THE CONRAD GREBEL REVIEW

Volume 37
Number 2
Spring 2019

The Conrad Grebel Review

W. Derek Suderman, Editor
Stephen A. Jones, Managing Editor
Kyle Gingerich Hiebert, Book Review Editor
Rebecca Smoot-Enns, Circulation
Pandora Press, Production

Editorial Board

Marlene Epp
Conrad Grebel University College
Waterloo, ON

Paul Heidebrecht
Conrad Grebel University College
Waterloo, ON

Judith Klassen
Canadian Museum of History/
Musée Canadien de L'Histoire
Gatineau, QC

Karl Koop
Canadian Mennonite University
Winnipeg, MB

Carol Penner
Conrad Grebel University College
Waterloo, ON

Consulting Editors

2016-2021

Jürg Bräker
Mennonite Church of Bern
Bern, Switzerland

Erin Dufault-Hunter
Fuller Theological Seminary
Pasadena, CA

Violet A. Dutcher
Eastern Mennonite University
Harrisonburg, VA

Timothy D. Epp
Redeemer University College
Ancaster, ON

Myron A. Penner
Trinity Western University
Langley, BC

Rebecca Slough
Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary
Elkhart, IN

2019-2024

Nancy Bedford
Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary
Evanston, IL

Daniel Shank Cruz
Utica College
Utica, NY

Daniel K. Listijabudi
Duta Wacana Christian University
Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Jennifer Otto
University of Lethbridge
Lethbridge, AB

Lisa Schirch
Toda Peace Institute
Tokyo, Japan

Alain Epp Weaver
Mennonite Central Committee
Akron, PA

grebel.ca/cgreview

The Conrad Grebel Review is published three times a year in Winter, Spring, and Fall by Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada.

The Canadian subscription price (individuals) is $34 + HST per year, $88 + HST for three years. Back issues are available. Student subscriptions are $27 + HST per year. Subscriptions, change of address notices, and other circulation inquires should be sent to The Conrad Grebel Review, Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, ON N2L 3G6. Phone 519-885-0220, ext. 24242; fax 519-885-0014; e-mail: cgreview@uwaterloo.ca. Remittances outside of Canada must be made in U.S. funds. Contact our office for subscription prices to the United States and overseas.

Manuscript submissions and other correspondence regarding the Review should be sent to the Managing Editor: cgredit@uwaterloo.ca.

ISSN 0829-044X

The Conrad Grebel Review

Volume 37, Number 2
Spring 2019

Foreword 107

MENNONITES AND THE TRINITY
Guest Editor
Kyle Gingerich Hiebert

Introduction 108
Kyle Gingerich Hiebert

An Impossible Task: Trinitarian Theology for a Radical Church? 110
John D. Rempel

RESPONSES TO REMPEL

The Scandalous Drama of Trinitarian Theology for a Radical Church 146
P. Travis Kroeker

Scripture and the Nicene Gift 154
Andrea D. Saner

The Anabaptists' Tie to Trinitarianism 163
Breanna J. Nickel

Trinitarian Worship for a Radical Church? 171
Sarah Kathleen Johnson

Living Out the Trinity: A Mennonite-Feminist Theology of Diversity and Community 180
Susanne Guenther Loewen

Doctrine, Stability, and Human Speech within God 190
Jeremy M. Bergen

Peace Spiritualities in a Trinitarian Grammar: The Ecumenical Pilgrimage of Just Peace 200
Andrés Pacheco-Lozano

REPLY TO RESPONDENTS

Impossible: Trinitarianism and a Radical Peace Ethic? 208
John D. Rempel

Foreword

We are pleased to publish this special issue on Mennonites and the Trinity. Guest Editor Kyle Gingerich Hiebert, director of the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre, conceived the idea for this project and brought it to fruition.

After a brief Introduction, the issue begins with an extended essay by John Rempel, based on a lecture he gave at the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre in February 2019. This essay is followed by seven responses and Rempel's rejoinder to his interlocutors.

This issue seeks to stimulate an important conversation that, as the contents uniquely attest, is already crossing generations and academic disciplines. What is offered here is certainly not "the last word" on the subject but rather is intended to invite further discussion.

We thank Kyle Gingerich Hiebert for contacting respondents, assembling and editing submissions, and working closely with the CGR production team. We must also thank John Rempel for providing a provocative piece that provided the original impetus, as well as his interlocutors for enthusiastically engaging with his argument.

W. Derek Suderman
Editor

Stephen A. Jones
Managing Editor

MENNONITES AND THE TRINITY

Introduction

Kyle Gingerich Hiebert
Guest Editor

Delivered as the 2019 Public Lecture at the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre and presented in full in this special issue of *The Conrad Grebel Review*, John D. Rempel's profoundly fertile ruminations on the Trinity begin by stating that the task is to "go in pursuit of a mystery and its implications for what we believe and how we live (112)." Importantly, Rempel immediately qualifies the character of such a foundational pursuit and his reference to the emeritus Pope, Joseph Ratzinger, echoes St. Augustine's observation that "nowhere is a mistake more dangerous, or the search more laborious, or discovery more advantageous."[1]

For Rempel, while the attempt to describe the three-in-one-ness that we see in the God found in scripture must be the theological starting point, it nevertheless cannot in any way contain or circumscribe the mystery of God. On one level, the difficulty of this pursuit is like trying to study the newly-discovered Atacama snailfish, tiny transparent creatures that live in the deepest trenches of the Pacific Ocean—and turn into jelly when brought to the surface. The acknowledged difficulty is more significant than it may seem at first because, in Rempel's hands, it points to more than merely a methodological necessity to affirm that the mystery of God cannot be completely understood by human minds, and suggests that Nicene Trinitarianism represents a creative theological hermeneutic wilder and more elusive than we are often comfortable countenancing.

Instead of reducing mystery to something graspable, Rempel provocatively suggests that a robustly Trinitarian faith stands as a bulwark that not only prevents us from dissolving mystery but could potentially enliven and animate Christian discipleship today by calling us back to engage with the God made known to us as three-in-one. Much of this comes

[1] St. Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill, OP (New York: New City Press, 2012), 68.

The Conrad Grebel Review 37, no. 2 (Spring 2019): 108-109.

through in his theological reading of the tradition of Nicene Trinitarianism, which sees it as less like a monolithic legislator requiring slavish adherence and more like an invitation to explore the immense diversity of trajectories that might give new life to contemporary theological problems and critical correction to others. Hence, not only do we get immensely illuminating historical readings of Mennonite Trinitarianism and anti-Trinitarianism, we get snapshots of contemporary "unruly Trinitarians," all of which Rempel marshals in order to call us back in various ways to the Trinitarian heart of Christian faith.

That Rempel develops readings of a number of historical Trinitarian improvisations is no accident and, indeed, he explicitly invites more. In this respect, I am delighted that his extended essay is accompanied in this issue by both the response of P. Travis Kroeker (delivered at the initial lecture in Toronto) and six other voices—many of them part of the next generation that Rempel invites to take up the torch—that together respond to the challenge he articulates. Perhaps unexpectedly, given that the Trinity seems to play little more than an implicit role in much Mennonite theology, each of these interlocutors can be read as one of his "unruly Trinitarians." Each offers a response to Rempel's expansive essay in a short scope and from a different theological perspective ranging from existential, biblical, historical, and liturgical to pastoral, systematic, and ecclesial.

Taken as a whole, this issue presents a compelling picture not only of Mennonite responses to and articulations of Nicene Trinitarianism throughout history but also of the range and direction of a future Mennonite theology deeply engaged with how scripture and tradition inform and inflect the ongoing shared task of faithfully discerning the signs of our times. I am grateful to Rempel for an immensely illuminating and courageous contribution to the Mennonite theological landscape, to each interlocutor for enthusiastically taking on the challenging task of responding to such a wide-ranging piece in a limited space, and to *The Conrad Grebel Review* for advancing the kind of dialogue that this issue represents and seeks to ignite.

Kyle Gingerich Hiebert is Director of the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre.

An Impossible Task: Trinitarian Theology for a Radical Church?

John D. Rempel

Abstract

This essay contends that only Trinitarianism adequately represents God's relationship with the world and offers a complete picture of Jesus, and that Trinitarianism is thus essential for Mennonite theology. The author considers Trinitarian thought and thinkers across the centuries; summarizes the Reformation's appropriation of the Nicene Creed and illustrates how Anabaptists applied it; offers historical examples of Mennonite engagement with Trinitarianism and anti-Trinitarianism; and assesses the Trinitarian views of six orthodox yet creative contemporary theologians (John Howard Yoder, J. Denny Weaver, James Reimer, Elizabeth Johnson, Jon Sobrino, and Jürgen Moltmann) as a source for a radical ecclesiology.

Introduction[1]

God is the ultimate mystery of being. Theology has a calling to speak meaningfully to each generation about God on the basis of Scripture and tradition. When all is said and done, theology is not an attempt to explain God but to worship God with our minds. Today, many churches and Christians in the West are in a crisis of belief: almost all of them are Trinitarian in doctrine but increasingly unitarian in practice. One reason for this dramatic progression is that God is talked about as an abstraction, unrelated to our world of experience. Jesus, on the other hand, is experienced concretely as one of the greatest human beings but not as both divine and human. Because of that, Jesus dies with us, in solidarity with his fellow humans. The problem with this picture is that if Jesus is only human he cannot die for us and for the whole creation; he cannot be our savior. Only the model of God as Trinity can

[1] This essay is based on a lecture given by the author at the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre in February 2019. Seven responses to this essay appear on pp. 146-207 of this issue of *The Conrad Grebel Review,* followed by the author's reply on pp. 208-14.

The Conrad Grebel Review 37, no. 2 (Spring 2019): 110-145.

make explicit the Bible's implicit claim that Jesus Christ is both human and divine. At its best, Trinitarian faith is not only the church's confession of God but also a comprehensive way of imagining God and all things in relation to God. Catholic theologian Karl Rahner summarizes thinking about God as Trinity with the double claim that "God has given himself in radical self-communication . . . while still remaining the sovereign, incomprehensible God."[2]

Imagining God as Trinity was done in a foundational manner by the Nicene Creed—the outcome of the Councils of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381). It provided an essential way, consistent with Scripture, to affirm that Jesus and the Spirit are one identity with the God of Israel. In this essay I want to challenge the widespread assumption about the patristic era that this belief is inherently conservative and aligned with violence. I will summarize the Reformation's appropriation of the Nicene Creed as the primal symbol of God and illustrate how this claim was applied in Anabaptism. I will go on to give three examples of Mennonite engagement with Trinitarianism and anti-Trinitarianism in Enlightenment Netherlands, Liberal Protestant Germany, and late 20th-century North America. I will conclude with sketches of six theologians, John Howard Yoder, J. Denny Weaver,[3] James Reimer, Elizabeth Johnson, Jon Sobrino, and Jürgen Moltmann. In all of them, to varying degrees, I see an unruly but accountable Trinitarianism as the source of a radical ecclesiology, signified by the practice of nonviolence. I choose these theologians because they are orthodox in a creative way. They claim the freedom to dissent and innovate on behalf of the Gospel but hold themselves accountable to the understanding of God as Trinity in doing so.

Overall, I seek to make the case for a threefold understanding of God in an age in which inherited thought structures are suspect in their very nature. I hope to lure sceptics of orthodoxy into reconsidering this understanding, and I want to engage people who have tried orthodoxy and found it wanting. (Their cardinal complaint seems to be that many of them admire Jesus but have concluded that Trinitarian doctrine is speculation unrelated to human

[2] "Trinity in Theology," in Karl Rahner, ed., *Encyclopedia of Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1975).

[3] Weaver only partly fits the pattern. He is a Trinitarian but not a Nicene one. He holds himself accountable only to the origins of Trinitarian belief.

experience.) My perhaps too-tightly-held hypothesis is that we cannot arrive at a true, complete picture of Jesus outside of a Trinitarian grasp of God, because Trinitarianism most profoundly addresses the question of God's relationship with the world.

My task is to go in pursuit of a mystery and its implications for what we believe and how we live. None other than the great dogmatician Joseph Ratzinger cautions us that we are going beyond where maps can guide us when we approach the Three in One:

> Any doctrine of the Trinity cannot, therefore, aim to be a perfect comprehension of God. It is a frontier notice, a discouraging gesture pointing over to unchartable territory. It is not a definition that confines a thing to the pigeonholes of human knowledge, nor is it a concept that would put the thing within the grasp of the human mind.[4]

Many seekers after love, truth, and beauty have found it possible to believe that there is a Source of Life. Fewer have found it possible to believe that there is an Eternal Word who has identified himself with the creation. Fewer yet have found it possible to believe that there is a Persistent Divine Presence, sustaining life and delivering us from evil. But the hardest reality of all to believe in is that this threefold God could be one! I intend to take this common conclusion seriously as a starting point for my task.

In the process of writing this essay I've become ever more conscious that I do my work from the vantage point of a generation that is passing the torch to the next one. Some of this essay's readers may belong to my generation, others to the next one. All will see that I am steeped in the era I belong to and my reference points are sages who have shaped my generation's identity. This is what we have to offer. To the new generation, I say, Take the torch! Meet us at the centerpoint of the Gospel, then trace out a faithful way of thinking and living that speaks into and out of your generation.

My thesis is that the Trinitarian picture of God, while more elusive than other pictures of the divine, is also more satisfying as the footing for interpreting the world. Part of the difference between the two pictures of God (Jesus as human; Jesus as human and divine) is that believing in God as

[4] Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1985), 122.

incarnate in Jesus holds together the divine and human, worship and ethics, in a way that they cannot be separated. I hope to show that it provides an alternative to the inherent reductionism of unitarianism in all its guises. To do so I rely on the Trinitarian logic of Pilgram Marpeck, a 16th-century Anabaptist theologian. I also point to the mindset of Thieleman van Braght, a 17th-century Dutch Mennonite minister who claimed that the Mennonite church of his day was in a state of crisis. Its remedy, he argued, lay in the fusion of Trinitarian doctrine with Sermon on the Mount ethics. I depend on John Howard Yoder for his conclusion that the Nicene Creed was the only formulation of the disputed God questions of the 4th century that did justice to the implications of New Testament claims.

A Word about Terminology

I use "Trinitarianism" in two ways. One is as a description of the three-ness of the one God found in the NT. The other and more common one is as a description of the Nicene Creed in its final form of 381. This creed is not an exhaustive statement of Trinitarian belief, but its claims remain the starting point for all further reflection on God. There were also forms of Trinitarian faith that were later judged heretical. Modalism, as the name suggests, thought of Father, Son, and Spirit as modes of the same divine revelation and not as distinct persons. Subordinationism taught that the Son was of like being but not of the same being as the Father.

"Anti-Trinitarianism" is a position taken in the patristic church by Christians who rejected belief in God as Trinity. Arianism is the first and best-known approach. In it Christ is the mediator between God and humanity; the Logos is a created being, not the eternal Son. A different kind of anti-Trinitarianism arose among theologians who taught that that the Holy Spirit was a substance and not a person. All these viewpoints were vying to become authoritative teaching from before Nicaea in 325 until after the Council of Constantinople of 381. The Nicene Creed was formulated in response to and over against these positions. All these stances recurred in the High Middle Ages, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and since then.

I occasionally use "unTrinitarianism" for the view of those who talk about God without a Trinitarian reference point but do not engage in the historical polemic. By "unitarianism" I mean the view of those who hold a

picture of God in which Jesus is a central figure but is not divine as well as human. This term includes the specifically named Unitarian denomination but goes beyond it.

The Issue

Christians today have inherited an approach to the Gospel in which God as Trinity hardly plays an explicit role. Implicit assumptions—for example, about God's infinite self-giving—are still at work within otherwise unTrinitarian approaches to God for which there is no longer a theological warrant. I wonder if the heirs of the Enlightenment and postmodernism have taken to heart the consequences of this reductive understanding for their primal symbols.

Let us take the Lord's Supper as a case in point. From the beginning there have been two actors in the Eucharistic drama—human and divine. Jesus gathered his closest friends together for a meal in which he gave himself to them. When we gather around the Lord's Table today we repeat the breaking of bread in Jesus' name and count on him to give himself to us. We pray for the *Spirit* of God to make the *Son* of God present in our midst with bread and wine. Everything about this founding ritual of the church depends on a Trinitarian picture of God. If Christ is not alive, if the Spirit is not the divine Go-between, the only actor in the breaking of the bread is *us*. Then all we have is *our* memory of Jesus and *our* resolve to be a community. We have not faced the starkness of an unTrinitarian Supper, to say nothing of an unTrinitarian world.

I have prepared this essay in a time of crisis. Assumptions that have sustained the Christian worldview and its role in shaping Western civilization are unraveling. The foundations are shaking: "The world has become detached from its enveloping skein of religious references."[5] Against this background I invite readers to consider a coherent core of belief with which to engage the incoherence of our time. In the West there are no longer universally held beliefs, practices, and loyalties in society, yet, by contrast, it is argued that there are universal values, like the human rights codified in the United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* of 1948. These values

[5] Graham Hughes, *Worship as Meaning: A Liturgical Theology for Late Modernity* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003), 2.

are arrived at on the basis of reason rather than revelation. On the religious level, thinkers like Joseph Campbell have made the case for mythological truth. But to the postmodern mind all myths are equal. On the everyday level, people receive their primary bearings from practices as different as yoga and identity politics. And in the church there is a relativizing of truth claims and the practices and loyalties surrounding them.

Some years ago a friend of mine was a fellow church member of the deconstructionist theologian Gordon Kaufman. My friend wrote me about a sermon by Kaufman that continued to trouble him. Kaufman had chastised the congregation for praying, since prayer is an irresponsible act in a world in which there is no personal being to hear us. The only adequate response we can make to the needs around us is our own action, Kaufman concluded. My friend, who calls himself a theological liberal, said he shrank from that conclusion, which he admitted was implied in his own theology.[6]

One of the implications of Trinitarian faith is that God discloses himself and binds himself to the creation. This is first revealed in God's covenant with Israel, and fulfilled in the incarnation in which the Son becomes flesh and makes the Father known (John 1:18). Christ comes to reclaim the cosmos for the Creator (Col. 1:15-20). This reclamation is accomplished in Jesus' ministry, cross, and resurrection. The Spirit is the divine promise that the inbreaking of God's reign will one day be completed. Jesus Christ is the human face of God (2 Cor. 4:6). In him we have confidence that God "sympathizes with our weaknesses" (Heb. 4:14-16). Through the Spirit we now behold the glory of God as through a mirror (2 Cor. 3:17-18). The Trinitarian picture of God is inherently personal: Father, Son, and Spirit are in a mutual relational bond that embraces the world. In this bond we are persuaded to pray to the One who is always listening to us, always acting on our behalf (Isa. 55:1-12; Rom. 8:26-27). Our surrender to this reality frees us for radical discipleship. When we confess God as "personal," we are using an analogy, because it is as close as we can come to the truth of God.

The Road to (and from) Nicaea

I will begin this section with a brief summary of the theological rumblings

[6] I return to Kaufman in the section below titled "The Trinity in 20th-Century North American Mennonite Theology."

that led to the Council of Nicaea and conclude it with the often overlooked fact that the church engaged with theological subtleties where ethical rigor was inseparable from belief. Before the 4th century, regional churches created their own confessional statements, especially for use with baptismal candidates. The Apostles Creed was one of them. By about the year 300, certain debates about Christ's identity had spread to the wider church. This debate's two most famous antagonists were Athanasius and Arias: Athanasius held that Christ was the eternal Son of the Father, ever one with him, while Arius asserted that Christ was the created Son, a mediating figure between divinity and humanity. A wide representation of regional churches comprised the Council of Nicaea in 325. The starting and finishing point of a many-sided quarrel was the question of Christ as the eternal or adopted Son of God. Nicaea proclaimed Christ as God's eternal Son. Debate then subsided for a time, but was stirred up as the consequences of each position were played out.

So much was at stake that an even wider representation of bishops convened for the Council of Constantinople in 381. Its overall goal was to consolidate the theological and tactical gains the pro-Athanasians had won since 325. Early in the debate they realized that the dispute could not be resolved in their favor without unambiguously declaring not only the Son's but the Spirit's divinity and personhood. "Once the Spirit has been implicated in the Son's work," argues Lewis Ayres, "and been presented as completing that work, then all the arguments that have been used to link the Father and Son can be used of the Spirit."[7] This assertion heightened the paradoxical nature of God's three-in-oneness, inviting centuries of speculation.

At the same time, the Council of Constantinople set in place the theological foundation of Christian belief.[8] Within the next half-century it became the most universal of all Christian declarations, providing an unrivalled resolution of conflicting attempts to state the relationship among Father, Son, and Spirit. However, the Creed's moral and theological authority

[7] Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004), 212.

[8] For a summary of the process that led to this fixing of terminology, see John McGuckin, "The Trinity in the Greek Fathers" and Michel Barnes,"Latin Trinitarian Theology," in Peter Phan, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011), 49-69 and 70-86.

has been challenged by critics who fault Constantine's misuse of Nicaea's theological process to unify his empire.[9] Attached to this challenge are further criticisms, one of which is that the Creed confesses nothing about Jesus' life and ministry. Another is that it makes Christian theology the captive of Greek philosophy. A final accusation is that a Trinitarian understanding of God is inherently conservative, on the side of power, at odds with the radical nature of the Gospel.

The Creed was composed because what it stood for was in dispute. Jesus' teaching was not in dispute. While it is true that in the course of the 4th century the church had become a mass church, Jesus' teaching, especially in preparing baptismal candidates, still retained its rigor. We need look no farther than Canon XII of the Nicene Council of 325. It stipulates that "those who endured violence and were seen to have resisted, but who afterwards yielded to wickedness, and returned to the army, shall be excommunicated."[10] (Here and elsewhere in the essay I use "nonviolence" as a cipher for radical ethics in general.) Jaroslav Pelikan, the historical theologian, summarizes the final outcome of the Nicene process this way:

> The climax of the doctrinal development of the early church was the dogma of the Trinity. In this dogma the church vindicated the monotheism that had been at issue in its conflicts with Judaism, and it came to terms with the concept of the Logos, over which it had disputed with paganism.[11]

As great an achievement as it was, the Nicene Creed could not address all the Christological implications of its claims. Hence the Council of Chalcedon was called in 451 to address conflicts regarding the two natures of Christ. Most of the ancient and Reformation churches consider it to be an essential clarification of Nicaea's affirmations.

---

[9] Competing interpretations are found in Peter Leithart, *Defending Constantine: the Twilight of an Empire and the Dawn of Christendom* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2010) and in responses in *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 85, no. 4 (2011): 547-656.

[10] "The Canons of the 318 Holy Fathers, assembled in the City of Nice in Bithynia," in Henry Percival, ed., *The Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 27-28.

[11] Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: the Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1975), 172.

The Question of Authority

When scholars speak of "Trinitarian syntax," they mean the principles and procedures that must be followed to take into account Scripture, tradition, and context. This does not mean that there is only one possible outcome to a theological inquiry, as we shall see, but that an argument is valid only if it follows agreed-upon ground rules. Thus, God's self-revelation becomes the paradigm, and belief in God as Trinity becomes the interpretive key for theology as a whole. As Disciples of Christ theologian Joe Jones summarizes it, "The doctrine of the Trinity is simply that set of rules and concepts proposed for the right understanding of the self-revealing God witnessed to in the Bible."[12] This definition, however, begs the question of when doctrinal language is authoritative. The ancient established churches (minus dissenting movements) accepted the Nicene Creed and its expansion at Constantinople because they believed it resolved crucial disputes undermining the churches' witness and order. Only in retrospect was the claim made that decisions of a universal council have *revelatory* status, that God discloses propositional truth beyond what is in Scripture[13] to the magisterium, the Catholic Church's hermeneutical community.

The authority of the Nicene Creed and similar conciliar doctrines was re-appropriated by the churches of the Reformation, but according to a different logic. Protestants accepted the Creed because they believed that it conformed to the Bible. They did not accept the Creed's propositions in a direct sense as revelation but as doctrine confirming and clarifying the revelation in Scripture.[14] Mennonites and later Free Churches were shaped by the Protestant stance but were more implicit than explicit about it. That is, the terminology of doctrine, the language of hymnody, and the piety undergirding discipleship assumed the three-ness and one-ness of God as confessed in the Creed, but the conciliar doctrines themselves were not formally confirmed.

---

[12] Joe Jones, *A Grammar of Christian Faith*, vol. 1 (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 151.

[13] In the mid-19th century when Catholicism had to explain the evolution of dogma, John Henry Newman expanded the patristic claim into "the development of doctrine." See J.M. Cameron, ed., *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (Toronto: Penguin, 1973).

[14] Jon Vickers, *The Making and Remaking of Trinitarian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 58-78.

The Trinity in the Middle Ages

It would exceed the bounds of this essay even to sketch the main lines of Trinitarian thought in the West during the Middle Ages. Yet they cannot go unmentioned, because medieval developments influenced later thinking. The dominant church father during these centuries was Augustine. In liturgy as in theology, the Early Middle Ages was a time of order and system, a tendency reinforced by the increasing role of philosophy in addressing theological questions. Certain debates, like the nature of personhood, become more complex because greater weight was given to rationality and logic in relation to revelation. In the High Middle Ages, the time of Scholasticism, this approach became even more refined as well as differentiated, thanks to the writing of both scholars and monks. In the early period, Peter Abelard and Peter Lombard are the best known of the scholars and Bernard of Clairvaux of the monks. In the later period, the luminaries are Bonaventure and Aquinas. Joseph Wawrykow summarizes later criticisms of Aquinas that also apply beyond him:

> This account of Trinity is too rationalistic and jargon-laden; the intimate connection between the immanent and economic Trinity has been broken; Aquinas' talk of God overemphasizes the essence and is relatively inattentive to the persons; the account of Trinity, sophisticated in itself, has inadequately informed the rest of theology; the Trinitarian teaching is simply too speculative and fails to make a difference in Christian living and practice.[15]

By the Late Middle Ages one of the foundational debates had been settled: there are three persons in one essence. However, other simmering issues were still open to dispute. It became common to claim that the Son "is generated by" the Father while the Holy Spirit "proceeds from" the Father and the Son. Many debates flowing from this assumption are accessible only to those with a sure grasp of Aristotelian logic. This philosophical structure—the scaffolding for the development of dogma throughout the Middle Ages—

[15] Joseph Wawrykow, "Franciscan and Dominican Trinitarian Theology (Thirteenth Century): Bonaventure and Aquinas" in Gilles Emery and Matthew Levering, ed.,*The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2014), 182.

was largely overthrown at the time of the Reformation, although theologians such as Calvin retained some of it and its methodology.

The Trinity in Anabaptist Thought

In the popular mind, the Protestant Reformation cast off the long tradition of the Western Church. Certainly, the Magisterial and Anabaptist reformers rejected the speculative nature of much late medieval theologizing and the many mediators of grace that had grown up. In keeping with a return to sources, the reformers reclaimed the primacy of the Bible in shaping the doctrine of the Trinity. Yet this is only half the truth. They were equally concerned to reform what was reformable. The Trinitarian imagination lived on in the Reformation's piety and theology, including Anabaptism.

The Protestant rupture of Catholic authority raises the matter of the relationship between the medieval church and orthodoxy. The Protestant principle was that where tradition conformed to Scripture it had a secondary authority. In general, the further away theologizing was from the apostolic age the less was its claim to authority. Since Protestantism had rejected papal authority as a whole, its break was truly a visceral rejection of the order and doctrine that the reformers had experienced while still Catholic. Concretely, this position was expressed in the positive doctrinal citations by Anabaptists, which are confined to the patristic era. Wawrykow's summary of Aquinas's modern critics, noted above, speaks for 16th-century Anabaptists as well.

This means that Protestant orthodoxy differs from Catholic orthodoxy, because the latter relies on an unbroken tradition of interpretation. This raises many questions in the search for church unity. Anabaptists who were concerned with a normative conceptual framework for belief defined orthodoxy primarily as fidelity to the Bible and secondarily to the Apostles and Nicene Creeds (and their early interpreters) because they were true to Scripture. At the same time, the Anabaptists took along with them medieval formulations of doctrine, like the perpetual virginity of Mary.

How did this mindset come to expression? The following questions are intended to shed light on this matter, but I will address only the first two of them: (1) Did Anabaptist theologians cite patristic authors and texts as authorities? (2) Did they deliberately retain an orthodox view of the Trinity? (3) Did any of them make a distinctive contribution to the relationship

between Trinity and ecclesiology? (4) Since they no longer regarded doctrinal and pastoral decisions of the old church as binding, what tied them to Trinitarianism?

Balthasar Hubmaier, a South German Anabaptist and a matriculated Catholic theologian, makes copious reference to the fathers in constructing his arguments.[16] His catechetical writings articulate God's work in humanity in terms of a dynamic in which Father, Son, and Spirit have different but inseparable roles.[17] He sees the Trinity as relevant to pastoral as well as academic theology, and God as Three in One is foundational for his ecclesiology. Hubmaier's understanding of God's provision for the universal church means that the church cannot err, because it is controlled by the Spirit, is assured of Christ's presence, and will be preserved by God throughout time.[18] Twice he mentions the Nicene Creed to clinch an argument about the relationship of baptism to the church.[19] This is a seminal case in point. Even though the long tradition teaches infant baptism, Hubmaier invokes the fathers in many of his treatises, claiming them as advocates for baptism on confession of faith. The most striking example is "Old and New Teachers on Believers Baptism," in which he cites Origen, Basil the Great, Tertullian, and others at length.[20] His Trinitarian mindset carries over into his anthropology. It holds that soul, spirit, and body are "made and unified in every human being according to the image of the Holy Spirit."[21] These examples illustrate that Hubmaier can distinguish between the Catholic Church as an institution, which he rejects, and some of its teachings, to which he holds fast.

This is also true of the Austrian Anabaptist theologian Pilgram Marpeck. The clash between orthodox and heterodox Christologies in the Radical Reformation came to a climax in the long-running debate between him and Silesian theologian Caspar Schwenckfeld, a Spiritualist. Marpeck sought a *via media* for Anabaptism between the Magisterial Reformers and

[16] For a comprehensive study see Andrew Klager, "Balthasar Hubmaier's Use of the Church Fathers," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 84, no. 1 (2010): 5-65.
[17] H. Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder, ed., *Balthasar Hubmaier, Theologian of Anabaptism* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1989), 84-86, 349, 430-31.
[18] Ibid., 352.
[19] Ibid., 351, 370.
[20] Ibid., 250-56.
[21] Ibid., 430.

the Spiritualists. His original contribution was a well-worked out focus on the incarnation. He contended that the church as the body of Christ was the prolongation of the humanity of Christ. Schwenckfeld held that Christ's incarnation was into a celestial flesh and not into our fallen nature, and concluded that fallen matter cannot mediate spirit. In a section on baptism in the "Admonition," Marpeck chides his Spiritualist interlocutors with conflating the Trinity into a bi-unity by dismissing the ongoing role of Christ's incarnation. The Father always acts inwardly through the Spirit and outwardly through the Son.[22] In his pastoral letter "Concerning the Lowliness of Christ," he describes the dynamic of God's transformation of people in which Father, Son, and Spirit have inseparable but different roles.[23] His Trinitarian logic is unmistakable. In particular his writing on the incarnation depends on concepts present in Nicaea and Chalcedon.[24]

Menno Simons, a Dutch ex-Catholic priest, adamantly rejected Catholic moral and spiritual practice, and just as adamantly retained much of its doctrinal structure, especially the Trinity. His teaching included the already mentioned notion of Christ's celestial body. "Menno's view was an attempt to exalt the truth of Christ's having been conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, and of his having been sinless,"[25] writes Mennonite historian J.C. Wenger. Notably, Menno took hold of a late medieval theory in defence of Biblical teaching. In his thinking, the incarnation culminates in the atonement. Christ bears the sin of the world to the extent that on the cross he is forsaken by the Father.[26] For all their differences in working assumptions and theological structure, Hubmaier, Marpeck, and Simons saw the Trinitarian paradigm as foundational to belief, ethics, and piety.[27]

---

[22] William Klassen and Walter Klaassen, ed., *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 192-98, 223, 231.

[23] John Rempel, *Joerg Maler's Kunstbuch* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora, 2009, 584-602).

[24] Ibid., 87, 113-15.

[25] J.C. Wenger, ed., *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons* (Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1984), 420.

[26] Ibid., 429, 435.

[27] Thomas Finger offers an insightful overview in *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004), 329-464.

The Trinity among Enlightened Dutch Mennonites

The 17th century was the Golden Age of the Netherlands in economics, politics, and culture. The nation was more tolerant of religious dissent than any other country in Europe. At the same time it was ruled by an alliance of the state and the Reformed Church whose demand for loyalty included Protestant scholastic orthodoxy. On the margins, there was enough freedom for alternatives to political and religious orthodoxy that both the theistic and atheistic forms of Enlightenment philosophy emerged.[28] The most philosophically refined of the theistic dissenters were the Socinians, whose protest against orthodoxy was comprehensive. They argued by means of a strictly rational reading of the NT that Christ was a human being whom God made divine because of his virtue. Following the logic of their novel Christology they rejected Nicaea and became Anti-Trinitarian.[29]

Early in the century a Proto-Enlightenment dissenter movement open to the emerging scientific worldview emerged on the edge of the official Reformed Church. Out of this dissent arose two coalitions, Collegiants and Remonstrants. They quickly spread to all the Dutch cities, meeting regularly for philosophical debate as well as 'rational' Bible study. Through their focus on Jesus' life rather than his death, most of them had become pacifists. Central to their identity was a belief in the light present in the individual soul. As traditional religious norms receded, 'light' became more and more equated with the natural light of reason.[30] Urban Mennonite intellectuals were immediately attracted to the message of these radicals.

This would soon lead to a crisis within Dutch Mennonitism. All its confessions of faith were explicitly Trinitarian, though not cast into the scholastic form of the official church. They were marked by Biblical language and written in simple prose. In making his insightful contrast between the

[28] Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750 (*Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2002), 3-17; *The Conrad Grebel Review 25, no. 3* (2007) features five essays on "Spinoza as a Religious Philosopher: Between Radical Protestantism and Jewishness."

[29] Lech Szczucki, "Antitrinitarianism," in Hans Hillerbrand, ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, Vol. 1 (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1996), 57-59.

[30] Andrew Fix, "Mennonites and Rationalism in the Seventeenth Century," in Alastair Hamilton, Sjouke Voolstra, and Piet Visser, *From Martyr to Muppie* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam Univ. Press, 1994), 167-69.

confessions of faith of established churches and those of the Mennonites, Hans-J*ü*rgen Goertz describes the Mennonites' goal as greater unity. To achieve it, they focused first on the Trinity, then went on to ordinances and behavior.[31] Their convictions were shaped by an understanding of the atonement focused on its power to transform believers. Their ecclesiology, life of nonconformity, and nonretaliation flowed from their Christological Trinitarianism.[32] This distinctive form of orthodoxy became more elaborate in the course of the century as assimilating Mennonites encountered both scholastic Reformed theology and the dissenting movements mentioned above. This is especially true of the Thirty-three Articles of 1617, which played a key role in the emerging debate within the Mennonite church.[33]

Liberally and spiritualistically inclined Mennonite thought leaders, like Galenus Abrahamsz (1622-1706), a medical doctor and minister, honed their Enlightenment beliefs in the company of other proto-unitarians.[34] Abrahamsz and his fellow-minister David Spruyt composed Nineteen Articles to explain their position to critics. The heart of their argument is the claim that the church fell in the generations after the apostles. Thus, no one today has authority to compel conformity to belief, and no church is the true church.[35] Behind this stance lies the crucial premise of the Enlightenment: since religious truths are not provable by reason, they cannot be binding. Only moral truths can be proven true by means of reason, and are thus binding.

Following this premise, Abrahamsz rejected Trinitarian faith and the ecclesiology of a visible true church. At the same time he remained a pacifist and, as a counterpoint to the rationalistic bent of Enlightenment theism, turned to mysticism. This was the path many religious followers

[31] "Zwischen Zwietracht und Eintracht," in *Das schwierige Erbe der Mennoniten* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2002), 103-110.

[32] Karl Koop, ed., *Confessions of Faith in the Anabaptist Tradition 1527-1560* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2006), 123-330.

[33] Ibid., 165-265, esp. 171-78, 199-212. Their strong Trinitarianism notwithstanding, the authors discretely affirm Menno's celestial flesh Christology—Christ brought unblemished flesh with him from heaven, 203, 207. Mennonites elsewhere in Europe had rejected this interpretation as undermining the nature of the incarnation.

[34] Fix, "Mennonites and Rationalism in the Seventeenth Century," 159-62.

[35] Michael Driedger, *Obedient Heretics* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), 51-57, esp. 54.

of Enlightenment Christianity took, profoundly identifying with Jesus and his teaching. In this first generation of innovators, devotion to Jesus and his teachings had an intensity greater than one would give to an ordinary mortal. The simplest explanation is that this generation brought along an inherited faithfulness to Christ that could not be passed on to subsequent generations—because giving him such exalted status went against the grain of explicit liberal beliefs.

Against this trend, led by Abrahamsz's fellow minister Thieleman van Braght (1625-1664), was the majority, holding fast to a disciplined church grounded in nonconformity of life based on Trinitarian faith. Van Braght and his movement were not making an Old Order-like retreat from modernity but rather repositioning tradition in a novel context. Ernst Hamm, a historian of science, writes that van Braght was "no less implicated in the ways of the modern world than Galenus."[36] To embody his vision van Braght continued the work of Hans de Ries, who had integrated martyr accounts of Mennonites beyond the Dutch Republic and of faithful Christians from other traditions into a massive tome with the Dutch accounts. Van Braght completed the task and called it the *Martyrs Mirror.* His greatest challenge was to urban Christians at ease in their prosperity and woozy in their belief.[37] He concluded his manifesto with the Apostles Creed. In addition, he insisted on including the Thirty-three Articles in the *Mirror* as the two most fitting summaries of the martyrs' faith.

In 1660—the very year the *Martyrs Mirror* was published—a synod of all Dutch Mennonite congregations met in Leyden to resolve the dispute between confessionalism and Enlightenment. Van Braght was asked to be the chair. Though pressed by the confessionalists to declare himself theologically, Abrahamsz refused to do so. He argued that the church today did not have the authority to impose conformity in matters of belief and doctrine. For their part, van Braght and the orthodox brought their list of conditions for unity to this Synod, desiring a new confession of faith, upholding the belief that the visible church expresses the faith of the apostolic age, speaking out

[36] Ernst Hamm, "Mennonites, Natural Knowledge and the Dutch Golden Age," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 30, no. 1 (2012): 22.

[37] *The Bloody Theater or Martyrs' Mirror of Defenseless Christians* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1950), 5-27.

against Socinianism, and warning ministers and congregations who ally themselves with non-Trinitarians.[38] However, van Braght and his allies were closing the barn door after the horse had bolted: they appealed for Galenus and his allies to help shape and give assent to a new confession of faith. But the latter group had already rejected the place of binding confessions because, in their view, no one faction had enough truth to make binding claims.

There was no reconciliation between the parties. Both maintained their strength for half a century. By then the anti-confessionalists were clearly winning the day. Both Mennonite conferences were becoming a church that belonged to the world of Enlightenment rationality—free from doctrinal and ritual norms, with an ebbing confidence that everyone who held the faith of the martyrs comprised the true church. Although Abrahamsz himself had been a pacifist, the anti-confessionalist alignment with ever-increasing Dutch nationalism was leading the next generation of Dutch Mennonites to abandon the peace position.

The Trinity and Liberal Protestant 19th-Century German Mennonites

No one shaped Protestant theologizing in the 19th century more than Friedrich Schleiermacher, who took the Enlightenment and its scientific method as the starting point for theology. At the same time, he reserved the realm of experience for what he called "religion." The immediate source of his influence on German Mennonites in mid-century was Carl Harder, minister of a Mennonite congregation in Elbing, Prussia. A prolific preacher and author, he popularized Schleiermacher's undogmatic belief accompanied by an intense piety.[39] He won a wide hearing by emphasizing devotion to Jesus without the traditional doctrinal structure. The gist of his position was that "theology requires the scientific method; religion concerns the immediate consciousness of God given to everyone."[40] In the 16th century, says Harder, only Menno was wise enough to leave theology to the scholars and make

[38] *By-een-Komste Tot Leyden Door eenige Doops-gezinde Leeraren en Diaconen…* (Amsterdam: Jan Rienwertz, 1661), 3-5.

[39] Samuel Powell has a crisp summary of Schleiermacher's approach to theology and religious experience. See his "Nineteenth Century Protestant Doctrines of the Trinity," in Emery and Levering, *The Oxford Handbook to the Trinity*, 269-72.

[40] *Religioese Ueberzeugungen*, n.p., n.d., 18.

religion relevant to the people. It is high time for the modern church to take this goal for itself.[41] He goes on to assert that God's Son never willingly sinned. Thus, he can be our model. Christ was not half human and half divine; he was a holy figure with a single identity.[42] Harder grapples with the perennial conflict between tradition (which he summarizes as the Apostles, Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds) and individual experience. The development of dogma has value but systematic concepts alone will not bring people to faith and "the restoration of their original humanity."[43] (Here he sounds like Richard Rohr, the current spiritual writer, who grapples with the interface of science and religion.) A transitional figure, Harder radically re-interprets but holds fast to Menno; he acknowledges the struggle to give both doctrine and experience room. His Christology deconstructs the Trinity from within but he does not explicitly abandon it.

The next generation of urban Mennonite scholars were more radical in their re-interpretation than Harder but lacked his theological depth. After German unification in 1866, intellectuals such as Hermann Mannhardt and Anna Brons repudiated the dissenting character of Anabaptism and urged assimilation into the political vision of the emerging German empire. The symbolic moment in this integration was rejection of nonresistance. Brons's writings are shaped by religious Enlightenment thinkers including Abrahamsz. She pits that stance against both Mennonite confessionalism and "the worn out confessions of the Protestants."[44] She praises Abrahamsz extravagantly and defends his theology, which she describes as "practical Christendom."[45] For her, Abrahamsz and those he spoke for wanted to "base their thought on the Gospel alone and demanded personal freedom in matters of faith. . . . Old questions about the divinity of Christ, his two natures and the three persons of the Trinity were brought up [simply] to counter him."[46]

A decisive factor in Mennonite theologizing was the new wave of

[41] Carl Harder, *Das Leben Menno Symons* (Königsberg: E.J. Dalkowski, 1846), 19.
[42] Ibid., 20.
[43] Ibid., 31-32.
[44] Anna Brons, *Ursprung, Entwicklung, und Schicksale der altevangelischen Taufgesinnten oder Taufgesinnten* (Norden: Diedrich Soltau, 1891), 370.
[45] Ibid., 150.
[46] Ibid., 151.

historical research into Anabaptist origins by scholars such as Ludwig Keller, a German Lutheran. What attracted him to Mennonitism was its dissident character both socially and theologically. For Keller and a growing following of Mennonites, doctrine had been of marginal concern to the Anabaptists; their originality lay in their attention to Jesus as the teacher of a radical ethic of love.[47] Keller points out that the true home of Hans Denck, the Anabaptist mystic, was with thinkers like Sebastian Franck, a mystical Anti-Trinitarian.[48]

The final act of this drama was written after World War I by ministers like Abraham Fast. His catechetical volume completes the movement away from orthodoxy and transcendence to heterodoxy and immanence. Fast's identification with the Free Thinker movement drew people disenchanted with traditional religion to his north German congregation in Emden. In his catechism for membership, he dismissed a personal God.[49] He was convinced that all the church's dogmatic decisions were opposed to Jesus,[50] and believed that there were many Christs.[51] Yet, despite his universalism, Fast fell prey to Germany's super nationalism that led him to fascism.

The Trinity in 20th-Century North American Mennonite Theology

In the years before World War I, mainstream North American Mennonites[52] were assimilating into anglophone culture. This development was greatly complicated by the Modernist-Fundamentalist controversy that reached a fever pitch in the 1920s. For Fundamentalists, the church would lose its integrity if it did not hold to a literal reading of the Bible; for Modernists, it would lose its integrity if it did so hold. Modernists were attracted to the portrayal of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels; Fundamentalists were drawn more to John and Paul.[53] As the conflict became more extreme, the Modernist

[47] Abraham Friesen, *History and Renewal in the Anabaptist/Mennonite Tradition* (North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 1994), 57-63.
[48] *Ein Apostel der Wiedertaeufer (*Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1882), iii.
[49] Abraham Fast, *Kurze Glaubenslehre fuer freie Protestanten* (Emden, self-published, 1928), 8.
[50] Ibid., 29.
[51] Ibid,, 34.
[52] In dealing with the 20th century I will refer to Mennonite Church USA and Canada as "mainstream Mennonites."
[53] These generalizations should not exclude striking exceptions. For example, William Jennings Bryan, a public intellectual, was both a spokesman for Fundamentalism and a pacifist.

attraction to Jesus focused almost entirely on his teaching, to the neglect of his death and resurrection. By the same token, the Fundamentalist attraction to John and Paul focused almost entirely on Jesus' death and resurrection, to the neglect of his teaching.

In 1914 Daniel Kauffman, a renowned (Old)Mennonite leader and lay theologian, published *Bible Doctrine,* a 700-page collection of theological essays (subjects included God, Bible, church, ordinances, ethical principles, spirituality, eschatology) written by ministers aware of the theological currents of the day. Its ambitious goal was to provide a comprehensive Mennonite theological and ethical system, including nonresistance, in an evangelical key in the midst of the Modernist-Fundamentalist conflict. It names Charles Hodge, the 19th-century American Presbyterian conservative systematician, as a main inspiration for the collection of essays but also Johann Arndt, the late 16th-century Pietist Lutheran theologian. Astonishingly, there is not a single reference to a Mennonite author![54]

All the chapters are written by contemporary Mennonites. The first chapter, "God," by J.S. Hartzler, is explicitly Trinitarian. Hartzler cites numerous OT passages that suggest the eternal three-ness of God.[55] He asserts that "Reason is in full accord with divine revelation" regarding God's existence.[56] He prefaces a section on Christ's two natures with a reference to Nicaea as where controversies about the Son's nature were resolved.[57] He makes most of his points with reference to the Bible, but quotes the Anglican Thirty-Nine Articles approvingly on Christ's two natures.[58] Then he goes on to emphasize the personalness and oneness of the Trinity. The sixth chapter, on "Nonresistance," was written by Kauffman himself. He does not limit the NT's peace teaching to individual conscientious objection but sees peace as God's will for the world, and supports the contemporary peace movement as long as it is based on the Bible and promotes absolute pacifism.[59]

Bible Doctrine's goal is to instruct a church increasingly drawn into the orbit of the Modernist-Fundamentalist controversy. But it has

[54] Daniel Kauffman, ed., *Bible Doctrine* (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1914), 8.
[55] Ibid., 22-25.
[56] Ibid., 27.
[57] Ibid., 37.
[58] Ibid., 39.
[59] Ibid., 538-42.

two major shortcomings: it does not integrate doctrine and ethics, and it makes no use of the flourishing historical research into the left wing of the Reformation in German-speaking Europe. Immediately after World War I this research became the subject of church historians who brought it to bear on North American church life, including the influence of the Modernist-Fundamentalist debate on Mennonites. Liberals championed the undogmatic mystics like Hans Denck, while Conservatives (but not Fundamentalists) championed the Swiss Brethren as the original, biblicistic Anabaptists and contended that other streams of Anabaptism flowed from Zurich.

The recovery of Anabaptist beliefs and practices was initially carried out by historians, not by theologians. Seldom were beliefs and practices placed within a systematic theological frame of reference, even though each leading figure brought a theological allegiance with him. It soon became irresistible to use history to score theological points. The most celebrated scholar, Harold Bender, saw the biblicism of Swiss Anabaptism as an alternative to both Fundamentalism and Modernism. For the charismatic Daniel Kauffman, Anabaptism was closer to Fundamentalism; for the academic C. Henry Smith, it was an early agent of modern individualism.[60] Once again, the strong Trinitarians—Kauffmann and Bender—gave pacifism confessional status, while Smith and other liberal luminaries like S.K. Mosiman, a college president, left the matter up to individual conscience.

After World War II, the first attempts were made to create an integrating method of theologizing among mainstream Mennonites.[61] In 1968 John Howard Yoder broke away from the prevalent practice of doing theology by means of history and started doing wholistic (if not systematic) theology.[62] In the same year Gordon Kaufman published the first truly

[60] Rodney Sawatsky, *History and Ideology: American Identity Definition through History* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2005), 40-47.

[61] John E. Hartzler, *The Supremacy of Christianity* (self-published, 1948); J.C. Wenger, *Introduction to Theology* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1954).

[62] John Howard Yoder, *Preface to Theology* [first published in mimeograph in 1968)] (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2002). [Perhaps the most well-known Mennonite theologian of the 20th century, Yoder is also remembered for his long-term sexual harassment and abuse of women. Documentation and discussion of these abuses is found at http://mennoniteusa.org/menno-snapshots/john-howard-yoder-digest-recent-articles-about-sexual-abuse-and-discernment-2/ and in *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 89, no. 1 (January 2015).—Ed.]

systematic Mennonite theology.[63] The brilliance and subtlety of his thought notwithstanding, it is precisely the God to whom I have been alluding that Kaufman rejects.[64] God is "a serendipitously creative process;"[65] "The notion of trinity (sic) provides us with a pattern of ideas and a dialectical understanding of the interconnectedness among ideas."[66] The consequence of this reconstruction of "God" is a radical ethic but it is grounded, by Kaufman's own admission, in a fundamentally different picture of God, one in which ultimate reality is process, not person.

Kaufman closed the door to a realm that he believed was no longer inhabited, at least in the way tradition has thought of a divine inhabitant. Surprisingly and ironically, earlier in his career he had closed another door to an attractive place of refuge from traditional belief. He concluded a section on the Trinity in his *Systematic Theology* with a critique of historic unitarianism and its dependence on implicitly Christian assumptions that it denies in its explicit portrayal of God.[67] He notes that the most common form of anti-Trinitarianism nevertheless still focuses on God as Father. Kaufman argues that there is no justification within his rational thought system to call God "Father" (or another personal name). Claiming God as Father can be accounted for only with an implicit Trinitarianism. Where the Trinitarian imagination has been extinguished, its language becomes anachronistic and cannot bear the weight put on it.

Towards a Proposal

My deduction from this historical survey is that the Trinity as the central symbol of Christian belief is more stable and has clearer ethical consequences than the unTrinitarian alternative. It is capacious enough to make room for dissent and improvisation as well as accountability. Unitarianism in all its guises is unstable and reductive because it is impatient with mystery; its

[63] Gordon Kaufman, *Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968). He later moved away from the systematic method of doing theology and would not let *Systematic Theology* be re-published.

[64] Gordon Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1993), 267-72; 278-79.

[65] Ibid., 279.

[66] Ibid., 413, 417.

[67] Kaufman, *Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective*, 244-52.

mindset is to reduce what must be believed. Trinitarianism has a greater capacity to cope with complex theological questions like the tragic nature of life, by holding together the fall and redemption in the person of Christ.

What emerges from this profile is something that seems at first glance to be an oxymoron: "radical orthodoxy." In this final section I will discuss a range of theologians who are radically critical of their own orthodox frame of reference. The first set consists of John Howard Yoder, J. Denny Weaver, and James Reimer. All are Mennonite and unmistakably pacifist; they creatively straddle the thinking of orthodoxy and dissent from it. Yoder honors Nicaea as groundbreaking for Christian theology but qualifies its authority for subsequent generations. Weaver sees an implicit Trinitarianism in the NT but rejects Nicaea as its authoritative interpretation. Reimer claims Nicaea as binding for all subsequent theologizing.

The second set comprises Elizabeth Johnson, Jon Sobrino, and Jürgen Moltmann, each of whom constructs a radical ethic in relation to a Trinitarian picture of God. At the same time they demand that this picture address a novel ethical context. Johnson is an American Catholic and a feminist who faults the church for absolutizing Nicaea's cultural context, such as its hierarchical categories. Jon Sobrino is an El Salvadoran Catholic and liberation theologian who gives priority to the NT witness to Father, Son, and Spirit, of which Nicaea is a guardian. Moltmann is a German Reformed theologian and a revisionist of orthodoxy in light of the horrible suffering in the 20th century, especially the Holocaust.

Five of these theologians stretch Nicene Trinitarian grammar as far as they can but remain within it. Weaver marginalizes the Nicene Creed and its theological method without disavowing belief in God as Trinity. This contrast highlights the fact that Yoder (with some qualification), Reimer, Johnson, Sobrino, and Moltmann follow one methodology and Weaver another. For the majority, the most important evidence of their creativity is what they do with the incarnation, the embodiment of God as Trinity. With their help, let me sketch the outlines of an internally consistent model of radical Trinitarianism.

Models of Radical Trinitarianism

John Howard Yoder was the defining Mennonite theologian of his generation. He offers a functionalist understanding of Nicaea, and does not dismiss

tradition in principle[68] but qualifies its authority. As soon as Christianity had spread beyond the Jewish world, according to Yoder, the most profound question it faced was how to hold together Jewish monotheism and the claims of the NT concerning Jesus. He approvingly cites the movement from "Sophia" to "Logos" within Scripture, calling it "the real beginning of the doctrine of the Trinity."[69] He notes the political machinations behind Nicaea but does not reduce the theological debate to the political one. He points out that the first version of the Nicene Creed is debated for the half-century following and only codified in the Council of Constantinople in 381.[70] He concludes—with significant qualifiers—that Nicea 381 was the only theological construct adequate to the philosophical challenges of the day. That is, it alone successfully made the claim that Jesus Christ shares in the identity of the God of Israel.

> The doctrine of the Trinity is the solution to an intellectual difficulty that arises if we accept the statements of the Bible. It is not itself a revealed truth but the solution to the word problem we get into when we accept revelation in Jesus, the continuance of that revelation in the Holy Spirit, and hold to monotheism at the same time.… But the problem that the doctrine of the Trinity seeks to resolve, the normativity of Jesus as he relates to the uniqueness of God, is a problem Christians will always face if they are Christian.[71]

Yoder disputes the claim that the Nicene Creed is normative in an absolute sense, that its Hellenistic thought forms are part of its normativity.[72] At the same time he acknowledges that the "naïve historical biblical Trinity" could not on its own deal with the concept of Christ's pre-existence[73] and required Nicaea's theological and philosophical grappling.

To grasp the nuances of J. Denny Weaver's position, we must understand his reading of key Anabaptist thinkers. For instance, he acknowledges that

[68] John Howard Yoder, *Preface to Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2002), 149-56.
[69] Ibid., 190.
[70] Ibid., 199-203.
[71] Ibid., 204.
[72] Ibid., 204-205.
[73] Ibid., 208.

Hubmaier remained in the orbit of classic atonement thought and that Marpeck's Christology was orthodox.[74] Then comes a twist. Weaver concludes that if Mennonitism wants to remain orthodox in relation to its own origins, it must depart from the long tradition.[75] His goal is to show that a consistent Mennonite theology must be based on "peace church assumptions" rather than on "doctrine inherited from classic Protestantism."[76] From the vantage point of Anabaptism's dissenting ecclesiology it was bound over time to reject Trinitarian orthodoxy.[77]

At the heart of Weaver's quest is a re-interpretation of the atonement. Weaver settles on the patristic Christus Victor model but overall does not employ a Trinitarian thought structure. In fact, in his earlier writing on the subject he insists that holding to both a Trinitarian syntax and a radical focus on Jesus is a contradiction.[78] In the second edition of *The Nonviolent Atonement* he takes Trinitarian thinking more seriously without explicitly committing himself to it.[79] He makes use of a principle in the Nicaean tradition: each person of the Trinity participates in all the attributes of God. Weaver uses it to arrive at a major postulate: Jesus' nonviolence becomes the Father's nonviolence.[80] However, Weaver often uses the terms "Jesus" and "God" as if they designate two separate beings. He makes little use of the Father-Son relationship in the Synoptics and John or its later expansion in the process of formulating the Nicene Creed. To what extent, then, is a doctrine of the Trinity integral to Weaver's theology? A lack of clarity intensifies when he rejects any notion implicating the Father in Jesus' death.[81] God is not acting in Jesus on the cross; it is not salvific; it is the outcome solely of how Jesus lived.[82]

This cluster of concerns raises questions that go to the heart of our

[74] J. Denny Weaver, *Anabaptist Theology in Face of Modernity: A Proposal for the Third Millennium* (Telford, PA: Pandora Press US, 2000), 100-104.
[75] Ibid., 100-107, esp. 107.
[76] Ibid., 94-97.
[77] Ibid., 106-109.
[78] Ibid., 112-15.
[79] J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 204-205, 222-26.
[80] Ibid., 245, 271, but also 251.
[81] Ibid., 42, 46, 48.
[82] Ibid.,65.

inquiry. Is there an inherent conflict between discipleship and metaphysics in the formation of Christian identity? How high is the correlation some scholars find between Trinitarianism and violence? How high is the correlation other scholars find between un- or anti-Trinitarianism and violence? Was the Anabaptist affirmation of patristic doctrinal orthodoxy and the negation of its ecclesial orthodoxy a contradiction, or was it evidence of a deeper logic? Did the lingering ambivalence toward orthodoxy create an unstable doctrine of the Triune God, such that it was easily overturned in Mennonite encounters with the Enlightenment and one of its offspring, Liberal Protestantism? I invite readers to bear these questions in mind as I probe the following case studies.

James Reimer's first goal is to establish theology's accountability to tradition, especially to the Nicene Creed, in the face of undogmatic Free Churches such as mainstream Mennonites, where dissent and improvisation have become the norm. He appeals to "classical, confessional orthodoxy" for a way of theologizing adequate for the interface of Scripture and ongoing tradition.

> In this approach "doctrines" would not be considered as static, literalistic propositions (as in twentieth century Fundamentalism) but as a dynamic genre mediating between the diversity of biblical texts and the tradition and the complexity of the contemporary situation.[83]

Reimer offers a much less restrictive endorsement of classical orthodoxy in general and Nicaea in particular. He argues that Constantinianism and orthodoxy are not intrinsically linked.[84] He makes a case for the breadth of Nicaea in that it preserved several strands of NT Christology,[85] and asserts that "Nicaea and Constantinople represent a required development of doctrine beyond the Scriptures."[86] Reimer admits the political misuse of theology

[83] A. James Reimer, *Mennonites and Classical Theology: Dogmatic Foundations for Christian Ethics* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2001), 210. Just before this he makes a detailed inquiry into Kaufman's theology, 138-60. Along the way he adds Denny Weaver to this list, 236ff.
[84] Ibid., 247-49.
[85] Ibid., 257.
[86] Ibid., 264-65.

woven into Nicaea.[87] This hermeneutic of suspicion creates common ground with feminists and liberationists (below), but does not itself decide whether Nicaea remains doctrinally binding.

Reimer uses several Mennonite theologians as a foil for his views. His foundational criticism of Robert Friedman, Harold Bender, John Howard Yoder, and Gordon Kaufman is that they share "an anti-metaphysical and anti-ontological worldview."[88] Ontology, the study of being as such, presupposes that there is an essence to reality; metaphysics is a method of thinking about reality in its essence. Reimer contrasts this worldview with that of historicism, which limits access to reality to the particulars of existence, places the nature of being outside the realm of human knowledge, and emphasizes the realm of ethics and human agency. Taken to its logical conclusion, historicism discounts claims to the knowledge of ultimate being, including revelation. In engaging with Kaufman, Reimer contrasts the two approaches as "ancient, eternal, structural" and "cosmic, evolutionary, historical." His clinching argument is that classic Trinitarianism makes room for both views.[89] Here he contrasts his view with that of Weaver.[90]

Catholic theologian Elizabeth Johnson describes herself as drawing "on the new language of Christian feminist theology as well as the traditional language of Scripture and classical theology."[91] While I am impressed with her creativity in placing herself in relation to current theologizing, I have a number of criticisms of her thought, which I make cautiously because of my conscious and unself-cautious male biases. Although her commitment to the normativity of Nicaea is stronger than Yoder's, it not only includes, but calls for, criticism of interpretations of the Creed that in her view misrepresent the Gospel. Theologizing that arises from the oppression of women judges traditional speech about God to be "humanly oppressive and religiously idolatrous."[92] Strikingly, she accuses Enlightenment theism (the compromise between Trinitarianism and atheism) of fashioning a God abstracted from

[87] Ibid., 269-70.
[88] Ibid., 162. Reimer unfolds his critique in the 100 pages that follow.
[89] Ibid., 139, 148-54.
[90] Ibid., 236.
[91] Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 8.
[92] Ibid., 18.

the world, self-contained, and shorn of attachment to it and healing for it.[93] Johnson carries out her critique on a foundational level; despite the Council of Chalcedon's stricture against confusing Christ's human and divine natures, Jesus' human gender was easily transferred by the church to the threefold God, violating the warning not to transgress on God's incomprehensibility.[94]

Without grappling with the wider texture of the NT, Johnson rejects any reference to Jesus' death as obedience to his Father. She sees it simply as an act of male violence against a defenceless person. Here her writing verges on a caricature of the biblical evidence.[95] As a feminist theologian she is combatting distorted male notions of Jesus' passion in which Jesus becomes a model of submission and passivity. Nevertheless, in completely dismissing the atonement she is violating the Trinitarian grammar central to Catholic tradition. Weaver is more thorough and substantive than Johnson is exploring models of the atonement. He re-interprets ancient thought on the subject but still recognizes that a theology with integrity requires taking seriously a category at the heart of the Christian narrative.[96]

Once she has made her critique clear, Johnson takes into account Christ's full humanity as well as divinity. As a counterpoint to the assumption that Christ must be male even in his divinity, she equates the divine Christ and the feminine Sophia. It is this Christ, as much female as male, who takes on human flesh.[97] Johnson is stretching the inherited categories of thought as far as she can without breaking them.[98] She reminds us "that God is *like* a Trinity, *like* a threefoldness of relation.[99] She adds that this way of speaking signals that God is ultimately unknowable.

The greatest contribution that German Reformed theologian Jürgen Moltmann makes to critical Trinitarian thinking is his radical interpretation of the incarnation in relation to God's identity. The culmination of the Word

[93] Ibid., 19. Sobrino is less pointed than Johnson but still critical of Enlightenment assumptions.
[94] Ibid., 35.
[95] Ibid., 158, 208.
[96] Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement,* 42-50.
[97] Johnson, *She Who Is*, 134ff, 150, 166-69, 193-97.
[98] Catherine Keller, by contrast, grapples with the Nicene syntax but goes beyond it as she constructs an expansive picture of God in *Face of the Deep: a Theology of Becoming* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 220-33.
[99] Johnson, *She Who Is*, 205.

becoming flesh is the cross. It is the place of God's fullest self-disclosure, as the title of Moltmann's most memorable book, *The Crucified God,* suggests. The starting point for his reflection is his four years as a prisoner of war at the end of World War II. In order to address the riddle of an all-loving, all-powerful God and the awfulness of suffering and evil, he returns to the Trinitarian paradigm "to inquire into the revolution needed in the concept of God."[100] He concludes that nothing less can be ventured than that God in Christ suffered on the cross and that God in Christ was forsaken on the cross.[101] This is the point at which the difference is greatest between the active Trinitarian model of God and other models.[102] In the latter, the cross is not salvific; it is solely the outcome of how Jesus lived.[103] In Moltmann's scheme, by contrast, the need for a crucified God is absolute. It is ultimately in Jesus' death with us and for us that the dark enigma of a loving Creator and a disfigured creation is illuminated and revolutionizes the concept of God.[104]

Human suffering, especially that of the poor and abandoned, provides Moltmann's starting point for this inquiry. For him it has immediate social, political, and personal consequences. He acknowledges his debt to his Dietrich Bonhoeffer as well as to Latin American liberation theologians, and uses Bonhoeffer's unforgettable words from to set the tone:

> God lets himself be pushed out of the world onto the cross. He looks weak and powerless, and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which he is with us and helps us. Matt 8.17 makes it quite clear that Christ helps us, not by virtue of his omnipotence, but by virtue of his weakness and suffering.[105]

In order to probe the deeper meaning of this assertion Moltmann places two motifs side by side. One motif is Paul's "word of the cross" (1 Cor. 1:18-2:5). It looks back at Jesus' death from the vantage point of the

[100] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (London: SCM, 1974), 4.
[101] Ibid., 227-35, also 151. This was Menno Simons' view. See footnote 26.
[102] Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, 42, 46, 48, 65. Weaver rejects any notion that implicates God in Jesus' death. In his model there is no need of a crucified God.
[103] Ibid., 65.
[104] Ibid., 146-52.
[105] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, enlarged ed. (New York: Collier, 1971), 360.

resurrection and the realization that the Crucified One is the Lord of Glory. The other is that Jesus the historical figure must govern what is claimed for him as Christ.[106] Trying to hold these claims together raises four daunting questions: "How can the intransitory God be in a transitory human being? How can the universal God be in an individual? How can the unchangeable God 'become' flesh? How can the immortal God suffer and die on a cross?"[107] These questions arise from and depend on the incarnation. Without this supreme act of God's solidarity with humanity and creation, there would be no point in asking them.

Condensing the origins of modern German philosophy and theology into a few phrases, Moltmann cautions against the reductionism of Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schleiermacher in pursuit of ontological questions such as those above. In Kant's worldview, ethics replaces metaphysics; in Schleiermacher's, religious experience replaces metaphysics.[108] Thus, Kant provides the scaffolding for social activism as the essence of religion, while Schleiermacher provides the scaffolding for dependence on the Absolute as the essence. In Enlightenment thought, Jesus first becomes the perfect human and then one of a series of perfect humans in every religion. His death appears as the consequence of how he lived; it has no significance beyond that.[109]

Moltmann's prescription against such reductionism is twofold. One is to press the paradox of Christ's two natures as far as he can. He concludes that nothing can be said but that God in Christ suffered on the cross and that God in Christ was forsaken on the cross.[110] This is where the difference is greatest between Trinitarian and non-Trinitarian models. Weaver rejects any notion that implicates God in Jesus' death;[111] the cross is not salvific; it is the outcome solely of how Jesus lived.[112] For Moltmann the need for a crucified God is absolute. This necessarily raises the question of God's "impassibility."

---

[106] Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 73, 86. This is also a key methodological commitment of Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1985), xxiii; 102-108; 338-40.
[107] Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 88.
[108] Ibid., 92-96.
[109] Ibid., 96-98.
[110] Ibid., 227-35, also 151. This was Menno Simons's view. See footnote 26.
[111] Ibid., 42, 46, 48.
[112] Ibid., 65.

In the orthodox picture, God cannot be moved by anything outside God, but God can will to move. Daniel Castelo sharply criticizes Moltmann for a simplistic reading of patristic theology on the subject, but the debate can continue because both Castelo and Moltmann share a common grammar to which they can be held accountable.[113]

According to the gospels, Moltmann argues, the earliest missionaries proclaimed the resurrection of the crucified Jesus. The resurrection was "a staggering novelty" oriented to the future that took Jesus beyond the expectations of Israel.[114] Thus the preaching of the resurrection of the crucified One is the apostolic form of Jesus' preaching of the kingdom. This surprising equation is the origin of Christology.[115] Behind it lies the unfathomable mystery of the Son's abandonment by the Father. What happened in that desertion tells us more than anything else who Jesus is. Since he was the faithfulness of God in the flesh, it is God's identity that is ultimately at stake. Thus, the resurrection revolutionizes the concept of God.[116]

Moltmann so focuses the question of God in relation to human and creaturely suffering that he portrays Christ mostly as a victim who bears all human brokenness in his body. In keeping with his strong incarnational bent, Moltmann might have made more of Christ's divine embrace of humanity: the Word taking on the fullness of our flesh in order to save it. Thomas Finger does just that. Interestingly, his thinking is indebted to Moltmann, especially at the point of the Father's abandonment of the Son.[117] But on the cross Jesus is not only victim but victor. Finger makes selective use of motifs from all the historic theories of the atonement to arrive at this assessment.[118]

Jon Sobrino, a Catholic liberation theologian in El Salvador, takes radical positions arising from that nation's poverty. Coming out of what he calls an abstract dogmatic tradition, he is interested in bringing Christology back to its starting point in the Jesus of history. This is the opposite to the

[113] Daniel Castelo, "Moltmann's Dismissal of Divine Impassibility: Warranted?", *Scottish Journal of Theology* 61, no. 4 (2008): 396-407.
[114] Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 105-107.
[115] Ibid., 117-23.
[116] Ibid., 146-152.
[117] Thomas Finger, *Christian Theology: An Eschatological Approach,* vol. 1 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985), 338-42.
[118] Ibid., 325-48.

starting point of theologians from dogmatically lean and concrete traditions, such as Finger and Reimer, who are eager to place the Jesus of history within a Christological framework. Sobrino's methodology roots theology in the historical Jesus. Yet his historicism is not reductive, because he places it within a Trinitarian paradigm: "This Christology is meant to be a trinitarian Christology. . . . Latin American theology of liberation . . . is reinstating trinitarian reflection as a serious theological theme."[119] The abstractness of doctrinal constructions is overcome in the concreteness of the incarnation and its culmination in the cross.[120] Jesus' engagement with the poor and their oppressors "flowed naturally from the inner dynamism of the incarnation."[121] Christology begins with seeing the historical Jesus from the vantage point of his resurrection. Dogmatic reflection is a necessary pursuit with the goal of summarizing the meaning of Christ, but it never displaces the historical figure as the first reference point.

Finger shares Sobrino's instinct to begin with the historical Jesus but makes it more explicitly part of his methodology. Finger's goal is to show how a Triune picture of God integrates everything. In order to develop a Christology shaped from the bottom up, he begins with anthropology and the rest of creation and then redemption; starting with the Spirit, going to the Son, and finally to the Father.[122]

Sobrino further qualifies the role of dogma as "an affirmation of faith formulated as doctrine and authoritatively put forward by the church's magisterium in order to defend the faith against some heresy."[123] Dogma makes explicit what is implicit in Scripture. At the same time, it does not exhaust the content of faith, nor does it replace the original witness in Scripture. Sobrino offers twin insights into the relationship between the Bible and church teaching: (1) dogma has a limit function—it helps us recognize when we have reached the boundary of knowing and when to surrender our egos to the mystery that is God; (2) dogma always points beyond itself—we "verify the truth of the Christological formula on the basis of the things said

[119] Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, xxiii.
[120] Ibid., 201-202.
[121] Ibid., 207.
[122] Finger, *Christian Theology*, 407-39.
[123] Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, 317.

about the person of the historical Jesus and his destiny."[124]

Sobrino's acute focus on history is well grounded. It challenges the Catholic Church to measure its dogmatic pronouncements against the history in which they arose. It is on the historical plane that he sees the relevance of the Gospel, because he is addressing the injustices afflicting the country in which he is theologizing. Perhaps because of his understandable preoccupation with ending oppression he does not delve into the relationship between the incarnation and creation at large. Here Finger has something to offer, in that he integrates this concern into a coherent cluster of beliefs. The constant, eternal interaction of the three persons in oneness draws the creation into the divine orbit that ultimately issues in the incarnation.[125] Finger makes the most of his theology of the incarnation and the coming of the Spirit to back his assertion that God's very self dwells with the creation and is moving it toward its final liberation.

In contrast with the above models that arrive at radical worship and ethics by means of the Trinity, some seminal thinkers have left that model behind. James Cone, Glen Stassen, and Walter Wink are prophetic figures who have radicalized Christians and others to think of peacemaking and justice-seeking as the heart of Jesus' ministry and the coming of God's reign. They have brought thousands of people (including me) closer to thinking and living in the spirit of Jesus. However, all three have explicitly stepped outside a Trinitarian confession late in their careers and can no longer be read as they once were read. While this essay cannot pursue all the questions that this shift raises, let me ask two: (1) Does anything of significance in their ethic change with their changed frame of reference? (2) What made the Trinitarian symbol inadequate to their ethic?[126] (By contrast, the two-generations-ago prophets of the nonviolent kingdom—Dorothy Day, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Jean Lasserre, and André Trocmé—cannot be understood without the Trinitarian frame of reference that grounded their radicality.)

I have argued that the starting point for addressing the chasm between

[124] Ibid., 325-26.

[125] Finger, *Christian Theology*, 447.

[126] See Walter Wink, *The Human Being: Jesus and the Enigma of the Son of Man* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 139-44.

God's love and human suffering is the incarnation. John's confession that "the Word became flesh" is the most profound claim of the Gospel. Everything else flows from that premise. That of God which we call "the Word" took on creatureliness, our humanity. Its logic is baffling, to be sure. To speak of the divine becoming one with the human is to drive a square peg into a round hole. There is no rational explanation for this claim. But neither Cone, Stassen, nor Wink is known for either an earthbound rationalism or an aversion to mystery. What, then, accounts for their giving up a Trinitarian grammar?

Modern thought, as expressed in the Enlightenment, made rational explanation the criterion for all claims about reality. Orthodox teaching on the incarnation was suspect not only because of its non-rationality but because of its formulation by a church that had stifled free thought. These contentions were also the basis of Enlightenment Mennonite thinking. The consequence of this reductionist view was the God of the Deists and Jesus as a great prophet.

I have pursued two related goals in this inquiry into historical case studies. One goal was show that the marginalization of Nicene Trinitarian patterns of thought has inevitably led to unitarianism. The other was to articulate a tentative correlation between Nicene Trinitarianism and radical discipleship, ethics, and ecclesiology.

Unscientific Postscript

Conclusions do not easily come to mind in a topic of this magnitude. But I will share a few provisional hunches the research has left me with. Several years ago, in short succession I heard an address by a leader of Mennonite Church USA and read an article by a leader of Mennonite Church Canada. Both the address and the article urged our denomination to deal with conflicting convictions on fundamental questions by leaving them aside and focusing on "following Jesus." On one level no one could argue with this, but on another level it begs the question: Which Jesus—Galenus Abrahamsz's or Thielemann van Braght's?

In order to address such fundamental questions we need first principles that give a subject coherence and establish what is normative within a system of thought. I wouldn't dare to use the term "metaphysics" myself,

but the Spanish Mennonite theologian, Antonio Gonzalez, does: "The fear of metaphysics is a hindrance for theology. Theology tries to understand reality in a radical way, and somehow is bound to use human conceptual instruments to think it."[127] The canonical Jesus Christ is the entry point for doing theology, but this task entails metaphysical reflection because all quests for meaning end up asking questions about the ultimate. In the case of the Trinity, we turn to Nicaea as the symbol of Trinitarian belief when more straightforward ways of naming and living God's revelation, like "following Jesus," aren't enough to keep us faithful.

As I pointed out earlier, Protestant traditions have a looser structure for the relationship between biblical and doctrinal thinking than does Catholicism. For one thing, the hermeneutical community is wider; for Mennonites it includes the congregation. In making my case I will go one major step further than Yoder's reading of the creeds. Yoder clearly affirms Nicaea as the most profound statement of Trinitarian faith in its day, but I would add that no subsequent engagement with God's threesome-ness can say less than Nicaea (along with Chalcedon's clarifications) in order to be faithful to the Gospel. What does this look like? The image that comes to mind is a circular movement between the Bible and the church as it grapples with the meaning of God's revelation. In this model, "tradition" is made up of each generation's engagement with Scripture, building on all previous ones. Thus, orthodoxy is not only teaching but process. Both need to be in place as a frame of reference for the unruliness that is inevitable in our ambiguous experience of reality.

The doctrine of the Trinity—both as a belief and a way of thinking—has shown itself able to hold together in a dynamic relationship between the Bible's witness to God's self-revelation, the Creed as its symbol, and its reception across the ages. Its grammar makes room for improvisations on the Trinitarian melody by the likes of Yoder, Weaver, Reimer, Johnson, Moltmann, and Sobrino. The church is obligated to take their dissent and innovation seriously because they hold their thinking accountable to a shared Trinitarian faith. By contrast, unitarianism in all its guises is inherently unstable and reductive, because it is impatient with mystery; its constant mindset is continually to abridge what must be believed.

[127] Personal correspondence, February 25, 2019.

My final observation is that Trinitarian theologizing is ecumenical by nature. This was obvious to the churches of the 4th century. They met at Nicaea because they realized that they needed one another in order to resolve the gaping discord among them concerning God's self-disclosure. The very structure of their belief was at stake. That is the case again today.[128]

John D. Rempel is Senior Fellow at the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre.

[128] I want to thank Antonio Gonzalez, Richard Kauffman, and Steven Siebert for their critical engagement with my ideas, and Arnold Neufeld-Fast for his help in accessing out-of-print documents.

The Scandalous Drama of Trinitarian Theology for a Radical Church

P. Travis Kroeker

Abstract

The theological vision of Julian of Norwich (1342-1423) is thoroughly Trinitarian yet scandalously radical in its implications. Her theology is compatible with the "vernacular mysticism" that influenced the Radical Reformation, but it will require Anabaptists to commit to the biblical witness that goes beyond conventional doctrinal or traditional logics.

When I was a graduate student at the University of Chicago, I was always amused when walking past the Unitarian church in Hyde Park to see that on the steeple was not a cross but a classic weathervane, complete with a rooster.[1] Aha, I thought, what better symbol for a tradition unanchored by the incarnational unity of the crucified messiah with the one God than one that is "buffeted to and fro by every wind of doctrine" (Eph. 4:14)—a weathervane moored to a cock! Imagine my surprise when I later learned that in the ninth century Pope Nicholas made the cock official as a symbol of Peter's betrayal of Jesus that should be displayed in all churches, and that many did so in the form of weathervanes on steeples. Was the pope being pious, ironic, self-critical, prophetic? Nicholas was also instrumental in expanding papal power (and Petrine political primacy) in Charlemagne's Holy Roman Empire in the heart of Christendom. These are the strange ironies, perhaps even paradoxes of language, iconography, and tradition: On what is Petrine authority and primacy founded? Why are Unitarians so patently or ironically faithful to that traditional symbolism? What is the unity that holds the key to the "one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord,

[1] This essay is a response to John Rempel, "An Impossible Task: Trinitarian Theology for a Radical Church?", *The Conrad Grebel Review* 37, no. 2 (Spring 2019): 110-45. Page references to Rempel's essay appear in parentheses.

The Conrad Grebel Review 37, no. 2 (Spring 2019): 146-153.

one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:4f.)?

It is a privilege to respond to John Rempel's essay on the highly controversial question of the Trinity: How can three persons (Father, Son, Holy Ghost; Creator, Christ, Holy Spirit) be one God? I agree with Rempel's claim, negatively stated, that Trinitarian theology is not inherently conservative nor need it be aligned with violence (though it must engage with the questions of violence if it is to be related to the Cross as atonement). And also, positively stated, that an unruly but accountable Trinitarian grammar may be the source of a radical ecclesiology that practices a sacrificial servanthood of nonviolence. Rempel rightly relates the Trinity to the "Eucharistic drama" of the "Lord's supper" which incorporates its participants into the messianic body of the Incarnation. From the beginning of Christian scripture, this will entail participation in the messianic scandal of the eternal Word made flesh, an impossible mixing of categories that violates all rational realisms—a principle first expressed in Plato's *Symposium* 203a: "no god mingles with human beings,"[2] a realism shared by our fellow monotheists who regard Trinitarian Christians as idolaters. The ancient Romans considered Christians to be atheists for worshiping a human being as divine, and (post) Enlightenment philosophers would agree—it is dangerously superstitious to use theological language in such unprincipled ways. One can hardly blame such skepticism, given our shared world and its complex histories.

These differences cannot be sorted out structurally or logically or doctrinally—only dramatically and in living language tied to daily embodied sacramental practices. I agree with Rempel about that, if this is what he is saying. Interestingly, while many (post)Enlightenment Christian theologians who are often intellectually embarrassed by theological language (like Gordon Kaufman) would like us to stop using theological terminology, such as Trinity, eternal life, virgin birth, and resurrection, another post-Enlightenment tradition of dramatic thinking (Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, Blake) agrees with Plato and other existential thinkers that we

[2] My translation of *Theos de anthropo ou mignutai*, based on Augustine's *nullus Deus miscetur hominis*, in *City of God* 8.18, 20; 9.1, 16. Against Plato's principle of erotic mediation, Augustine insists on the Trinitarian scandal of messianic mediation: only the divine Word made flesh can liberate us from bondage to disordered love.

cannot do away with mythical and dramatic languages in coming to terms with the mysteries of our lived reality. The big existential, social-political, and ethical question remains: By which drama/s and figural enactments will we orient and live our lives? This, as Rempel rightly insists, is the critical question regarding truth, beauty, and goodness, and above all, I suggest, it entails asking what, whom, or how will we *love*?

At the heart of the Trinity lies the drama of kenosis, incarnation, cross and resurrection in which, the New Testament writers consistently proclaim, we are called to become participants if the world is to be "saved." What could this salvation possibly entail, and why is it a vision of true health and well-being for the whole world, and not simply a religious, political, or academic power game played by Christians?

Consider the narrative of Peter, who betrays Jesus out of fear or embarrassment. In Matthew 16 he is given the revelation of Jesus' identity as the Messiah, "the son of the living God" (early Trinitarian language), and Jesus blesses him and gives him the "keys of the kingdom" that binds and looses in heaven and on earth. That binding and loosing has to do with forgiveness from sin (Matt. 18:15-22), but immediately after this lofty "revelation" from the "heavenly Father," Peter rebukes Jesus for saying that his messianic mission requires crucifixion and not coronation. Jesus curses him: "Get behind me, Satan! You are a scandal to me, for you are not on the side of God" (Matt. 16:23). In other words, the revealed "doctrine" neither saves Peter nor provides him with the "interpretive key" to theology as a whole, any more than the revelation of God's name to Moses in Ex. 3:14 does: "I am who I am//I will be who I will be." The revelation of the hidden God's identity entails a wilderness journey of complete, utterly vulnerable faith (cf. Heb. 11-12).

Augustine in his extensive reflection on the Trinity and theology suggests that the key to interpretation is not *scientia* or "*gnosis*" knowledge but *caritas* or *agape* love, revealed above all in "the form of the servant" in Philippians.[3] Here he agrees with Paul in 1 Cor. 8. The ground of

[3] See Augustine, *Teaching Christianity*, trans. Edmund Hill, Works of Saint Augustine I/11, Book I (New York: New City Press, 1996); Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill, Works of Saint Augustine I/5 Books I-IV (New York: New City Press, 1991). The "power of caritas" is brought to perfection in the "weakness of humility."

messianic authority regarding divine agency and character—the Trinitarian grammar—is less conceptual than existential, a process of formation by following the revelation of a mystery in complete lived obedience. Here I see a strong connection with the "*nachfolge Christi*" of the Anabaptists, in contrast to the doctrine of the Trinity as a set of rules and concepts for correct understanding. I'm not finally sure where Rempel takes his stand on this Pauline-Augustinian hermeneutical key. With Paul, Augustine, and the early Anabaptists, I'm less moved by creedal formulations of Trinitarian grammar than by dramatic accounts of the logos becoming flesh (John 1) by not clinging to divine identity (the *kenosis* of Phil. 2).

This is not to reduce theological affirmations to "ecclesiological assumptions." Quite the contrary, as creeds can also be so reduced! Here I disagree with John Howard Yoder's approval of the movement from Sophia to Logos—as if this is an either/or logic. I'm more open to feminist theologians such as Elizabeth Johnson and Julian of Norwich. The Trinity is a lived economy into the dynamic movement of which we are invited as participants, not a conceptual logic that sorts things out at the level of formal "belief." I think the latter emphasis is more an inheritance of neo-scholastic orthodoxy and Enlightenment liberal Protestantism than of the radical Anabaptist path of monastic (not necessarily celibate or cloistered) discipleship lived out in the everyday world through the mystical body of Christ becoming conformed to the divine image in a social-communal process of deification, a thoroughly existential Trinitarian drama. Augustine's profound reflections on the psychological image of the Trinity (the inner *imago Dei*, the silent Word) is not individualistic and private; rather, it is closely related to the "exemplum" of Christ as a fully social, embodied, relational, indeed cosmic and apocalyptic, revelation of the divine economy that nevertheless remains a mystery.[4]

Here I will turn to the first female vernacular (not doctrinal) theologian of the English-speaking world, from whom Augustinians and Anabaptists could learn a few things, namely Julian of Norwich (1342-1423) and her *Revelations of Love*. Her theological vision is thoroughly Trinitarian

[4] See Travis Kroeker, "Augustine's Messianic Political Theology: An Apocalyptic Critique of Political Augustinianism," in *Messianic Political Theology and Diaspora Ethics: Essays in Exile* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017), chapter 3.

yet scandalously radical in its implications for Trinitarian theology in our own time no less than hers—not least because she remains very closely and existentially attuned to the dramatic center, the cross of Christ. Julian includes an extensive allegory on the Lord and the Servant, based upon the kenotic hymn in Phil. 2 and the second Adam's reversal of the first Adam's fall—which she extends to the *kenosis* of Mary and the central images of womb and tomb in her visions.[5]

Julian also offers a striking vision of the redemptive passion of Christ for the world. This vision makes her "laugh greatly," recognizing that attunement to the great pain of the world (its sin that causes such suffering), sought out and felt with compassion by all who follow in the path of divine redemption, is the result of participating in a great love. We should not fear this pain but rather rejoice that we can still feel it. Life itself is still present in this point—a womb, a cross, and a tomb, the pathways of everyday human natality, suffering, and mortality where kenotic death may become another birth in which the logos made flesh is kept alive in a world on the point of death. Julian also includes a vision of at-one-ment with the divine Trinity that "knits together" not only Father, Son, and Holy Spirit but also relations such as mother, spouse, and lover in a communion including (as Paul also says) "all things" in an intimate union where there is no violence and no wrath, only love.

Such a vision of atonement as kenotic compassion has real political theological implications that will not allow church or state to use the cross as an instrument of violence based on fear, obsessive attention to the sins of others, or retributive punishment of those who disagree. For Julian the cross is precisely an instrument of retributive justice as public torture designed to instill power as fear. It reveals a punitive rejection of Jesus, whose everyday, non-professional life was devoted to embodying divine love of all, especially the despised victims of power games who are labeled and shunned as sinners, enemies, outcasts, criminals, and heretics. Julian's vision also scandalizes by revealing that the Trinitarian God of relations also includes a community

[5] *A Book of Showings to the Anchoress Julian of Norwich*, Long Text, chapter 51, the basis for her extensive elaborations in chapters 52-63. See *Julian of Norwich: Showings* (Classics of Western Spirituality), trans. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1978).

of divine names, not only fathers and sons but also mothers, lovers, and daughters. Indeed, Jesus symbolized as the "Word made flesh" cannot be understood otherwise, since Mary is completely and intimately involved from the beginning! Not only Mary (and the son knitted together in her womb) but "all things" are being "at-oned" in a process in which God and the whole range of relations entailed in divine love, from the greatest to the least, will erase all human-all-too-human distinctions of power, hierarchy, nobility, and rank in the mysterious completion of divine Trinitarian love.

There are two related striking and highly subversive scandal claims in Julian's dramatic and visionary account of the Trinitarian grammar. The first claim is that sin is literally a "nothing" that underlies the problem of evil and that generates violent attempts to solve it. Augustine also saw this, but Julian radicalizes it with laughter, scorn, and consolation: The "fiend" representing the power of sin/evil is decisively overcome in divine love. Yet God in love has created a cosmos in which sin as negation and pain/suffering is always possible as a refusal of love, a pain that love is willing to accept ("suffer"). This acceptance is revealed above all in viewing sin as "behovely," as Julian puts it, befitting the drama of divine love in which God's very being is willing to suffer the pain of love without "solving" it in practices taken up by the devil, whose power is focused on fear, wrath against sin, and a blaming or vengeful mode of justice that refuses the patience of resistance as "waiting." But this waiting is anything but passive; it is a highly challenging practice of knowing that we must constantly work to unknow the powerful illusions that deny the cosmic claim that suffering love overcomes evil, not violent attempts to wipe it out in a final solution. The cross for Julian is not a symbol of divine wrath; she says vehemently (in the Long Text, chapters 48-49) that in God she sees "no wrath." The wrath is all on the human side and rooted in both a deception about what should be feared and a narrative of retributive justice—in which the Satan/devil/fiend is an expert.

However, that leaves us with a problem, Julian suggests. Christ on the cross, if not a symbol of triumph in a narrative of retributive justice and imperial power based on his sacrifice, must then be a symbol of failure: the suffering of God-abandonment by God's messianic servant being put to death (this is what scandalizes Jesus' immediate male disciples). It seems to intensify a narrative of failure, the failure of divine love so understood. In his

death Jesus is not only in an agony of physical suffering but torn apart by an experience of seemingly being abandoned in his hour of greatest need—not only by his disciples but by God ("My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"). The fiend seems to have won the narrative war, and the actions of so-called Christians that come later seem to prove it in word and in deed. They turn the practices of knowledge in the church into exactly the kind of power games that put Jesus to death, and for the same reason: focusing on fear of sin and evil-doing, trying to find a political-religious solution to the problem by getting rid of it, and possessing just authority and the success that comes with it. Julian claims that this narrative misses key aspects of the revelation, and that Mary and the other female lovers of Jesus are perhaps closer to its true meaning.

The second scandal claim is not only that the revealed God is a Trinity of relations as Augustine says but that the community of names for God includes not only fathers and sons but also mothers, lovers, and daughters. The God who enacts the overcoming of sin/evil in the form of the servant even unto death, mediates this both in the son and in the female servant Mary, who consents to his birth in her womb and is present in the final suffering of his death. Jesus symbolized as the word made flesh cannot be understood otherwise, since Mary is completely involved. Not only Mary but "all things" are being "knitted together" in a process of at-one-ment in which God will erase all distinctions of power, hierarchy, nobility, rank—it will be "all God" in its completion. God is Father, Mother, Lord, and Servant, and more, beyond all containment or possessive naming.

How does this knitting or joining together in the "divine body" come about? With a good deal of social subversion and gender bending? No, but through divine love: humble, vulnerable, unafraid of sin/evil, patient (willing to suffer), and unwilling that anything, even the smallest part of "all things," should remain unloved in practices of com-passion. Here Julian cites the terms of previous Christian thinkers (Augustine, Anselm, Revelation, Paul, Matthew) as well as Jewish and Hebrew texts. Just as this revelation does not belong only to her, and the Hebrew scriptures do not belong only to Jews, "the body of Christ" does not belong only to Christians. All are contained in a larger memory and drama that finally goes beyond containment even if always experienced in a spatio-temporal point. God as Mother is not

contained by gender; in fact, the revelation subverts strict gender-based identities as the ground of knowing, since this ground contains "all things" and the only access to it is by giving up our ego as the point of containing knowledge. In the end, suggests Julian (Long Text, chapter 73), the divine drama of atonement will heal us from two kinds of sin-sickness: *impatience*, which leads to an anxious search for solutions rather than an ability to endure or be patient, the root of com-passion (waiting for divine love); and *despair*, an obsessive attention to suffering and death to the point of hopelessness rather than practicing gifts of humble love in the divine point of presence in the everyday.

I believe Julian of Norwich's Trinitarian theology is compatible with the "vernacular mysticism" that influenced the ecclesiologies of the Radical Reformation, which envisioned "the body of Christ" as a kind of "monasticism in the world." However, it will require Anabaptists to become more radical in committing to the figural drama of the biblical witness that goes beyond conventional doctrinal or traditional logics in the service of the scandalous divine love for a sinful, suffering world.

P. Travis Kroeker is Professor of Religious Studies at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario.

Scripture and the Nicene Gift

Andrea D. Saner

Abstract

The Nicene Creed's relation to the Bible is neither a solution to a problem the text poses nor an articulation of the judgments of individual passages. In illuminating the movement of the Christian life toward the Father, by the Spirit and in communion with the Son, this Trinitarian creed is a gift.

John Rempel takes the place and point of theology to be "not an attempt to explain God but to worship God with our minds" (110).[1] He rightly suggests that moving away from Trinitarian theological grammar impedes Christian life, not only because the divinity of Christ substantiates authority for Christ's teachings but because Trinitarian grammar clarifies what is expressible in the divine economy. As Scripture witnesses, it is the Spirit who draws us to the Father through the Son, and this action includes reminding us of what Jesus taught, thereby empowering us to follow in the way of his teachings. As Jesus tells the disciples, "the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you" (John 14:26). This statement comes in the midst of a discourse in which he states that those who keep his commandments abide in him, though he is going to the Father. Going to the Father, he sends the Spirit, who teaches and guides his followers in the way that leads to the Father. What is at stake in debates about the Trinity is at the heart of salvation itself. Christian life *is* the Spirit's drawing us, in union with Christ, to the Father.

Scripture invites this way of speaking about Christian life, and Rempel alludes to the biblical bases of Nicene faith in his essay. Offering examples of creative theologians who hold themselves accountable to the doctrine of the Triune God, he critiques J. Denny Weaver and Elizabeth Johnson for

[1] This essay is a response to John Rempel, "An Impossible Task: Trinitarian Theology for a Radical Church?", *The Conrad Grebel Review* 37, no. 2 (Spring 2019): 110-45. Page references to Rempel's essay appear in parentheses.

The Conrad Grebel Review 37, no. 2 (Spring 2019): 154-162.

using too narrow a range of biblical texts in addressing the Son's relation to the Father. Weaver "makes little use of the Father-Son relationship in the Synoptics and John or its later expansion in the process of formulating the Nicene Creed" (134), and "without grappling with the wider texture of the NT, Johnson rejects any reference to Jesus' death as obedience to his Father. [. . .] Here her writing verges on a caricature of the Biblical evidence" (137). Moreover, in a postscript Rempel suggests a vision of ongoing reading of Scripture in a church shaped by the Nicene Creed.

However, probing Rempel's view provides an opportunity for developing his proposal at the point of this intersection. Rempel states that "only the model of God as Trinity can make explicit the Bible's implicit claim that Jesus Christ is both divine and human" (110-11). This statement looks to support the biblical basis of Nicaea. It recalls an argument by Lutheran theologian David Yeago that in order to understand Scripture's relationship to the Nicene Creed, we must distinguish and order the concepts and judgments of the text: "the Nicene *homoousion* [. . .] describes a pattern of judgements present *in* the texts, in the texture of scriptural discourse concerning Jesus and the God of Israel."[2] This language of "judgements" and "concepts" differs from Rempel's language of "implicit" and "explicit," but seems a plausible way to interpret what Rempel means. Moreover, Rempel evokes John Howard Yoder[3] for the point that "the Nicene Creed was the only formulation of the disputed God questions of the 4th century that did justice to the implications of New Testament claims" (113). In the following section I describe Yeago's argument and its commonalities with Yoder's account, before turning to a critique of Yeago that suggests how attending to the exegetical character of early Trinitarian debates could advance Rempel's argument, even as it renders more complex the issue of the authority of Nicene faith among heirs of the Radical Reformation.

[2] David S. Yeago, "The New Testament and the Nicene Dogma: A Contribution to the Recovery of Theological Exegesis," *Pro Ecclesia* 3, no. 2 (1994): 153.

[3] [Perhaps the most well-known Mennonite theologian of the 20th century, Yoder is also remembered for his long-term sexual harassment and abuse of women. Documentation and discussion of these abuses is found at http://mennoniteusa.org/menno-snapshots/john-howard-yoder-digest-recent-articles-about-sexual-abuse-and-discernment-2/ and in Mennonite Quarterly Review 89, no. 1 (January 2015).—Ed.]

Yeago and Yoder

David Yeago has argued that the earliest Christians, calling on the name of Jesus in worship, already identified him with YHWH, the one God of Israel. In their preaching and worship, the apostles reflected an understanding that "in the resurrection and exaltation the God of Israel has *identified himself* with the particular human being, Jesus of Nazareth."[4] In Philippians 2, Jesus receives "the name above every name," about which "there can be little doubt" that what is meant is the divine name, YHWH.[5] Moreover, the text's allusion to Isa. 45:21-24 is striking, given that the Isaiah passage articulates the incomparability of Israel's God: "for I am God, there is no other." Yet Phil. 2:10-11 identifies this incomparable God with another, namely Jesus. "If 'there is no other,' how can the bending of knees and the loosing of tongues at the name of some other be compatible, much less identified, with the recognition of the 'glory' of the God of Israel?"[6] Yeago concludes that "A strong case can be made that the judgment about Jesus and God made in the Nicene Creed—the judgment that they are 'of one substance' or 'one reality'—is indeed 'the same,' in a basically ordinary and unmysterious way, as that made in a New Testament text such as Philippians 2:6ff."[7]

The editors of John Howard Yoder's *Preface to Theology* emphasize the importance of Phil. 2:5-11 for Yoder's understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity: "Nicaea and Chalcedon are but particular outcomes of developments begun in Scripture and, in particular, in the hymn of Philippians 2."[8] Yoder first discusses Phil. 2 in *Preface* in the midst of names and titles for Jesus in the synoptic gospels, noting that "Lord" is "a term that was probably more important than all of the others in the early church."[9] In a Roman worldview "Lord" was used for the worship of Caesar, and in Hebrew "Lord" is the appropriate way to vocalize the unspoken divine name, YHWH.[10] This title

[4] Ibid., 154.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid., 156.
[7] Ibid., 160.
[8] Stanley Hauerwas and Alex Sider, "Introduction," in John Howard Yoder, *Preface to Theology: Christology and Theological Method* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2002), 18. The index lists 20 references to this chapter in addition to a nine-page section devoted to it.
[9] Ibid., 71.
[10] Ibid., 72.

"is the center of the early Christian confession of faith. This was the strongest thing that the early church could say about Jesus."[11] This statement is almost identical to Yeago's on the confession "that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:11): "Within the thought-world of Israel's Scriptures, no stronger affirmation of the bond between the risen Jesus and the God of Israel is possible."[12]

Summarizing his argument on the biblical basis of the doctrine of the Trinity, Yoder says this: "That there is God the Father, that there is the Son, that there is the Spirit—and that these three are the same—*that* much we can find in the Bible."[13] In this passage, which Rempel quotes, Yoder suggests that the doctrine of the Trinity has arisen because of an "intellectual difficulty" or a "word problem" arising from biblical statements about God. While Yeago understands the Nicene Creed as an articulation of the judgments of Phil. 2:5-11, Yoder views it as one solution to the difficulty the text poses. For him, this particular articulation of the solution is not authoritative, although the problem is. This point is important because, as Rempel moves beyond Yoder in advocating for Nicene language, so his argument becomes open to being taken in a direction even more akin to Yeago's argument.

Yoder's way of framing the matter should be understood in light of his context; he builds on the state of theological education in 1960. This may explain his failure to account for the exegetical nature of early Trinitarian debates and his indebtedness to a contrast between Hebrew and Greek languages and philosophical outlooks.[14] These limitations affect his account of the post-apostolic period, whereas his account of the writing of the NT is more historically and exegetically nuanced.

Yoder's extended exegesis of Phil. 2 differs instructively from Yeago's account in that Yoder recognizes the openness of the passage to multiple interpretations. First, he suggests that there are two "obvious" ways of taking the references to image/form and equality. One is to say that image/form and equality are parallel, identical, the same—and that this is what Christ gave up. He emptied himself; this is his *kenosis*. So, "the form of God" is

[11] Ibid., 73.
[12] Yeago, "The New Testament and the Nicene Dogma," 155.
[13] Yoder, *Preface*, 204.
[14] Hauerwas and Sider, "Introduction" to *Preface*, 22-23.

more or less equivalent to the Greek *doxa* and to the Hebrew *kabod*. Yoder brings several OT and NT texts together to reflect on what this "form" might mean, arguing that it is more Hebraic to think of it as "light" (cf. 2 Cor. 4:6; Rev. 21:23; Exod. 24:10; Rev. 4:3). If this is so, various meanings of *kenosis* are possible.[15]

Second, Yoder observes that another interpretation says that equality with God was not something that Christ originally possessed, but was something within his grasp that he chose not to seize, unlike Adam, who strove to be like God. "After the model of what Adam should have done," Christ refused "to seize that which was not yet his;" he refused disobedience.[16] The same question can be posed with regard to the lordship of Jesus. Is the "now" in which "every knee shall bow" from eternity (that is, pre-existent), or "is this exaltation the reward, the results, and the recompense for his humiliation and his death"?[17] Many will think it is "simply the unveiling of what was always the case."[18] While either reading is plausible, Yoder suggests that the reward or results reading was intended by the author but the "pre-existent" reading later became preferred. The former is "the more literal, the more historical, and therefore, on general grounds, the more likely reading."[19] However, this reading loses force in the canon as NT authors, responding to their own contexts, identify Christ with creation, suggesting something like the later notion of pre-existence,[20] place Christ above the OT story as its fulfillment, and further develop their understanding of incarnation. Therefore, the reading of Phil. 2 suggesting that Jesus *became* the Son (or Lord) through obedience gives way to the sense that "equality with God" suggests "a *prior* divine dignity of some kind."[21]

In sum, Yoder acknowledges the plausibility of multiple readings of Phil. 2:5-11 and the influence of cultural and philosophical contexts on theological statements within the text. I suggest that Rempel and his readers

[15] Yoder, *Preface*, 82-83.
[16] Ibid., 84.
[17] Ibid., 86.
[18] Ibid., 86.
[19] Ibid., 87.
[20] Ibid., 123.
[21] Ibid., 124.

should follow this more nuanced direction of Yoder's work rather than adhere to the similarities Yoder shares with Yeago. I now turn to a recent critique of Yeago to demonstrate why.

A Critique of Yeago and Yoder

Lewis Ayres, a leading scholar of early Christian exegesis and Trinitarian theology,[22] recently addressed Yeago's proposal for understanding the relationship between Nicene Trinitarianism and the NT, questioning whether what Yeago takes to be the implicit *authoritative* judgments of the text are not simply part of a range of *possible* judgments as Yoder suggested.[23] To demonstrate this, Ayres summarizes two 4th-century readings of Phil. 2:9-10.

In his first *Oration Against the Arians*, Athanasius addresses his opponent's argument that the "therefore" in 2:9 suggests the mutability of the Son, whose status changes at the point of his exaltation. Ayres points out that Athanasius's prior discussion of whether the term "unbegotten" applies to the Son or only to the Father has a bearing on how he reads 2:9-10. Moreover, Athanasius first references his earlier discussion of the Word's status, in which he argued, using Rom. 1:20, 1 Cor. 1:24, and Isa. 40:28, that since the Father is eternal, the Father's power—that is, the Son—must also be eternal. Athanasius's opponents seem to suggest that the Father is his own power when they speak of the Son as an "image" of the Father's power, but Athanasius argues that the Father cannot be his own eternal power.

Turning to Phil. 2:9-10, Athanasius argues for the Son's unchangeability, citing texts that include Heb. 13:8, 1:12; Mal. 3:6; and Ps. 102:26. Ayres emphases Ps. 102:26, which suggests that the created order is distinct from the Lord in its changeability, the Lord being unchangeable. If this is

[22] See especially Lewis Ayres, "Scripture in the Trinitarian Controversies," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Paul M. Blowers and Peter W. Martens (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2019), 339-454; Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004); and Lewis Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010).

[23] Lewis Ayres, "Is Nicene Trinitarianism 'in' the Scriptures?" Presentation given at the "Theological Exegesis: Scriptural Theology" conference, Rome February 2019: https://youtu.be/cvpF5PsPAtA. Ayres makes similar observations about Athanasius's strategies for reading Prov. 8:22 in "Scripture in the Trinitarian Controversies," 440-46.

so, "therefore" cannot mean that that Christ's exaltation and humiliation indicates a change in essence as a result of his humiliation. For Athanasius, the exaltation in Phil. 2:9 refers to the Son's humanity. Other texts support this view, showing the presence of the Son with the Father in the beginning (Prov. 8:30, John 17:5, Matt. 11:27, John 10:35).

In his discussion, Athanasius argues in two ways. First, he brings in a host of other texts to answer the question about Phil. 2:9. Any one of these texts may be taken differently apart from the chain in which they appear. By not simply arguing from within the whole passage, he recognizes that the passage on its own may be taken otherwise. Second, he brings in a host of conceptual resources from his own context—such as the distinction between creator and creation and the nature of eternity. His argument cannot be understood apart from these wider philosophical resources and the definitions and distinctions he makes of and between key terms such as unbegotten, image, word, and power.

Ayres then summarizes Eusebius's rather different reading of Phil. 2:9-10 in *Ecclesiastical Theology*. Eusebius writes against Marcellus of Ancyra, who taught that the word of God came forth only for the purpose of creation. Eusebius states that the Son is the eternally existing image of God through whom things are made; the Son is light, life, rock, and radiance. Thus, the statement in Philippians that Christ was "in the form of God" must be read alongside his designations as mediator (Gal. 3:19-20) and image. The Son is distinct from the Father, but as the Father's radiance is an offspring like no other. There is one God (Deut. 4:35), but the Son may also be called God because God is in him as in an image. There is marked difference between Athanasius and Eusebius in their use of key terms. Athanasius's trajectory is toward understanding that anything identified with God must be completely united. Eusebius's emphasis on image suggests that the Son has or receives the Father's form secondarily, which allows terms like "radiance" to have a different meaning than for Athanasius. Eusebius, drawing on extra-biblical and biblical resources rather differently, imagines a lesser being (Word or Son) who is God in that he uniquely receives some characteristics of the Father.

A Circular Movement

Clearly, the Nicene Creed's relation to the Bible is not well described as either a solution to a problem the text poses (Yoder) or as an articulation of the judgments of individual passages (Yeago). Trinitarian debates of the early centuries and in our own day are rather more complex than these options. In light of this, Rempel's statement that "only the model of God as Trinity can make explicit the Bible's implicit claim that Jesus Christ is both human and divine" (110-11) could be nuanced with attention to the exegetical character of early Trinitarian debate.

Moreover, if we cannot say that the Bible hands us an understanding of the Father, Son, and Spirit as "the same" in an obvious way, then articulating the doctrine of the Trinity requires a continual returning to the text of Scripture, drawing on a range of biblical and extra-biblical resources to consider the mystery of the Triune divine life. Such a reading can, and should, engage readings incompatible with the Nicene Creed, given that they might offer plausible accounts of the plain sense of individual passages. Those shaped by Nicaea do well to be as honest as possible about how this affects their reading of Scripture.

In his postscript, Rempel suggests the purpose of doctrine is to provide guidance for Christians' ongoing reading of Scripture. He envisions "a circular movement between the Bible and the church" whereby "'tradition' is made up of each generation's engagement with Scripture, building on all previous ones" (144). He seems to be testing this idea, his description more suggestive than exact. He appears to be moving away from the kind of Anabaptist view voiced, for example by James McClendon, that "the church now is the primitive church."[24] For Rempel, the church today receives and builds on the understandings of her predecessors. Robert Barron, critiquing McClendon, draws on John Henry Newman's image of a tree, which as it grows "sends off errant shoots, fights disease, and endures deformations both life-threatening and trivial, all the while maintained in its integrity by the on-going work of the Holy Spirit."[25] Likewise, I wonder if an organic image,

[24] James William McClendon, Jr., *Systematic Theology, vol. 1: Ethics*, rev. ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 30.

[25] Robert Barron, "Considering the Systematic Theology of James William McClendon, Jr.," *Modern Theology* 18, no. 2 (2002): 270.

such as the Newmanian tree, would help Rempel to nuance his account.

For Rempel, this building—or growing—tradition must include the Nicene Creed, as when he states that "no subsequent engagement with God's threesome-ness can say less than Nicaea" (144). But even the models of "Radical Trinitarianism" that he gives are not all Nicene. So, why *Nicaea*? One answer—that the plain sense of the Bible requires the Nicene Creed—I suggest we eliminate, though biblical arguments for Nicene Trinitarianism can, and should, be made. Another answer is that, in its articulation of the movement of the Christian life toward the Father, by the Spirit and in communion with the Son, the Nicene Creed is a gift to be received.

Andrea D. Saner is Associate Professor of Old Testament at Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Virginia.

The Anabaptists' Tie to Trinitarianism

Breanna J. Nickel

Abstract

The writings of Balthasar Hubmaier and Pilgram Marpeck exemplify a willingness to re-describe Trinitarian meaning, but it is difficult to apply their theological viewpoints today. Nevertheless, this essay affirms that a human world without a divine Trinity is not enough for intellectual or spiritual growth.

What tied [the Anabaptists] to Trinitarianism? This is only one of many formidable questions posed by John Rempel in his sweeping assessment of Trinitarian theology in multiple perspectives.[1] The larger questions with which he contends––those involving the defense of theological orthodoxy, and especially those approaching the Trinitarian heart of Christianity––are so complex that it is tempting to leave them up to the "experts," whoever they may be. However, this temptation is precisely what Rempel encourages us to overcome. In his discussion of the ecumenical councils, the Creed, and a diverse range of subsequent Trinitarian thinkers, as well as in his exhortation to new generations to "take the torch" (112), he reminds us that the great divine mysteries of Trinity and Christ are common property. Therefore I do not discount the scholarly sophistication of Rempel's survey when I say that his argument for Trinitarian "accountability" is also a legitimate plea for us all to practice intellectual courage.

The 16th-century Anabaptists practiced this type of courage, which is why they are well worth considering even if they had not helped to originate the Reformation movements. On the one hand, first- and second-generation Anabaptist figures such as Balthasar Hubmaier and Pilgram Marpeck never published extensive treatments of Trinitarian or Christological doctrine. They have also not always been considered deeply theological thinkers—

[1] This essay is a response to John Rempel, "An Impossible Task: Trinitarian Theology for a Radical Church?", *The Conrad Grebel Review* 37, no. 2 (Spring 2019): 110-45. Page references to Rempel's essay appear in parentheses.

The Conrad Grebel Review 37, no. 2 (Spring 2019): 163-170.

alternative adjectives such as biblicist, ethical, or polemical are common in later descriptions of their work––and they have not been consistently called "orthodox" except by their own definition, as Rempel observes (120-21). Furthermore, they are far removed from the initial urgency felt in the Trinitarian debates of the Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople. Thus, despite their reforming dispositions they treat the Trinity as an assumption rather than as a problem to be solved or a scaffold to be built.

On the other hand, both Hubmaier and Marpeck are clearly (if often implicitly) Trinitarian, and both are distinctly creative in how they navigate and utilize the Trinitarian framework. Yet none of the above characteristics––not their "return" to the Bible, nor their partial rejection of traditional doctrinal authorities, nor their desire to reform long-standing ecclesial practices, and not even their implicit Trinitarian assumptions––answer Rempel's open-ended question, What tied them to Trinitarianism? To this line of inquiry I would assign a second question that Rempel implies: What value do Anabaptist Trinitarian understandings have for our theological work today?

Two Trinitarian Anabaptists: Hubmaier and Marpeck

At least part of the answer to both questions must lie in where Trinity appears in Anabaptist thought, and on this point there are major differences between Hubmaier and Marpeck. Again, as Rempel notes, both viewed "the Trinitarian paradigm as foundational to belief, ethics, and piety," but nevertheless they each subscribed to a Trinity in which the Father, the Son, and the Spirit maintained "different but inseparable roles" (121).[2] On Hubmaier's part, there are Trinitarian echoes in his baptismal treatises, which are also the writings in which he most frequently cites patristic authorities (121).[3] Yet arguably the more crucial and curious connection (one that is foundational for his sacramental thought) is the connection between his Trinitarian convictions and his tripartite anthropology, the latter of which depends

[2] Do Rempel's comments on Hubmaier reflect a departure from his prior view that Hubmaier "has no Christology explicitly set in a trinitarian framework"? See John Rempel, *The Lord's Supper in Anabaptism: A Study in the Christology of Balthasar Hubmaier, Pilgram Marpeck, and Dirk Philips* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1993), 69.

[3] See Andrew Klager, "Balthasar Hubmaier's Use of the Church Fathers: Availability, Access and Interaction," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 84, no. 1 (2010): 5-62.

primarily upon his extensive knowledge of medieval rather than patristic authorities.[4] Alternatively, for Marpeck the most obvious connection to a Trinitarian God is found not in anthropology but in Christology. Marpeck's contemplation of Christ's incarnation, and particularly Christ's humanity, colors not only his perception of the Triune God but also his sacramental apologetics. Both thinkers, then, have the Trinity firmly in the back of their minds, but when, if ever, does it come to the forefront?

Hubmaier's Perspective

In each of his two treatises on the human will, Hubmaier conceives of human beings as joined to God by reason of their creation and their essential tripartite structure. He opens the first treatise by presenting tripartite anthropology as deliberately chosen by God in the creation of human beings and as a clear reflection of the Trinity. Not only does Hubmaier suggest that the Genesis creation story shows God forming each of the three "substances" of body, soul, and spirit,[5] he concludes his opening comments by asserting that human beings are created not in the image of God but in the "image of the Holy Trinity."[6] Thus the standard that he sets for the rest of his discussion of human nature, sin, and freedom––the same standard for his discussion of Christ's nature as well, given that he specifies Christ's humanity as tripartite––is one wherein human beings are intended to know God intimately by reason of their very composition.

However, the picture of the Trinitarian "image" in humanity that Hubmaier draws is complicated by the rest of his anthropological analysis. This is partly because his primary goal is not to speculate upon the divine essence; in fact, elsewhere in his writings he counsels against investigating anything that belongs to the mystery of God's essence or the actions of God's hidden will.[7] Rather, he aims to explain the potentialities and failings of the tripartite human will (encompassing the wills of the body, the soul, and the

[4] Breanna J. Nickel, "Balthasar Hubmaier as a Scholastic Anabaptist Theologian," Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 2018.

[5] H. Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder, eds., *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1989), 429-30.

[6] Ibid., 430; referred to by Rempel, 11. Hubmaier does use the terms "image of God" and "image of the Trinity" interchangeably. See, for example, ibid., 432.

[7] Ibid., 471.

spirit). In doing so, he spends most of his time describing the postlapsarian struggle between the "worthless" bodily will, the "wounded" or captive will of the soul, and the "upright" will of the spirit.[8] As a result, he seems to cast doubt on whether the Trinitarian image remains in sinful human nature. After all, how can the three substances of body, soul, and spirit (along with their respective wills) demonstrate a Trinitarian connection unless they are "three in one" in some comparable way—that is, unless they are whole and undivided in their purpose as well as distinct from each other in how they move? What is more, the apparent challenge to the Trinitarian image in the inner conflict of the tripartite will leads to an even more troublesome conclusion: namely, that if the Trinitarian image is so soon lost or darkened in human nature, then the concept of Trinity may have no real contribution to make to earthly human life and action marred by sin.

Admittedly, Hubmaier makes no obvious attempt to trace the continuation of the Trinitarian image in the postlapsarian state, but this does not mean he did not consider the aforementioned complications. In fact, he never intends to lose sight of the Trinitarian image, as shown by his consistent attention to all three kinds of will, by his repeated affirmation of the spiritual will's undamaged capacity, and especially by the utter dependence upon the Trinity and the Trinitarian image that he displays in explaining the restoration of the human will's freedom. At various points in discussing the tripartite will's restoration, Hubmaier indicates the spiritual will as the unmoved location of the divine image. He also names multiple ways in which the Persons of the Trinity act in the human will's restoration, such as when he credits the divine Spirit's power as the source of the human spirit's power, or when he states that without Christ's coming no restoration of the will's capacity, knowledge, and goodness would have been accomplished. As he says concerning the will of the soul, the will "has been awakened by the heavenly Father . . . made whole by his dear Son, and enlightened by the Holy Spirit—as the three main articles of our Christian faith concerning God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit show—by this the soul now again . . . can will and choose good."[9] Thus it is not the case that Hubmaier treats the Trinitarian image as a mere starting point, nor does he find the

[8] Ibid., 433-35.
[9] Ibid., 439.

Trinity to lose its relevance in the realm of sinful human nature. Instead, the continued activity of each of the three divine Persons is all that allows sinful nature to be restored, and at the root of this activity is the bond between God's essence and humanity's tripartite substance that is forged by the enduring Trinitarian image.

Marpeck's Perspective

Like Hubmaier, Marpeck demonstrates a Trinitarian orientation, while often expressing it implicitly rather than explicitly. In stark contrast to Hubmaier, though, his preferred avenue into Trinitarian thought is not the created tripartite image but Christ's incarnation. Marpeck everywhere demonstrates the "focus on the incarnation" and its "ongoing role" that is succinctly stated by Rempel (122). Yet it is questionable whether Marpeck succeeds in upholding an ongoing role for the Trinity (at least one that can be observed by human beings) along with Christ's humanity or "body" that is constituted by the church community. At times in his treatises, he appears content to leave the Trinity to its own devices and only to treat the "physical" Christ (whether his teachings, his moral example, or the sacramental ceremonies he institutes) as something directly active in human life, as when he writes:

> I comfort myself, as do all believers, who are unprofitable servants that do not work, but simply receive the physical words and voice of Christ in order that we may confess them and thereby testify to His physical works, leaving the effect to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who have worked until now and have reigned from eternity and will reign in eternity.[10]

Although Marpeck here acknowledges the eternal working of the Triune God, his recommendation to "simply receive the physical words" gives the impression that while the human Christ is readily accessible, the full meaning and activity of the Trinity is several steps removed from the domain of human concern. A similar ambiguity arises whenever he addresses Christ's intermediary role. For instance, when he remarks that "it is precisely

[10] William Klassen and Walter Klaassen, eds., *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1978), 77; cf. 96.

the humanity of Christ which is our mediator before the Godhead,"[11] his explanation leaves unclear whether he is simply reminding his Spiritualist opponents of the validity of physical externalities,[12] among which lies Christ's humanity, or whether his apparent relegation of Christ's mediating role to Christ's humanity actually renders the Trinitarian Godhead more distant and harder to access.

Then again, Marpeck's emphasis upon the human Christ does not prevent him from conceiving of the incarnation and its ongoing role as accomplished by the three Persons. Marpeck does not commonly refer to the Spirit as a separate divine Person but rather to the eternal working of Christ's Spirit,[13] and he takes seriously the commitment to a specifically Trinitarian God that is conveyed in Christ's baptismal commission in Matt. 28.[14] Undoubtedly it is still one of the primary implications of Marpeck's view that the activity of both Father and Spirit[15] cannot be known or recognized apart from the incarnation. Therefore the particular Trinitarian declaration from Marpeck that Rempel specifies—that the Spirit is the Father's inward working while Christ is the outward working[16]—may reflect a somewhat contradictory or unfinished aspect of Marpeck's thought. Nevertheless, Marpeck does offer a creative interpretation in which the incarnation and the Trinity are inseparable, and consequently he can still assert that they are equally essential to the life of the body of Christ.

The Value of Trinitarian "Ties"

What do we gain by this consideration of two Anabaptists' Trinitarian thoughts, especially in light of Rempel's much more ambitious survey? At the least, it is evident that the concept of a Triune God is everywhere

[11] Ibid., 82.

[12] Neal Blough explains this aspect of Marpeck's thought as a differentiation between the "material" and "historical" functions of Christ's humanity. Neil Blough, "Pilgram Marpeck, Martin Luther and the Humanity of Christ," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 61, no. 2 (1987): 203-204.

[13] Klassen and Klaassen, *Writings of Marpeck*, 49-50, 58, 77, et passim.

[14] Ibid., 183-85, 187.

[15] Marpeck speaks of the "drawing" of the Father and Spirit. Ibid., 76.

[16] Ibid., 195; also stated by Rempel, 12.

assumed, implied, and depended upon by both Hubmaier and Marpeck.[17] Hubmaier's examination of the human will is constructed according to the will's possession of the Trinitarian image, while Marpeck's concept of the incarnation draws its aspect of "eternity" from the Trinity despite a focus on Christ's humanity. Both thinkers tie themselves to Trinitarianism, and they do so not just on the basis of accepting an inherited framework but because the Trinity is what provides them with their individual explanations of why the divine/human relationship continues (whether because of the human will's restoration to the image, or because of the incarnation's eternal role). Thus the Trinitarian framework, far from something they felt a need to reject, is considered by both to maintain both its relevance and its orthodoxy.

Whether these Anabaptists' thoughts have an ongoing value for contemporary generations remains to be seen. Hubmaier and Marpeck may have followed the "calling" that Rempel names in their own time (110), but they also represent two significantly different Trinitarian accounts each addressed to their own particular, contextualized theological debates and personal concerns. On the one hand, the differences may reflect the kind of capacity for improvisational or creative formulations that Rempel thinks possible within the bounds of Trinitarian accountability. If so, and given that a certain amount of theological improvisation is necessary over time, then their writings exemplify a willingness to re-describe Trinitarian meaning and theological methods, a willingness that remains applicable for contemporary Christian thinkers. On the other hand, it may be far more difficult to apply these two Anabaptists' particular Trinitarian viewpoints to contemporary theology––or to the life of the contemporary church beyond the realm of formal scholarship––than to apply their creative methods. Thus, if I might state one primary concern in regard to Rempel's conclusions, it is this: It is possible that his compelling proposal defends the preservation of the initial (Nicene) Trinitarian structure and language, as well as the essential methodological willingness to re-describe the Trinity again and again,

[17] Accordingly, the evidence for Marpeck's Trinitarian assumption seems sufficiently clear to dispute the multiple previous studies that deny his Trinitarianism, which J.C. Wenger already felt the need to argue in 1938. Wenger, "The Theology of Pilgram Marpeck," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 12, no. 4 (1938): 214-15.

better than it defends the ongoing validity of past particular Trinitarian interpretations.

Undoubtedly a stronger argument for the lasting value of both the content and the methods of past Anabaptists' (and others') Trinitarian-based contributions could be made by expanding the "tentative correlation" that Rempel offers between the Trinitarian framework and "radical discipleship, ethics, and ecclesiology" (143). This kind of expansion in relation to Hubmaier's and Marpeck's thoughts must wait for a future time, except to say that the connection Rempel desires to make between thoughtful consideration of the Trinity and "clearer ethical consequences" (131) seems highly persuasive. This is because, to recall my opening remark, we should not expect to sustain any kind of moral courage apart from a dedicated application of intellectual courage.

Beyond the analysis, questions, and recommendations offered above, I cannot come to any better conclusion than the gem that Rempel offers in his "unscientific postscript." There he writes that we turn to Trinitarian belief "when more straightforward ways of naming and living God's revelation, like "following Jesus," aren't enough to keep us faithful" (143). So, if I may side with "sages" (112) of my own choosing and echo Rempel's informed sentiment to some extent, I re-affirm that a human world without a divine Trinity is not enough for either intellectual or spiritual growth. Such a world was not enough for Hubmaier or Marpeck, and it is not enough for us.

Breanna J. Nickel is the Conrad J. Bergendoff Visiting Fellow in Religion at Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois.

Trinitarian Worship for a Radical Church?

Sarah Kathleen Johnson

Abstract

Three principles for radical Trinitarian worship emerge from John Rempel's argument for radical Trinitarian theology: attention to deep structures, extension of historical memory, and pursuit of disciplined creativity. These principles are applied to two examples of worship practices: the place of creeds in denominational worship books and the Trinitarian dynamics in congregational song.

John Rempel begins his argument that creative Trinitarian orthodoxy is vital for radical ethics and ecclesiology with the claim that *theology is worship*: Theology "is not an attempt to explain God but to worship God with our minds" (110).[1] One can also claim that *worship is theology*. Worship, the term used to describe the activity of the assembly of the Christian community, is a principal place for meaningful speech about God, in dialogue with Scripture and tradition, that expresses and forms the faith and life of the church. The phrase *lex orandi, lex credendi* ("the law of prayer [is] the law of belief"), ascribed to 5th-century Prosper of Aquitaine and embraced in 20th-century liturgical theology and reform,[2] succinctly expresses the interconnection of liturgy and theology. At times a third phrase is added that resonates with Rempel's claims: *lex vivendi* ("the law of life")—as we worship, so we believe, and so we live.

Attending to how creative Trinitarian orthodoxy is expressed and formed in liturgy and life is particularly important for Anabaptists, for whom Trinitarian theology has historically been more implicit than explicit (118). For present generations, speech about God is ever more concentrated in the Sunday assembly. Participation in worship is how most Christians who are

[1] This essay is a response to John Rempel, "An Impossible Task: Trinitarian Theology for a Radical Church?", *The Conrad Grebel Review* 37, no. 2 (Spring 2019): 110-45. Page references to Rempel's essay appear in parentheses.

[2] Kevin Irwin, *Context and Text: Method in Liturgical Theology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994), 3-43.

not academic theologians "go in pursuit of a mystery and its implications for what we believe and how we live" (112). Worship is the living theology of the church. Therefore, if robust Trinitarianism is required for radical discipleship, the question becomes, What is Trinitarian worship for a radical church?

Anabaptist worship is extraordinarily diverse. In Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA alone, congregations worship in more than 25 languages and in expressions that are formal and informal, structured and spontaneous, and exuberant and contemplative. Rooted in local tradition and context, each community establishes its own practices drawing on a range of resources. It is therefore challenging to speak of "Mennonite worship" in general. Nevertheless, I extract three principles for radical Trinitarian worship from Rempel's discussion that can be applied to specific cases, including the place of creeds in denominational worship books and Trinitarian dynamics in congregational song.

Principles for Radical Trinitarian Worship

The first principle is attention to *deep structures*. Rempel focuses on an expansive rather than reductive approach to the central symbols, the deep structures, of Christian theology, especially the Trinitarian faith that clarified the revelation in Scripture and is "the interpretive key for theology as a whole" (118). An extension of this focus is an invitation to consider the deep structures of Christian worship, how the Trinity, in each Person and in relationship, is encountered expansively in the assembly—in Scripture, prayer, song, and central practices such as baptism and communion. It implies that the Trinitarian dynamics of worship—space for mystical silence, singing "Holy, Holy Holy," and the celebration of the Supper, for example—are as important for ethical formation as explicit engagement with ethical matters such as embracing the Season of Creation, singing global song, or hearing from speakers from local service agencies. More foundationally, however, attention to deep structures demands worship that is patient with mystery (cf. 131), that refuses reductive approaches that limit the activity of the assembly to personal encounter with God, relationship building in community, or formation of better disciples of Jesus, although each of these dimensions may be present. Radical Trinitarian worship aspires to sink ever deeper into the expansive mystery and paradox of a Trinitarian and

incarnate God.

Second, radical Trinitarian worship stretches *historical memory*. Through a sweeping historical narrative that spans the late antique period to the 21st century, Rempel invites Anabaptists to claim a long and ecumenical vision of Christian history. Encounter with the practices and voices of every era in worship is one way to strengthen connection to Trinitarian tradition, not because Christians got theology or worship "right" in the 4th, 16th, or mid-20th century, but because we are all part of the same conversation and we need one another (145) to engage the challenges of today. Stretching historical memory does not involve rigid adherence to past practices, but dynamic exploration of how they can live anew in the present.

Third, Trinitarian worship for a radical church strives for *disciplined creativity*. Rempel constructively engages interlocutors who are "orthodox in a creative way," those who claim "the freedom to dissent and innovate on behalf of the Gospel but hold themselves accountable to the understanding of God as Trinity in doing so" (111). Creative "improvisation" (131) in worship that attends to particularity and context is essential, especially for opposing violence and oppression associated with gender, race, religion, economic status, and colonialism, as Rempel's interlocutors demonstrate. But creative improvisation must be disciplined in stretching the inherited categories as far as possible "without breaking them" (137). Because decisions about Anabaptist worship are made congregationally by a diversity of leaders, there is tremendous potential for contextual creativity; the challenge is often whether and how to discipline it.

Creeds in Mennonite Worship

For Rempel, the creeds of the early church—especially the Nicene Creed—are the central symbol of the Trinity and the orthodox Trinitarian tradition. While acknowledging critiques of the Nicene creed, he also highlights its use in 16th-century Anabaptism, its implicit reception in Free Church traditions, and its affirmation by key Mennonite theologians in the 20th century. Nevertheless, in recent decades the creeds have rarely been used consistently in Mennonite worship, although readily available to congregations.

Creeds are included in *The Mennonite Hymnal* published in 1969,[3] and in *Hymnal: A Worship Book* published in 1992.[4] *The Mennonite Hymnal* includes a small section titled "Additional Worship Resources" that includes four "Affirmations of Faith" (Items 720-723), including the Apostles' Creed (Item 721) and the Nicene Creed (Item 722), which are preceded by this introduction:

> Four affirmations of faith are given to provide an opportunity for congregations to express unitedly and in summary form the essentials of Christian belief. These affirmations do not represent official documents of any church body; but they are, in a sense, the church's answer to the Word of God. No one statement covers the entire range of Christian doctrine. The Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed are confessions that were developed from the fourth to the eighth centuries. A contemporary Affirmation of Faith (no. 4) was created by several leaders for *The Mennonite Hymnal* and was completed in 1967. Every hymn that a congregation sings is, in a sense, an affirmation of faith. Scripture readings can also be used as a confession of faith.

Hymnal: A Worship Book likewise incorporates "Worship Resources," including a section of eight items titled "Affirming Faith" that includes the Apostles' Creed (Item 712) and an adaptation of the contemporary Affirmation of Faith from 1969 (Item 713) among other resources (Items 710-717). It does not include the Nicene Creed. The *Hymnal Companion* describes the different attitudes toward the use of creeds in worship in the Mennonite and Brethren traditions, the two groups collaborating on the hymnal:

> Brethren claim the New Testament as their only creed; thus they have not drafted confessions of faith during their history. . . . Reading affirmations of faith in a worship setting is an accepted

[3] *The Mennonite Hymnal* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1969). *The Mennonite Hymnal* is a collaboration between the General Conference Mennonite Church and the (Old) Mennonite Church.

[4] *Hymnal: A Worship Book* (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1992). *Hymnal: A Worship Book* is a collaboration between General Conference Mennonite Church, the (Old) Mennonite Church, and the Church of the Brethren, with contributors from other believers church traditions.

> practice. However, many Brethren are uneasy about using creeds. . . .
>
> On the other hand, Mennonites have a long history of making confessions of faith to reflect their biblical beliefs and understandings, their tradition, and their current practice. . . . While Anabaptist/Mennonite confessions of faith have been used in worship rarely due to their length, other creeds, confessions of faith, and affirmations have been used frequently.[5]

Personal conversations with both Mennonite and Brethren members of the *Hymnal: A Worship Book* committee reveal that including the Apostles' Creed but not the Nicene Creed in the volume was a compromise for both traditions that fully satisfied neither.

Since 2015, Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA have been developing a new hymnal and worship book called *Voices Together*[6] that will include a section of "Worship Resources" for "Confessing Faith." From the outset, the "Confessing Faith" section prompted spontaneous and diverse feedback. Therefore, a consulting process was established to invite advice from Mennonite theologians, pastors, and worship leaders on 13 potential resources. Certain points of consensus emerged;[7] however, at least one consultant was "not in favour" or "strongly opposed" to 9 of the 13 resources. The Nicene Creed was the point of greatest divergence, with one theologian indicating it "absolutely must be included" and another being "strongly opposed to including this item." Discussion among the Mennonite Worship and Song Committee was also characterized by strong and divergent perspectives, along with ample ambivalence. At a minimum, this division and uncertainty indicates that Mennonites are far from settled on the role of the Nicene Creed in worship. Since this creed is readily available

[5] *Hymnal Companion* (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1996), 413.

[6] *Voices Together* (Harrisonburg, VA: MennoMedia, anticipated 2020).

[7] No one opposed inclusion of: the Apostles' Creed; the Shared Convictions of Mennonite World Conference (https://mwc-cmm.org/article/shared-convictions); the Spanish-language creed known from the *Sing the Journey* supplement (Justo Gonzalez, in *Sing the Journey* [Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing Network, 2005], 135), or a version of Menno Simons's "True Evangelical Faith" statement from Menno Simons, *Why I do Not Cease Teaching and Writing* (1539).

for use, regardless of whether it is included in *Voices Together* or whether a community uses *Voices Together*, the question of the place of creeds in Anabaptist worship remains.

It is fruitful to apply the three principles for radical Trinitarian worship that emerge from Rempel's paper to the conversation about including creeds in *Voices Together*. First, the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds articulate the Trinitarian *deep structures* at the heart of Rempel's argument. One challenge that emerged in conversations about the hymnal was a reductive understanding of the creeds as lists of modern truth claims that fully summarize the Christian faith and require cognitive assent rather than an expansive understanding of the creeds as multivalent symbols. Exploring ways to engage creeds as symbols rather than checklists could facilitate their use in worship and allow their deep Trinitarian dynamics to infuse Mennonite theology and practice.

Second, recognizing the creeds as contextual rather than comprehensive can stretch the *historical memory* of the church. Seeing these symbols as historical products limited by the time period and debates that formed them, yet used continuously and ecumenically over the centuries, may help communities discover in them an expanded vision of faith and life that transcends and speaks into contemporary tensions.

Third, *disciplined creativity* is encouraged when using the creeds in Mennonite worship settings. From a theological and ecclesial standpoint, congregations are free to frame or juxtapose the creeds with more expansive ways of naming God and alternative approaches to affirming central theological commitments. However, the most common objection to including the Nicene Creed in *Voices Together* was not theological but practical: it was viewed as too long and complex to be "usable" in worship. Millions of Christians around the world voice these words together in worship each week, but since this is not the practice of most Mennonite communities, it is perceived as difficult or out of place.

One way to introduce this practice could be speaking a creed together for a season such as during Lent or the season of Easter, or during a related sermon series. Another option is to set apart the three main sections with an introductory question, Do you believe in God the Father?, or to respond to each section with a short song such as a sung "Amen" or "Alleluia." An

alternative to speaking the creeds is singing them; many musical settings are available. Options that may be especially at home in Mennonite congregations include strophic texts paired with familiar four-part tunes, such as Sylvia Dunstan's "I believe in God Almighty" set to PLEADING SAVIOR[8] or versions of the creed expressed through Contemporary Worship Music, such as Hillsong's "This I Believe (The Creed)."[9] While any rearrangement of the text to facilitate congregational song is open to critique, these expressions of creative orthodoxy may make the creeds accessible to communities that would never otherwise engage them.

The Trinity in Mennonite Congregational Song

Singing arrangements of the Apostles' and Nicene Creed is only one example of how Anabaptist worship can manifest radical Trinitarian orthodoxy through congregational song. As Rempel observes, a primary way that Trinitarian faith has been transmitted in Anabaptist contexts is through "the terminology of doctrine, the language of hymnody, and the piety undergirding discipleship" (118). Although an analysis of Trinitarian content in the historical development and current practice of Mennonite congregational singing is worthy of study, it is beyond the scope of this response. Therefore, I will comment on only a handful of examples as they connect to the three principles for Trinitarian worship aligned with radical discipleship and ecclesiology.

Deep structures and expansive symbolic language for the Trinity are characteristic of congregational song. Some of the most widely-sung, ecumenically-known classic hymns are profoundly Trinitarian, such as Richard Heber's "Holy, Holy, Holy"[10] or Thomas Ken's "Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow," whether sung to the tune DEDICATION ANTHEM or OLD HUNDREDTH.[11] Trinitarian stanzas conclude many traditional

[8] Sylvia Dunstan, "I believe in God Almighty" (GIA, 1991); Joshua Leavitt, *Christian Lyre* (1830).

[9] Ben Fielding and Matt Crocker, "This I believe (The Creed)," (Hillsong, 2014), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FtUNQpu2b7Q.

[10] Reginal Heber, "Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!" (1826), in *Hymnal: A Worship Book*, 120.

[11] Thomas Ken, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow" (1674); Lowell Mason, *Boston Handel and Haydn Society* (1822); Louis Bourgeois, *Genevan Psalter* (1551); in *Hymnal: A*

European and American hymns. There are also Trinitarian songs from beyond Europe and North America, such as Nobuaki Hanaoka's "Praise the Lord" from Japan.[12] Although many classic Trinitarian hymns are more metaphysical, several recent Trinitarian hymns make explicit the ethical implications of Trinitarian theology. One example of a new hymn text set to the familiar tune Lauda Anima is "Praise with joy the word's Creator" from the Iona Community, which dedicates one stanza to the liberating work of each person of the Trinity.[13] A Contemporary Worship Music approach to a similar theme is "Trinity Song" by Sandra McCracken, whose simple lyrics speak to the deep metaphysical and ethical structures of Christian worship.[14]

Congregational song is an aspect of Mennonite worship where there is a longer *historical memory*. Denominational hymnals include texts and tunes written throughout the history of the church—from the late antique, medieval, and early modern periods, to the present— and songs based on the writings of significant figures from the past. Whether or not the Trinity is the focus of the song, singing with Trinitarian theologians of the past keeps present-day communities in conversation with Trinitarian tradition. Points of connection to Rempel's interlocutors include links to the 16th century, such as the writings of Balthasar Hubmaier[15] and Menno Simons.[16] *Voices Together* aims to expand this early Anabaptist collection to include Pilgram Marpeck, whose writings inspired a communion hymn by Mennonite hymn writer Adam M.L. Tice, "Spirit, Do Your Work in Us," that explores the Trinitarian and ethical dimensions of the central symbol of communion,[17] and hymns

Worship Book, 118, 119.

[12] Nobuaki Hanaoka, "Praise the Lord, praise the Lord" (1980), in *Hymnal: A Worship* Book, 52.

[13] Iona Community, "Praise with joy the world's Creator" (WGRG [Wild Goose Resource Group], 1987), in *Sing the Journey*, 16; John Goss (1869).

[14] Sandra McCracken, "Trinity Song" (Drink Your Tea Music, 2016).

[15] Balthasar Hubmaier, "Rejoice, rejoice in God" (1520), versified by Ruth Naylor (1983), in *Hymnal: A Worship Book*, 313.

[16] Menno Simons, "We are people of God's peace" (1552), versified by David Augsburger (1978), adapted by Esther Bergen (Mennonite World Conference, 1990), in *Hymnal: A Worship Book*, 407; Menno Simons, "O God, to whom then shall I turn," adapted by Kenneth Nafziger (1996), in *Sing the Story* (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing Network, 2007), 61; Menno Simons, "True Evangelical Faith" adapted by Jeremy Kempf (2014).

[17] Adam M.L. Tice, "Spirit do your work in us" (GIA, 2004); MARPECK, Chris Ángel (GIA, 2015).

based on the stories and writings of Anabaptist women, including those told in Thieleman van Braght's *Martyrs Mirror*. Sources from before the Reformation are also being set to music in new ways, such as "Christ Be All around Me,"[18] a contemporary worship song based on words attributed to St. Patrick as part of his robustly Trinitarian "Breastplate Prayer." "Mothering God, You Gave Me Birth," a contemporary hymn text based on the writings of Julian of Norwich, was created by Mennonite poet Jean Janzen for *Hymnal: A Worship Book* and is included in at least 13 hymnals.[19] By employing feminine imagery for all three persons of the Trinity, in addition to stretching the historical memory of the church, this text is an example of creative orthodoxy.

Congregational song, as a fusion of poetry and music, is a generative space for *disciplined creativity* in worship. The examples mentioned above are instances of this disciplined creativity, and of deep structure and historical memory. Many writers are crafting Trinitarian hymns that expand our understanding of this symbol of the divine. One powerful example is Ruth C. Duck's "Womb of Life and Source of Being,"[20] which links the central practices of Christian worship, the ethical life, and the interrelationship of the persons of Trinity, with an expansive layering of Triune names for God.

Rempel frames the question of a Trinitarian theology for a radical church as a potentially impossible task in a time of crisis. But radical Trinitarian theology may not be impossible if it is formed and expressed—maintained and developed—in and through the activity of the Christian community gathered in worship. The deep structures, historical memory, and disciplined creativity required for Trinitarian liturgical theology may be chosen and cultivated by leaders and communities. Mennonite worship that is patient with mystery in pursuit of the Holy One, Holy Three, could have powerful implications for radical faith and life. As we worship, so we believe, and so we live.

Sarah Kathleen Johnson is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Notre Dame and a Visiting Fellow at the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre.

[18] David Leonard, Jack Mooring, Leeland Mooring, and Leslie Jordan, "Christ be all around me" (Jack Mooring Music, 2014).
[19] See https://hymnary.org/text/mothering_god_you_gave_me_birth.
[20] Ruth C. Duck, "Womb of life, and source of being" (GIA, 1992).

Living Out the Trinity: A Mennonite-Feminist Theology of Diversity and Community

Susanne Guenther Loewen

Abstract

This essay affirms the Trinity as a valuable frame for conceptions of God. Informed by feminist methodology and norms, and favoring orthopraxy over orthodoxy, the author is most concerned with the living, relational experience of the divine. The divine community can encompass and weave together diverse perspectives, experiences, and identities.

I had just finished preaching through a worship series on Names for God, concluding with a sermon on the Trinity, when I received the invitation: Would I be willing to engage John Rempel's essay on the Trinity from a pastoral perspective?[1] Well, how could I refuse? So, I gladly took up the torch that Rempel has thrown to the next generation to ponder the significance of the Trinity in and beyond the church today. As a Mennonite-feminist theologian and pastor, I was pleased to discover that he engages prominent Catholic feminist theologian Elizabeth A. Johnson, among others, on the Trinity. This is laudable for its rarity—too often, feminist theologians remain absent from such lists, even when their work is highly relevant.[2] Rempel makes no such omission, choosing to include her voice within his comprehensive survey of radical-yet-orthodox Trinitarian theologies.

Rempel's intriguing thesis is that the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity is flexible enough to allow for radical innovation within accountability to tradition (111). Thus he places feminist and Mennonite theologies side-by-side as radical theologies that approach the Trinity from their respective

[1] This essay is a response to John Rempel, "An Impossible Task: Trinitarian Theology for a Radical Church?", *The Conrad Grebel Review* 37, no. 2 (Spring 2019): 110-145. Page references to Rempel's essay appear in parentheses.

[2] See Malinda Elizabeth Berry, "Yoderian Messianism Isn't My Cup of Tea," in the following symposium: https://syndicate.network/symposia/theology/messianic-political-theology-and-diaspora-ethics/.

places on the margins of the history of theologizing (132). I follow him in placing them there, in close proximity, and in reaffirming the Trinity as a key doctrine, capable of being engaged by and making room for radical theologies. But my theological method diverges significantly from Rempel's. While his work makes the case that Mennonite theology remains in continuity with the sacramental, classical theology of the early church creeds and councils—rooted mainly in Nicaea (325 A.D.) and Constantinople (381 A.D.)—my interpretation of contemporary Mennonite theology is informed by feminist methodology and norms. While I reach a similar conclusion—that the Trinity remains a valuable frame for Christian conceptions of God—I get there via a decidedly different route.

Starting with Rempel's engagement of Johnson, my response will explore a feminist theological method in more detail, tracing its commonalities with Mennonite theologizing. I will then use this Mennonite-feminist lens to sketch some of the theological, spiritual, and ethical implications of a metaphor for Trinity that resonates with both streams of theology: Trinity as Community.

Johnson's Feminist Theological Method

Rempel admits that he makes his critique of Johnson's theology of the Trinity "cautiously" because of his "conscious and unselfconscious male biases" (136). I likewise make my critique of Rempel cautiously, realizing that I am likely undermining the very criteria by which he includes her in his list of contemporary Trinitarian theologians. Nevertheless, in my view he holds Johnson accountable to norms and a theological method which she does not apply to herself. Rempel claims that her rejection of the traditional satisfaction theory of the atonement amounts to "a caricature of the Biblical evidence" and that "she is violating the Trinitarian grammar central to the Catholic tradition." In addition, he views her as possessing a "commitment to the normativity of Nicaea," although her reimaging of the Trinity using divine Sophia is "stretching the inherited categories of thought as far as she can without breaking them" (137). But in evaluating her work in this way, Rempel does not sufficiently analyze the distinctly feminist theological method and norms to which Johnson holds *herself* accountable.

In *She Who Is*, Johnson's project is not, as Rempel implies, to recover

and apply a Nicaean understanding of the Trinity to the contemporary context. Rather, it is closer to the inverse: she begins with feminist norms and engages classical theology only insofar as it "could serve a discourse about divine mystery that would further the emancipation of women" today.[3] She is clear that "a feminist hermeneutic" is primary, given the "profoundly ambiguous" legacy of classical theology in the lives of women, which has been both the grounds of "exclusion and subordination" and a "source of life" that "sustained generations of foremothers and foresisters in the faith."[4] Thus she begins with the feminist and liberationist norm of historical, socio-political experience, rooting her reimagining of the Trinity in its reflection of Christian religious experience across the centuries; this is where she locates its "truth" and its continued relevance:

> [T]he Trinity is a legitimate but secondary concept that synthesizes the concrete experience of salvation in a 'short formula.' Without attentiveness to this rootedness in experience, speculation on the Trinity can degenerate into wild and empty conceptual acrobatics.[5]

This emphasis on concrete, historical experience and on encounter with God as the basis of theologizing leads Johnson to identify three interconnected problems with the doctrine of the Trinity in its present form: it is disconnected from experience, it has been literalized, and it has been used to legitimate the marginalization of women in its reification of both maleness and hierarchical relationships within a framework more Neoplatonic than biblical.[6] Her solutions further reveal her reliance on feminist norms as she reconceives of the Trinity in terms of the biblical divine name of Holy Wisdom or Sophia, which she argues "evokes a sense of ultimate reality highly consonant with the feminist values of mutuality, relation, equality, and community in diversity."[7]

While Nicaea pointed in the direction of equality, Johnson argues, it

[3] Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 9.
[4] Ibid., 9-10.
[5] Ibid., 197-98.
[6] Ibid., 192-94.
[7] Ibid., 211.

is ultimately inadequate on its own to sever the close ties between patriarchy, empire, and Roman Catholic orthodoxy.[8] This is why she turns instead to feminist values and various contemporary reimaginings of the Trinity. These foster liberation in much more direct ways, not least through the diversity of experiences they reflect, since feminists are particularly attuned to "the insight born in pain that a monolithic position inevitably works to the disadvantage of somebody, usually the most powerless."[9] She highlights Gordon Kaufman's Trinity of "God's absoluteness, humaneness, and present presence," Sallie McFague's "God as mother, lover, and friend of the world which is God's body," Dorothy Sayers's God as "a book, thought, written, and read," as well as her own Spirit-Sophia, Jesus-Sophia, and Mother-Sophia.[10] These renewed images for Trinity render the doctrine meaningful in the sense of reflecting and emphasizing "mutual relation," "radical equality," and "communal unity in diversity."[11] She concludes that "The mystery of God as Trinity, as final and perfect sociality, embodies those qualities of mutuality, reciprocity, cooperation, unity, peace in genuine diversity that are feminist ideals and goals derived from the inclusivity of the gospel message." [12]

Given that these are Johnson's articulated norms—those to which she holds herself accountable—how might her work be evaluated from an Anabaptist-Mennonite perspective? While Rempel is undoubtedly more knowledgeable than I am about the origins and history of our shared tradition, it's not difficult to find commonalities between contemporary feminist and Mennonite theology and praxis. Both arose as protest movements that used a hermeneutics of suspicion against the dominant hierarchies claiming to mediate between the church community and God (mainline Catholicism and Protestantism, and/or (hetero)patriarchy). Mennonite and feminist ecclesiologies often resonate as well. Both ecclesiologies emphasize communal discernment and hermeneutics (reading and interpreting the Bible, theology, and ethics through dialogue and in community); an egalitarian, anti-hierarchical discipleship based on positive theological

[8] Ibid., 209. Cf. 194. I would add heteronormativity.
[9] Ibid., 10.
[10] Kaufman, McFague, and Sayers are referenced in Johnson, *She Who Is*, 210.
[11] Johnson, *She Who Is*, 222.
[12] Anne Carr quoted in ibid., 223.

anthropology (everyone is made in God's image, and discipleship in the Way of Jesus is possible because sin and violence do not have the last word); and orthopraxis (right action or lived faith, often including a peace ethic) over orthodoxy (right belief, often enforced by violence).[13] It is difficult to characterize two anti-hierarchical traditions that are by definition decentralized, voluntary communities. Nevertheless, in light of this significant common ground between Mennonite and feminist norms and theological methods, it becomes possible to look more closely at one of Johnson's reimagined metaphors for the Trinity, in order to see a Mennonite-feminist theological method in action. I now turn to her image of the Trinity as community to parse its implications for our theology, spirituality, and ethics.

Trinity as Community: A Mennonite-Feminist Interpretation

Karl Rahner once joked that the Trinity is so far removed from ordinary people's faith that "if people were to read in their morning newspaper that a fourth person of the Trinity had been discovered it would cause little stir."[14] The pastoral and theological task thus becomes how to make the Trinity come alive, able to spark the spiritual and theological imagination of people within and beyond the church. I agree with Rempel that the Trinity is able to encompass both a rootedness in the tradition as well as a radical theology and ecclesiology, but I would lean with Johnson into innovative renewing of our language for the Trinity versus emphasizing fidelity to Nicaea. In keeping with a feminist and Mennonite emphasis on unmediated encounter with the Divine and orthopraxy over orthodoxy, my pastoral approach to the Trinity is not primarily concerned with our speech and thinking about God staying beholden to an ancient philosophical formula[15] but with articulating and sparking a living, relational experience of the Divine. We may call this

[13] See Lydia Neufeld Harder, *Obedience, Suspicion, and the Gospel of Mark: A Mennonite-Feminist Exploration of Biblical Authority* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier Univ. Press, 1998), ix, 2, 5, 8; Gayle Gerber Koontz, "Peace Theology in Transition: North American Mennonite Peace Studies and Theology, 1906-2006," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 81, no. 1 (2007): 78, 80-82; Gayle Gerber Koontz, "The Liberation of Atonement," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 63, no. 2 (1989): 173, 176.

[14] Paraphrased in Johnson, *She Who Is*, 192.

[15] See Malinda E. Berry, "A Theology of Wonder," in *The Conrad Grebel Review* 23, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 14.

approach "radical mysticism" in Dorothee Soelle's sense of the term.[16]

> The question which is often put to me, 'Do you believe in God?', usually seems a superficial one. If it only means that there is an extra place in your head where God sits, then God is in no way an event which changes your whole life. . . . We should really ask, 'Do you live out God?' That would be in keeping with the reality of the experience.[17]

Our guiding question thus changes from Rempel's *Is the Classical, Nicaean doctrine of the Trinity conceptually compatible with radical theologies like Mennonite and feminist and liberationist?* to *How do we practice and live out the doctrine of the Trinity today? How can the Trinity be embodied in and beyond the church today?* This starting point is concrete, incarnate in history, pastoral, and ethical in its emphasis. Accordingly, I do not set out mainly to think about God rightly, but to articulate lived encounters with and mystical experiences of God incarnate in the everyday and often on the underside of history. The image of the Trinity as a Community speaks powerfully to this starting point.

The Divine Community

Envisioning the Divine as a Triune community signifies that God encompasses oneness and diversity, unity and difference, within Godself. This radical theological statement dethrones the imperial and theistic notion of God as the almighty, singular heavenly patriarch who is wholly other (as in "superior" or "at the top of the cosmic hierarchy").[18] In its place, we find a God who is in relation, whose identity is relationality even within Godself—a God who is quite simply Love. Along these lines, Mennonite-feminist theologian Malinda Berry revives the image of Trinitarian relationships as

[16] Dorothee Soelle, *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 11. She speaks of "democratizing mysticism"—i.e., rendering encounter with God accessible to everyone and incarnating God in peacemaking.

[17] Dorothee Soelle, *Thinking about God: An Introduction to Theology*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia, PA: Trinity Press International, 1990), 186.

[18] This theistic God is often critiqued by feminist theologians, including Johnson, *She Who Is*, 19-20, and Dorothee Soelle, *Christ the Representative: An Essay in Theology after the "Death of God,"* trans. David Lewis (London: SCM, 1967), 130-34.

divine *perichoresis*, the mutual indwelling of the three persons of the Trinity, sometimes depicted as a dance. This "suggests the partnership of movement, symmetrical but not redundant, comprised of . . . an eternal movement of reciprocal giving and receiving, giving again and receiving again.[19] For Berry, this reimagined image gives the church "theological tools to dismantle the male edifice of God,"[20] leaving us with God who instead reifies mutuality or reciprocity, equality, and relationality that neither erases nor merely recognizes but creatively celebrates difference and diversity.

The Trinity as Community also functions, in Johnson's words, as a "short formula," reminding us of the multiplicity of experiences of the Divine, as reflected in the Bible, where multiple names for God are preserved without ranking or literalizing them.[21] The Trinity as Community is thus shorthand for the diversity of experiences of the One God throughout history and today. To offer just one biblical example, Pentecost depicts God the Spirit becoming present to the gathered community of Jesus' friends in multiple ways: as a strong wind, as tongues of fire, and as the ability to speak different languages (Acts 2:1-4). This Triune depiction of God does not conform to the orthodox notion of the persons of the Trinity but nevertheless holds together the oneness and many-ness of the Divine as we experience and encounter our God.[22] This God is decidedly hospitable, reaching out to embrace and include us in the divine dance and inviting a diversity of people to participate in God's community.

Community as Image of the Divine

If the Trinity is a perichoretic divine community, then it is not only as individuals that we image God but also as human communities, including the church. This is not to say that any kind of community images God. Rather, human communities image the divine community when they reflect the same characteristics of the perichoretic dance: mutuality and reciprocity, relationship that celebrates diversity, anti-hierarchical equality, and radical hospitality. These distinctives shape the everyday life of our communities, and

[19] Catherine Mowry LaCugna, cited in Berry, "Theology of Wonder," 22-23.
[20] Berry, "Theology of Wonder," 22.
[21] Johnson, *She Who Is*, 198.
[22] Johnson also encourages not literalizing God's "Oneness" and "Threeness" in ibid., 204.

make a statement about our theologizing, namely that our thinking about, search for, and wrestling with God is best done with others, in community. Diverse voices and experiences are needed to inform our worship and theo-ethics, as both feminist and Mennonite theologians affirm in emphasizing hermeneutic communities and a priesthood of all believers (a "discipleship of equals").[23]

Returning to Pentecost, we see that even when the gathered community encounters the divine, it is not a uniform or identical experience for everyone. The Holy Spirit comes upon all of those gathered in its Triune form, and each of them prophesies, fulfilling Joel's words that all different people will receive the Spirit (Joel 2; Acts 2).[24] As this diverse group prophesies in multiple languages, we see the Spirit crossing and re-crossing multiple boundaries, overturning hierarchies of all kinds—between slaves and free people, between genders, between generations, and between cultures and ethnicities. With this diverse community united in peace and right relation as our image of God, it becomes impossible to justify the various hierarchies and systemic, structural sin with which we live as human beings. This is not only non-hierarchical but actively anti-hierarchical in privileging mutuality and equity as central to the identity of the divine community and our imaging of it. Thus, "every kind of hierarchy, exclusion, and pattern of domination, whether religious, sexual, political, clerical, [or] racial"[25] is ruled out as God's will for our life together.

This is not an abstract or gratuitous form of diversity, but one that privileges marginalized voices because its purpose is liberation.[26] The image of Trinity as community specifically resonates with postcolonial, Indigenous, and Third World theologians, making it particularly conducive

[23] See Elisabeth Schuessler Fiorenza, *Discipleship of Equals: A Critical Feminist* Ekklesia-*logy of Liberation* (New York: Crossroad, 1993).

[24] Berry also mentions this passage in passing as she discusses the Trinity as a Dance. See Berry, "Theology of Wonder," 23.

[25] LaCugna, quoted in ibid., 22.

[26] "[N]either a feminist liberationist nor a biblical-exegetical discourse of meaning can rest with the play of multiple meanings, languages, and images. Rather their interest in survival and liberation compels both discourses to evaluate critically the play of images and meanings and their pre-constructed kyriarchal frame of reference … to produce change and transformation."—Elisabeth Schuessler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 120-121.

to liberative theologizing. For instance, Chung Hyun Kyung speaks of Asian women viewing God as a community, affirming that to be in the image of God is "to be in community," reflecting "interdependence," "harmony," and "mutual growth."[27] Similarly, Cayuga (Six Nations) theologian Adrian Jacobs emphasizes the Spirit's move toward a diversity of languages at Pentecost as poignantly relevant for Indigenous experiences of cultural/linguistic revival and decolonization, since here and in Isaiah 2 God values and preserves many languages and cultures.[28] And postcolonial feminist theologian Kwok Pui-Lan contends that hybridity, multiplicity, and even "fruitful ambiguity" are nothing new in Christian theology and can be traced back to the very notion of "Jesus/Christ" and the "inclusive" and "pluriform" christologies already apparent in the New Testament.[29]

Thus, in imaging the Trinity as divine community and aiming to live out this image together, we hold open the possibility of learning from those whose voices have not historically been heard, drawing on ancient threads of tradition that resonate anew as the good news of liberation in our time and place.

Dorothee Soelle has made the case that the "death of God" can be viewed as an opportunity in contemporary theology rather than a crisis. The god of theism—absent and apathetic in the face of our suffering—is dead and perhaps always was. In its place, we can now find God who "lives for us and with us."[30] I have tried to address this opportunity in the present response, using trajectories noted in Rempel's essay, such as understanding God as relational; fostering dialogue between theological innovation and strands of tradition; holding ethics, worship, and theology together; and engaging with feminist and other liberative theologies. I hope I have shown how we can all be transformed and liberated through this dialogue by holding vulnerable and sustained conversations across difference, held and encouraged by the

[27] Chung Hyun Kyung, "To Be Human Is to Be Created in God's Image," in *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader*, ed. Ursula King (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), 253. Some of this is Chung quoting Philippine theologian Elizabeth Dominguez.

[28] Personal conversation with Adrian Jacobs, March 30, 2016, Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg, MB. He is Keeper of the Circle at the Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre.

[29] Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 171-72.

[30] Soelle, *Christ the Representative*, 130, 132-134.

divine community, which is wide enough to encompass and weave together our diverse perspectives, experiences, and identities. As we often sing:

> Praise the Maker, Christ, and Spirit, one God in community,
> calling Christians to embody oneness and diversity.
> This the world shall see reflected: God is One and One in Three.[31]

Susanne Guenther Loewen is co-pastor at Nutana Park Mennonite Church in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, and an instructor in the M.Div. program at Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

[31] Iona Community, "Praise with Joy the World's Creator," *Sing the Journey* (Scottdale, PA: Faith & Life Resources, 2005), #16.

Doctrine, Stability, and Human Speech within God

Jeremy M. Bergen

Abstract

The doctrine of the Trinity, as doctrine, may not achieve the results Rempel is seeking. This paper argues for shifting away from foundationalist assumptions, and utilizes Sarah Coakley and Robert Jenson to reframe the conversation constructively. The "impossible task" is to speak truly about God, even with the challenges it presents.

John Rempel's essay is rightly premised on the conviction that theology is ultimately practical theology.[1] How a faith community thinks about and articulates its beliefs, with none more basic than the doctrine of God, has implications for all aspects of faith and life. His essay is expansive and programmatic since much is at stake. He writes out of concern for specific challenges and threats, such as the reduction of Jesus to a merely human ethical example, or the loss of commitment to pacifism. Rempel worries about denial of mystery in favor of a merely rational faith as well as the coherence of Mennonite theology within the wider Christian movement. Most basically, he proposes the doctrine of the Trinity as the key to the integrity of Christian theology.

My response shares with Rempel a deep personal investment in the faithfulness of the Mennonite church, and an ecumenism of gifts given and received. I also share a commitment to an orthodox account of the Trinity as "grounding" not only for theology in the Mennonite tradition but for faith and practice in church life more broadly. Within these commitments, I suggest a subtle shift away from some of the foundationalist assumptions in Rempel's approach. I develop the first phase of my response around two themes: the promise of the stabilizing effect of the doctrine of the Trinity, and the tensions that Mennonite ecclesiology presents to stability in faith

[1] This essay is a response to John Rempel, "An Impossible Task: Trinitarian Theology for a Radical Church?", *The Conrad Grebel Review* 37, no. 2 (Spring 2019): 110-45. Page references to Rempel's essay appear in parentheses.

and ethics. In the second phase, I explore how the work of Sarah Coakley and Robert Jenson on reflexive understandings of God may constructively reframe the conversation Rempel has convened.

Method, Doctrine, and Stability

The idea of stability emerges at numerous points in Rempel's essay, most notably in the claim that "the Trinity as the central symbol of Christian belief is more stable and has clearer ethical consequences than the unTrinitarian alternative" (131). Throughout the essay, Rempel is much more explicitly engaged with questions of theological method and debates about the authority of tradition, especially the doctrinal formulations of the classical creeds, than with the being and acts of the triune God per se. This reveals what seems to underlie his diagnosis of the problem and his proposed solution. For example, in his subsection "The Trinity in Anabaptist Thought" a key issue is how early Anabaptists navigated the positions of the Protestant reformers on the question of authority in matters of faith. He notes approvingly how the Anabaptist reformer Balthasar Hubmaier distinguished between treating patristic sources as authoritative and denying the authority of the Roman Catholic hierarchy. Similarly, Dutch Mennonite leader Thielemann van Braght makes the case that the Trinitarianism reflected in the Apostles Creed is at the center of the faith of the non-conforming church through history. These are primarily claims about the systematic location of the doctrine and the nature of its authority.

Debate among Mennonite theologians about the authority of doctrines and creeds is associated with other key figures of Rempel's generation, such as A. James Reimer, Thomas Finger, and J. Denny Weaver, and I read Rempel's essay as an intervention in these discussions.[2] In one illuminating exchange, Finger argued for an Anabaptist theology rooted in affirmations that are universally Christian to which are added particularities rooted in the Anabaptist traditions but that also draws selectively and positively (i.e.,

[2] A bibliography of exchanges in the 1980s in *The Conrad Grebel Review* is provided in A. James Reimer, *Mennonites and Classical Theology: Dogmatic Foundations for Christian Ethics* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2001), 247. See also chapters by J. Denny Weaver and Thomas Finger in *Jesus Christ and the Mission of the Church: Contemporary Anabaptist Perspectives*, ed. Erland Waltner (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1990), 83-119.

not just defining itself by what it is not) from other Christian traditions.[3] By contrast Weaver criticized most Mennonite theologizing for adding Mennonite distinctives to a presumed "theology-in-general" foundation that typically includes the doctrine of the Trinity as expressed in the creeds. He argued that this approach characterized the fundamentalist Daniel Kauffman, the conservative H.S. Bender, and the liberals J.E. Hartzler and Edmund Kaufman, as well as contemporaries such as Finger and Reimer. For Weaver, the supposed "theology-in-general" reflects particular accommodations of doctrine with violence and war (as epitomized in the Council of Nicea) and therefore a Mennonite tradition that rejects violence ought to articulate a theology starting from the story of Jesus that is distinct all the way down.[4]

Reimer repeatedly argued for an orthodox/creedal doctrine of the Trinity as authoritative foundation and methodological point of reference for all theology, including Mennonite theology. The key is the balance of immanence and transcendence as a bulwark against the tendency to emphasize one or the other. Even in an essay on "Trinitarian Orthodoxy, Constantinianism, and Radical Protestant Theology," Reimer is less concerned with explicating speech about God than with defending on methodological grounds a particular relationship between scripture and tradition. He concludes that "classical dogmatic formulations are essential for assuring an ontological-metaphysical grounding for ethics."[5] Reimer worries that if the tradition follows John Howard Yoder and Weaver, then ethics as human response becomes the measure of theology, a concern most realized in Gordon Kaufman's account of theology as imaginative construction. For Reimer, the doctrine of the Trinity functions to ensure that theology starts with God and appropriately balances transcendence, historical particularity, and immanent presence.

[3] Thomas Finger, "Appropriating Other Traditions While Remaining Anabaptist," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 17, no. 2 (Spring 1999): 52–68.

[4] J. Denny Weaver, "The General versus the Particular: Exploring Assumptions in 20th-Century Mennonite Theologizing," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 17, no. 2 (Spring 1999): 28-51. Finger's argument is about "Anabaptist theology" whereas Weaver addresses "Mennonite theology." The two subjects are not exactly parallel. In such a debate, "Anabaptist" comes to stand for a set of ideal commitments in contrast to the actual theology of Mennonites represented by specific individuals and their communities.

[5] Reimer, *Mennonites and Classical Theology*, 265.

My concern with this discourse is that it risks instrumentalizing the doctrine of the Trinity. I agree that the theological task is creativity with accountability, and that right diversity, rather than uniformity, should be the aim of Christian life together. Yet I want to be cautious about whether such positions may be derived or deduced from the doctrine of the Trinity. Any doctrine of God risks projection, but the dangers are magnified for an instrumentalized one. Also, Reimer's urgent insistence that the doctrine of the Trinity stabilize and balance theology may produce a functionally modalist account of God's three-ness.

I wonder if sounding the drum of the *doctrine* of the Trinity is enough to ensure adequate recognition of the otherness of God, the grounding of faith outside of ourselves, and the delineation of right diversity in unity. Will this do what Rempel hopes it will do? Will it provide stability for the church? Will it fund a pacifist ethic? Ultimately the effort to place any doctrine at the center will be a human effort. In light of this, I question whether Rempel's concern is truly about the *doctrine* of God (and the function of doctrines and creeds typically Trinitarian in their structure), or whether he means to turn our attention to the *reality* of God as experienced by communities of faith.

Confessional and Ecclesial Stability

Rempel observes how challenges arise for the stability of Mennonite congregations, and for accountabilities beyond the congregation, because of the significant role of individual conscience. If authority in matters of faith and life resides in the local congregation or in individual conscience, such a tradition may well fragment theologically. One solution historically has been confessionalism and its enforcement through discipline. Rempel points to 17th-century Dutch Mennonite non-confessionalism and 19th-century German Mennonite liberalism as cautionary examples of such fragmentation and consequent compromise of witness. He laments the current fragmentation of Mennonite denominations in North America over issues of sexuality, hermeneutics, authority, and acceptable diversity in the church, and he worries that a simple appeal to "follow Jesus" (143) will not be enough to hold these bodies together. Can confessional agreement on a robust Trinitarianism accomplish this?

In Rempel's survey of 17th-century Dutch Mennonites, developments

culminating in conflict between confessionalist and non-confessionalist groups were influenced by various cultural, political, and intellectual factors, as well as the personalities of leaders. On the non-confessionalist side, the "proto-Unitarian" Galenus Abrahamsz emerged as a key leader, countered by the confessionalist Thielemann van Braght. Abrahamsz did not believe any presently fallen church should compel a person in matters of belief. Van Braght sought enforcement of discipline in matters of faith and ethics through the production of confessions of faith that exhibited the visibility of the true church. This vision was reinforced rhetorically in account in *Martyrs Mirror* of the continuity of a true "baptism-minded" and "defenseless" church through time: "Mennonite confessions of faith were simply restatements of the faith of the first Christians."[6]

On my reading, the authority of particular doctrines to determine faith, ethics and theology, as well as effective discipline, were crucial issues. Yet, it is not clear that the material content of Trinitarian theology protected the outcomes important to Rempel. Some non-confessionalists did align with Dutch nationalism and reject pacifism, although such a development may be correlated with non-Trinitarianism only in the sense that without a central ecclesiastical authority, both beliefs about God and beliefs about right action were free to develop in directions deviating from prior commitments.

For Rempel, developments among 19th-century German Mennonites show the danger of giving authority to individual experience and conscience over the tradition epitomized by the classical creeds. Karl Koop traces how Wilhelm Mannhardt argued against an "ontological linkage between Christ and Christian identity" in the regenerated person and therefore against the logic of Chalcedon.[7] Instead, for Mannhardt, the essence of Mennonite faith is a particular account of the church as a "freely self-determined, constantly renewing brotherhood of persons determined to become disciples of Christ dedicated to mutual admonition, assistance and encouragement to act ethically."[8] It is within the strong congregationalism governed by a "democratic

[6] Michael D. Driedger, *Obedient Heretics: Mennonite Identities in Lutheran Hamburg and Altona during the Confessional Age* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001), 56.
[7] Karl Koop, "A Complication for the Mennonite Peace Tradition: Wilhelm Mannhardt's Defense of Military Service," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 34, no. 1 (Winter 2016): 40.
[8] Ibid., 39.

principle" that pacifism is a matter for discussion and potential rejection, as Mannhardt argues it should be. But which caused which? While one could argue that the rejection of Chalcedon led to a self-determining ecclesiology that led to the rejection of pacifism, an ecclesiology that placed authority in individual conscience, which the rejection of Chalcedon fostered, allowed an ecclesiology accommodating such a development to emerge.

Rempel's discussion of the early 20th-century U.S. Mennonite controversy between fundamentalism and modernism could also be taken as a debate about authority, in particular whether the church (here, "denomination") or the individual should define a particular doctrinal or ethical issue. Trinitarians Daniel Kauffman and Harold S. Bender may have given pacifism confessional status not because it emerged from a Trinitarian framework (Rempel acknowledges that Kauffman failed to integrate doctrine and ethics) but because consistent confessional identity was important for the institutional visibility of the church.

Rempel's appeal to the doctrine of the Trinity is one potential strategy for counterbalancing the fragmenting tendency built into Mennonite ecclesiology. Yet, I doubt that the doctrine will deliver on what is hoped for. Holding to, or being held to, a Nicene doctrine of the Trinity is itself not enough to ensure any particular ethical stand, as is already obvious from the diversity of views on war and peace within Nicene Christianity. Nor is it enough to fund a particular ecclesiology over against others. Ecclesiologies of communion, for example, articulated explicitly as reflective of Trinitarian communion can range from radically egalitarian to rigidly hierarchical.[9] While beliefs about God are obviously connected to beliefs about the church, decisions on the authority of traditions, creeds, and confessions of faith seem to be made primarily in the sphere in ecclesiology. Ecclesiology is high on agenda of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches precisely because different understandings and practices, especially around matters of ministry, authority, and continuity over time, seem to perpetuate separative logics despite doctrinal agreement on many themes.

There is not space here to analyze the instability built into Mennonite

[9] Nicholas M. Healy, "Communion Ecclesiology: A Cautionary Note," *Pro Ecclesia* 9 (1995): 442-53.

ecclesiology.[10] Rempel's comment that Trinitarian theology is properly ecumenical (145) is a key insight about the necessity of Mennonite theology and Mennonite churches to be profoundly and vulnerably engaged with other Christians about the calling of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church to bear witness to God's intention for all persons and indeed all creation. In this respect, the calling of one particular tradition such as the Anabaptist-Mennonite may be to be less concerned about internal stability than about a shared, common movement with other Christians in the Spirit towards Christ as the center. Such movement may be characterized by strangeness, astonishment, disruption, and perhaps even the death of cherished distinctives.[11]

Reflexive Accounts of God

I welcome Rempel's exhortation for an approach to the doctrine of God that is patient with mystery (cf. 131). Indeed, one way to understand the classical Trinitarian heresies (tritheism, modalism, and subordinationism) is that all seek a somewhat rational and impatient explanation for how God is both three and one in ways that ultimately deny something about the inadequacy of all human concepts and analogies. In that respect, orthodox Trinitarian doctrine may serve a more apophatic function than is often supposed.

The "impossible but necessary" task may be to concede that no particular doctrinal formulation can ultimately bear the weight of providing stability to the faith and life of a community. Thus, I advocate shifting from the *doctrine* of the Trinity to the *reality* of the triune God. This might initially seem like a distinction without a difference. After all, our experiences of God are always human experiences, and therefore mediated and expressed in human terms and language. Yet, to the extent that church communities may be in need of anything, it may be to perceive an encounter with God in which they experience stability as well as interruption.

[10] For a relevant discussion, see Gerald Schlabach, *Unlearning Protestantism: Sustaining Christian Community in an Unstable Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2010), especially chapters 1 and 2.

[11] See Jeremy M. Bergen, "The Ecumenical Vocation of Anabaptist Theology," in *Recovering from the Anabaptist Vision: New Essays in Anabaptist Identity and Theological Method*, ed. Laura Schmidt Roberts, Paul Martens, and Myron Penner, T&T Clark Studies in Anabaptist Theology and Ethics 1 (New York: T&T Clark, forthcoming 2020).

Here I point to the work of Sarah Coakley and Robert Jenson—without proposing either of their approaches as *the* solution to Trinitarian or ecclesiological woes. These thinkers emerge from different denominational and intellectual traditions but each observes how the person or community speaking about God may already be caught up by the reality of God's being and action in the world, a pattern that is noticeably Trinitarian. The issue is less how a *doctrine* about God may function or be deployed, and more about how communities of faith and the theologies emerging from and serving them are themselves implicated in this pattern. Significantly, both foreground the Holy Spirit's work and the Holy Spirit's role in shaping human speech about God.

At the core of Coakley's reclamation of the systematic theological project is the act of contemplative prayer, "an act that, by grace, and over time, inculcates mental patterns of 'unmastery'"[12] According to Romans 8:26, it is the human impossibility of prayer together with the Spirit's initiative to make it possible that is the paradigm of God's drawing human persons into God's triune being.

> There is . . . an inherent reflexivity in the divine, a ceaseless outgoing and return of the desiring God; and insofar as I welcome and receive this reflexivity, I find that it is the Holy Spirit who 'interrupts' my human monologue to a (supposedly) monadic God; it is the Holy Spirit who finally thereby causes me to see God no longer as patriarchal threat but as infinite tenderness; but it is also the Holy Spirit who first painfully darkens my prior certainties, enflames and checks my own desires, and so invites me ever more deeply into the life of redemption in Christ. In short, it is this 'reflexivity in God,' this Holy Spirit, that makes incarnate life *possible*.[13]

Coakley revisits Maurice Wiles's thesis that adoption of the Trinitarian formula for baptismal practice in the first centuries prematurely "fixed" an orthodox notion of the Trinity and thereby foreclosed critical reflection of

[12] Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2013), 43. This is the first of a projected four-volume systematic theology.
[13] Ibid., 56.

what kind of experiences are true data for Christian reflection. For Wiles, once experience pointed to the Spirit as a hypostasis, which issued in a Trinitarian formulation, the experiential ladder was kicked away in favor of demands for assent to a creed. This analysis leads him to conclude that the church was, in Coakley's words, "duped all along by its own authority and tradition."[14] Although she rejects Wiles's conclusions, she notes how his line of reasoning reveals the pervasive but problematic assumption that the significance of the doctrine of the Trinity is in the knowledge it conveys and communicates (and enforces) rather than in how it names the "incorporative" reality of the triune God. For her, "orthodoxy" is more a spiritual process than a doctrinal product demanding assent. While I do not agree with all of her arguments, I read her as cautioning us about how we think about "doing" anything with the doctrine of the Trinity, insofar as such doing succumbs to arbitrary assertions of authority as well as assumptions of "mastery" in language about God.

Throughout his writings, Jenson provides tools for Christians to unlearn assumptions that block or skew encountering the biblical God; one of these is the Hellenistic philosophical assumption about the necessity for deity to be immune from time. Jenson charges that Western Christology is functionally Nestorian in its distinction of the divine and human natures of Christ, a distinction driven by the perceived need to protect divinity from contamination by contingency, particularity, change, and death. However, this is not the God whose story in the Bible is one in which God is irrevocably *involved*. Thus, "the doctrine of Trinity is but a conceptually developed and sustained insistence that God himself is identified by and with the particular plotted sequence of events that make the narrative of Israel and her Christ."[15] Jenson writes that the being of God is "not a something, however rarefied or immaterial, but a *going-on*, a sequentially palpable event, like a kiss or a train wreck."[16] In the first instance, God is "what happens between Jesus and his Father in their Spirit," and thus also "what happens to Jesus and

[14] Ibid., 109.
[15] Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology: The Triune God*, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997), 60.
[16] Ibid., 214, emphasis in original.

the world."[17] Echoing Karl Barth, Jenson affirms that God's act is identical with God's being. However, unlike Barth's tendency to collapse God into God's primordial decision to be God in Jesus Christ, and thus for the Spirit to inspire mere human response, Jenson emphasizes the future of the story and its end. The Spirit *is* the power of God's future. God's future is one of true anticipation, and as the Spirit moves it animates and liberates humans and all creation in their contingent twists and turns to be truly enclosed within God's own being, God's own story. The "time" of the story of God plays out among the persons Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and as such is both cosmic and personal. Paradigmatically, as humans pray they find themselves taken up by the Spirit into the dialogue of Jesus and his Father.

Jenson's pneumatology provides helpful guidance for thinking about the nature of tradition, especially the irrevocable developments in the Spirit such as the establishment of the canon, a development of the tradition that Mennonite theology would generally affirm. Some of his consequent assertions—about the meaning and status of dogma, and the necessity of a teaching office in the church—pose a considerable challenge to the Mennonite tradition. But to Rempel's concern about the link between ecclesial stability and doctrinal integrity, Jenson offers this: "At bottom, the chief thing to be done about the integrity of the church across time is to pray that God will indeed use the church's structures of historical continuity to establish and preserve it, and to believe that he answers this prayer."[18] The veracity and meaning of any confessional statement are rooted in trust and prayer.

The point, then, may be not to start with doctrine but rather to find ourselves, including our human speech, already within the reality of the God who creates and redeems. The impossible task set before churches in the Mennonite tradition, and all Christians, is to speak truly about God. Nevertheless, Rempel rightly calls Mennonite churches to this task, despite and even because of the challenges in doing so.

Jeremy M. Bergen is Associate Professor of Religious Studies and Theological Studies, and Director of Theological Studies, at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo, Ontario.

[17] Ibid., 221.
[18] Ibid., 41.

Peace Spiritualities in a Trinitarian Grammar: The Ecumenical Pilgrimage of Just Peace

Andrés Pacheco-Lozano

Abstract

This essay references the WCC's Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. A peace spirituality rooted in a Trinitarian grammar invites pilgrims to become transformed as they confront the powers of violence and death. This framework makes a clear connection between self and community, self and public witness, and spirituality and ethics.

As I engaged with John Rempel's essay,[1] my attention was caught by one of his concluding arguments for the role of Trinitarian theologizing in ecumenical relations, both in its origins and contemporary implications. He contends, for example, that "Trinitarian theologizing is ecumenical by nature" (145). Concretely, I thought about the World Council of Churches' current programmatic initiative named the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace (hereafter PJP), the centrality of Trinitarian language in its conception, and how this language can be a framework to reinterpret the spiritual dimension in witnessing to God's peace and justice. While Rempel's historical reconstruction seems to account for the Mennonite tradition in relation to the doctrine of the Trinity, I will focus here on challenges that Historic Peace Churches (HPCs) are facing in their relations in ecumenical spaces, among which is the need to re-imagine a "transformative spirituality."

Conversations about the doctrine of the Trinity and its connections with classical and ecumenical theology on the one hand, and with Peace Church ecclesiology on the other, are not new. While A. James Reimer's explorations, as found for example in *Mennonites and Classical Theology* and *Toward an Anabaptist Political Theology,* relate classical theology (with special

[1] This essay is a response to John Rempel, "An Impossible Task: Trinitarian Theology for a Radical Church?", *The Conrad Grebel Review* 37, no. 2 (Spring 2019): 110-45. Page references to Rempel's essay appear in parentheses.

attention on the doctrine of the Trinity) to Anabaptist/Mennonite theology,[2] Fernando Enns has reflected on ecclesiological terms in the relations between the HPCs and the ecumenical family. In *The Peace Church and the Ecumenical Community,* Enns explores how the Trinitarian understanding embedded in the ecumenical movement "has provided correctives to apparent limitations in peace church ecclesiology."[3] Among these correctives is a reinterpretation of the church, the *koinonia*, as participation in the Triune God.[4] From this comes an invitation to rethink the boundaries of the church in respect to unity and ecumenicity, and to engage critically with the gap between the *experienced* church (what the church is) and the *believed* church (what the church ought to be), as well as the possibility of preserving a balance between personal belief/confession and life as a community without collapsing one into the other. Enns also accounts for how HPC ecclesiology has influenced ecumenical discussions by stressing the connection between theology, a non-hierarchical community, and the ethics of nonviolence.[5] I take as a point of departure this mutual relation between the ecumenical movement and the HPCs (particularly the Mennonites) as I engage with the PJP and its Triune grammar.

Three Interpretations of Spirituality

While there is a rich variety of ways to understand "spiritual" and "spirituality,"[6] I will consider three different sets of interpretation. First, spirituality as individual path. I have found this notion in Western-European circles: spirituality as a way to signal simultaneously a personal search for God or transcendence (expressed mostly in emotional and practical terms) and a disbelief of, or a disconnection with, the institutional side of religion,

[2] A. James Reimer, *Mennonites and Classical Theology: Dogmatic Foundations for Christian Ethics* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2001); A. James Reimer, *Toward an Anabaptist Political Theology*, ed. Paul G. Doerksen (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017).

[3] Fernando Enns, *The Peace Church and the Ecumenical Community: Ecclesiology and the Ethics of Nonviolence* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2007), 232.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., 243.

[6] For a more comprehensive and historical approach to uses of the notion of "spirituality" and the "spiritual," see Dorothee Soelle, *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2001).

including "systems of belief." In a context often framed as secular or even post-secular, spirituality[7] seems to have become either the last element to hold onto in the search for ultimate meaning, or the product of living in a highly individualistic society, seeking a path for oneself but doubting meta-narratives.

Second, spirituality as disconnected from social engagement or public witness of the churches. I have come across this notion particularly in the Colombian context, where historically different churches have claimed to focus on "the spiritual life" rather than on "political matters,"[8] as if these are opposite elements on the spectrum: the individual or even the church on one end, and the social/public on the other. I have found a variant of this notion in Mennonite conversations both in Colombia and in the international community, where spiritual life is presented as separate from a peace witness in society, as if the latter would be simply a social project of the church but not part of its core identity.

Third, spirituality can also be framed in terms of transformation and decolonization. If one works with *campesinos* and women's groups in Colombia, it is almost impossible not to notice the centrality that spiritual practices and rituals play in their nonviolent resistance to violence and their active search for transforming realities of injustice. Rather than disconnecting spirituality and the peace witness, these groups embody the deep connection between the two. Yet the challenge on many occasions is to find a theological language to express and embrace that connection. Along similar lines, I have come across work on post-colonial theology by Susan Abraham, who sees in spirituality the potential of "decolonizing the spirit."[9]

---

[7] "God in Nederland" (God in the Netherlands) is a study conducted every year since 1966 on the phenomenon of belief in that nation. The most recent one states that 14 percent of the population claim to be "theists," while 28 percent describe themselves as "believers of something," over against 34 percent agnostics and 24 percent atheists. For the full report and a nuanced and detailed differentiation between faith, belief, and spirituality, see Tom Bernts and Joantine Berghuijs, eds., *God in Nederland: 1966-2015* (Utrecht: Ten Have, 2016), 65.

[8] Colombian sociologist William Beltran describes the tendency of protestant churches in their emergence in Colombia to focus on individual faith as their central focus. See William Beltran, "Pluralización religiosa y cambio social en Colombia" in *Theologica Xaveriana* 63, no. 175 (January-June 2013): 57-85.

[9] Susan Abraham, *Identity, Ethics and Nonviolence in Postcolonial Theory: A Rahnerian Theological Assessment* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 170.

While colonialism is characterized by the rigidity of identities (of both the colonized and the colonizers), spirituality is a search for unity with God. It is "the *ekstasis* toward God, out of the rigidity of self-identity," says Abraham, and "the *ekstasis* out of the self-authorized position of power in the sincere empathy for the otherness."[10] The path of this search is translated into nonviolence as the only way that the rigidity of "victims" and "perpetrators" can be overcome, by persuasive actions leading aggressors to "recognize in the victims of their inhumanity, the humanity they have in common."[11]

In the midst of these different understandings of spirituality, I think that the ecumenical PJP could serve as a theological framework, with a Trinitarian grammar, to engage with some of these notions while providing a theological language to articulate others.

PJP and Trinitarian Grammar

In 2013, the World Council of Churches (WCC) embarked on the PJP initiative, which emerged as both a general programmatic guidance for individual activities within the WCC and an ecumenical theological horizon. Of particular interest here is the use of the pilgrimage metaphor as a way to stress the *spiritual* dimension of transforming injustices and building peace. The PJP has been framed as "a transformative journey that God invites us to in anticipation of the final purpose for the world that the Triune God brings about. The movement of love which is essential to the Triune God manifests itself in the promise of justice and peace."[12] The first invitees to engage in this journey from the perspective of the ecumenical fellowship were the churches themselves, implying that a transformative spirituality is not reduced to individual experience but can take shape in, and be nurtured and inspired by, a community.

The WCC—especially the Theological Study Group on this initiative—has considered three different dimensions of the PJP, building on the work of Dorothee Soelle[13] and providing Trinitarian language for understanding

[10] Ibid., 156.

[11] Ibid., 183-84.

[12] World Council of Churches, "An Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace." https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/geneva-2014/an-invitation-to-the-pilgrimage-of-justice-and-peace, accessed October 1, 2019.

[13] Soelle depicts mysticism (spirituality) as "*cognitio Dei experimentalis* (the knowledge of God

them. These dimensions are *via positiva, via negativa,* and *via transformativa*. Given that these dimensions have been described in more detail elsewhere,[14] I will present these dimensions briefly, paying attention to how the theology of Jürgen Moltmann, one of Rempel's chosen dialogue partners, gives more Trinitarian depth to the PJP.

The first dimension, the *via positiva*, highlights the image of God as creator.[15] This image implies that a transformative spiritual journey begins when we as pilgrims recognize ourselves—in a movement that can be described as "being amazed"—as interconnected with, and in relation to, God and creation. Following Moltmann's arguments in *The Crucified God*, it could be said that this expression of God as creator acquires new proportions and proximity in light of the incarnation, in which God's character and care for creation is ultimately expressed in the gift of reconciliation in Christ. This leads us to see ourselves as a reconciled creation (WCC sometimes uses the term "reconciled diversity") to be perfected in the eschatological promise of "God being all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28).[16] Spirituality is in this sense a journey to recognize ourselves as broken-and-restored members of creation, a recognition made possible by the work of the Spirit, who guides us into community. In the midst of current divisions and polarizations, this path of searching and embracing a reconciled unity with God, with others, and with nature seems to be one of the most radical expressions of faith. This search counteracts individualistic notions of the spiritual, and therefore overcomes such apparent dichotomies as individual-community and spiritual-social.

The second dimension, the *via negativa*, is framed within the PJP in close connection with Jesus' way of the cross.[17] In the light of the cross, the

through and from experience):" in *The Silent Cry*, 45. Mysticism (spirituality) is a journey of searching for union with God and, through it, with the rest of creation.

[14] For a more detailed description of the PJP, see Fernando Enns and Andrés Pacheco-Lozano, "The Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace: A Fresh Ecumenical Approach in the Violent Context of Colombia in Global Mennonite Peacebuilding" *The Conrad Grebel Review* 35, no. 3 (Fall 2017): 308-22.

[15] See World Council of Churches, "Statement on the Way of Just Peace," https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2013-busan/adopted-documents-statements/the-way-of-just-peace, accessed October 1, 2019.

[16] See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1993).

[17] See World Council of Churches, "Statement on the Way of Just Peace."

spiritual journey entails a certain sense of purge and purification, expressed in a confrontation with our own connection and identification with the powers of violence and death that are exposed at the cross, insofar as we visit the wounds that those powers have created.

In my view, relating the *via negativa* with the cross does not mean reducing the Christ event to the *via dolorosa*—as if the only meaning of Jesus in the world is his death—but rather points to a God whose love for creation has led God to make space in Godself for mourning, suffering, and feelings of godforsakenness.[18] This understanding of God, Moltmann would argue, is only possible when thinking in God in Trinitarian terms.[19] We are to consider a Son who feels forsaken; the Father's mourning for the death of the Son; and the work of the Spirit, who brings life out of death and in whom the godless and godforsaken are justified—for the Spirit is the giver of faith. Thus, the "purification of the self" cannot be for selfish reasons but rather is the result of letting go of the ego in order to open up and be in solidarity with the other. The way of the cross, then, signals a call to walk in radical solidarity with the victims, echoing God's expression of solidarity at the cross, while allowing their experiences to inform and reshape our own spiritual journey. Without taking seriously both evil and the wounds it creates, it is impossible to nurture a spirituality that leads to healing and the transforming of those very structures. In this sense, spirituality and public engagement and witness cannot be opposed or disconnected.

The third dimension, the *via transformativa*, is inspired by the transformative action of the Holy Spirit, according to the WCC's framing of the PJP.[20] The work of the Spirit leads pilgrims into transformation in at least two directions: (1) resisting violence and injustices, and (2) becoming "healed healers." By embracing being part of creation and by letting go of the connections to violence and oppression, we gain space for a renewed ethical commitment to witnessing to peace and justice within the realities of injustice and oppression. The *via transformativa* is a form of resistance to those destructive forces.

In the midst of a yet-to-be-perfected world it is the crucified Christ,

[18] Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 19.
[19] Ibid., 203, 244.
[20] See World Council of Churches, "Statement of the Way of Just Peace."

Moltmann argues, who is the "compass" that enables us to "test" our witnessing.[21] This is a reminder that the pilgrimage involves constantly re-rooting ourselves—reinterpreting our identity and decisions in light of a God whose love becomes intelligible in the most radical form on the cross, embracing in it all creation and making transformation a possible path for us. When rooted in a Trinitarian grammar, transformation takes place as we open up to the Divine other and to others, inspired by the making-space-in-the-self and the opening-up-to-the-other[22] that characterize the relations of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

It is in this framework that pilgrims can become "healed healers." Thus, rather than simply becoming "activists," they will find that a spirituality rooted in a Trinitarian grammar invites them to be become transformed as they confront—in themselves and in the world—the powers of violence and death. This framework provides a theological language to articulate spirituality in terms of transforming the realities of oppression while simultaneously decolonizing the spirit, in that it counteracts rigid identities (even when "peace" is alleged to be a central aspect of our identity). It becomes a lens for looking critically at reduced or limited notions of spirituality while offering a language and an imagination to relate spirituality and ethics as well as spirituality and witnessing to peace and justice.

Towards Spiritualities of Peace and Justice Inspired by a Trinitarian Image

By embracing God's gift of creation, letting go of the ego, visiting the wounds (the cross of Christ), and healing/transforming the realities that cause these wounds (empowered by the work of the Spirit), we can gain a more complex and encompassing image of spirituality. Moltmann's theology helps us take a step in that direction by showing how each dimension of the transformative journey cannot simply be referred to one person of the Trinity, and how the community of the Trinity becomes intelligible in the incarnation, cross, and resurrection of Christ, providing guidance for our transformation.

[21] Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 3.

[22] Building on Moltmann's Trinitarian theology, Miroslav Volf claims that at the center of human reconciliation is the question of how the Triune God and the relations of the persons of the Trinity can become a model for their framing and reconstruction. See Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), especially 100 and 126.

A triune image of God, then, is (1) an invitation to participate in the life of the divine community and to participate in, and anticipate, God's promises of justice and peace, and (2) a model that signals the different dimensions that a spiritual transformative journey must consider. With this image it is impossible to advance a spirituality disconnected from public witness, and equally impossible to assume to be peacemakers without being self-critical and willing to walk a path of self-transformation. Such a Trinitarian framework enables us to see a clear connection between self and community, self and public witness, and spirituality and ethics.

I have tried to stress how Trinitarian theology not only connects the ecumenical fellowship but also provides a corrective and an inspiration to the HPC witness. In this particular case, the connection I am making includes addressing the dimension of spirituality, which has often caused internal division between "spiritual" and "social" focuses. The approach I am suggesting will help widen the understanding of peace by exploring the spiritual dimension and, with it, create spaces for dialogue within the Mennonite community.

Andrés Pacheco-Lozano is a Ph.D. candidate at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and a Research Assistant for the Amsterdam Center for Religion, Peace and Justice Studies.

Reply to Respondents

Impossible: Trinitarianism and a Radical Peace Ethic?

John D. Rempel

Abstract

In engaging with seven respondents to "An Impossible Task: Trinitarian Theology for a Radical Church?" the author observes that several affirm, enrich, or extend his argument, while others pose significant challenges to it. He re-affirms the mystery of God, the limitations of language, and the importance of the Nicene model.

I am honored that seven theologians wrote such probing and challenging critiques in a collegial spirit.[1] That all the critiques are Trinitarian not only offers us a common starting point for theologizing but also shows the distinctiveness, for good or ill, of Nicene Trinitarianism. The challenge before me here is to select a few trains of thought in each of my interlocutors that have made me think twice in relation to the Nicene model I had proposed, with a social Trinity as the central paradigm. Some took exception to my logic or method, while others found the substance of my thesis unpersuasive. Still others affirmed the direction of my thesis by expanding arguments I had made from the vantage point of their discipline. My procedure below will be to engage two or three postulates of each writer, bearing in mind the two questions that guided my thinking as I prepared the original lecture. First, does Nicene Trinitarianism provide an entry point to the Bible that is unique, a grammar that is dynamic enough, a model that is capacious enough, to accommodate new contexts? Second, does it preserve and prosper images of God that make pacifism a likely interpretive key of the Gospel?

Travis Kroeker's quarrel is not with 'doctrine' as such, as his love for Augustine's theology attests, but with harnessing the insights of theological

[1] This essay is a reply to respondents who engaged with the author's essay, "An Impossible Task: Trinitarian Theology for a Radical Church?" That essay and the responses appear in *The Conrad Grebel Review* 37, no. 2 (2019): 110-207.

inquiry to "a conceptual logic that sorts this out at the level of formal 'belief.'" (149) Am I not grasping the fullness of Kroeker's case, if I respond by agreeing that "the dramatic accounts of the logos becoming flesh" is the Event, and Julian of Norwich's spirituality is the experience of the Event? If we keep the ranking clear—first the Incarnation, then our participation in it—then our articulation of doctrine seems to be the inevitable articulation of the meaning of the Incarnation. Doctrine is the servant. If it remains true to the Event that inspired it, it has the necessary vocation of addressing the affirmations and questions arising from the Christian's experience of the Event. I think Kroeker is arguing that the Event, the Gospel, is subversive and scandalous in a way that bursts out of any systematic articulation of it. That's why I say doctrine is the third dynamic of Christian identity. But even "vernacular mysticism"—whether of Julian, the Waldensians, or the Anabaptists—allowed for doctrine's tertiary but essential place in the Christian scheme of things.

I like the pithy phrase early in Andrea Saner's response: "Trinitarian grammar clarifies what is expressible" (154). It reminds us that the mystery of God is beyond human expression yet there is enough divine self-revelation for us to live by. I accept Saner's counsel to attend more seriously to the Scriptural character of the doctrine of the Triune God. Her contrast between the exegetical method of David Yeago and John Howard Yoder is illuminating at several points. She rightly notes that I remain unsatisfied with Yoder's judgment that the Nicene Trinity arises only because of an intellectual difficulty. But she enriches my grasp of Yoder by illustrating his theological method by means of his reading of Philippians 2. In it she traces a theological process in which the on-the-face-of-it interpretation of the noun 'form' yields to insights from other biblical writers, and concludes with the less obvious but cumulative meaning of 'pre-existence' in early Christological formulations (158). Saner claims that the "doctrine of the Trinity requires continual returning to the text of Scripture" (161). My approach would be to set two claims side by side. One is Saner's, urging that Nicene theologians be totally honest when they go back to individual Scripture passages. The other is my own, namely that no subsequent engagement with the threesome-ness of God can say less than Nicaea, although it can say more.

In her skilled examination of Hubmaier's and Marpeck's

Trinitarianism, Breanna Nickel makes an incisive assertion: the former's conviction is expressed most fully in his tripartite anthropology, whereas the latter's is grounded in his Christology (167). Nickel marshals evidence to conclude that Marpeck's overemphasis on Christ's humanity "renders the Trinitarian Godhead more distant and harder to assess" (168). Context is important here. Marpeck focuses on the humanity of Christ because Christ's true and enduring human nature was under fire from Marpeck's fellow radicals, the Spiritualists. I suggest that his imbalance has a valid pastoral reason. Marpeck acknowledges this in the latter part of his *magnum opus*, *The Response,* where he repeatedly refers to the Trinity as his foundational reference point.[2] I welcome Nickel's insight that both theologians are Trinitarian not simply as an inherited framework but because it provides explanations for the divine/human relationship in their own theologizing (169). In conclusion Nickel wonders whether my defence of the ongoing validity of past "particular" Trinitarian interpretations stands up to scrutiny (170). On the positive side, she acknowledges my attempted correlation of ecclesiology, ethics, and doctrine. The challenge her conclusion leaves with me is to search the dominant and dissident tradition for better models for each generation's creativity in relation to its accountability.

Sarah Johnson rightly moves the discussion from scholarly abstractions to pastoral concretions. Since "speech about God is ever more concentrated on the Sunday assembly. . . . What is Trinitarian worship for a radical church?" (171-72). I will comment on possible implications for a number of Johnson's topics. First is the debate about creeds in recent Mennonite hymnals. The editors of the 1969 book use 'affirmations of faith' to include any public, corporate profession of faith without an explicit priority other than that the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds come first. I affirm Johnson's point that creedal language "articulate[s] Trinitarian deep structures" and "stretch[es] the *historical memory* of the church" (176). The matter of "cognitive assent" is tricky. While creedal language is not a set of rational propositions, it is making truth claims. I'm attracted to her suggestion (and examples) that Mennonites might be more receptive to sung responses that

[2] Johann Loserth, Pilgram Marpecks Antwort auf Kaspar Schwenckfelds Beurteilung des Buches der Bundesbezeugung von 1542 (Wien: Carl Fromme, 1929), 135, 144-45, 532-35, 549-53.

resonate ecumenically and use poetic language faithful to the original text.

Suzanne Guenther Loewen makes her starting point my premise "that the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity is flexible enough to allow for radical innovation" (180). We both agree that in principle Mennonitism and feminism meet the criterion of communities of dissenting creativity that nevertheless remain accountable to the Trinitarian confession of God. But, as she Loewen says, her theological methods and mine diverge. First, she asserts that I wrongly hold Elizabeth Johnson "to norms and a theological method which she does not apply to herself" (181). Guenther Loewen lists Johnson's three interconnected problems with the inherited doctrine of the Trinity: "it is disconnected from experience, it has been literalized, and it has been used to legitimate the marginalization of women" (182). While theologians sometimes get lost in abstractions, the intention of Nicene Trinitarianism is to show precisely that it is God's relational nature that lets us experience God That is why the process leading to the Creed insisted that the Holy Spirit, like the Father and the Son, is a "person." One source of this claim is Paul's picture of the bond between God's Spirit and our spirit, especially in Romans 8. Secondly, Johnson (and Guenther Loewen) fault the church for taking Nicene language literally. I agree. Doing so is an abuse of the theological method behind Nicaea. However, I find the evidence convincing that the limits of language and its analogical nature in talking about God were inherent in the mindset of the doctrine's framers and later exponents. This is most profoundly true of Gregory of Nazianzus. Third, the Creed's hierarchical view of the world and God has been used to marginalize women. This is true. At the same time the 4th-century picture of God behind Nicaea asserts, particularly in the East, a dynamic mutuality among the three persons of the one God as the counterpoint to hierarchy. In *God for Us*, Catherine LaCugna incorporates this mutuality into feminist theologizing.[3]

According to Guenther Loewen, leading feminist theologians like Johnson and Soelle have taken this notion of God's mutuality in a "post-theistic" direction. This concept has been variously interpreted but it generally stands in contrast to "theism," a useful shorthand for the orthodox picture of God, characterized by transcendence and immanence. I raise two

[3] Catherine LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1973), 288-305.

questions concerning this radical shift in models for talking about God: one has to do with method, the other with substance.

As to method, while feminism and Mennonitism share aspects of context and stance, I disagree that they have the same paradigm (183-84). To go back to origins, Anabaptism was a diverse, communal movement. But at its most crucial turning point—exceptions aside—it did not take the path of its radical siblings, Spiritualism and Unitarianism, but remained consciously Trinitarian. The principle I take from this defining choice is that the Anabaptist path of dissent realized that in and of itself it could not preserve the Gospel. It could do so only in common with the dominant tradition, for all the ethical and ecclesiological wrangling this brought with it. In my essay I tried to show that beginning with the Enlightenment, when Mennonitism broke away from its rootedness in the long tradition, it endangered both its theological and ethical moorings.

As to substance, I question the haste with which Guenther Loewen identifies theism with a God who is wholly other and absent from the world. I take it that the gist of post-theism, as she sees it is the overcoming of this perceived estrangement of God and world. But for Nicene orthodoxy, the paradoxical overcoming of God's absence with his presence is the genius of Trinitarianism. Much more is at stake here than meets the eye. This is evident from the stance of dissident theological examples that Guenther Loewen affirms. In Gordon Kaufman's thought the divine is a benign process and explicitly not a "person" to whom we can pray. Soelle describes the 'god of theism' as absent and apathetic. Instead, in her later writings, she takes refuge in a form of mysticism that her critics would say forfeits the "personhood" of God. Having made this argument, I still wonder if Guenther Loewen and I have missed the heart of each other's stance.

Obviously, I cannot do justice to Jeremy Bergen's erudite presentation in a few paragraphs. His chief worry is that my approach instrumentalizes the doctrine of the Trinity. His stress on "method, doctrine, and stability" (191ff) rings true to me. Rather than grounding the church's way of imagining and believing in God in a doctrine of God, Bergen grounds the nature of theology directly in the reality of God. The one is metaphysical, the other is experiential. He points out that James Reimer and Denny Weaver both root their way of theologizing in the being of God expressed doctrinally

but make quite different deductions from it. Bergen concludes that "to place any doctrine at the center will be a human effort" (193). Is the church's and the Christian's experience of God's "reality" less characterized by human limitation? My counterpoint is that the source of doctrine is God's self-disclosure recorded in the Bible to Israel and the church. Tradition, in the deep sense, is the work of the Holy Spirit faithfully guiding the church to re-articulate that truth in new contexts. This process is fallible but includes moments of transformative clarity like Nicaea and the church's much belated condemnation of slavery. Bergen uses Robert Jenson's felicitous phrase "irrevocable developments in the Spirit" (199) to say what I am trying to say with the term "moments of transformative clarity." Maybe holding both notions side by side can create a bridge between our approaches.

Bergen accurately summarizes my comparison between Galenus Abrahamsz and Thielemann van Braght, but disputes my conclusion. He wants to see if and how Abrahamsz's and van Braght's positions are correlated with the doctrine of the Trinity, and contends that other convictions about belief and practice shaped their positions. I haven't studied this 17th-century case enough to argue one way or the other. When Bergen moves to the 19th-century case study, it seems to me that the subjectivism built into liberal theology unintentionally makes doctrine the primary means of the church's faithfulness and experience the secondary one. The subjectivism and reductionism of 19th-century Mennonite church life (congregational autonomy and individual conscience as final reference points) opened the way for departing from both ecumenical and Mennonite tradition. Especially after the recent exodus of conservatives from Mennonite Church Canada and USA, are we in danger of the same reductionism?

At the same time, I heed Bergen's warning that for over 1500 years holding to "a Nicene doctrine of the Trinity itself [is] not enough to ensure any particular ethical stand" (195). It is the church in its experience of God that applies doctrine: how it does this depends on what kind of church it is. Mennonite ecclesiology, Bergen suggests, has instability built into it (195-96). Historically, Mennonites would have agreed with Anglican theologian Maurice Wiles**.** Isn't the Mennonite teaching—that baptism is the enactment of a believer coming to faith and the church as the body of those who have done so—an act of restoring "the experiential ladder"? I welcome, as

Coakley says, "an inherent reflexivity in the divine" into which the church and the Christian are drawn. I resonate with the doctrine of the Trinity as the insistence that God is identified by the sacred narrative (199). But God is more than that. Bergen turns to Jenson for a framework of the church's experience of God's reality as the basis of ecclesial stability and doctrinal integrity, two essential aspects of the model I am advocating (199). For this approach to be convincing we need to know more concretely what beginning with "human speech" and the "reality of God" looks like (199).

Andrés Pacheco-Lozano begins where Bergen left off, by applying a Trinitarian grammar concretely to the pursuit of peace and justice, especially as expressed in the World Council of Churches' Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace (PJP). Pacheco-Lozano offers an understanding of the church's *koinonia* as participation in the Triune God (201). According to peace theologian Fernando Enns, this reality consists of a dynamic unity among theology, non-hierarchical community and the ethic of nonviolence. Bringing together the building blocks of such a Trinitarian architecture is both ambitious and laudable. It is a viable alternative to the common, if well intended, model in which Christology is often reduced to Jesus as teacher, for lack of a Trinitarian structure with a fuller Christology. Pacheco-Lozano's contrast between "activist" and "healed healer" (206) clarifies the difference between the two. With reference to Moltmann's Triune paradigm, the proposed model has a robust picture of God as creator, as the Incarnate One, and as the Indwelling Presence, who is at work in the creation, the church, and the world. However, although the place of the church is implied, little is actually said about the church as covenanted believers in whom this experiment in nonviolent community is incubated over and over again. This grounded and engaged *ecclesia* would be a corrective to the practice of being church in both established and free churches.

John D. Rempel is Senior Fellow at the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre.

Call for Proposals

HOPE, DESPAIR, LAMENT

Graduate Student Conference IX
June 18-20, 2020
Eastern Mennonite University
Harrisonburg, VA

O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen?
Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save? -- Habakkuk 1:2

What is the role of hope, despair, and lament for a people of peace in a world marked by polarization, violence, and ecological catastrophe? How might the church make sense of an uncertain future, and what possible futures might emerge from and for the church? Are there resources within Anabaptist/Mennonite faith traditions that speak to our current moment?

Hosted by the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre, this conference invites proposals for scholarly papers and other presentations aimed at a scholarly audience that explore hope, despair, and/or lament. The aim is to offer a forum for graduate students working on Anabaptist/Mennonite related topics and/or belonging to Anabaptist/Mennonite traditions to present their research in an interdisciplinary and ecumenical context and to engage with colleagues and peers.

We welcome proposals from disciplines including but not limited to theology, biblical studies, patristics, pastoral/practical studies, ethics, philosophy, religious studies, peacebuilding and conflict transformation studies, anthropology, sociology, gender studies, diaspora and transnational studies, history, literature, and musicology.

Travel bursaries may be available to qualifying presenters.
Accommodation details TBA.

For more information: http://uwaterloo.ca/grebel/tmtcgradconference

DEADLINE FOR PROPOSALS: FEBRUARY 1, 2020

Send your proposal (300 words max., incl. title) to mennonite.centre@utoronto.ca.
Include your name and affiliation only in your e-mail cover, not in the proposal.

Conference Notice

INDIGENOUS-MENNONITE ENCOUNTERS

May 14-16, 2021

A DIVERGENT VOICES OF CANADIAN MENNONITES CONFERENCE

Conrad Grebel University College
Waterloo, Ontario

In October 2000 the History of Aboriginal-Mennonite Relations Conference was held at the University of Winnipeg. Much has happened in Indigenous-Canadian relations since then, including the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the "Idle No More" movement, awareness of the impact of the "Sixties Scoop," and initiatives to Indigenize post-secondary institutions. At the same time Mennonite organizations, churches, and individuals are establishing new relationships with Indigenous communities, reconsidering their settler narratives, and assessing their roles in past injustices.

The Institute of Anabaptist and Mennonite Studies is pleased to host a Divergent Voices of Canadian Mennonites conference in 2021 on the theme of Indigenous-Mennonite encounters. The conference location is significant, as Mennonites were the first European settlers on this land, the traditional territory of the Attawandaron, Anishinaabeg and Haudenosaunee peoples, comprising Block 2 of the Haldimand Tract granted in 1784 to the Six Nations. Waterloo is also near both the first area of settlement for Mennonites in Canada and the largest First Nations reserve in Canada, Six Nations of the Grand River.

The conference will involve Indigenous and Mennonite voices and will focus on building present relationships through discovering the past.

ADDITIONAL DETAILS AND A CALL FOR PROPOSALS WILL FOLLOW.

Marlene Epp and Laureen Harder-Gissing,
Institute of Anabaptist and Mennonite Studies,
Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, ON N2L 3G1

The Conrad Grebel Review (CGR) is a multi-disciplinary peer-reviewed journal of Christian inquiry devoted to advancing thoughtful, sustained discussions of theology, peace, society, and culture from broadly-based Anabaptist/Mennonite perspectives. It is published three times a year in print and electronically.

Articles
Articles are original works of scholarship engaged with relevant disciplinary literature, written in a style appealing to the educated non-specialist, and properly referenced. Length limit: 7500 words, excluding notes, plus a 100-word abstract. Manuscripts are typically sent in blind copy to two peer-reviewers for assessment.

Reflections
Reflections are thoughtful and/or provocative pieces drawing on personal expertise and experience, and may take the form of homilies, speeches, or essays. While held to the same critical standard as articles, they are generally free of scholarly apparatus. Length limit: 3000 words.

Responses
Responses are replies to articles either recently published in CGR or appearing in the same issue by arrangement. Length is negotiable.

Book Reviews and Book Review Essays
Book reviews draw attention to current scholarly and other works that fall within CGR's mandate. Length limit: 900 words. Book review essays typically cover several publications on a common theme. For more information, contact CGR Book Review Editor Kyle Gingerich Hiebert (kyle.gingerichhiebert@utoronto.ca).

SUBMISSION PROCEDURE

We welcome submissions of articles, reflections, and responses. Send your submission electronically as a WORD attachment to: **Stephen Jones, Managing Editor, cgredit@uwaterloo.ca.** Include your full name, brief biographical information, and institutional affiliation in the covering e-mail. CGR will acknowledge receipt immediately, and will keep you informed throughout the assessment process. Accepted papers are subject to Chicago style and copy editing, and are submitted to authors for approval before publication.

For CGR's Style Guide, Citation Format Guide, and other useful information, please consult the submissions page on our website: grebel.ca/cgreview.

CGR is indexed in Religious & Theological Abstracts, EBSCOhost databases, in the Atla (American Theological Library Association) Religion Database, and in the full-text AtlaSerials® collection. CGR is also available online at grebel.ca/cgreview.

Contents

MENNONITES AND THE TRINITY
GUEST EDITOR: Kyle Gingerich Hiebert

Introduction
Kyle Gingerich Hiebert

An Impossible Task: Trinitarian Theology for a Radical Church?
John D. Rempel

The Scandalous Drama of Trinitarian Theology for a Radical Church
P. Travis Kroeker

Scripture and the Nicene Gift
Andrea D. Saner

The Anabaptists' Tie to Trinitarianism
Breanna J. Nickel

Trinitarian Worship for a Radical Church?
Sarah Kathleen Johnson

Living Out the Trinity: A Mennonite-Feminist Theology
of Diversity and Community
Susanne Guenther Loewen

Doctrine, Stability, and Human Speech within God
Jeremy M. Bergen

Peace Spiritualities in a Trinitarian Grammar:
The Ecumenical Pilgrimage of Just Peace
Andrés Pacheco-Lozano

Impossible: Trinitarianism and a Radical Peace Ethic?
John D. Rempel