

Singing Shapes Communion: The Progression of Eucharistic Theology in 20th-Century Mennonite Hymnals

Adam M.L. Tice

Introduction

Over the course of the 20th century, North American Mennonites have experienced major shifts in eucharistic theology and practice. According to Mennonite theologian John Rempel, early Anabaptist eucharistic thought involved a sense of “ethical earnestness” with a “pre-condition of faith and love for a true breaking of bread.”¹ A preparatory service, held the week before communion, was centered on confession and reconciliation. As North American Mennonites became less separatist, these eucharistic themes were augmented and shifted. In some cases, traditional ideas were rejected outright.

Careful analysis of hymnals, which provide a useful glimpse into a denomination’s historical theology and practice, can reveal what theology is made most memorably available to the church body. In addition, hymnals have served to influence Mennonite eucharistic practice by introducing new themes and ideas to congregations. Hymnals both reflect and drive worship practice and theology; beyond being an aid to worship, they are communal books of living theology. They reflect what has come before and what is current in the worship of the community at the time of publication. Hymnal committees also shape future practice by introducing new hymns and excising others. Editors make significant decisions about placement and indexing that influence the way hymns are used.

In this article I examine the evolution and refinement of eucharistic theology, worship, and practice as evidenced in Mennonite hymnody.² I consider three major periods in 20th-century Mennonite eucharistic thought and show the contribution the various hymnals made to each, and I conclude with suggestions for future directions in Mennonite eucharistic hymnody.

My focus is on six hymnals representing a family tree of music and text. These books have reflected and driven worship since the first

one was published in 1902.³ Two converging branches of this tree are the General Conference Mennonite Church (GC) and the Mennonite Church (MC). From the MC side come *Church and Sunday School Hymnal with Supplement* 1902, *Supplement* 1911, hereafter MC1,⁴ and *Church Hymnal*, 1927, hereafter MC2.⁵ From the GC side are *Mennonite Hymn Book*, 1927, hereafter GC1,⁶ and *The Mennonite Hymnary*, 1940, hereafter GC2.⁷ The fifth book was published jointly in 1969 (*Mennonite Hymnal*, hereafter MH),⁸ and the sixth in 1992 (*Hymnal: A Worship Book*, hereafter HWB.)⁹ The two denominations merged in the late 1990s; the joint hymnbooks helped propel the move toward union.¹⁰

The six hymnals cover three time periods that in turn reveal distinct strains of eucharistic thought. The first period encompasses the first four hymnals, independently produced by the GC and the MC. Penitence and memorial marked historical Mennonite practice.¹¹ Ethical conformity was of utmost importance. The link between the eucharist and the passion of Christ was dominant in the hymnody of the time.

At the beginning of the 20th century, MC and GC churches diverged in their acceptance of these traditions. MC churches almost universally continued them while GC churches began exploring new forms. By mid-century, problems of legalism (especially an overemphasis on using the Lord's Supper as a means of church discipline) drove MC churches to join GC churches in exploring eucharistic practices of other traditions.¹² This inevitably meant previous practices were ignored. MH represents this second period in the present study.

The third period is ongoing. It is a time of recovery and reclamation of past traditions. Liturgical scholarship and an expanding awareness of outside practices are influencing expansion and creativity. Rempel writes, "The advent of ecumenical biblical scholarship, a richer theology of grace, and the recovery of an appreciation for the nonrational dimensions of human experience are leading to a fuller theology and practice of communion in all churches."¹³ HWB represents this period.

Methodology

I have included hymns that are grouped together in a communion section, with the exception of MC1, which does not have a table of contents. There

are, no doubt, many other hymns that have been utilized by congregations in conjunction with the Lord's Supper, but I focus on those that hymnal committees considered specific to the eucharist and related rites, e.g., foot washing. By briefly analyzing each eucharistic text, I identify several themes occurring in Mennonite hymnody. Most texts have more than one theme; in some cases, up to five themes were evident in the progression through several verses. Certain themes are closely matched with each other and tend to appear together. The themes of memorial, thanksgiving, eschatological banquet, unity, mystery, and liberation/justice are adapted from Horton Davies.¹⁴ I have added nourishment, penitence, intimacy, and ordinance, as well as extra designations for foot washing and passing the peace. Following is a brief discussion of each theme with examples from the hymnals.

Memorial

Traditionally, the Eucharist is a time of remembrance of the first Lord's Supper. Memorial themes originate in the *anamnēsis*, the part of the eucharistic prayer in which the redemptive acts of Jesus are recalled. Rempel states that "[t]he primal act of the Christian church is the gathering to eat bread and drink wine *in memory* of Jesus."¹⁵ Memorial hymns often foster an explicit or implicit sense that the singer is in some way personally involved or responsible for Christ's suffering. One of the most explicit is an Isaac Watts hymn:

Alas! and did my Savior bleed?
And did my Sovereign die?
Would He devote that sacred head
For such a worm as I?¹⁶

This hymn is found in each of the six hymnals; however, it is included only in the communion section of the two MC books, indicating the importance of Passion-oriented memorial hymns in that tradition. The other books locate it under Jesus' Passion. GC2 and MH include it in the index under communion or Lord's Supper, while HWB does not.

Penitence

Penitential hymns invite confession but may or may not include assurance of forgiveness. A strong awareness of personal unworthiness is often cultivated,

and a sense that the Christian does not deserve the fruits of Christ's gracious action. Benjamin Beddome wrote a hymn demonstrating this theme, found in MC1.

Did Christ o'er sinners weep,
And shall our cheeks be dry?
Let tears of penitential grief
Flow forth from ev'ry eye.¹⁷

Thanksgiving

Though I use "Eucharist" in a general sense throughout this study, the term is derived from a Greek word best translated as "thanksgiving." Thanksgiving is deeply rooted in Hebraic understandings of history, particularly as expressed in the Passover. God's actions in history are recalled, and there is a deep awareness of God's continuing action as well as the community's participation in God's history. The thanksgiving theme often memorializes Christ's continuing life, as opposed to the more penitential version of memorialism stressing Christ's passion and death. Strangely, thanksgiving in the context of memorial has not been evident in Mennonite practice or hymnody until recently. Brian Wren, a significant hymn-writer in the late 20th century, contributes this hymn of memorial and thanksgiving to HWB:

I come with joy to meet my Lord,
Forgiven, loved, and free,
In awe and wonder to recall
His life laid down for me.¹⁸

Intimacy

The theme of intimacy refers to an awareness of the presence of Christ at the Lord's Supper, experienced either individually or corporately. A related theme is that the church itself is the body of Christ. Communion serves as a reminder that Jesus is still living and present, both in the body of believers and in the Spirit. A central metaphor is that in taking communion we make Jesus a part of us. MH includes a hymn by James Montgomery expressing the dual themes of intimacy and nourishment:

Be known to us in breaking bread,
But do not then depart;
Savior, abide with us, and spread
Thy table in our heart.
There sup with us in love divine;
Thy body and Thy blood,
That living bread, that heav'nly wine,
Be our immortal food.¹⁹

Nourishment

I include nourishment as a separate category because a number of hymns deal with the dual themes of physical and spiritual nourishment without dealing explicitly with the presence of Christ. The symbol, rather than its antecedent, is of primary importance in many of these hymns. A key consideration is that the Lord's Supper is an actual meal with spiritual value. Nourishment of the soul is tangibly enacted, and so, understood. John 6:32-35 provides a framework for this understanding. Jesus identifies himself as the true life-giving bread that satisfies all hunger and the drink that satisfies all thirst. The hymn "I am the bread of life" by Suzanne Toolan is drawn directly from this text.

I am the bread of life.
You who come to me shall not hunger,
and who believe in me shall not thirst.²⁰

Unity

Unity is the theme most closely associated with the word "communion." The focal point is the connection between believers forged by Christ through his meal. The body of believers, made up of many individuals, is corporately nourished and strengthened through the breaking of bread. Davies states that "the sense of unity of Christians – past, present, and future – is also manifested in the service of Holy Communion. What this sacred meal is intended to exhibit is the profound fellowship and sharing of Christians with Christ."²¹ In addition, the church itself is the body of Christ. "In the breaking of bread, this reality is recreated, in it Jesus' incarnation is

prolonged through time.”²²

In these hymns, the theme of unity is most often tied to those of intimacy and nourishment. It appears as a primary theme in a hymn by Charles Wesley found in the two MC hymnals.

Verse 1

All praise to our redeeming Lord,
Who joins us by His grace,
And bids us, each to each restored,
Together seek His face.

A non-Wesley verse is added:

Verse 3

The kiss of peace to each we give—
A pledge of Christian love;
In love, while here on earth we’ll live,
In love we’ll dwell above.²³

This hymn is the single entry under the designation “Holy Kiss” in MC2. It is grouped with a few other eucharistic hymns in the Supplement section of MC1. It also appears in the two GC hymnals without the added verse, though it is associated with the Lord’s Supper via the index of GC2. It is retained in the two jointly produced hymnals, though neither book associates it with the Lord’s Supper either by section or by index. Both include the added verse, although the practice of a literal kiss, associated with passing of the peace, has all but disappeared from mainstream Mennonite worship.

Liberation

Feeding the hungry is a central action of communion in this theme. No preference is shown at the table. In his first letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul “excoriates the greedy wealthy members of the church because they rush to eat their own food and do not divide and share it with the poor.”²⁴ The field of liberation theology has broadened ecumenical understandings of justice in the eucharist.

Delores Dufner pairs the theme of liberation with nourishment in this hymn:

Let the hungry come to me, let the poor be fed.
Let the thirsty come and drink, share my wine and bread.
Though thou hast no money, come to me and eat,
Drink the cup I offer, feed on finest wheat.²⁵

Eschatological Banquet

The Lord's Supper is not only a present reality but also points to the future heavenly banquet. Eschatology, with its focus on the kingdom of God, is closely related to liberation. Walls are broken down, conflict is brought to an end, and at last, all of God's children eat at the same table. Eschatology appears quite frequently as a secondary or tertiary theme in Mennonite eucharistic hymnody but very rarely as the primary theme. John Casper Mattes' translation of Johann Franck's *Schmücke dich, O liebe Seele* expresses eschatological joy:

Deck thyself with joy and gladness,
Dwell no more, my soul, in sadness;
Let the daylight shine upon thee,
Put thy wedding garment on thee,
For the Lord of life unending
Unto thee His call is sending,
Come, for now the King most holy
Stoops to thee in likeness lowly.²⁶

This translation carries the theme of the wedding feast of the Lamb more clearly than Catherine Winkworth's more reserved version of the same text in HWB. The version of the tune used in MH features the original rhythm, which makes this renaissance tune much more dance-like. Bach's version of the same tune (found in HWB) with its straight rhythms and chromatic harmonies is rather less celebratory.²⁷

Mystery

Mystery refers to "the divine initiative and the action of transforming grace in the Eucharist."²⁸ The people of God are "mystically incorporated into the *corpus Christi* in the action of the Eucharist, sharing the life, purposes, and divine energy of God."²⁹ Mystery has historically been used as a

means to exert clerical control. Worship was obfuscated to the point of incomprehensibility. Because Anabaptist reformers struggled to make worship accessible, the language of mystery and symbol has largely been avoided. A hymn by a Mennonite in the MC1 *Supplement* defies this trend. In fact, the text sounds distinctly un-Mennonite in its use of High Church language.³⁰ It was written by S. F. Coffman.

Verse 1

In thy holy place we bow,
 Perfumes sweet to heaven rise,
 While our golden censers glow
 With the fire of sacrifice.
 Saints low bending, prayers ascending,
 Holy lips and hands implore –
 Faith believing and receiving
 Grace from him whom we adore.

Verse 3

On thy holy bread we feed,
 Hunger never more to know.
 Thou suppliest all our need.
 Father, whither shall we go?
 Ne'er forsaking, here partaking,
 Bread our souls to satisfy.
 Here abiding and confiding,
 We shall never want nor die.³¹

This hymn is retained in MC2 and HWB. It is in neither book's communion section, although HWB does index it under communion.³²

Ordinance

Ordinance refers to texts in which the main motivation for the Lord's Supper is that Jesus commanded it. Questions of purpose and effect are secondary to obedience. Of the hymns in this study, most on this theme either involve memorial and penitence, or refer to foot washing. A verse by James Montgomery illustrates the theme.

According to Thy gracious Word,
In meek humility,
This will I do, my dying Lord,
I will remember Thee.³³

Foot Washing and Passing the Peace

Foot Washing and Passing the Peace are two historically important ordinances associated with the Lord's Supper in the Mennonite tradition. A literal kiss was exchanged as a blessing between believers (see "All Praise to Our Redeeming Lord" [under Unity above] for the sole hymn featuring the holy kiss). Foot washing appears along with intimacy, unity, ordinance, and penitence in various hymns. A penitential text of unspecified German origin appears in GC1:

O Savior, cleanse our weary feet,
Remove all trace of sinful stain;
So that our lives may all be meet
To serve and follow in Thy train.
Then may Thy resurrected life
Lead us to heaven from earthly strife.³⁴

MENNONITE CHURCH ROOTS

According to John Rempel, within the Mennonite Church during the early part of the last century, there was "enormous weight on the Lord's supper as the celebration of the unity of the church." This was expressed in the 'inquiry,' which stressed "there had to be reconciliation before you could have communion.... At the same time, the service was very reverent," an atmosphere cultivated through "a kind of belief in a special presence of Christ."³⁵ The unity Rempel describes was forged through penitence and inspired by memorial; it focused on the piety of individual congregants in relation to the faith community. The inquiry a week before communion provided an opportunity for the church to reconcile within itself. It also became a time to enforce church rules within the congregation – people outside the proper boundaries were excluded from the table. The two most important aspects of the Supper were a high reverence and a stress on

worthiness and reconciliation.³⁶

In many MC circles the memorial association was very literal: dark clothing was worn and a solemn atmosphere was cultivated. This practice closely associates the body and blood of Christ with his death, to the exclusion of the present reality of his continuing redemptive action. Hymns associating the life of Christ with the Lord's Supper almost invariably focus upon the passion and suffering of Christ. In hymnals from the MC tradition, these hymns are indistinguishable from passion hymns. In more recent hymnals, several of these hymns have been retained but moved to the passion section.

Dual themes of penitence before God and penitence before the community of faith became the focus of eucharistic preparation. Earlier hymnals tend to reflect the theme of penitence before God, but there is little on reconciliation within the community. In recent hymnals, neither theme is prominent in connection with the Lord's Supper. The two MC hymnals reflect the themes in their emphasis upon memorial, and particularly in MC1 upon penitence. In MC2 we begin seeing a very slightly expanded notion of communion, though not a major divergence from MC1.

Church and Sunday School Hymnal with Supplement, 1902, 1911 (MC1)

As noted above, this hymnal did not include a table of contents. Its topical index, however, lists 13 hymns under "Communion" and 4 under "Feet Washing." One hymn is listed under both. In the *Supplement* there are 3 hymns in the "Church—Worship, Ordinances and General Hymns" category that seem intended as communion hymns, as well as 1 foot washing hymn. Between the hymnal proper and the supplement, there are 20 hymns with a eucharistic emphasis, comprising 3.7 percent of the collection.

Memorial appears as a theme in all but one of the hymns in the 1902 portion; however, no eucharistic hymns in the *Supplement* are memorialistic. The only other significant theme is penitence, which appears in 9 of the 20 hymns. Other themes appear in less than one-quarter of the hymns. Two of the 3 communion hymns in the supplement include the theme of nourishment, a theme that would later become dominant in Mennonite understanding. All but 4 hymns indexed as "communion" are also indexed as "Christ's suffering," indicating the importance of passion-oriented memorial to the Mennonite Church. Were a separate communion section included, it would

likely have contained only 4 hymns.

EUCCHARISTIC THEMES LISTED IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE³⁷

| | | | | | |
|--------------|-------|-----|----------------|------|-----|
| Memorial | 15/20 | 75% | Nourishment | 3/20 | 15% |
| Penitence | 9/20 | 45% | Thanksgiving | 2/20 | 10% |
| Foot Washing | 5/20 | 25% | Unity | 2/20 | 10% |
| Ordinance | 4/20 | 20% | Eschatological | 1/20 | 5% |
| Intimacy | 3/20 | 15% | Passing Peace | 1/20 | 5% |

Church Hymnal, 1927 (MC2)

Eucharistic hymns are grouped under “Christian Ordinances” in the table of contents and divided into 7 hymns under “Communion,” 4 under “Feet-Washing,” and 1 under “Holy Kiss.” These 12 constitute just under 2 percent of the hymnal. Five hymns are retained from the previous book. Two of those are specific to foot washing. Two are memorial hymns of Christ’s passion. The fifth is the single entry under “Holy Kiss.” These 5 indicate that little had changed in eucharistic theology in the 25 intervening years. Several hymns moved into other sections of the hymnal. Three of the 4 eucharistic hymns in the *Supplement* of 1911 made their way into this book. The index includes 3 additional suggestions for communion, all of which are passion hymns.

Memorial remains the dominant theme in this hymnal’s Communion section. Penitence is de-emphasized, but this is a result of hymns moving to the section on Jesus’ suffering and death. A number of hymns begin to feature primary themes other than memorial. Examples include “Bread of Heaven” (nourishment), “Till He come” (eschatological banquet), and “According to thy gracious Word” (ordinance). The biggest development in this hymnal is that 5 of the 7 communion specific hymns actually refer in some form to the breaking of bread or taking the cup.

EUCCHARISTIC THEMES LISTED IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE

| | | | | | |
|----------------|-------|-----|-------------------|------|-----|
| Memorial | 10/12 | 83% | Penitence | 2/12 | 16% |
| Foot Washing | 4/12 | 33% | Unity | 1/12 | 8% |
| Eschatological | 3/12 | 25% | Passing the Peace | 1/12 | 8% |
| Ordinance | 3/12 | 25% | Liberation | 1/12 | 8% |
| Nourishment | 2/12 | 16% | | | |

GENERAL CONFERENCE ROOTS

The General Conference Mennonites brought together two separate streams of eucharistic thought. One stream included Mennonites who had emigrated from Russia and Prussia in the 1870s. Their Lord's Supper was similar to the MC practice, with "a high reverence, and a preparatory service beforehand," though legalism was not as strong a factor. Other GC Mennonites of Swiss background maintained similar traditions but made "the preparatory service or the council meeting more into a devotional preparation than an ethical one." Some Mennonites left the MC to join GC congregations because "they were protesting the emphasis on moral perfectionism" in their tradition.³⁸

Around 1925 many GC congregations began practicing a more mainline Protestant version of communion. Fewer and fewer held a foot washing or preparatory service. The Lord's Supper was usually added onto a regular Sunday service rather than being a service by itself.³⁹ The mainstreaming of GC practice is seen in the fact that none of the hymns considered in this study were by GC Mennonites, while several MC Mennonites contributed a very few hymns to their books.

The GC side was considerably more diverse than the MC side, a fact well represented in the two GC hymnals. While memorial and penitence are still primary themes, nourishment and intimacy are also prominent. By GC2, nourishment, with its associations with intimacy, had become the dominant theme. The movement away from foot washing can also be observed in these two hymnals.

Mennonite Hymn Book, 1927 (GC1)

GC1⁴⁰ features 10 "Communion" hymns and 2 hymns under "Feetwashing." They constitute just under 3 percent of the hymnal. A broader influence than on the MC side is evident in the inclusion of 2 hymn/tune combinations of German origin and 1 translation from Latin. Memorial is the most prominent theme though not to the extent it is in either MC book. Penitence, nourishment, and intimacy follow, with several other themes evident. Intimacy is the primary theme in several hymns, which further separates this hymnal from the MC hymnals. Most hymns are obviously written with the Lord's Supper in mind. Texts and tunes in this hymnal average around 20-30 years younger than in either MC book, perhaps revealing a somewhat lessened deference to tradition.

EUCCHARISTIC THEMES LISTED IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE

| | | | | | |
|-------------|------|-----|----------------|------|-----|
| Memorial | 7/12 | 58% | Eschatological | 2/12 | 16% |
| Penitence | 5/12 | 41% | Mystery | 2/12 | 16% |
| Nourishment | 4/12 | 33% | Thanksgiving | 2/12 | 16% |
| Intimacy | 4/12 | 33% | Unity | 2/12 | 16% |
| Ordinance | 3/12 | 25% | Foot Washing | 1/12 | 8% |

Mennonite Hymnary, 1940 (GC2)

Only 1.5 percent of GC2 is devoted to the Lord's Supper, revealing its diminished importance. Nine Eucharistic hymns appear in a section titled "Lord's Supper." Four of these are retained from GC1. No individual theme is pervasive. Nourishment, penitence, and memorial are the most prominent. The lack of a dominant theme suggests the strong sense of tradition in the MC books was absent here. At the same time, GC Mennonites were exposed to a greater variety of eucharistic expression. The index lists 10 hymns for "Feet Washing," but this is the only hymnal in the study that does not include a separate selection of hymns on foot washing. The index suggestions do not deal directly with foot washing. Instead, they focus on ordinance, and several refer to "walking with Jesus." The index lists an additional 7 suggestions for "Lord's Supper." These hymns are drawn from a variety of sections in the hymnal and represent a further broadening of thought.

EUCCHARISTIC THEMES LISTED IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE

| | | | | | |
|-------------|-----|-----|----------------|-----|-----|
| Nourishment | 5/9 | 55% | Eschatological | 2/9 | 22% |
| Penitence | 4/9 | 44% | Mystery | 1/9 | 11% |
| Memorial | 4/9 | 44% | Unity | 1/9 | 11% |
| Intimacy | 3/9 | 33% | Ordinance | 1/9 | 11% |

Convergence and Reaction

By the 1960s, greater assimilation into the surrounding culture meant that Mennonites of both denominations were encountering new forms of worship. As more church leaders received upper-level training outside Mennonite institutions, they became disenchanted with traditional Eucharistic forms. The MC tradition, particularly, was seen as pastorally unhelpful. Leaders

began to propose expanded understandings of the Lord's Supper, urging more frequent observance.⁴¹ A "wholesale borrowing" from other traditions shaped worship education and the formation of MH.⁴² By combining the MC and GC streams, reacting against certain traditions, and embracing mainstream Protestant Eucharistic forms, the hymnal shaped communion theology through this period.

Mennonite Hymnal, 1969 (MH)

"The Lord's Supper" continues to be a very small portion of this hymnal. Ten hymns fall into the category and only 2 appear in "Foot Washing." These 12 hymns constitute less than 2 percent of the hymnal. One tune and one text are by Mennonites – both appear under Foot Washing. Musically, the only major departure from either tradition is the inclusion of a chant tune, "Sing, My Tongue," MH 404. Eight of the hymn texts are from the previous hymnals. Of the 5 hymns retained from the MC side, 2 are Foot Washing hymns. Of the other 3, 2 also appear in the GC books. Thus, excluding the 2 foot washing songs and those hymns present in both singing traditions, only 1 hymn unique to the MC books made it into MH. That hymn is "Bread of Heaven," a hymn of nourishment and intimacy. Three additional hymns are retained from the GC side. They are "Bread of the World," "Here, O my Lord, I See Thee," and "Come, Risen Lord and Deign;" all 3 hymns emphasize intimacy or nourishment.

Other than the 2 foot washing hymns, neither tradition made a unique or distinctive eucharistic impact upon this book. Instead, MH developed a new set of priorities for the Lord's Supper, based more upon ecumenical practice than upon either preceding tradition. The selection represents "a dissatisfaction with the extremely somber practice, particularly on the MC side."⁴³ Memorial remains the top theme but without the strong passion emphasis of the MC hymnals. Each of the other themes (except for liberation and passing peace) appears in at least 2 hymns. Expanding the selection are 23 hymns listed in the index that represent a wide variety of sections of the hymnal.

EUCCHARISTIC THEMES LISTED IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE

| | | | | | |
|-----------|------|-----|---------|------|-----|
| Memorial | 7/12 | 58% | Unity | 2/12 | 16% |
| Penitence | 4/12 | 33% | Mystery | 2/12 | 16% |

| | | | | | |
|-------------|------|-----|----------------|------|-----|
| Nourishment | 4/12 | 33% | Thanksgiving | 2/12 | 16% |
| Intimacy | 4/12 | 33% | Eschatological | 2/12 | 16% |
| Ordinance | 3/12 | 25% | Foot Washing | 2/12 | 16% |

Recovery and Expansion

In the 1980s a joint committee made up of representatives from the Church of the Brethren, General Conference, and the Mennonite Church formed to prepare a hymnal. As a result, the Church of the Brethren has had a major impact upon Mennonite eucharistic practice. Participants wanted to use the fruit of the liturgical movement but desired that “some use of traditional forms which had been used and then largely lost should be included.”⁴⁴ By this time there was already concern that traditional Anabaptist understandings had been rejected.⁴⁵

Hymnal: A Worship Book, 1992 (HWB)

Managing editor Rebecca Slough reports that the hymnal committee was concerned there were practices and traditions that people had become unreflective and inarticulate about. There was the possibility of introducing new things “not new for the sake of being novel, but new for the sake of reminding us again of the broader biblical tradition of which we are a part and also the broader church tradition of which we are a part.”⁴⁶ According to Rempel, in HWB “[t]he changes that had been coming about were reflected in the selection, but the selection then shaped or broadened an expanded diversity of Eucharistic motif into congregational life, and I think it’s evident that it has shaped the experience for people.”⁴⁷

Scholars were concerned that nothing peculiarly Mennonite was present in the “Mennonite” Lord’s Supper. Eucharistic practice no longer bore the markers of Mennonite piety. Rather, in many churches it could not be distinguished from the practices of any other denomination. Reaching beyond current trends, the hymnal committee identified eucharistic themes important to participating churches. They determined the most important were ‘Memorial’ and ‘Fellowship.’⁴⁸

One major indication of shifting eucharistic practice is that 30 hymns, 4.5 percent of the hymnal, fall under the sections “Love Feast,” “Communion,” and “Footwashing.” Slough acknowledges that the Hymnal

Project did not look very much to the pre-1969 hymnals.⁴⁹ In fact, no hymns appear in HWB's eucharistic sections that had been included in those sections of the MC hymnals. Several of those hymns, particularly passion hymns, remain in the hymnal but are no longer directly connected with the Lord's Supper. Four hymns are passed down from the GC side, which means that only about 13 percent of the eucharistic hymns in HWB came from pre-1969 Mennonite hymnals. Two of those had skipped over MH. An additional 2 hymns were passed down from MH, for a total of 6 hymns from predecessor hymnals.

Thematically, HWB offers a potpourri with every theme but "passing the peace" represented. Nourishment and intimacy are the most prominent. A major development is that the theme of liberation becomes significant. Unity is important, providing a transformed version of the type of penitential unity prevalent in MC circles. In the latter part of the 20th century, foot washing underwent a serious decline in Mennonite worship. Fortunately, a strong (if small) foot washing section remains in HWB. The inclusion of sections on "Love Feast" and "Footwashing" were largely due to the influence of the Brethren.⁵⁰ Both rituals are important in their tradition. The "Love Feast" (not treated separately in the table below) is gaining acceptance in Mennonite circles, and even where it is not practiced, these hymns are used in conjunction with regular communion, contributing themes of unity to worship. Having a section of "Footwashing" hymns has helped encourage the continuation of that practice. Two out of 3 hymns intended for foot washing are Brethren in origin.

There is enough variety in HWB that a eucharistic service could choose to focus on any one of the themes and be able to find several suitable hymns. An additional 21 hymns in the index provide an even broader base of eucharistic understanding.

EUCCHARISTIC THEMES LISTED IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE

| | | | | | |
|----------------|-------|-----|--------------|------|-----|
| Nourishment | 17/30 | 56% | Ordinance | 4/30 | 13% |
| Intimacy | 12/30 | 40% | Liberation | 4/30 | 13% |
| Unity | 12/30 | 40% | Mystery | 4/30 | 13% |
| Thanksgiving | 9/30 | 30% | Penitence | 4/30 | 13% |
| Eschatological | 8/30 | 26% | Foot Washing | 2/30 | 6% |
| Memorial | 6/30 | 20% | | | |

Conclusions

Thanks in part to HWB, Mennonites continue to experience incredible growth of Eucharistic practice – not only in frequency of observance but in variety of thematic understanding. Use of a greater variety of texts and tunes from a wide array of sources has helped infuse Mennonite liturgy with fresh eucharistic theology. Another addition to the hymnological repertoire came in 2002. Editors of the Hymnal Subscription Series produced an edition devoted to the Lord’s Supper.⁵¹ They took an even broader approach to the subject than HWB does.⁵² They include texts that Mennonites have not traditionally associated with communion, such as the *Agnus Dei* and the *Magnificat*. Numerous other hymns deal with varied themes.

Despite the shifts that have occurred in eucharistic theology over the last century, Mennonites have not yet developed a distinct eucharistic hymnody. This is not surprising, because we have produced so little of what we sing. If we desire to sing Mennonite theology, then we must produce it ourselves. As communion is practiced more frequently in our churches, we will require more hymns tying communion to the various seasons of the Christian year. The historically important theme of unity among believers should be emphasized. An even greater emphasis on liberation would be appropriate for our tradition. Though nourishment has gained in popularity, we should be careful to not focus on the symbol so much that we forget what it represents.

In conclusion, I offer the following as a possible example of a distinctly Mennonite eucharistic hymn.

Coming together for wine and for bread,
Tasting the story and hearing it read,
Knowing our hunger and sharing the meal,
Opens our eyes to see Jesus is real.

Who will be hungry if, hearing the call,
We offer seats at our banquet to all?
Who is forgotten, what names will be missed,
Who is the outcast—the gap in our list?

Here at this table, we're welcomed by name
 All are invited, each seat is the same.
 Serving, receiving, and eating the feast
 Humbles the haughty and honors the least.

Breaking of bread and the pouring of wine,
 Often, mere motions we do as we dine,
 Give us a vision, so suddenly clear:
 Hosting our table, Christ Jesus is here.

Eating and drinking, and passing it on,
 Quickly we finish; the supper is gone.
 Broken within us, the body is fed—
 Nourished by Jesus, the Wine and the Bread.

10.10.10.10.

Suggested tune: SLANE

©March 31, 2004, AML Tice

*Permission to use this text may be obtained
 by e-mailing the author at amltice@yahoo.com.*

Notes

¹ John D. Rempel, *The Lord's Supper in Anabaptism* (Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1993), 209.

² The term "Mennonite hymnody" is problematic, because only a very small percentage of the content of Mennonite hymnals has been produced by Mennonites. I use this phrase to refer to the body of music made available to Mennonites, not just hymns of Mennonite origin.

³ Certain German language hymnals were also prominent in the United States into the mid-20th century and in Canada into the 1980s. Here I focus exclusively on English language hymnals.

⁴ J. D. Brunk, ed., *Church and Sunday School Hymnal. A Collection of Hymns and Sacred Songs, Appropriate for Church Services, Sunday Schools, and General Devotional Exercises* (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1902) bound with *Church and Sunday School Hymnal Supplement. A Collection of Hymns and Sacred Songs, Arranged as a Supplement to Church and Sunday School Hymnal* (1911).

⁵ J. D. Brunk and S. F. Coffman, eds., *Church Hymnal, Mennonite. A Collection of Hymns and Sacred Songs Suitable for Use in Public Worship, Worship in the Home, and all General*

Occasions (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1927).

⁶ *Mennonite Hymn Book*. Published by the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America (Berne, IN: Mennonite Book Concern, 1927).

⁷ Walter H. Hohmann and Lester Hostetler, eds., *The Mennonite Hymnary*. Published by the Board of Publication of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America (Berne, IN: Mennonite Book Concern, 1940).

⁸ *The Mennonite Hymnal* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1969).

⁹ Rebecca Slough, ed., *Hymnal: A Worship Book*. Prepared by Churches in the Believers Church Tradition (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 1992).

¹⁰ Joint hymnals and joint educational efforts at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary are often cited as important factors in the drive toward unification.

¹¹ John D. Rempel, *Minister's Manual* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1998), 61.

¹² John D. Rempel, "Communion," *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Vol. 5 (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press 1990), 172.

¹³ Rempel, *Manual*, 62.

¹⁴ Horton Davies, *Bread of Life and Cup of Joy: Newer Ecumenical Perspectives on the Eucharist* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1993).

¹⁵ Rempel, "Communion," 170. Emphasis mine.

¹⁶ MC2, 315. I cite each hymn according to its most recent appearance in the six hymnals of this study if the hymn has gone without major change. Where necessary, I include copyright information.

¹⁷ MC1, 262.

¹⁸ Brian Wren, 1968, revised 1977, ©1971 Hope Publishing Co. HWB, 459.

¹⁹ MH, 408.

²⁰ HWB, 472.

²¹ Davies, *Bread of Life and Cup of Joy*, 117.

²² Rempel, "Communion," 170.

²³ MC2, 329. The authorship of the third verse is unknown; it was first printed in *The Brethren's Hymn Book*, 1867.

²⁴ Davies, 191.

²⁵ HWB, 464. ©The Sisters of Saint Benedict.

²⁶ MH, 406.

²⁷ HWB, 473.

²⁸ Davies, *Bread of Life and Cup of Joy*, 153.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ It was not included in MH "because of the theological implications for a church that does not call places 'holy.'" Mary Oyer, *Exploring the Mennonite Hymnal: Essays* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1980), 68.

³¹ MC1 supplement, 434.

³² MC2, 167 and HWB, 2.

³³ MH, 440.

³⁴ GC1, 319.

³⁵ John D. Rempel, personal interview, 19 January 2004.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Because hymns often contain more than one theme, these percentages do not add up to 100%. Percentages represent the prominence of individual themes among all eucharistic hymns in each hymnal.

³⁸ Rempel interview.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ GC1 is of somewhat limited use for this study because it never became popular, selling only 5,000 copies in three editions (see Harold S. Bender, "Hymnology," in *The Mennonite Encyclopedia* Vol. 2 (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1956), 883). In contrast, MC2, printed the same year, sold 120,000 copies over 13 editions to 1956. (Bender, 882).

⁴¹ See Paul Miller, *Servant of God's Servants: The Work of a Christian Minister* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1964), 143-49.

⁴² Rempel interview.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ See the significant section on "Anabaptist Understandings" in Edwin W. Epp, Henry V. Friesen, and Henry Peters, *The Celebration of the Lord's Supper* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1979), 11-18.

⁴⁶ Rebecca Slough personal interview, 15 January 2004.

⁴⁷ Rempel interview.

⁴⁸ Slough interview.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Hymnal Subscription Service (Scottsdale, PA: Faith and Life Resources) 2002:2.

⁵² This is, of course, a luxury of space.

Adam Merrill Longoria Tice is a student at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana, and a published hymn-text writer.