worshipers to hope for the fulfillment of God's reign?

God decides what's good

When all is said and done, God determines whether worship is faithful or not—not an intrepid team of mystery worshipers who

show up on Sunday morning with evaluation grids in hand. The prophets of the Old Testament often warned God's people not to become complacent or self-satisfied about worship.[11] God expected them to give their best and provided detailed instructions for visual elements, music, rituals, and spoken words. Like those ancient leaders, worship planners and leaders today are called to excellence: to keep worship Christ-centered, to call the community to genuine engagement with one another, and to strengthen the links between worship and our life of peace and justice in the world.

Without a robust theology of the Trinity, however, Christian worship easily becomes one-dimensional, anemic, and unfaithful. What the image of the Trinity offers us is a durable and comprehensive framework for focusing our efforts and evaluation on what is essential and life-giving, not on what is peripheral and ephemeral. And although we have looked at worship analytically through the lens of the Trinity as distinct members, the reality that we desire in worship is—like the Trinity itself—an integrated whole. With the Trinity as our guide, we will offer worship that is pleasing to God, creating space for an encounter with the fullness of God, by which the Spirit transforms God's people into vibrant witnesses of God's love and grace in the world.

Notes

[1] For more information, see http://ship-of-fools.com/Mystery.

[2] For examples of these older oral traditions in worship, see John L. Ruth's essay in this issue of *Vision*, "Affectionate Memories of Traditional and Transitional Mennonite Worship in Pennsylvania."

[3] Wilfrid J. Unruh, *Planning Congregational Worship* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press; and Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1978), 28–30.

[4] *Hymnal: A Worship Book* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press; Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press; Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1992), i.

[5] Barry Wayne Liesch, *The New Worship: Straight Talk on Music and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 64–67.

[6] Though scripture speaks more suggestively than definitively regarding the Trinity, the Christian church has from the beginning found this image to be essential for understanding and describing God's character and activity in the world. A small flood of contemporary theologians has been reexamining the doctrine of the Trinity, finding in it a source of creativity and new life for the postmodern church. See, for example, Paul S. Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000); Stanley J. Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004); Catherine Mowry Lacugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper

SanFrancisco, 1991); Molly T. Marshall, *Joining the Dance: A Theology of the Spirit* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2003); Mary Timothy Prokes, *Mutuality: The Human Image of Trinitarian Love* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993); Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). After his careful discussion of early and contemporary Anabaptist understandings of the Trinity, Mennonite theologian Thomas N. Finger, in *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology: Biblical, Historical, Constructive* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 421–64), affirms that a theology of the Trinity offers the church essential perspectives for both ministry and mission.

[7] John of Damascus, seventh-century Greek theologian, describes the relationship of the persons of God as *perichōrēsis*. Literally meaning "circle dance," this image emphasizes constant movement in an interpenetrating circle of intimacy, equality, and mutuality. Furthermore, this interaction is not only external; it is also a reciprocal interiority. Shirley Guthrie writes, "The oneness of God is not the oneness of a distinct, self-contained individual; it is the unity of a *community* of persons who love each other and live together in harmony" (*Christian Doctrine*, rev. ed. [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994], 92).

[8] For a fuller discussion of these three essential movements in worship, see chapter one of the forthcoming book, *Preparing Sunday Dinner: A Collaborative Approach to Worship and Preaching* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2006), collaboratively written by June Alliman Yoder, Marlene Kropf, and Rebecca Slough.

[9] This definition is central in *Preparing Sunday Dinner: A Collaborative Approach to Worship and Preaching*.

[10] For another useful set of evaluative questions, see "The Opening of Worship: Trinity," by John Witvliet, in *A More Profound Alleluia: Theology and Worship in Harmony*, ed. Leanne Van Dyk (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 1–27, in which Witvliet discusses a series of Trinitarian habits which become central in congregational life and thus form worship and its outcomes.

[11] For example, this warning from Isaiah 29:13–14: "The Lord said: Because these people draw near with their mouths and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their worship of me is a human commandment learned by rote; so I will again do amazing things with this people, shocking and amazing. The wisdom of their wise shall perish, and the discernment of the discerning shall be hidden."

About the author

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Affectionate memories of traditional and transitional Mennonite worship in Pennsylvania

John L. Ruth

Most of the Mennonite worship I experienced in my youth was in the ambience of a rural mission congregation founded in 1931. However, I also fairly frequently got into the traditional congregations of both the Franconia and Lancaster Mennonite Conferences, 1935–48. In later decades, it has been my privilege to visit services of quite a few conservative Mennonite congregations where the patterns of earlier eras are still in evidence. Here I shall muse informally on remembered elements of singing and preaching in these settings.[1]

Was there something profound residual in traditional Mennonite worship, an afterglow of a radical sense of community from four centuries earlier? Was there in our weekly regathering in itself a feeling of sacrament?

In a local funeral sermon of 1936, unusual for that time in its discursive rather than incantatory manner, one of our traditional ministers described the life of his deceased pulpit colleague as characterized by "love and humility."[2] Those were iconic words. Even on the way to meeting, these attitudes were palpable. A local Dunker remembered that horses were kept to an appropriately moderate going-to-meeting trot (*fasammling drot)*. On the half-mile hill between our neighbor's mill and the Salford meetinghouse, miller Abraham Groff required his children to refrain from talking, and another neighbor allowed only discussion of spiritual subjects.

Singing

The first voice heard in our traditional Sunday gatherings, sometimes partly muffled, other times strong, announced the number of a song. The song leader, seated near the front of the congregation, was heard but not necessarily seen. This was not a venue in which an individual, especially one not ordained, should call attention to his own presence or role. It was our time, and God's

time, not his time. Only during the less sacred Sunday school hour would a leader stand and beat time. Among the "Old Orders" in Lancaster County, the song leader's voice came from one of the seated men around the singers' table in the front and center of the gathering. This arrangement was reminiscent of the layout of farm dwellings which in colonial times had served as meetinghouses *(G'meehäuser)* for worship.

Two modes of singing, with differing emotional qualities, are still employed in the traditional communities. The older mode, which I heard mostly in German, is still alive among Old Order Mennonites and Amish. The sometimes hardly recognizable melodies, sung strongly, nasally, and in unison, linger over the syllables. Impatience has no function here; our Amish friends get their full spiritual dollar's worth out of every word. The melodies are full of mordents (swift, mournful-sounding undulations) and melismas that may vary somewhat from community to community but remain stable in their local settings.

Franconia conference leaders blessed singing in four parts as a healthy metaphor for spiritual harmony. Where singing schools had been welcomed, it was to be characterized by unself-conscious gusto.

Although in my youth such grace notes already sounded almost bewilderingly quaint or melancholy, I privately enjoyed and imitated them. Meanwhile, elements of the folkish, mordent-employing "old" style were emerging in songs on the radio—in Bing Crosby's crooning; in country and western music; in Black Gospel; and in later, rawer, folk-tinged pop. After a while, this tendency actually took over; even our Mennonite young people when singing solos in church could sing no other way than to round off or slide into the notes. Surely elements of this mode, allowing words or phrases to be emotionally decorated, echo medieval European singing that was influenced by Byzantine sources.

Unlike the Old Orders, Franconia conference leaders in the previous half-century had blessed singing in four parts as a healthy metaphor for spiritual harmony. It was certainly to be enjoyed, and where singing schools had been welcomed for a century, to be characterized by unselfconscious gusto. The chorister himself was expected to sing loudly enough to be heard to the four corners of the Franconia congregation's large meeting room. Individuals

were permitted to sing at the top of their voices. Such enthusiastic participation was especially likely during the singing of gospel songs, which were accepted in the church service itself in the early twentieth century. Sixty years later, I can still hear my Sunday school teacher's tenor singing the refrain, "Hope of earth and joy of heav'n."

In both unison and harmonic modes, the traditional singing had the sound not of performance but of community. People sang in a mode that blended rather than individuated their voices.

In a large congregation at full volume, your ears could ring. A cousin at Salford remembers that his ears hurt when he sat across the aisle from Susan Clemens or Mrs. Jake Detweiler as they shrilled out the alto of "She only touched the hem of His garment / As to His side she stole." Particularly for young people, singing could be the high point of the service. For them, of course, the gospel songs of the Moody-Sankey era may have been the most enjoyable. Personally, I found the noble imagery of great hymns—"Each angel sweeps his lyre / And claps his wings of fire"—to have the most lasting spiritual effect.

In our Montgomery County community, a Brethren song leader of Mennonite ancestry in his nineties still retained the traditionally stentorian chorister's voice. He needed no microphone. His nineteenth-century intonation and pronunciation were clearly audible as late as the late 1970s. A family historian pointed out that in this man's family, musicality could be traced in an unbroken line to a Mennonite farmer who had sung his way out of a jail in Philadelphia during the American Revolution. Some said his daughter could learn the tenor part of a new hymn before the men of the community did. Astoundingly, the memory of her descendant Rein Gottschall (born in 1876) carried into the 1970s the words and tunes of well over a hundred German chorales, in addition to many Methodistic choruses.

Both his voice and that of Mennonite song leader James Derstine (also born in 1876) remain with us on audiotape, the latter's enfeebled by age. They evoke a generous love for their fund of songs, often connected in memory with some passage of our local church history, or with their own spiritual pilgrimage. Such men were adept at choosing songs that contained echoes of the scriptures or themes they had just heard in the preaching.

In both unison and harmonic modes, the traditional singing had the sound not of performance but of community. People sang in a mode that blended rather than individuated their voices. Composer-arranger Alice Parker recalls a vivid first experience of typical Mennonite hymn singing, at Laurelville Mennonite Church Center in July 1961: "In the dining hall, after a brief grace, one voice began a familiar hymn. On the second note, the entire room joined in the most beautiful four-part hymn singing I had ever heard. I hear it in my mind's ear to this day. . . . It had never occurred to me that a tradition of unaccompanied singing, along with a natural, free vocal production and a love for and understanding of the text, could add up to the kind of sound I heard."[3] This experience was a creative watershed for Parker, echoing through the next decades of her nationwide teaching career.

A late-arriving ordained man would move along the bench, to be greeted sequentially with a holy kiss by each colleague. It was a solemnly visualized tableau of Gemeinschaft reaching beyond the local congregation into the broader fellowship of likeminded Christians.

Preaching

Even as the ministers walked in and seated themselves along the long preachers' bench or pulpit *(Bredigerschtuhl)*, they did so with bowed heads, without looking out over the gathering. If—after they had hung their black, broad-brimmed hats on a row of pegs above their bench—a late-arriving ordained man joined them, he would move along the bench, to be greeted sequentially with a holy kiss by each colleague. It was a solemnly visualized tableau of Gemeinschaft reaching beyond the local congregation into the broader fellowship of likeminded Christians. The presence of visiting *fremder Brediger* always added enjoyment, as witnessed by my grandmother's favorable references to "strange preachers" in the first three decades of her English diary of 1911–52.

When the minister was heard "making the opening," it was in a tone less of summons or announcement than of corporate acknowledgment of God's presence. A congregation of Christ's followers having assembled, a response was now due—the response of worship to an awe-inspiring, gracious God. No rhetorical, liturgical, or architectural flourish was to interpose a

decorative motif on the humble act of gathering. The summons had already been given by Christ; it need not be ornamentally announced. I was sometimes struck by the undemanding, hardly audible opening sentences of initiation, spoken as if the minister didn't mind that it would take awhile for his audience to focus on his familiar, formulaic words.

Several decades ago, I wrote down the formulaic opening phrases one heard ca. 1935–1950 in conservative eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite worship. None of our ministers, whose mother tongue was Pennsylvania German, had gone beyond high school; most had not even that much schooling. The transition to English language (though not to an unaccented pronunciation) was complete in our worship.

> *We greet one and all in the Master's worthy name on this beautiful Lord's Day morning. We trust that each one in divine presence can say with the Psalmist of old, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord." I believe that should be the testimony of all, when the end of the week comes, and we lay aside our daily cares, and look to our heavenly Father, the one who provides for our needs, and the one to whom one day every knee shall bow, and render a full account of the deeds done in the body.*
>
> *This is surely a sobering thought, when we think of the responsibility that is placed upon us. And as we look to the Lord for a message, we crave an interest in your prayers, that we may be given liberty to declare the whole counsel of God, without fear or favor of men, to a lost and dying world. And that all that is said and done here today may be to the honor and glory of Almighty God. As our mind went back during the past week, over many precious scriptures, we were made to think how often the Lord reminds us of what he expects of his children. How great a love he has shown toward the children of men, and yet, how often his love is rejected, as our minds become filled with the things of this passing world. Beloved, my hope and prayer this morning is that we may*

hearken unto the voice of our Lord, while it is called today. I would like to call your attention to the fifth chapter of . . .

At this point there would be an audible riffling of Bible pages—of thin "India paper"—that served to unite the conscientious part of the congregation in a common experience of scripture, as it reminded others of their marginal status.

I cannot claim that the content of such preaching itself laid strong hold on the hearts of my generation. Our fellowship might be said to have survived, where it did, almost in spite of the rhetorical quality of our pulpit fare. This is to say that we experienced in our worship much more than the virtues of a good speaker. When the speaker was good, we were grateful. But the selection of men to be placed "in the lot" for this office had traditionally centered much more on whether a man would "make himself useful" than on his ability *(fähigkeit)*—the key requirement advanced in 1847 by John H. Oberholtzer, proponent of the progressive wing that became the new Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Conference (and eventually the General Conference Mennonite Church).

"He had one text," it was said of a local bishop ordained in 1906: "the whole Bible." This pattern contrasted with what our plain people observed about the preachers of the "church people" *(Kariche Leit)*: "*Sie hen drei punkte k'hatt*" (they had three points).

The preaching was not given to self-reference, humor, or compliments to the audience. Illustrations were welcome, if used sparingly. Preachers could be loudly declamatory, but were better received, in the long run, if their sermons came "*so wie 'n landrehe*"—like a gentle summer rain.[4] Often there was what struck visitors as a melancholy tone—resonant with the seriousness of spiritual issues, the memory of persecution, the loss of children to the encroaching world. That tone had been prominent in the incantatory mode, still practiced today by the Amish, the fading echoes of which I heard in our Mennonite congregations of the 1930s and '40s. In the 1980s, long after that mode had become a curious (if not comic) memory, an old layman of our community could still imitate it as practiced by a bishop who had died in 1937.

The sermonic content, expected to be thoroughly scriptural, was laced with what the audience already knew of the biblical narratives. For example, at funerals the Amish preacher begins with creation, musing with existential feeling on the primeval fellowship God had with Adam and Eve, into whom were infused the divine breath that is still sustaining both preacher and congregation. At communion the salvation story is relived across the biblical span. "He had one text," it was said of a local bishop ordained in 1906: "the whole Bible." This pattern contrasted with what our plain people observed about the preachers of the "church people" *(Kariche Leit)*, their Lutheran and Reformed neighbors: "*Sie hen drei punkte k'hatt*" (they had three points).

In our fellowship it was normal for beginning preachers to struggle almost painfully before a sympathetic audience. A woman at Weaverland in Lancaster County stated, "It takes ten years to make a preacher." In fact, if a newly ordained one came on immediately with ease or eloquence in the pulpit, it could raise the suspicion that he was motivated by the willful preaching spirit *(brediger geist)* rather than humble obedience to the call.

Of course a spiritual price could be paid when the preacher never grew into maturity in his function. Expressions of dismay and the record of departing families remain in my congregation's anecdotal memory. One of our old ministers remarked regretfully about a pulpit colleague, "He never could handle a text." In contrast, one of our members somewhat wistfully described a neighboring Dunker preacher as able to "take a text and lay it out." On the other hand, I have found some of the un-eloquent, mnemonic preachers of former decades more quoted in the long run than those who seldom repeated themselves. Today's accomplished pulpit essayists are unlikely to be remembered with the words, "As old _____ used to say . . ."

Indeed, not all memories of typical worship in our local congregations are positive. There was a traditional whispering and otherwise audible socializing among the younger people toward the rear. A nearly unspeakable incident in 1929 (my devout father thought it should not even be recorded) was the accidental discharge of a revolver a young trapper had brought along—during the closing, kneeling prayer. I recall my own discomfort, as a very young preacher in the latter phase of the transitional years,

at not being able to hold the attention of the back third of the audience. This problem disappeared with the advent of families sitting together, after the 1950s. The Old Order Amish meeting in homes frequently make no attempt to keep the young men—who sit closely packed on backless benches—from sleepily resting their heads on the shoulders of those in front of them. Visitors may be surprised to learn that it is not considered proper to stare, even appreciatively, into the eyes of the preacher. This would signify a "bold" rather than a submissive spirit.

Why, in a sense beyond nostalgia, could one feel affection in recalling these odd memories? Is it because residual under the old-fashioned gauche pronunciation, elementary exegesis, intramural atmosphere, and transitional cultural context, there was something profound? Was it the afterglow of the radical sense of community in Christ that had imprinted the gathering of our world-forsaking fellowship in its birth phase four centuries earlier? Was there in our weekly regathering in itself a feeling of sacrament? In an era of replaceable covenants, have the tastefully superior symbolisms we are conscientiously borrowing for our corporate worship been able to equal that pleasure?

Notes

[1] I have written elsewhere on the general subject of Mennonite traditions in worship: "How to Have a Good Worship Experience," *Gospel Herald* (19 March 1991), 1–3; "Glimpses of 'Swiss' Anabaptist-Mennonite Worship," in *Anabaptist Currents: History in Conversation with the Present*, ed. Carl F. Bowman and Stephen L. Longenecker ([Camden, ME?]: Penobscot Press, 1995), 83–100; "'Only a House . . . Yet it Becomes': Some Mennonite Traditions of Worship Space," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 73 (April 1999): 235–56.

[2] Elias N. Landis, MS notes for the funeral sermon of Henry M. Clemmer, Harleysville, PA, 28 November 1936; photocopy in author's possession. Landis and Clemmer were both ministers of the Salford Mennonite congregation.

[3] Alice Parker, "Singing Mennonites: A Vision for Congregational Music," *Builder: An Educational Magazine for Congregational Leaders* (August 1995), 14–15.

[4] From Amos B. Hoover, Old order Mennonite deacon and historian.

About the author

John L. Ruth (Harleysville, PA), a retired Mennonite minister and English professor, has written and made films on the life and heritage of his Mennonite community, including books such as *'Twas Seeding Time, Maintaining the Right Fellowship*, and *The Earth is the Lord's: A Narrative History of the Lancaster Mennonite Conference*.

Distilled as new wine

Worship in a congregation of refugees and immigrants

Betty Kennedy de Puricelli

How can our ever-changing community of faith worship cross-culturally in a way that is faithful to our holy God of love? When our backgrounds—levels of formal education, life experiences, and political realities—are very diverse, can we find unity of purpose and spirit through our common worship?

We gather as those whose lives have been crushed

Toronto Mennonite New Life Church (TMNLC) is a small Spanish-speaking Anabaptist congregation that is part of Mennonite Church Eastern Canada. On most Sundays, eight or ten different nationalities are represented when we gather for worship. Most of us are Latin American refugees and immigrants. Civil wars and strife have raged across Central and South America, and the superpowers of the past and the empire of the present have ruled us with an iron grip. Some who have gotten caught up in and been victims of these struggles have come to Toronto seeking a new home in a land where they can start again.

What constitutes meaningful worship for our constantly changing fellowship? Can we embrace the various wandering souls in their brokenness? Can our circle be the winepress that holds us, unites us, and draws the best wine from us?

Ours is a transient community of individuals and families torn by the tensions and paradoxes that are the aftermath of refugee experience as it confronts present realities of limitation and deprivation. Havoc exists at the heart of family life, and instability leaves people fragile and broken. Grief is part of daily life. Those in the older generation cannot let go of what they have lost, and youth want to forget where they came from and embrace the new culture, to fit in and belong somewhere—if only to a gang.

Households that had been dominated by the father are suddenly ripped apart by a culture that grants all members of the

family the right to be and do as they wish. The older generation's norms derive from what anthropologist Edward Hall refers to as a *high-context* culture, which is relational, collectivist, intuitive, and contemplative. The younger generation is taking its cues from the dominant *low-context* Canadian society, which tends to be logical, linear, individualistic, and action-oriented. Adolescents take over in their families and anarchy ensues. Fragmentation and loss of identity make for fearful hearts and crushed spirits.

In the midst of this fear, in the face of a struggle with unknown powers that are sucking people down into depression or enticing them with supposed freedoms, we at TMNLC offer a variety of services. Through the church, people are invited into a space for exploring faith in God and God's call to become part of a new community. As the presence of God grows in our hearts, we become a fellowship, a new body of believers who are learning to listen to the Lord. This communion with God and our fellow pilgrims is what we read about in 1 Peter 2:10: "Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." We believe and proclaim the gospel of peace and try to sow the seeds of life of the Prince of Peace in the hearts of those who are drawn near.

Every Sunday the congregation is different. We never know who will be able to attend. Newcomers have very little security. Permanent work is hard to find. Opportunities to earn money are sometimes available only on weekends. Families have to move to surrounding towns and cities, because life in Toronto is expensive. Some who have participated in our circle for several months or even years are deported to their countries of origin.

What constitutes meaningful worship for this constantly changing fellowship? Can we embrace the various wandering souls in their brokenness, in their varied experiences and needs? Is there a common foundation on which we can build? Can our circle be the winepress that holds us and unites us and draws the best wine from us? We are finding out that the experience of building community is like placing ourselves in a winepress; it contains our crushed lives and brings us close to one another as we go through the process of being transformed together into new wine. As we let go of our pain and brokenness, we are distilled so the essence of God's life in us can emerge.

Scripture reveals to us a God of nomads and refugees

To address the needs of refugees and immigrants, we have developed two worship services, one on Sunday morning and the other on Wednesday evening. They are spaces in time, offering worship and pastoral care for a journey of constant invitation to dwell in the security of the One our scriptures reveal to be the God of pilgrims, desert nomads, refugees, and outcasts. These services have different approaches but many of the same elements. Some people can only come to one of the two services every week; as a result they sometimes participate for months or years and never meet those who participate in the other service. Other brothers and sisters come to one and then another worship time, depending on their other commitments, and they do not find the services repetitious, because the approaches are different.

Our two services offer worship and pastoral care for a journey of constant invitation to dwell in the security of the One our scriptures reveal to be the God of pilgrims, desert nomads, refugees, and outcasts.

The main difference between Sunday worship and Wednesday worship is in the use of scripture. Sunday mornings we follow the Revised Common Lectionary. These ecumenically chosen readings provide a framework for worship and praise around a theme which is the basis for an exposition of the Word and for our communal prayer time. For people who have never participated in a church service, and for those who come from different traditions, discovering the basis of our faith is a unifying experience. Through the scriptures, the Spirit continues to reveal to our hearts who God is and how God is at work in the world.

Our Wednesday worship is organized around systematic study of a book selected from the Bible. At present we are studying the Acts of the Apostles, having just finished the Gospel of Luke.

The Old Testament uses the image of the vine as a metaphor for the people of God. In the New Testament, Jesus calls himself the vine, and his people are the branches that produce fruit if we abide in him. The metaphor is expanded into the trampling of the grapes in the winepress. Jesus endured being crushed for us. This image becomes a balm for us in our broken lives, as we identify with the experience of being crushed. Scripture draws us close when we discover that from beginning to end it illuminates and

describes our experience of suffering. Here is the foundation for community building: the Spirit revealing God's nature and we seeing ourselves mirrored in this revelation.

We pour our grief into the cup of Christ's suffering

In both services, we offer the Eucharist (thanksgiving service) once a month and on special occasions. At present, we serve communion on the first Sunday of the month and the third Wednesday. The Eucharist is the proclamation of the basis of our faith, the pathway to God left to us by Christ himself. Evangelism at its best happens through this remembrance proclamation.

We partake of this meal of the living Christ himself as the supreme food from heaven for our earthly journey. Like God's people who were fed manna in the wilderness, we are invited into a nourishing relationship through eating the bread that is different from all foods because it comes from above. The more we are fed by this experience of the mystery of God's presence as we partake, the more the presence of the eternal is revealed to us, so that our faith grows and unfolds in deeper communion and strength for the journey through the wilderness of unknowing.

As we are called to participate in this meal, our worship reaches into the timelessness of eternity. We are then set free to see God breaking through into the present. As we are drawn into God's eternal present, we become increasingly aware of God's intervention in the world of now, in our behalf. Before the foundations of the world were laid, God preordained that the Lamb of God would be slain for us so we could be clothed in the garments of Christ. God provides the robes of righteousness through the living Word of redemption, to replace our own garments of inadequate covering.

It is in participating in the Eucharist that we are united in a new bond and become blood-brothers and blood-sisters. Through the body and blood of Christ, we become a worshiping community. We are no longer strangers but family, with God as our father and Jesus as our brother. Suffering "plants the flag of truth" in our hearts, as C. S. Lewis said. Gathered in this newfound place of assurance and meaning, we pour our pain, tragedy, and grief into the cup of Christ's suffering. As we surrender our suffering to him, he invites us to drink of his suffering for us. We then participate in

drinking the cup of salvation, God's communion. We find great comfort in the truth of meaning in suffering beyond our ability to comprehend.

As we are nurtured and filled, we desire to become channels of this new life for others. The experience of having been crushed makes us vulnerable and able to identify with other vulnerable ones. It is only when we pass on the blessing we have received that we continue to be filled. Our congregation has come to see Mennonite Central Committee and Christian Peacemaker Teams, to mention but two entities, as meaningful arms for extending the blessing. It is important to keep before us the many who are still in situations like those from which we have been healed and are being healed. The practice of our faith in service to others has meant getting involved in fundraising and participating in a variety of needs such as disaster relief. One member of our congregation represents us on the board of Lazarus Rising, a Mennonite initiative that employs a street chaplain to work with homeless people in Toronto.

As we surrender our suffering to Christ, he invites us to drink of his suffering for us. We then participate in drinking the cup of salvation, God's communion. We find comfort in the truth of meaning in suffering beyond our comprehension.

The Eucharist becomes the sustaining food and drink that brings true meaning to our past and present journey of being crushed grapes that are now becoming holy wine.

Singing articulates our gratitude and longing to belong

Our songs of praise and adoration are a visible, communal, musical expression of the gratitude in our hearts. The experience of singing together binds us in an offering of mutuality as we join in voicing the same words. The poetic forms carry a message about our intimate relationship to our Lord.

The hymns and songs vary in their style and content. An open time for requesting songs or hymns gives room for personal preferences. And leaders also select classical, traditional, and folkloric hymns and songs in accordance with the theme of the scripture texts. The instrumentalists practice these in advance. Guitars are used regularly, along with other percussion instruments: tambourines, maracas, drums. We prefer this accompaniment as reminis-

cent of campfires, spaces of community respite, and oases of the past. Piano accompaniment is sometimes used as well.

The whole of the worship team strives to prepare a meaningful sequence of hymns and songs that include children and adults in expressions of joy, reflection, adoration, praise, and reverence. Sometimes we invite corporate dance with children and adults. The purpose is to guide us into a time of reflection and openness to the message of the Word. As we are caught up, our individual voices become one, and we find ourselves receptive and open.

One of the hymns, "You called me, Lord my God," from the Honduran Anabaptist community of faith, has become very meaningful to us is:

You called me, Lord my God,
my hands are ready now
to build with you, O God,
a fellowship of faith.

No angels can perform
the task given to transform
a world in pain and grief
to wholeness, joy, and peace.
But God chose human hands
his mandate to fulfill.
Lord, help me in this work,
to do your holy will.

Blessed are the faithful ones,
those who strive for love and peace,
proclaiming to all justice
while living liberty.

This song recognizes our human condition, a personal call from God to be involved in building a new community with others, and a continued challenge to live in a new freedom. This liberty restores us to practice justice without ignoring the injustices, as we build a community of people of peace.

The refrain of another favourite hymn, from the Paraguayan Anabaptist community, affirms that "God is calling forth a people

his true Israel to be. I belong to God's own people by his power and grace to be." The second stanza reminds us,

> *God had said in Jeremiah*
> *thirty-one, verse thirty-three:*
> *Very soon a day is coming,*
> *a new covenant there'll be.*
> *I will write my laws within them,*
> *in their mind and in their heart:*
> *then they'll always be my people,*
> *I'll forever be their God.*

This sampling articulates our longing to belong. God is the initiator and the enabler who desires to grant us what we covet: to be brought into a new community, to be the new wine of meaning and healing that embraces the past and transforms it.

In prayer we seek God

The fourth and final element of our worship, communal prayer, incorporates abundant thanksgiving, petitions, intercession, and praise. The methods of prayer are varied. Sometimes the leader responds to the requests or expressions of thanksgiving with the phrase "For this we pray to the Lord," which is followed by "Lord, hear our prayer." Other times, people rise and pray spontaneously. Sometimes someone may be asked to pray for another, perhaps because the intercessor has lived through a similar experience and can pray with great empathy for the one in need of prayer. On Wednesdays we often give opportunity for everyone who is present to pray aloud for the requests that are brought to the community.

Every two months, we incorporate a healing service into our Wednesday service. Prayers for healing of body, mind, and spirit are followed by anointing with oil and communion. On these occasions, each person who requests prayer is prayed for in private space, one on one, with full confidentiality, by someone asked in advance to be available to offer such prayers. We have often held these services with Toronto United Mennonite Church and had people pray in different languages. A physician joins us for these services to pray for her patients in great need.

These services are deeply moving and are requested by the congregants. Occasionally we have also had prayer vigils for specific needs to seek God more intensely. This practice, combined with fasting, is especially needed when someone brings a request for a prayer of liberation.

Sometimes we receive people who do not speak Spanish, and several members of the congregation who are good at simultaneous translation into English can step in to translate during the service. We welcome these visits and the opportunity to interact with visitors and friends of the participants, who are themselves exploring faith. We thank God for opportunities to witness as best we can and to discover how others are seeking the Holy One. In God's power and strength, we try to be faithful in what we do and say. The greeting of peace is our final embrace with our brothers and sisters, as we face the mission that each of us returns to.

Sharing a meal strengthens us for the journey

Every Sunday morning we share a simple meal after the service. In a sense, our sharing bread is a continuation of our worship. Each Sunday a different family is responsible for preparing and serving the meal. On Wednesdays the communal meal is shared as people come in from work before the service. These times of sharing our food and having fellowship are community-building experiences through which we get to know one another better. Both physical and spiritual bread of life strengthen us for the daily journey.

We are slowly becoming "poured-out wine" for our God, as Oswald Chambers writes. When I first read this phrase, I had not experienced what Chambers meant. I could understand the concept in my head, but it was not in my experience. Now, in a closer walk with God, I am just beginning to understand how we arrive at the willingness to become poured-out wine. Daily we are crushed and yet not defeated. Daily we offer to God the blood of our lives that is being transformed into new wine: the best wine from the winepress of trodden grapes. Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus, come. Amen.

About the author

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Worship on the northwestern frontier

Rod Stafford

Two hundred years ago, Captains Lewis and Clark set out with their Corps of Discovery to explore the uncharted west. President Thomas Jefferson had commissioned them to look for the mythic Northwest Passage. (Along the way, perhaps they would run into the wooly mammoths; Peruvian llamas; and blue-eyed, Welsh-speaking Indians that were rumored to live here.) For all their epic adventure, they discovered no great passage and no mammoths, but the West was irrevocably opened, and explorers have been streaming this way ever since.

Given its roots in a Wild West past of logging camps and endless range, it is perhaps not surprising that the Northwest has become the least churched region in the United States. Census studies show that on any given holy day, fewer people find their way to church, synagogue, or mosque in Oregon than in any other state.

One person who sporadically attends our church posed the question this way: "Is it better for me to sit in church for an hour and think about the mountains, or to sit in the mountains for an hour and think about God?"

For one thing, there is simply too much else to do. One could ski a glacier on Mount Hood in the morning, windsurf in the Colombia River Gorge in the afternoon, and still make it to the Pacific Ocean for a dinner of cracked crab at sunset. One person who sporadically attends our church posed the question this way: "Is it better for me to sit in church for an hour and think about the mountains, or to sit in the mountains for an hour and think about God?" That logic is hard to refute.

Though Christendom may still be in place in much of the South, it never took hold in the Northwest. And in contrast to the Northeast's tradition of the church on the village green—a central, organizing, community institution—Christianity up here

is, at best, one faith among many. Two blocks from my church there is a Wiccan meeting house. And the Goddess Gallery that used to be across the street recently moved down the block into an expanded space.

There is a deep and pervasive spiritual longing here. But much of it is diffuse, some of it is antithetical to organized religion, and some of it is simply unconnected to any religious past. A man recently joined the congregation who for the previous eighteen years would have described himself as "a bit of a Buddhist." He proudly told me that his son was learning "The Lord is my shepherd" in Sunday school. Then he asked, "That's in the Psalms, right?" Then added, "That's in the Old Testament, right?"

There is a deep and pervasive spiritual longing here in the Northwest. But much of it is diffuse, some of it is antithetical to organized religion, and some of it is simply unconnected to any religious past.

In the Northwest, Christianity does not enjoy the support of a cultural consensus. People don't necessarily grow up learning its stories and symbols, Wednesday evenings are not reserved as church night, and people experience little—if any—social pressure to be in worship on Sunday mornings. Religiously, the Northwest is still the frontier. We are on the leading edge in a time when Christendom is ending. The Bible Belt may not know it yet, and TV preachers may fight it, but the era of the mutually reinforcing connection between Christianity and American culture is nearly over.

So how do Mennonite churches worship in such a setting as the Northwest? Are there lessons in our experience for the broader Mennonite Church in North America?

Worship that fits a post-Christendom context

The Pacific Northwest Conference is a disparate group. Local mythology has it that earlier generations of Mennonites back east fought, split off, and kept moving west until finally they hit the Pacific Ocean and were thrown back by the waves. From our many places of origin, we've ended up at a distance from the Mennonite centers and from one another. We are spread out over Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and even into Alaska and Montana. We are in metropolitan centers and rural farming hamlets.

The challenge, as one pastor put it, is to worship in a way that "fits the context." And, he added, because of geography we are pretty much "each on our own." In the absence of an overarching Mennonite theology of worship, what has emerged is an eclectic mixture of styles and practices. On any given Sunday, a rural congregation in the fertile Willamette Valley sings four-part a cappella music from *Hymnal: A Worship Book*, while another church an hour south wouldn't know how even if they wanted to. A Spanish-language church in inner southeast Portland sings praise-and-worship music accompanied by drums, guitars, and keyboard, while an English-language congregation of primarily homeless people draws on music written by their pastor.

When asked about worship in the Northwest, one pastor commented that because there is not a built-in expectation of church attendance, he has sometimes felt the temptation to compete—that is, to make worship entertaining enough to draw people in. While resisting that impulse, he has introduced PowerPoint projections into the service, sometimes as visual accompaniment to music and sometimes to enrich his sermons.

Another pastor spoke of his experience in starting a new Mennonite church out of another congregation that had left the denomination. As a chorister in the previous church, he had led hymns; within two years, the new congregation had switched over completely to contemporary Christian music of the kind published by Hosanna, Integrity, and Maranatha. In those early years, he explained, the group rented space from a Seventh Day Adventist church and had no money to buy hymnals. More to the point, they had few people with any experience of hymn singing. The change in music in their congregation was directly linked to their "vision of reaching people."

In our worship as Mennonites, we use a variety of books, follow a variety of patterns, and incorporate a variety of symbols. The very diversity of our practices reflects something of our implicit Mennonite theology of worship. We believe that faith is contextual; it must be lived out among particular people and at a particular place and time. Local churches are best equipped to be attentive and responsive to the movements of God's Spirit in their setting. So we trust each congregation to discern how best to be present with God in its gatherings for worship.

And yet we are still connected. For all of our differences, we are all Mennonites sharing a common story and a common faith. Because worship forms us week after week, it must be rooted in our deepest commitments. Out here on the northwestern frontier, we need to be part of a larger community that can help us discern and discover new ways of worshiping—new wineskins—in this new era.

First, we need help to discover new ways of singing. Mennonite Church USA has done a wonderful job in producing *Hymnal: A Worship Book* and the new *Sing the Journey* supplement. But these resources by and large represent a limited range of musical expression. They include traditional hymns, international songs, and contemporary music from John Bell, from publishers such as GIA and OCP. Conspicuously absent are resources from the praise-and-worship songbook, the kind of music sung almost exclusively at one of the largest churches in Pacific Northwest Mennonite Conference. Granted, those songs are readily available, but we need to do the same careful theological reflection with respect to that music that has been done with the worship book. In addition, access to that kind of music can enrich the worship of individual congregations, as it enhanced our 2005 denominational gathering in Charlotte, North Carolina.

We are faced with the task of unpacking the formulas we have used, rediscovering the core commitments embedded in them, and finding new ways and new words for authentically and evangelically expressing the good news.

Second, we in the Northwest need to be part of a larger community that is discovering new ways of speaking our faith. Much of the language the church has used through the age of Christendom is no longer comprehensible to many in this post-Christendom culture. We can no longer assume the prior knowledge that makes our old formulas intelligible. How can we invite people to "repent of their sins" if they have no idea they are sinners? Does it make sense to plead with people to "accept the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior" when they are not sure what a savior does, or that they have any need of one?

Robert Guelich, in an article published after his death, asked the question: "What is the gospel?" In answer, he pointed to the

varied expressions in the New Testament—Paul's emphasis on Christ's death for our sins (in 1 Cor. 15:3, for example), and the evangelists' references to Jesus' proclamation that "the kingdom of God has come near" (Mark 1:15). He ended provocatively by asking how adequate those expressions are for our world.

> *How well does language such as "justification by faith," "redemption," "salvation," "atonement," . . . communicate effectively today? To what extent are we simply passing on traditional formulas if we settle for the biblical or historical expressions of the gospel? The very presence of the diverse New Testament expressions of the gospel drawn from and sensitive to the times and contexts of their day challenge us to explore intensely the question of our expressions of the gospel for our day.*[1]

In a post-Christendom culture, we are faced with the task of unpacking the formulas we have used, rediscovering the core commitments embedded in them, and, in continuity with the deep substance of our faith, finding new ways and new words for authentically and evangelically expressing the good news.

Now is the time to develop a Mennonite theology of worship

As the church enters this new age, we must do the careful work of developing a theology of worship that can guide our songs, prayers, and preaching. Historically, we haven't had one, I suspect in part because Mennonites haven't been identified by our mode of worship. Episcopalians are Episcopalians because of the *Book of Common Prayer*. Pentecostals are Pentecostals because they speak in tongues when they gather for worship. Walk into any Catholic church and you immediately know where you are. But Mennonites worship in an amazing—almost bewildering—range of styles and settings. For all of our careful reflection on an array of theological topics, we have rarely thought intentionally about the church's work of worship.

Now is the time. We need a theology of worship big enough to embrace and shape our great range of styles and practices. Instead of investing energy in the hot-button issues that absorb so much

of our attention, Mennonite Church USA needs a period of time to consider our language, symbols, and practices, and the core commitments we reflect and inculcate. Perhaps theologians and pastors could develop a denominational resource that invites and challenges congregations to carefully examine the worship of the church.

People still come to the Northwest looking for all sorts of things, real and imagined. Underneath the quest is the deep longing to know God in the deepest part of our souls. May our worship point the way to such good news.

We have a theology big enough to transform not only us but our world. In a culture that knows only the story of individual achievement and redemptive violence, the church has another, better story to tell—of God's creative power, of Christ's self-giving love, of the Spirit's whole-making grace. People still come to the Northwest looking for all sorts of things, real and imagined. Underneath the quest is the deep longing, present in each of us, to give and receive love, to live lives that matter, to know God in the deepest part of our souls. May the church, in our worship, point the way to such good news.

Notes

[1] Robert Guelich, "What Is the Gospel?" *Theology, News and Notes* (Spring 2004): 7).

About the author

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Maintaining unity in faith

Toward a theological link between baptism, foot-washing, and the Lord's Supper

Pieter Post

Among Dutch Mennonites, adult baptism and the Lord's Supper are the only two biblical ceremonies practiced today. Foot-washing has not been practiced in our circles since the nineteenth century. Dantzig and Groningen Old Flemish Anabaptists maintained foot-washing in different ways into the mid-eighteenth century, when these groups died out or merged with the wider Mennonite stream in the Netherlands. The Dantzigers used the practice to express hospitality and service—when a guest came to preach, for example, or when new members were welcomed. The Groningen Old Flemish emphasized service and held foot-washing after the Lord's Supper, but under the influence of the Enlightenment, they began to relativize the practice; one answer in a 1759 catechism notes that it might be useful to honor and revere foot-washing, not that it is commanded.[1]

As a staff member of the Mennonite seminary in Amsterdam, I was invited to participate in a foot-washing ceremony with a group of thirteen Dutch Mennonite lay preachers who observe this ritual once a year. This event—an unusual practice for Dutch Mennonites—made a profound impression on me. We washed each other's feet and then celebrated the Lord's Supper in an *agape* meal. During this meal, the discussion focused on service. I experienced a spirituality I have never encountered in a Dutch Mennonite congregation. There was great attentiveness, and the atmosphere was serene. Everyone was focused on the essence of discipleship. Afterward I wondered: Could foot-washing be reintroduced in Dutch Mennonite congregations? How could I explain the practice? How could its relationship to baptism and the Lord's Supper be articulated?

The essence of the foot-washing ritual is to remind ourselves anew of the loving relationship between Father and Son and to express it in mutual service to the outside world.

In what follows, I will lay out my attempts to answer those questions. The first step is to articulate a theology of Mennonite liturgy, because baptism, foot-washing, and the Lord's Supper are always celebrated in a liturgical context. Then I indicate sources of inspiration on the connectedness of these rituals. From this point of departure, I explain these three ritual acts as phenomena and pursue my inquiry into whether a theological link between baptism, foot-washing, and the Lord's Supper is sustainable.

Theology of Mennonite liturgy

The first historical attempt—a modest one—to provide a review of Anabaptist-Mennonite liturgy can be found in the 1998 worship book *De gemeente komt samen* (the congregation comes together).[2] In its explanation of the word *eredienst* (worship), the book appeals to two biblical passages, Romans 12:1–2 and Hebrews 9–10. In that context, the passages are not treated exegetically. However, it is worth noting a few key points in these biblical texts that are important for understanding worship from an Mennonite perspective.

Sacrifice. The term *sacrifice* involves a functional question: How does the congregation approach the Father of Jesus Christ? When Paul speaks about our bodies as a "living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God" (Rom. 12:1), we hear a reference to the ceremonial sacrificial system of Israel with which Paul was acquainted before the destruction of the second temple in 70 CE.[3] However, Paul's thinking does not follow traditional lines. He gives the Greek word for sacrifice *(thusia)* a metaphorical definition that has something to do with doing good or with the performance of good works. A direct connection is made between sacrifice, our bodies, and an appeal to the compassion of God (12:1). Paul calls this a "spiritual service of worship" (*logikē latreia*).[4] This spiritual service of worship does not, in any case, occur without the renewing of our minds (12:2).

The renewing of our minds. What is important in Paul's eyes is that we do not allow ourselves to be formed by something that belongs to this age. Rather, we should allow our inner lives to be formed, arranged, and organized by the compassion of God, so that we can become acquainted with God's will—God's good, acceptable, and perfect will.

The difficult letter to the Hebrews explains to us that temple and sacrifice are no longer necessary now that the high priest, Christ himself, has given an eternal sacrifice with his body, once for all time (7:27). According to the author, this sacrifice means that through his own blood Christ has entered the sanctuary "not made with hands," heaven (9:11–12). The writer denies the efficacy of the traditional sacrifices for the satisfaction of sins (10:1–4) and encourages his readers to hold fast to an unshakable confession (*homologian)* (10:23). At the same time, the author emphasizes the cleansing of our conscience from dead works, in order to serve the living God (9:14), and he commends spurring one another on toward love and good works, and not neglecting to meet together (10:24–25). Only in this way can our confession remain alive, summoning us to good works.

What is important in Paul's eyes is that we do not allow ourselves to be formed by something that belongs to this age. Rather, we should allow our inner lives to be arranged by the compassion of God.

In my opinion, we can legitimately make a connection between this text and Paul's view of reformation in Romans 12, which can only be attained by the renewing of our minds. The act of worship recreates the community.

In summary, in the letters to the Romans and the Hebrews, the concept of sacrifice is not given up, but the traditional sacrificial culture is abandoned. The concept of sacrifice has, as Paul indicates, undergone a metamorphosis: it has been transformed into praise and thanksgiving. From a Mennonite perspective, one's whole life is *logikē latreia,* and liturgy is more than the congregational gathering between 10:00 and 11:00 a.m. on Sunday. It is also the organization and the empowerment of Christian, societal, and personal life. We are ourselves living sacrifices; we entrust ourselves to the eternal one, our God, whom we approach.[5]

Sources of inspiration

We can best understand baptism, foot-washing, and the Lord's Supper as human, non-sacramental deeds of remembrance that appeal to the compassion of God, and from which two things are made manifest: (1) the source to whom we owe thanks for these institutions, Jesus Christ, and (2) the personal desire to be spiritu-

ally renewed. All in all, we can say that these acts are the offering of a sacrifice that is living, holy, and pleasing to God. These ceremonial acts can also be described, from a Mennonite perspective, as visualizations of consciously confessed faith, which help form the community.

The Dutch Mennonite response to "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry." In 1983, the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches approved "Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry." In its response to this document, the *Algemene Doopsgezinde Sociëteit* (General Mennonite Society [Netherlands]) offers the beginnings of an Mennonite claim for the mutual relationship between baptism and the Lord's Supper (and the ministerial office). As a minister in a congregation, I found support in this ADS response for my catechetical teaching.

The response offers a non-sacramental understanding of baptism and the Lord's Supper. In the Dutch Anabaptist tradition, the celebration of the Lord's Supper is called "maintaining unity." This designation has to be viewed in the light of God's work "in liberating humankind from its rebellion against him by gathering people into his congregation which is to be a symbol of reconciliation, liberation and hope in this sinfully divided world"[6] (Gal. 3:27–28). This statement implies that the church, because of our calling to work for God's kingdom, should not give in to our divisions but should manifest itself as a peace church; this peace is evident in our celebration of the Lord's Supper. This celebration, like baptism, should be understood as an act of human confession.

The Supper does not achieve or found a new community but presupposes it. Of course, the quality of the church community depends on the commitment of the brothers and sisters to God's acts of reconciliation and liberation, which empower us to resist all divisive forces as well as those forces that tempt us to self-reliance. Our baptism assumes our willingness to rely on these divine resources, and our commitment to do so should be safeguarded by members of the church. Our mutual pastoral care should be devoted to this task.

Linda Oyer. In her book about foot-washing, *Dieu à nos pieds* (God at our feet), Linda Oyer makes a plea for the restitution of the practice and explains it christologically.[7] In general our orientation in life defines our lifestyle. Sometimes relationships are

severely disturbed, with disastrous consequences (see, for example, the role played by Judas [John 13:2]). For this reason, Oyer emphasizes the purifying aspect of foot-washing. It is a spiritual act in which Jesus reveals God's love to us.

In its soteriological aspect (13:6–11), foot-washing is done *to us*. This aspect is evident in Jesus' words to Peter, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me" (13:8). The key idea here is that having a share with Christ is having a share with the Father. The Gospel according to John proclaims the intimate, loving relationship between the Father and the Son. As Jesus tells Philip, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (14:8–9). By washing their feet, Jesus enables them to participate in his intimate, loving relationship with the Father.

Liturgy is more than the congregational gathering on Sunday. It is also the organization and the empowerment of Christian, societal, and personal life. We are ourselves living sacrifices; we entrust ourselves to the eternal one.

In the ethical aspect (13:12–17), this benefit is perpetuated *through us*. Instead of asking his disciples to wash his feet, Jesus now commands them to wash one another's feet. The beneficiaries of this good deed turn out to be those who then demonstrate this intimate and loving relationship of Father and Son in the world. The essence of the foot-washing ritual, therefore, is to remind ourselves anew of the loving relationship between Father and Son and to express it in mutual service to the outside world. Foot-washing so understood is a deed of remembrance.

John H. Yoder. The above analysis takes on greater significance when coupled with John H. Yoder's conception of sacrament as "social process."[8] Yoder points to sanctification by means of five social practices serving church and society. He explains that these practices can be considered, from the perspective of the new creation in Christ, as models of human restitution, of which Jesus is the bearer. I will focus on the fourth practice, the breaking of bread, because Yoder (like the ADS response to "Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry") interprets the Lord's Supper in a non-sacramental way as a form of economic sharing.[9] He explains: "Not merely symbolically but in actual fact it extends to a wider circle the economic solidarity that normally is obtained in the family."[10] Unlike Arthur Paul Boers, who believes that such an approach

risks overestimating ourselves and thereby underestimating God's action in the sacrament,[11] I would rather we understand the practice as a matter of offering ourselves to God's mercy through the breaking of bread, which expresses itself, among other things, in solidarity. Economic solidarity, provided it is founded in Christ, is a revelation of God's reign.

Menno Simons. Finally, saying something about the Mennonite practice of adult baptism requires looking at Menno Simons's notion of the congregation. His point of departure is the congregation as a social body founded in unity with Christ. One could say that the congregation is principally a community celebrating unity, and its mission is rooted in that identity. In most Dutch Mennonite congregations, the Lord's Supper is only celebrated a few times a year. Nevertheless, congregational life is rooted in this practice. The union that the congregation celebrates with its Lord transforms a seeker into a covenant companion. Through this congregational unity, the seeker comes to the point of conversion, and this change happens freely on the basis of a confession of faith. In classical Anabaptist terminology, baptism is a conscious transformation of one's old life into a new life in Christ. The convert leads a penitent life, a life which should be full of accountability.

Links between baptism, foot-washing, and the Lord's Supper

Baptism. Adult baptism involves the transformation of one's old life to new life in Christ. The conversion includes an absolute concentration on what God has revealed in Christ. Baptism is a symbol of this concentration and marks, at the same time, one's joining of the congregation of Christ, the collected folk who witness to God's reign on earth. Converts turn their lives toward the business of the gospel, with a new mentality and new way of life. With other members of the congregation, converts constitute an interpretation of the nature of the new creation. The congregation walks forward into the new humanity for which the world longs (as Yoder has said). In this way, the congregation is also there *for* the world. Converts witness to this fact through their testimony.

Lord's Supper. One loaf of bread is made from many kernels of grain. The congregation is that one bread; it lives from that one

bread ("I am the bread of life"). In the Spirit, it is actually a congregation characterized by its celebration of the Lord's Supper. The great words—justice, peace, and the wholeness of creation[12]—find their true meaning in the Lord's Supper; there is no more room for sin, revolt, or rebellion against God. We invest this hope partly in the symbols of bread and wine. "Maintaining unity" is the expression of our collective recommitment to baptism, a fresh sign of God's plan for the world. The congregation is interpreter of the new era here and now. The congregation reflects the relationship between the Father and the Son in the world. It is a re-creation, a new humanity; its members are conscious of the reign of God which we are interpreting but have not yet grasped. Using good theological arguments of faith, the congregation becomes a place for practicing the new world. In the Holy Spirit, who penetrates the old world of the present, the congregation lives in the future time through our eschatological faith. In Yoder's terms, the confessing people of God is the new world on its way.

Disharmony. However, we also know that the congregation is subject to negative influences from the outside. Through the influence of the spirit of the world (the principalities can manifest themselves in many different kinds of evil), this new mentality and way of life can disintegrate. The congregation can then to an extent become caught up in a "divide and conquer" system, where one person is seen as standing above the other, as in the relationship between a master and a slave, and unity in Christ is dissolved. We may then ask: By what manner of penitence and sorrow can unity be restored?[13]

As already noted, Dutch Mennonites are accustomed to viewing baptism and the Lord's Supper as the only acts that proclaim God's work "in liberating humankind from its rebellion against him by gathering people into his congregation which is to be a symbol of reconciliation, liberation and hope in this sinfully divided world."

"God is working to liberate people from their rebellion against him and from the turmoil and fighting resulting from their rebellion by joining them with the new community of the congregation." However, the step from a divided (although baptized) congregation to a congregation engaging in the celebration of unity—the Lord's Supper—can be a big one if foot-washing has

not taken its place between baptism and the Supper. Here we have reached the matter of a theological link: If parties in conflict have not first talked through the problem at hand, one cannot speak directly of reconciliation. First, the gospel-induced mentality and way of life must be restored.

Foot-washing. In other words, how can the divide-and-conquer congregation become a serving community again? Foot-washing can have a restorative function. It is a symbol of the purification of the soul; how we think and believe (mentality) determines where we go (foot). The question Oyer asks is appropriate: How do we once again see the true, serving relationship between the Father and the Son, of which the congregation is, in a theological sense, the reflection in the world (John 14:18–21)? Answer: By concentrating anew on what Christ has offered.

The importance of the reintroduction of foot-washing could consist in the community growing in our understanding of what it means to penetrate the existing old world as a living sacrifice.

In foot-washing, the members of the congregation orient themselves anew toward the unity between the Father and the Son. While washing each other's feet, the congregation once again becomes aware of its call to submission, of its call to reject the dominant relationship of slave and master.[14] In this manner, we acknowledge the character of remembrance inherent in foot-washing, as well as in baptism and the Lord's Supper. We remember anew what Christ calls us to even now, to mutual submission, as a witnessing example in and for the world.

The foot acquires a symbolic meaning in John 13, which has to do with one's way of life (mentality).[15] The foot has a direct relation to destination; it is closely related to the means used to reach the destination (the renewing of our minds, a new world). Our Christian witness to God's reign of justice and peace can be tarnished by the means used to reach it. The kiss of peace, which is given to the convert as a sign of victory over enmity, can become the kiss of Judas. A vulnerability among brothers and sisters can be changed into an oppressive relationship of hostility. We cannot find the answer to this problem unless we literally fall on our knees. This posture is not only necessary to reach the foot; it also expresses our giving up of unequal systems and structures.

Real unity can be celebrated after this act of service has been testified in actuality.

From a historical Anabaptist viewpoint, this paradigm of baptism, foot-washing, and the Lord's Supper cannot be the only one. Foot-washing could, of course, be considered in the light of hospitality and welcoming new members. And I could advocate that understanding, too. But I have sought here to identify the mutual relation of baptism, foot-washing, and the Lord's Supper, inspired by a non-sacramental answer to God's request for mercy. In doing so, I choose an ethical understanding of liturgy. However, I am aware that one cannot avoid seeing a sacramental motive in the soteriological aspect of the foot-washing ritual.

The importance of the reintroduction of foot-washing among Mennonites in the Netherlands and the worldwide church could consist in the community growing in our understanding of what it means to penetrate the existing old world as a living sacrifice.

Notes

[1] *Geloofsbelydenis der Doopsgesinden van de Sociëteit, Oude Vlamingen genaamt, Opgestelt in Vragen en antwoorden: het geen aan de Gemeente tot een Proef wordt gegeeven* (1759), 19th question, page 109.

[2] *De Gemeente komt samen, dienstboek ten behoeve van doopsgezinde gemeenten* (Zoetermeer/Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 1998). This is the most recent Dutch Mennonite minister's manual.

[3] After the destruction of the second temple, no more animal sacrifices were offered. Rather, along with acts of love and justice, the study of the Torah was seen as something greater than any sacrifice (*b. Berakhot 32b*). And: "What replaces the steer that we were just supposed to offer for You? Our lips, the prayer that we pray to You" (*Pesiqta of Rab Kahana* 24:19).

[4] *latreuō* (serving, in a religious sense).

[5] John Richard Burkholder links René Girard's theory of the scapegoat mechanism with the letter to the Hebrews and makes the case that an Anabaptist-Mennonite theology of liturgy can be found via this link. See "Leitourgia Beyond Altar and Sacrifice: How Then Shall We Worship/Serve God?" in *Anabaptists and Postmodernity*, ed. Susan and Gerald Biesecker-Mast (Telford, PA: Pandora Press U.S., 2000): 214–32. In summary, Burkholder claims: The Bible takes the victim as its point of departure (Hosea 6, Amos 5, Micah 6, and Psalm 40). Christ took the place of the victim. His death is a sacrifice against sacrificing, and in this way, it eliminates the sacrifice, brings an end to the culture of sacrifice, and brings the faithful back to the origin of God's purpose. In this manner, the cross receives its meaning. It is the sign of the permanent end of the sacrificial system. The congregation takes part in God's sacrifice, which is a sacrifice against all sacrifices; the congregation itself is a voluntary, living sacrifice, a manifestation of true worship. The ultimate character of Jesus' self-surrender brings about the transformation of the sacrificial culture into a culture of obedience, the

movement from the bloody altar to a defenseless discipleship (Heb. 13:12–16).
[6] "General Mennonite Society (Netherlands)," in *Churches Respond to BEM: Official Responses to the 'Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry' Text*, Faith and Order Paper 135, ed. Max Thurian (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1987), 289.
[7] Linda Oyer, *Dieu à nos pieds: Une étude sur le lavement des pieds* (Montbéliard: Éditions Mennonites, 2002).
[8] John Howard Yoder, "Sacrament as Social Process: Christ the Transformer of Culture," in *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 359–73.
[9] Ibid., 365.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Arthur Paul Boers, "In Search of Something More: A Sacramental Approach to Life and Worship," *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology* 2 (Spring 2001): 42–58.
[12] In the 1980s, the commission of the World Council of Churches gave these themes a unique prominence in the mission of the church. See the WCC statement, "Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation."
[13] Certainly when it concerns penance, remorse, and restoration, the pastoral and catechetical disciplines also play a large role here.
[14] C. J. den Heyer and Pieter Schelling, *Symbolen in de Bijbel: Woorden en hun betekenis* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2000), 484.
[15] I am aware of the fact that the meaning of the foot is differently interpreted in several cultures.

About the author

Pieter Post teaches homiletics, liturgy, and hymnology at the Mennonite seminary in Amsterdam. At present he is at work on a theological-historical dissertation on Dutch Mennonite hymnology from 1793–1973.

Creating a daily office for Mennonites

Eleanor Kreider

In September 2003, twenty people gathered at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary (Elkhart, IN) to explore the possibility of preparing a prayer book explicitly rooted in the Anabaptist tradition. It would, for example, place emphasis on Jesus' teachings, the Beatitudes, peace and justice concerns, and hymn singing. Conveners Nelson Kraybill and Arthur Paul Boers asked whether it might be possible to find a way of common prayer that honors classical daily office traditions while reinforcing important aspects of Anabaptist faith.

A particular bond forms between individuals and groups who pray together. God's Spirit calls and bonds us, individually and corporately, as we learn to pray together.

Enthusiasm for the project grew as participants related their experiences of praying with prayer books from a wide spectrum of Christian traditions. Despite the strengths and beauties of these prayer books, something seemed to be missing in them. Through listening and discussion, participants in the consultation came to articulate some unfulfilled longings. They also spoke of members of their congregations and friends who are yearning for a more significant prayer life.

Why is interest in a prayer book so high?

The Rhythm of God's Grace: Uncovering Morning and Evening Hours of Prayer, by Arthur Paul Boers, has been warmly received among Mennonites.[1] The consultation took this interest to indicate openness and a sense of *kairos* for a prayer book project. C. Arnold Snyder's recent research and publications, notably his *Following in the Footsteps of Christ: The Anabaptist Tradition*, feed an increasing interest in Anabaptist spirituality.[2] A number of students at AMBS are exploring a spirituality of disciplined daily corporate prayers. In many places across Canada and the US,

Mennonites are already praying a version of the daily office, using materials from many Christian traditions. These are a few reasons why the consultation was called and why it seemed timely to explore the possibility of preparing an Anabaptist prayer book.

The process of developing the prayer book

The consultation established some general directions for the project: Jesus' voice should lead our praying; the choice of Bible readings should allow prayer to flow through the scriptures that are particularly significant for our tradition; there should be a simple structure that can expand and be tailored to local needs; the initial work should use the NRSV.

A working group of four (Arthur Paul Boers, Gloria Jost, Eleanor Kreider, and John Rempel) began preparing a sample set of services, a two-week cycle of morning and evening prayers for ordinary time, suitable for use by individuals or groups. Testing by many people has led to revision of these initial materials. To this the editorial group (now composed of Arthur, Eleanor, John, as well as Mary Schertz and Barbara Nelson Gingerich) has now added an additional two weeks' services, so there is now a four-week cycle of services for ordinary time. Mary's willingness to bring her New Testament expertise to the project is an especially welcome development, given that scripture scholars and liturgists do not often collaborate.

This prayer book is for all who are drawn to the Anabaptist tradition's focus on Jesus and the life of discipleship within the grace-filled community, a balance of inner life and outer activity, a passion for God's shalom.

Does this prayer book express Mennonite spirituality?

From the responses that came from those who had used the draft prayer book, an interesting picture of Mennonite spirituality emerged. Daily Bible reading and prayer have characterized our tradition's spirituality. Our correspondents tell of family prayers around the table, morning or evening, of kneeling for prayer in the living room with grandparents, of "quiet times" in college dorm rooms, of "prayer walking" in places of natural beauty, of prayer in small groups. For many, both young and old, Bible memorization has been important. Some correspondents tell

of praying through Bible texts set to music; others have developed intercessory prayer through close attention to social and political news. Praying is the heartbeat of Mennonite piety.

Take Our Moments and Our Days: An Anabaptist Prayer Book is an expression of our Mennonite spirituality. It is a resource we offer for all Christians who are drawn to the deep expressions of our tradition: the focus on Jesus and the life of discipleship within the grace-filled community, a spiritual balance of inner life and outer activity, a passion for the justice and wholeness of the shalom of God, and the desire to be involved in God's own mission of healing and hope for all of creation.

What have we learned about Mennonites at prayer?

Test groups for the initial two-week set of services embraced a wide range of experience in praying, both individual and corporate. Half of the respondents had used the daily office for years; others came to these services with virtually no knowledge of the venerable traditions of Christian daily prayer. Understandably, we heard some frustrations from both ends of this spectrum: "Where is the daily collect?" "I would repeat nothing every day. My eyes glaze over." "More psalms, please." "Why such long intercessions?" "I miss a majesty of language."

A number of pastors welcomed this initiative as a way of teaching and modeling prayer in the congregation. The simply structured form of prayer "enables some to pray who have never been at ease with *ex tempore* prayer"; "it ensures a variety of concerns, thoughts, and reflections and keeps our prayers broad." "We are finding this helps connect our Sunday worship with daily prayers by various individuals and groups in the church."

An unexpected development has been the use of individual services for special meetings, conferences, staff sessions, even Sunday church services. Any service, downloaded from the AMBS website (in Microsoft Word or pdf format, at www.ambs.edu/prayerbook/index.php), provides a framework for worship in a wide variety of settings.

Some of the earliest responses were calls to adapt the services specifically for young people, for people with little formal education, or for people new to English. We did not have these groups in mind when we chose to use the NRSV. Because the services are

made up primarily of Bible words, it is reasonably easy to prepare different versions. In fact, people inspired by this project are already developing parallel Anabaptist prayer books in French and Lithuanian. What came clear was a recognition that it must be a priority to help people pray—our own children and youth, those who are new to faith, as well as maturing Christians.

How is this prayer book different from other prayer books? Prayer books for the daily office are characteristically rich in scripture. Ours also uses psalms, biblical hymns, and benedictions. We devised a medium length service, with spaces to add prayers, songs, devotional readings, silence, or a sermon. We have not written or provided collects (short written prayers) or many canticles (biblical hymns). While our services have a distinctive shape, they always specify psalm, scripture, hymn, and prayers—as Christians have always done.

Two features give a unique color to this prayer book. First is the striking prominence given to the voice of Jesus. A second is a pattern of themes that informs the choices of scripture and the shaping of the prayers.

Two features give a unique color to this prayer book. First is the importance our services give to the voice of Jesus, whose words are strikingly prominent. The fifty-two services of the initial four-week cycle center around the Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes, the great commandment, the parables, and the miracles of Jesus. By incorporating this Jesus material into the heart of our prayers, we provide opportunity to internalize Jesus' explicit teachings, concerns, warnings, comfort, and challenge. The early Anabaptists learned much scripture by heart, and we hope that through using these services, we may do the same.

A second feature is a pattern of themes that informs the choices of scripture and the shaping of the prayers. We attempt to infuse the prayers with biblical passages that express these themes—the prayer book's "DNA"—keeping them concrete and connected with daily life. These themes are usually not overt but operate behind the scenes.

Briefly, the themes are: for Sunday, resurrection; for Monday, the era of the Holy Spirit and God's new creation; for Tuesday, incarnation and God's presence with us; for Wednesday, God

manifest in Jesus Christ, God's realm of justice, peace, and joy; for Thursday, discipleship and walking in Jesus' way; for Friday, the cross, transformation of suffering; for Saturday, God's realm, Christian solidarity and community within the body of Christ. The brief petition phrases reflect these themes.

These are themes that all Christians share, of course. But the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition since the sixteenth century has placed them in a special configuration and gives them special weight. For example, the Sunday theme of resurrection not only celebrates Jesus' rising but highlights the call to walk in the resurrection. The Tuesday theme calls us to see God in manifestations of glory and power but also in the lives of brother, sister, neighbor, and enemy.

Challenges in this work

Using or adapting classic forms of praying. Monastic communities in the Benedictine tradition, which pray seven times a day, have developed and maintained a pattern of devotions that includes psalms, scripture readings, hymns, and prayers. Most important has been the round of psalmody. Monastic praying is infused with psalms. Monks also attend daily Eucharistic services, where the Gospels are central. When free church Protestants appropriate monastic forms of prayer, we get a high dose of psalms with suggested Old Testament and Epistle readings, but—because we don't celebrate Eucharist daily—no set Gospel readings. At this point our prayer book's emphasis on Gospel readings and Jesus' voice comes into play. We incorporate a round of psalms and give space for other scripture readings, but our focus is on Jesus.

Many Mennonite churches currently use the Revised Common Lectionary at least part of the year. How will the readings in this prayer book connect with the Sunday readings? Which daily lectionary do we suggest to supplement the suggested readings? These are live issues we have not yet resolved.

Fixed forms and written prayers. Mennonites represent an approach to worship that is generally wary of set forms and composed prayers. In our tradition, leaders of worship face the challenge of finding fresh words, neither personal clichés nor writings plucked whole from others' notebooks; staying open to the Spirit

in the live moment of prayer; drawing deeply on scripture for prayer's breadth and content. We hope this prayer book will help worship leaders find a good balance between the formal and the spontaneous. We long for worship drenched in scripture and open to the Spirit's promptings.

Ecumenical accessibility. Mennonites sing their prayer—an insight vividly revealed in *Singing: A Mennonite Voice,* by Marlene Kropf and Ken Nafziger.[3] For this reason, we are especially pleased to suggest hymn selections from *Hymnal: A Worship Book* and *Sing the Journey*,[4] keyed to the themes of the daily prayers. Does selecting hymns from these denominational sources make the prayer book seem exclusive of or inhospitable to non-Mennonites? Thess hymnals include materials from many Christian traditions throughout the ages and around the world. And many of the hymns we suggest may easily be found in other hymn books, so we trust the list will be useful to people of a variety of Christian traditions.

The Anabaptists internalized the Word and lived by it. Those compiling this prayer book hope that the biblical choices we have made will lead to a scripturally repetitive form that is spiritually fruitful.

A distinctive Anabaptist coloration. We are concerned to develop daily prayers with a distinctive Anabaptist flavor. The predominance of Jesus' voice, the space for communal reflection on scripture, and the specific choices of Bible readings—all of these are all evidence of our Anabaptist stance. For the early Anabaptists, the remembered Word was the heart of their spirituality. As Arnold Snyder has put it, "The central discipline of Anabaptist spiritual life—the discipline on which all others depended—was becoming thoroughly immersed in the words of Scripture, remembering them, internalizing them, pondering them, all with a view to living in obedience to God's will as expressed in Scripture."[5]

So the Anabaptists internalized the Word and lived by it. They were not all literate. Many, even those who could read, could not afford Bibles, which were bulky and expensive. Faced with persecution, they had to prepare for interrogation. In prison, where they often didn't have access to the Bible, they needed to comfort one another in distress by means of the remembered Word. The Anabaptists were committed to follow after Jesus, so they needed his story and teachings at the core of their consciousness.

Can we, who seek to worship God and follow Jesus today, have the words and narratives of Jesus at the core of our consciousness? Those of us who are compiling this prayer book hope that the biblical choices that we have made will lead not to vain repetition but to a scripturally repetitive form that is spiritually fruitful. Early responses from the first users are gratifying: "These phrases stick, and visit us through the day: 'do this and you will live'; '. . . your neighbor as yourself'; 'a servant is not greater than the master'; 'Father, forgive.'"

We are laying plans for prayers through the festival seasons. We hope the first will be available on the AMBS web-site for testing beginning in Advent 2005. Eventually all the materials will be assembled and published in book form.

We recognize that a particular bond forms between individuals and groups who pray together in similar ways, at the same times, using similar resources of scripture and tradition. Prayer is not only what we do; it is God at work within and among us. God's Spirit calls and bonds us, individually and corporately, as we learn to pray together. It is in this spirit that we offer this prayer book as a resource for the life and mission of the church. Our prayer is that this Anabaptist prayer book will equip many people to follow Jesus in the strenuous era in which God has called us to live.

Notes

[1] Arthur Paul Boers, *The Rhythm of God's Grace: Uncovering Morning and Evening Hours of Prayer* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2003).
[2] C. Arnold Snyder, *Following in the Footsteps of Christ: The Anabaptist Tradition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004).
[3] Marlene Kropf and Kenneth Nafziger, *Singing: A Mennonite Voice* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001).
[4] *Hymnal: A Worship Book* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press; Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press; Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1992); *Sing the Journey* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Resources, 2005).
[5] Snyder, *Following in the Footsteps*, 116.

About the author

Eleanor Kreider, adjunct faculty in worship and mission at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary (Elkhart, IN), is a member of Prairie Street Mennonite Church. A missionary teacher in England for twenty-six years, she is author of two books, an extension course for the Open Theological College (UK), and many articles on worship.

On Mennonite preaching
A review article

Allan Rudy-Froese

The most recent contribution to the growing list of books on preaching in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition is *Anabaptist Preaching: A Conversation between Pulpit, Pew and Bible*, edited by David B. Greiser and Michael A. King (Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2003). Its subtitle identifies three actors and an action that lie at the heart of preaching: the preacher (pulpit); the gathered congregation (pew); and the contents of faith (Bible). The action in question is conversation.

Another way of picturing the relation of pulpit, pew, and Bible is as a dance, as Nancy Heisey suggests in her contribution, "Premodern text to postmodern ears: Steps across the hermeneutical bridge . . . or joining the circle dance." She understands hermeneutics as a circle dance done to the rhythm of the Holy Spirit. This dynamic, relational, and playful image provides us with a lively picture of one who preaches, the many who also engage the Word directly, and the life-giving Word that inspires the community. In what follows, we will focus in turn on the three participants in this dance. Then we will consider some aspects of the dance that goes on between these actors and the wider world.

Of the twelve contributors to *Anabaptist Preaching*, one is from the Church of the Brethren, one is Mennonite Brethren, and one is from MC Canada. The remainder are members of MC USA. Thus, this volume looks at preaching from the standpoint of those who are part of mainstream North American Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition. While the primary source for this essay is *Anabaptist Preaching*, we will also note in passing several other works on preaching in this tradition.

The pulpit

Mennonites have ranged from holding the pulpit in high esteem, even according preachers unchallenged power, to fostering skepti-

cism of the preacher. David Greiser gives a good thumbnail sketch of this tension in "What exactly is Anabaptist-Mennonite preaching? A nod to the ancestors." He concludes that Mennonite preachers have generally preached in a communal voice, with the understanding that "preaching is always a part of an on-going conversation" (24). But what role does the preacher play in the conversation? Is the preacher herald, storyteller, prophet, pastor, proclaimer? Each role has implications for how the preacher's power is viewed in relation to the congregation.

Mennonites are becoming more comfortable with the notion that the preacher, whether storyteller or proclaimer, is engaged in persuasion. In "The ethics of persuasion in preaching," Dennis Hollinger lays down guidelines for ethical persuasion, with emphasis on the congruity between the preacher's character, actions, and words (187–94).[1] Michael King notes that in the postmodern era, when the pastor's authority has to be earned, the preacher's persuasion should be as a weaver of enchantment. Weavers do not tell but show the beauty of the gospel, inviting others to see the world through an alternative script ("Weaving enchantment: Preaching and postmodernity," 35–39).

In recent decades, preachers have claimed status of storytellers partly as a way to foster ongoing congregational conversation. While *Anabaptist Preaching* confirms this reality, it also indicates that we are becoming more comfortable with speaking about the preacher as authoritative and persuasive—although we are quick to qualify these terms!

The pew

Like many congregationally oriented denominations, Mennonites have stressed the role of the congregation in the preaching event. More than many other Protestants, we have understood preaching in the context of ongoing conversation, which has taken a variety of shapes through the years. The early Anabaptists, who met in small groups, discussed the Word the preacher brought. Nods and comments were witnessed from "the bench" of elders in some eras. In our day, sermon discussion or sermon response may follow the sermon, either in the context of worship or in a Sunday school class. We have taken the priesthood of all to mean that the preacher does have a word to speak, but so do others.

Among Mennonite preachers these days there is ferment around a model June Alliman Yoder describes in "Collaborative preaching in the community of interpreters." The preacher collaborates not only with the Spirit, the text, the experts (commentaries), and the worship setting, but also with the congregation. To make this collaborative reality concrete, Yoder advocates a method, similar to the one articulated by John McClure in *The Roundtable Pulpit: Where Leadership and Preaching Meet* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1995), in which a team from the congregation meets with the preacher both before and after the preached sermon. This process assures congregational contribution to each sermon, and it also creates an increased sense of congregational ownership for the preached Word (117–19).

A factor related to the communal nature of preaching in our tradition is the tension between speaking to the individual hearer and to the congregation as a whole. Do preachers address the Word to a collection of isolated individuals, or do they address the body and hope to form a congregation? While many of the articles in *Anabaptist Preaching* touch on this issue, Lynn Yost and Nathan Showalter especially address aspects of forming community through preaching. Yost's article, "Preaching for a hearing: The sermon in human consciousness," summarizes David Buttrick's efforts to take seriously both individual and social consciousness in the enterprise. Buttrick echoes Anabaptist thought in his contention that the sermon is heard primarily in a communal context (147). Showalter gives practical advice on building up the church in multicultural and intergenerational settings. The Bible, he reminds the preacher, is a multicultural, bilingual, and interfaith book; these characteristics have obvious parallels with our postmodern, interfaith, and multicultural settings (135–46).

The late 1960s and early 1970s saw a movement in preaching in North American Protestant circles characterized in part by a "turn to the hearer." The person in the pew began to be taken seriously in the event of preaching. One fruit of this turn was the pervasiveness of the narrative mode in preaching: hearers appreciate and are engaged by the gospel through story. The Anabaptist tradition has had much to contribute to discussions on the turn to the hearer, because the hearing and interpreting congregation has

been central to preaching ministry from the beginnings of Anabaptist movement.

The Bible

Mennonites have sought to be a biblical people, with biblical preaching being the norm in the pulpit. But what is biblical preaching? James Waltner's 1971 study of preaching among General Conference Mennonites, *The Authentication of Preaching in the Anabaptist Mennonite Tradition* (PhD dissertation, School of Theology, Claremont, CA), found that the scriptures and the theme of discipleship were central. A generation later, Mary Schertz ponders the matter of biblical preaching in her contribution to *Anabaptist Preaching*. Biblical illiteracy is a problem in many Christian groups, but Schertz points out that for preachers, the larger issue concerns their knowledge and experience of the entire canon. Because Mennonite worship increasingly relies on the Revised Common Lectionary, sermons tend to deal with a single text, sometimes in ways that obscure the larger story of salvation in the biblical canon (68). Schertz's title says it all: "Preaching and the Bible: First we have to read it."

As Renée Sauder observes, North American preachers have been focusing not only on narrative approaches to preaching but also on narrative texts from the Bible. Dawn Ottoni Wilhelm and David A. Stevens point to other parts of the canon and other kinds of preaching that deserve attention. Wilhelm, in "God's Word in the world: Prophetic preaching and the gospel of Jesus Christ," notes the importance of prophetic preaching. She distinguishes between topical social gospel preaching and Jesus-centered prophetic preaching. Through a study of the words and ministry of Jesus, she concludes that prophetic preaching includes lament as well as proclamation of God's passion, promises, and possibilities for humanity (85–89).

Given North American Christianity's recent penchant for narrative preaching, how do we preach on important theological tenets? Mark Wenger's article, "Theological preaching in an age of doctrine lite," gives practical advice for creating effective sermons on doctrine. Keeping God as the centre of the sermon and concentrating on one doctrine in each sermon are approaches Wenger suggests, with a view to keeping the sermon theologically

sound (124–26). Ervin R. Stutzman, in "Preaching grace to hardworking people," ponders how we speak about grace to people with a strong work ethic. We are reminded here of the Anabaptist theology of grace which precedes and pervades our lives of faithful discipleship (202–204).

The essays in *Anabaptist Preaching* that focus primarily on the Bible push us to preach from more than the stories of Jesus. We need to bring to our preaching a sense of the entire canon, grasped theologically. Texts from the Hebrew Bible and non-narrative Gospel passages, such as those in which Jesus chides the Pharisees, beg to be preached. The epistles of Paul, neglected in our preaching, can serve as conversation partners as preacher and congregation explore theological convictions such as the grace of God.

Conversation

Though many of the articles in *Anabaptist Preaching* deal directly or indirectly with the dance that goes on between pulpit, pew, and Bible, the articles by Michael King and Nancy Heisey are significant in encouraging preachers to bring themselves to the biblical text, with conversation in mind. King makes a case for eisegesis (along with exegesis) of biblical passages. Eisegesis has for centuries been frowned on in biblical interpretation, because the interpreter is supposed to get out of the way to ensure a true reading. With the help of Hans Georg Gadamer, King notes that it is precisely when we bring our concerns—our pet peeves and loves—to our reading of the Bible that we gain understanding and are engaged by the world of the text (39–40).

Finally, pulpit, pew, and Bible dance and converse in a worship space. The air between the dancers is saturated with the joyful spirit of God and with our praise of God. The preaching moment happens in the context of worship. Rebecca Slough's chapter, "Acting the Word: Preaching in the context of worship," describes several worship patterns, noting the place and role of the sermon—God's Word coming into the congregation—in each. She reminds the reader that God's Word to us in worship and our responses to God in worship must not squeeze each other out (180–81). A telling comment is buried in a footnote: in her experience, preachers and worship leaders rarely attend each

other's seminars: on both sides of the divide, ignorance abounds regarding the ministry of the other (185, n. 12).

Conclusion

In Mennonite colleges, seminaries, and churches in the United States in the late 1960s, Russell L. Mast, fresh from a sabbatical in Scotland, gave several lectures on preaching. His fellow Mennonites were eager listeners. Those lectures were published as *Preach the Word* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1968).

While Mast would not have described preaching as a dance, and while he could not then envision the present interest in preaching in the narrative mode, his book in some ways parallels *Anabaptist Preaching*. Both books are less occupied with delivery and technique than with the larger concerns of hermeneutics, the place of the pulpit in relation to the pew, the place of Jesus Christ's ministry as a model for preaching, and the relationship between our word and God's Word.

Mast too was integrating the work of theologians and homiletics scholars of his time in his effort to construct a theology of the Word for Anabaptist-Mennonites. He used the wisdom of Emil Brunner and T. F. Torrence; *Anabaptist Preaching* uses the wisdom of Gadamer, Buttrick, and Walter Bruggemann. While Mast was pondering the role of authoritative proclamation in the context of the disintegration characteristic of the modern world, *Anabaptist Preaching* witnesses to our pondering and praying about the role of persuasive proclamation in a context of emerging postmodernity.

Considered side by side, *Preach the Word* and *Anabaptist Preaching* give us a picture of the state of homiletics among Mennonites in North America. We are a people of pulpit, pew, and Bible, ever conversing—dancing—in worship, with the Spirit, one another, the scholars around us, and the culture in which we live.

Notes

[1] See also June Alliman Yoder's 1991 D.Min. dissertation, *Collaborative Preaching: Persuasion and the Spirit in Close-Up*. She notes that persuasion is a natural dialogical process that falls between apathy and coercion.

About the author

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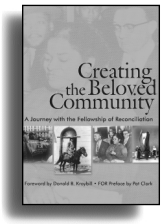

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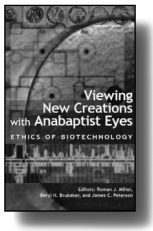

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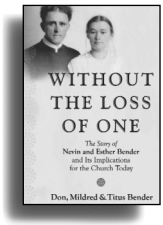

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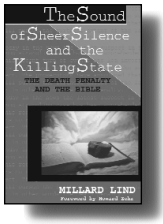

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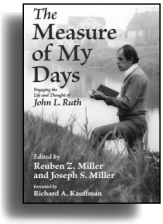

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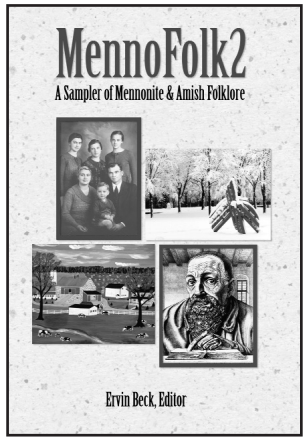

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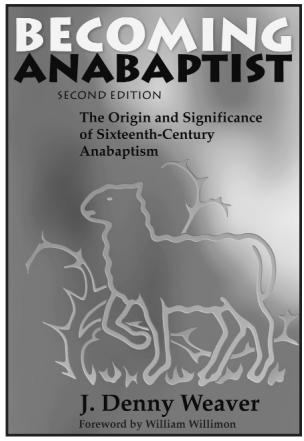

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