The General versus the Particular: Exploring Assumptions in 20th-Century Mennonite Theologizing

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Introduction

At least since the latter decades of the nineteenth century, Mennonites have been talking seriously about theology. But they did not always call it theology– a lot of theologizing for Mennonite churches went on under the guise of expounding Bible doctrines or describing what sixteenth-century Anabaptists believed. Perhaps only in the last two decades have we started to become comfortable talking about theology as theology. And it is a quite recent development to say we are searching for a theology that will serve specifically the modern Mennonite churches or the modern peace church.

This essay is a part of that quest. The argument proceeds on the basis of four assertions about Mennonite theologizing in this century. As a response to these assertions, I make a specific suggestion for refocusing and restructuring the quest for a systematic theology that will serve the modern peace church. While the historical subjects come from the Mennonite tradition, the conclusion that I draw applies to the Brethren as a peace church equally as much as to Mennonites.

Two assertions

Assertion I: *For most of their theologizing in the twentieth century, Mennonites have assumed that their theology was built on a larger or broader theological entity located outside the Mennonite tradition.*

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This larger theological entity contained formulations of the classic foundational doctrines of Christian theology, including but not limited to formulations of the Trinity, Christology, and atonement. As such, they comprised a standard program, a theology-in-general or Christianity-as-such, that existed independent of particular historical contexts and denominations. These doctrines were assumed to be suited for and accepted by all right-thinking Christians. This assumption was paralleled in other denominations. A given writer's relationship to the standard program was a matter of the difference between truth or orthodoxy and heresy. To deviate from or to be outside the standard theology-in-general was to be unorthodox or even heretical, whether Arius in the fourth century, those in the sixteenth century who refused to acknowledge the Lutheran and Reformed creeds, or early twentieth-century modernists who claimed the right to reject classic doctrines which no longer made sense.

It was simply assumed that Mennonites borrowed this theology-in-general and built their own upon it. In fact, for them not to build on that theology-in-general would seem audacious as well as unorthodox. It would seem unthinkable that such a small Johnny-come-lately in the nearly two millennia of Christian history would dare to say anything unique about doctrines professed for so long. If the much larger traditions of Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, and John Calvin, which also began in the sixteenth century, affirmed the centuries-old creeds and confessions of Christendom, it would be brash for Mennonites to assert they had anything original to say about classic theological questions.

> Assertion II: *What was distinct about Mennonite theology came in what Mennonites added to the standard program of theology-in-general.*

Assertions I and II are virtually self-evident. For the most part, the writers specifically organized their theology in categories, such as general Christian teaching and distinct Mennonite teachings. The primary focus in the discussion to follow falls on the relationship between the two lists envisioned by these writers. Both the two lists and the interaction between them come in assorted packages.

Fundamentalist and evangelical packages

John Horsch

John Horsch's assumed standard theological core came from Fundamentalism. In *The Mennonite Church and Modernism*, the foundation included these doctrines: the word of God equated with the Bible; Jesus as unique son of God; the super-natural birth of Jesus; the expiatory death of Jesus; special creation; innate human sinfulness; justification by faith in the atoning blood; and the need for supernatural regeneration.[2]

In his later *Mennonites in Europe*, Horsch wrote that Anabaptists and early Mennonites agreed with the major reformers on the fundamentals relating to original sin, justification by faith, salvation through the atoning blood of Christ, the full deity of Jesus, and the Trinity of the Godhead.[3] Differences came at the point of practices–Anabaptists believed that justification by faith should of necessity result in Christian living, which included nonresistance.[4] Other incorrect practices of the reformers included "infant baptism, the union of church and state, the persecution of dissenters, and war."[5]

Horsch also tied the fundamentals–his standard theological core–to the classic creeds of the church, which he located in the New Testament. Playing off a remark from J. E. Hartzler that the transition from the Sermon on the Mount to the Nicene creed was a "philosophical acrobatic stunt,"[6] Horsch virtually equated the Nicene Creed with the fundamentals of the faith as well as linking it to the Sermon on the Mount.

> As if the Nicene Creed, that is to say, the confession of the fundamentals of the Christian faith, were not in perfect agreement with the Sermon on the Mount. In fact, a number of the fundamentals are either expressed or implied in the Sermon on the Mount, and the rest of the fundamentals are taught in other parts of the Scriptures. That they are not all mentioned in the Sermon on the Mount does not detract from their authoritative value.[7]

Such comments indicate that Horsch operated with two lists–Christian doctrines and Mennonite practices. They also imply the priority of the first list over the second. Horsch eventually makes that implication explicit. An

individual who rejected the deity of Christ, his supernatural birth, and his resurrection would not be a Christian, he said, "even if he believed in the principle of nonresistance." Although some Christian supporters of World War I–what he called the "last war"–were "unenlightened or disobedient," they were still Christians. As Horsch said,

> Placing first things first we have the fundamentals of the faith and then the principles and commandments that have reference to practical life and conduct. If you deny Christ, these principles lose their importance.[8]

In Horsch's view, there is more difference between Mennonites and a modernist who believed in nonresistance than between Mennonites and a Fundamentalist who rejected nonresistance. For Horsch, the list of Mennonite distinctives defers to the list of fundamentals.

Daniel Kauffman

Like John Horsch, Daniel Kauffman organized theology into those doctrines that Mennonites shared with others and those that were distinctive. While a careful comparison of Kauffman's lists would reveal their increasingly Fundamentalist-like language and conceptualization, that development is secondary to the present description of Mennonite theologizing in terms of general and specific doctrines.

Kauffman's list in *Gospel Herald* (1910), for example, offered nine points (with some subpoints) on which "all Christian people" should be able to agree.[9] A list in 1916 presented a different version of the same "Christian Doctrine" in nineteen points.[10] This one included some explicitly Mennonite-oriented items. For instance, no.12 stated that Christians are a "separate people from the world" and thus cannot have part in the world's "fashions, carnal strife, oaths, secret societies, or unscriptural insurance."[11]

Kauffman offered another list (1920) to counter a proposed set of unifying doctrines from the church federationists. He did not consider the items on the liberal list to be inherently false. It was rather that they promised a self-help approach to human betterment without being born again. If they would emphasize the items in his list, he said, then "we might have a different

first list to be general theology, to which any and all right-thinking Christians should adhere.

If there were items on which all Christians should agree, it is equally true there were beliefs on which all Mennonites should agree. Note for example the chapter on "Mennonite Doctrine" in Kauffman's *The Mennonite Church and Current Issues*. After yet another list of nineteen points (identified as "Evangelical Faith") that Mennonites believe "in common with all other adherents of the evangelical faith," a second list followed, called "Distinctive Doctrines." It gave fifteen items that Mennonites believe "in common with some churches and unlike other churches." This slate covered the range of practices commonly attributed to the conservative Mennonite agenda: belief in obedience to all the commandments of Christ, adult baptism, prayer veiling, feetwashing, the holy kiss, separation of church and state, no participation in war or in lawsuits, nonswearing of oaths, nonmembership in secret societies, and more.[13] Of greatest import here is the relationship Kauffman saw between this second list and the first. He called items in the second one "Mennonite doctrine." But he considered them more than that. "In reality," Kauffman said, "it is *Bible Doctrine*, for they are all taught in the Word of God."[14] That is, since they are all Bible doctrines, it is really one list with subgroups.

A similar understanding appeared in two of Kauffman's editorials separated by a ten-year interval. In a comment on "Unfundamental Fundamentalists," he chastised militaristic fundamentalists who attempt to discredit pacifist organizations. His chief criticism is that "they do not go far enough" on the issue of peace and war, "they do not endorse the nonresistant doctrine in its entirety." The philosophy that compels fundamentalists to accept the doctrines of immediate creation, absolute reliability of scripture, and the deity and the virgin birth of Christ also "requires that we accept the nonresistant teachings of the Gospel of Christ."[15] Ten years later, Kauffman classed Mennonites as fundamentalists, although on the doctrine of nonresistance they were "more nearly like the liberalists." Frequently liberals "assume the role of pacifists" and "on this point they are more Scripturally fundamental than are the so-called fundamentalists who at times advocate war."[16]

Whereas Horsch gave a kind of priority to the first list, Kauffman virtually equated the two lists or made them segments of one list. The problem with the fundamentalists was not that their roster of general doctrines was

wrong; rather, it was too short. Mennonites had the complete set of biblical doctrines, in contrast to fundamentalists who possessed an admirable but incomplete set.[17]

Harold S. Bender

Harold Bender's description of what Anabaptists, Mennonites, and magisterial Protestantism believed also displays two lists. In "The Anabaptist Vision" he wrote that Anabaptism was a "consistent evangelical Protestantism seeking to recreate without compromise the original New Testament church, the vision of Christ and the apostles."[18] That identity with mainline Protestantism included an embrace of the core of Protestant theology. Some years before "The Anabaptist Vision," Bender described this core: "All the American Mennonite groups without exception stand upon a platform of conservative evangelicalism in theology, being thoroughly orthodox in the great fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith such as the unity of the Godhead, the true deity of Christ, the atonement by the shedding of blood, the plenary inspiration and divine authority of the Holy Scriptures as the Word of God."[19] Later he wrote that Anabaptists did not differ from the major Reformers "on such doctrines as the sole authority of the Scriptures, grace, and justification by faith, or in the classic Christian loci of doctrine."[20]

Such comments show several things. First, Bender thought in terms of a core of doctrines–a theology-in-general located outside the Mennonite tradition. Second, he assumed that the validity and truth of Mennonite views on these classic doctrines was vouchsafed because Mennonites had learned them or borrowed them from that outside source. Third, the distinct Anabaptist and Mennonite identity came from additions to the central core. But fourth, much like Daniel Kauffman, Bender considered the items on the second list not mere add-ons but integral parts of full-orbed Christian faith. Without these Anabaptist emphases, Christian faith is incomplete. Some of Bender's well-known formulations in "The Anabaptist Vision" display that integration, as when he wrote that "the essence of Christianity [is] discipleship," and when he called Anabaptists "a consistent evangelical Protestantism" and "the culmination of the Reformation."[21]

John C. Wenger

In a similar fashion, the writings of John C. Wenger, Bender's longtime colleague, friend, and supporter, portray theology for Mennonites in terms of a general core with particular Mennonite additions. Wenger followed Bender in calling Anabaptism "the logical outcome of the Protestant reformation." Wenger then divided the theology of these more consistent Protestants into two primary categories, "Major Doctrines" and "Mennonite Emphases." On the fundamental doctrines Anabaptists agreed with Lutherans and Reformed, he said, "since Anabaptism was simply a radical form of Protestantism."[22] Included in his list of major doctrines were evangelical or conservative-oriented statements on God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, sin, regeneration, holiness of life, divine grace, the church, eschatology, and inspiration of the Bible.[23]

Wenger listed Mennonite emphases under three major headings: "The Bible," "The Church," and "The Christian Life." The biblical emphases included "Bible, not theology," "Biblicism," which included ordinances and restrictions, and "New Testament finality." The church section dealt with discipleship and church discipline, while the section on the Christian life emphasized the importance of a lived-out faith and a church obedient to the will of God.[24]

As was true for Kauffman and Bender, while the items on the second list were not the theology-in-general of Protestantism, neither were they merely add-ons. For Wenger, they were necessary for a complete, full-bodied biblical faith.[25]

Ronald Sider

Some years ago, in an address directed primarily to a Mennonite audience, Evangelical Mennonite theologian Ronald Sider depicted a theology for Evangelicals and for Mennonites in terms of the two categories–doctrines claimed by all right-thinking Christians, and "emphases" associated with Anabaptism.[26] His slate of central doctrines included "the Trinity, the full humanity and full Deity of Jesus Christ, the atonement, the bodily resurrection." Two further items adhered to by both Evangelicals and Anabaptists were "concern for evangelism" and a commitment "to the full authority of the

Scriptures as the norm for faith and practice."[27] On the Anabaptist side, Sider offered four beliefs related to practice: "costly discipleship, on living the Christian life, on the church as a new society living the ethics of the kingdom (and therefore living a set of values radically different from the world), on the way of the cross as the Christian approach to violence."[28]

While Sider posed two lists, he really considered them one. In the article cited, he argued that: (1) if Evangelicals who care deeply about the first list are truly as biblical as they claim, they will also embrace the Anabaptist list; and (2) commitment to the Anabaptist list is ultimately invalid without adherence to the first list. "Orthodoxy and orthopraxy are equally important."[29] When addressing Mennonites, Sider stressed that the two lists–or the pair of orthodoxy and orthopraxy–are really one, that either emphasis without the other is a truncated or rootless gospel or Christian faith.

Writing recently for a wider, generally evangelical audience, Sider offered a somewhat different understanding of the relationship of the two slates,[30] but the core remained basically unchanged from his statement to a Mennonite audience.[31]

Beyond the agreement Sider assumes among Christians on the basic core, he noted that Christians differ on both important and insignificant issues. An example of an insignificant difference might be the use of candles in spiritual devotion. Significant differences are those which form the basis of denominational traditions. These might include disagreement about predestination between Presbyterians and Wesleyans, or disagreement between Mennonites and "Just War" Christians on whether there are exceptions to Jesus' teaching about killing. On these differences, Sider asserts, denominations and local congregations need to insist that membership means acceptance of the item in question as something the denomination believes is taught in scripture. However, these denominational differences ought not to obscure the underlying unity which all Christians have in "the same triune God," the confession of "the deity and humanity of Christ," and their "trust in salvation through Christ alone."[32] The implication is that these constitute the sine qua non of theology-in-general, whereas Mennonite belief in Jesus' rejection of the sword is outside the heart of the gospel.

Sider's description of the relationship of the two lists for a wide Christian audience appears to make the connection less tight than in his earlier discussion.

In this second instance, the peace church focus on rejection of violence is in the category of things to agree to disagree on; it is not intrinsically part of the gospel. In addressing evangelicals at large, Sider chose to focus on the core and allow the second list to appear optional. Earlier, he appeared to say that the two lists were in essence one–that evangelicals without the Anabaptist emphases were not fully biblical, while Mennonites without the general theological core lacked a valid foundation for nonviolence. The first Sider recalls Kauffman, Bender, and Wenger, while the second Sider resembles Horsch.

Our discussion so far reveals significant tension or even ambiguity about the relationship between general core theology and Mennonite distinctives. Rodney Sawatsky has used "orthodoxy" and "orthopraxy" to distinguish the content of the two lists.[33] The tension between the two is real, as the account of Sider vividly illustrates. It results from the Mennonite writers' assumption that they must necessarily stand on a general Christian core, located outside of their tradition and prior to it, coupled with the realization that this general core lacked at least one item crucial to their Christian identity. That item is variously Jesus' teaching and example on nonresistance, rejection of the sword, or love of enemies. The (primarily) ethical items in the second list are clearly specific to Mennonites and do not belong to the theology-in-general claimed both by them and by those located outside their tradition. But the second lists did comprise what these Mennonites all considered clear, biblical commands that must be obeyed, since obedience was the essence of being Christian. From this standpoint, the Mennonite emphases were not mere add-ons but a part of the full gospel.

These theologians were both agreeing with a core assumed by wider tradition and claiming it was incomplete. They did not fully resolve this tension. Their implicit evaluation of wider Christendom was that it proclaimed an incomplete gospel and held to an incomplete list of doctrines. Mennonites could not identify with this inadequate version of Christian faith. Yet, they needed this wider faith because it supplied the theology-in-general on which Mennonite theology was or should be constructed.

Progressive and liberal packages

Cornelius H. Wedel

Theologizing with a general core and Mennonite distinctives as add-ons was not limited to the fundamentalist, conservative, or evangelical side of the Mennonite theological spectrum. The theology of Mennonite progressives and liberals exhibited the same characteristic.

Cornelius H. Wedel did not make lists. However, his comprehensive theology was built around a set of Anabaptist and Mennonite beliefs and a set of beliefs shared with majority Christendom. Wedel's four-volume history of Mennonites identified the distinct Mennonite tradition in terms of *Gemeindechristentum* or "Congregation Christendom." It was a believers church Christendom, a pacifist Christendom, posed as an alternative to state church Christendom. In his analysis, congregation Christendom described those who maintained New Testament Christianity when the majority church became the church of the bishop in the third century and the imperial church under Constantine in the fourth. An unbroken succession of groups retained and maintained this believers church Christendom through the centuries, right down to Wedel's own Mennonite people on the prairies of central Kansas.[34]

Wedel also wrote a systematic theology, which exists only in manuscript form.[35] While this work dealt knowledgeably with the classic formulas of Christology, Trinity, and atonement, it did so without reference to congregation Christendom. In effect, Wedel assumed that for these classic issues, the views for Mennonites would be those learned from the wider tradition. Although he did not explicitly divide theology into beliefs shared with Protestantism and Mennonite distinctives, his writings reflect such a division. When he wrote a history with a view to identifying Mennonite beliefs and practices for his church, he depicted the church in terms of traditional Mennonite issues such as rejection of violence and adult baptism. However, when he talked about theology, he used the classic categories of Christendom, and his discussion carried the arguments from American Protestantism without major impact from the Mennonite tradition.[36]

J. E. Hartzler

Progressive J. E. Hartzler posed an assumed general core in his address to the 1919 All-Mennonite Convention in Bluffton, Ohio. This one had a marked liberal-leaning cast. Hartzler noted three essentials "around which may be thrown all other essentials, or non-essentials, if such there be."[37] The three, each having several subpoints, were "The Fatherhood of God," "The Brotherhood of Man," and "Salvation by Faith Alone in Christ as the Divine Savior of Mankind."[38]

Speaking to Western District Mennonite Conference in 1920, Hartzler presented a core that still sounded liberal when he described the "five leading doctrines of Christian Faith around which may be thrown every other detail of the Christian Religion." These five doctrines included Jesus Christ as "the Divine Son of God"; the doctrine of the atonement in which "the Christian God . . . gave his Son in sacrificial death that the atonement might be provided"; salvation from sin, through faith in Christ, repentance, regeneration by the Holy Spirit and adoption in God's family; the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, who reproves the world, teaches believers and comforts the saints; and the doctrine of the Bible, which is inspired, "authentic and trustworthy," and the source of redemption.[39]

Hartzler's article, "The Faith of Our Fathers,"[40] described the Anabaptist and Mennonite additions to this liberal-leaning center. The faith of the sixteenth-century Anabaptist fathers included the following four points:

> (1) That the Bible was an open book . . . for all men . . . . (2) The right of any person, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to freely interpret this Book for him or herself. (3) The right of every person to an individual conscience in matters of religious belief and conduct, and the personal right of dissent in matters political, social, or religious. . . . (4) Religious toleration; in other words, the right of men to differ on matters nonessential to vital faith, and yet maintain a brotherly attitude toward each other.[41]

A similar list a quarter-century later added a fifth point, "complete separation of church and state."[42]

Hartzler's view displayed less tension and less sharp contrast between the lists than that proposed by Mennonite fundamentalists.[43] In "Faith of Our Fathers," Hertzler said the four Anabaptist principles "implied" his liberal core.[44] And going the other way, glimpses of the Mennonite emphases can be found in parts of the liberal core. For example, in the section on "The Brotherhood of Mankind," he said that this doctrine contains "all the elements of right living, "including"service of friends and enemies, . . . the protection of life, rather than its destruction. God only has the right to end the life which He alone began . . . . Brotherhood means no war."[45] Whereas John Horsch separated the lists, established the priority of one over the other, and said that not all the fundamentals were in the Sermon on the Mount, Hartzler contended that the general (liberal) Protestant core was implied in the Mennonite distinctives and the liberal core contains the Mennonite emphases.

Edmund G. Kaufman

Edmund G. Kaufman also exhibited a liberal-leaning theology composed of a general core plus Mennonite distinctives. He described his theology as "basic Christian convictions."[46] His book of that title begins with a discussion of religion as the context for expounding the Christian doctrine of God. Explicitly stated Mennonite perspectives are minimal. Kaufman used the traditional language about Jesus as divine and human, and spoke of him as a divine-human mediator, but his discussion dealt primarily with the human life of Jesus. He described each of the three families of atonement, but his evaluation favored the moral influence theory. Sections on the Christian life did not deal with issues of pacifism and refusal of military service or with church-state relationships. James Juhnke characterizes Kaufman's theological orientation as "a Mennonite-biased Christocentric progressivism."[47]

In an extended footnote Kaufman noted six specific Anabaptist ideas: 1) discipleship; 2) separation of church and state; 3) freedom of conscience; 4) adult baptism; the Lord's Supper and baptism as outward symbols of inward convictions; 5) nonparticipation in war and nonviolence; 6) emphasis on the simple life.[48] While placing these ideas in a footnote does not indicate a lack of commitment, it does show Kaufman's theologizing operated in terms of an assumed general core with specific additions.[49] The tension was unresolved,

and is perhaps mirrored in his life. For example, in China he had not made the Mennonite peace witness central to the gospel proclaimed, and he had supported "Christian General" Feng, who practiced mass baptisms on his army, as "an instrument in God's hand to bring order out of chaos in China." Nevertheless, as president of Bethel College, Kaufman remained a staunch pacifist throughout World War II.[50]

Recent general theology plus distinctives

A. James Reimer

Although the terminology differs, some recent efforts have continued to use the idea of a theology-in-general plus distinctives. For instance, James Reimer has posed the Nicene Creed as the core on which theology for Mennonites should build, and he has rejected the suggestion from John H. Yoder[51] that peace church theology might pose some alternatives to Nicaea-Chalcedon.[52] For Reimer, Nicaea, with its culmination in trinitarian doctrine, constitutes the necessary development and statement in nonbiblical language of the essence of the New Testament's depiction of Jesus Christ.[53] At this level, the classic creedal statements assume for Reimer the *a priori* quality of a theology-in-general–the functional equivalent of doctrines accepted by all Christians in the writers discussed earlier.

Reimer is aware of the absence of explicit ethical dimensions to Nicaea as well as to Chalcedon's formula and the doctrine of the Trinity. As he has said, "the ethical gets lost" between the first and fourth or fifth centuries.[54] Since he has affirmed the nonviolence of his Mennonite tradition, like the exponents of the two lists, Reimer recognizes the need to add to the core of the presumed theology-in-general. His solution is to "retrieve the historical, narrative, and ethical content of trinitarian christology."[55]

To preserve the biblical character of Nicaea and thus its role as the general theology on which Mennonites should build, Reimer distances the Nicene formula from Emperor Constantine, who proposed it at Nicaea and participated in the council's deliberations.[56] Reimer then contends that the trinitarian orthodoxy of Nicaea is necessary to anchor "the moral claims of Jesus" in the "very nature and person of God." In particular, this moral claim

includes "a nonviolent love ethic."[57] Reimer believes a trinitarian orthodoxy built around Nicene Christology is "the surest way of guarding against all forms of political and national idolatry (Constantinianism)."[58] For him, the nonviolent love ethic, which must be added to the creedal formula that is without ethics, is the functional parallel to the distinctive Anabaptist or Mennonite doctrines for writers such as Kauffman, Bender, Wenger, or Sider.

If some tension appeared in attempts of earlier writers to hold together their two lists, a parallel tension appears here. How do the very formulations, which Reimer concedes were the end result of a process that allowed ethics to get lost and that contains no explicit ethical dimensions, now turn out to be the best foundation for ethics? Equally ambiguous is how these formulations also become the buttress against Constantinianism, the political theology that legitimated a civil religion, in the very Constantinian church which initiated the fusion of church and state and proclaimed creedal formulations lacking ethics.[59] Reimer does not sufficiently acknowledge that both sides in the Arian controversy sought imperial support whenever it suited them. As R. P. C. Hanson wrote, "Neither East nor West formulated any coherent theory during the period under review of the relation of church and state. When the state brought pressure to bear on them, bishops of every theological hue complained. When it used its power to coerce their opponents, they approved."[60]

Thomas Finger

Thomas Finger suggests a different way to keep emphases from particular classic theologies together with peace church emphases. His approach is as much a methodology as a theology. Finger collects motifs, terms, themes, or content from a great variety of traditions. Sometimes retaining traditional terms with new definitions, at other times retaining traditional definitions and content under new names, he weaves the results into a modern synthesis on top of a peace church framework. The intent is to develop a theology whose bare foundation is clearly Anabaptist and peace church, but which also feels a lot like a Protestant reformed orthodoxy. Finger seems to treat each historic theology or tradition to some extent as incomplete or inadequate, with its full potential realized only in the all-seeing modern synthesis. Or perhaps a better image is to see the various themes and doctrines as discrete and interchangeable

parts to use in building a complete theology, much like using interchangeable parts to customize an automobile.

However, although it is not at all the simple two list approach described earlier, Finger's methodology remains in that genre. It is a more sophisticated version of combining Anabaptist distinctives with other Protestant emphases. This Anabaptist theology is gaining validation from other Protestants in so far as it needs these borrowings to fill out its own incomplete outline. But, this procedure also reflects the recognition that these traditions also have some inadequacies. This approach seems to grant the modern assumption that there is a universally or generally verifiable theology, if we can only identify enough of the pieces. The result is the functional equivalent of a two list approach fusing Anabaptist theology and other theology into one whole.[61]

Scott Holland

Scott Holland's kind of post-orthodoxy might be another approach to a Mennonite theology that begins with roots in an assumed general theology. Holland has worried that persons like John H. Yoder or myself are "sectarian." While obviously cognizant of violence and justice issues, Holland is concerned that a proper theology for the peace church be one that embraces learnings from the world, is accessible in the world, uses some of the language and concepts of American democracy, and serves the world (the public sphere) as well as the church. This theology is arguably searching for a foundation in a supposed theology-in-general, albeit one markedly different from that proposed by any of the other writers discussed thus far.[62]

Two more assertions

> Assertion III: *Although much of the theologizing by Mennonites in this century has assumed a standard core of doctrines located outside of the Mennonite tradition, or in some other way combined what were considered Anabaptist and non-Anabaptist doctrines, there was little general consensus on the identity or the shape of the core or the material borrowed. Theologizing on the basis of a supposed theology-in-general has not produced a consensus on the nature of that general theology.*

This assertion should be obvious from the foregoing discussion. My survey has noted several versions of the supposed theology-in-general–fundamentalist, evangelical, liberal, creedal orthodox, and more. The only new learning here–and it is not really new–is to make explicit that each of these Mennonite theologies or theologies for Mennonites assumed it was related to a theology-in-general, a standard agenda from which a theology for Mennonites acquires validity.

Efforts to construct a theology for the peace church by adding Mennonite distinctives to a standard core has bypassed a very important step. They have assumed that one can build on this core without going through the difficult process of developing a consensus about the nature of the core.

> Assertion IV: *Theologizing on the basis of a core and Mennonite additives was motivated, at least in part, by a perceived gap or inadequacy in the received theology-in-general.*

This assertion too should now be obvious. The several solutions or methodologies display the gap. Although in different ways, each writer suggested either a list or a methodology which would combine Mennonite emphases with doctrines from some other tradition, whether assumed general or particular. None of the borrowed theologies made nonviolence central. In fact, to begin with an imported theology-in-general, as did everyone surveyed except Thomas Finger, was to begin with a theology that had already made nonviolence or Jesus' rejection of the sword peripheral. The tension between needing a presumed core theology-in-general to vouchsafe the truth of Mennonite theology and the perceived incompleteness or inadequacy of that core was never fully resolved.

A further manifestation of the tension comes from the fact that the fused lists or the redefined or revised version of the core will no longer satisfy the other-than-Mennonite guardians of the supposed theology-in-general. Unless they have somewhere developed peace church sympathies, non-Mennonite bearers of that theology will not readily accept the expanded or reshaped core that now includes Jesus' rejection of the sword–whichever one of the supposed theologies-in-general or combining methodologies is in view. I suspect that the effort to retain a theology-in-general has succeeded more in enabling Mennonites to identify with some version of wider Christendom

than it has either produced a genuine peace theology for the Mennonite churches or persuaded other Christians of the truth of Christian nonviolence.

A proposal

These observations about doing theology for the peace churches on the basis of an assumed theology-in-general, while not deciding on which one, does change, or ought to change, the form of the question about a theology for these churches. If we are serious about being a peace church, does a (systematic) theology for us begin with one first developed within another tradition's assumptions or with peace church assumptions?

I suggest we discard the idea that there is a theology-in-general that has an assumed priority and that we must plug into in order to validate our theology. What was an assumed theology-in-general is not really general. Every theology reflects a particular history or tradition, and is specific to a context. Consider the labels attached to the standard programs twentieth-century Mennonite theologies have built on–Horsch's and Kauffman's fundamental ones, the evangelical-oriented core of Bender, Wenger, and Sider, the progressive cores of Wedel, Hartzler, and Kaufman, Reimer's Catholic orthodoxy, Finger's more reformed and evangelical orthodoxy, and Holland's postmodernity. These theologies are not general theologies. Rather, they were first developed in or for a specific tradition to respond to, or reflect, particular needs in that tradition. When others accept them, they are accepting a specific tradition. Alongside those theologies, it ought to be possible for the peace church tradition to develop a theology shaped by its own understanding and commitment to Jesus Christ.

Acknowledging that a theology-in-general is really a specific theology frees us from having to accommodate a theology that does not share peace church assumptions about the centrality of nonviolence in the story of Jesus Christ.[63] Much of the theology of western Christendom has accommodated violence and war, and has done so in such a presumed universal fashion that even peace churches barely acknowledge it. That accommodation is true of the several theologies which twentieth-century Mennonite thinking has tried to build on or borrow from. If these theologies had not accommodated violence, Mennonite writers would not be adding Mennonite lists or making other adaptations. Does the fact that violence-accommodating theology has been so

widely accepted that its specific reference point is usually forgotten qualify it to be the core of a theology for the modern peace church? I think not. Stated another way, if one begins with peace church assumptions instead, is it not possible that a new and fresh reading of the Bible might produce a different, a better rendering of Christology and atonement than what emerged from the Constantinian church? I think so.

Recognizing there are only specific theologies leads to a change in understanding the nature of theological disagreement–from a discussion of orthodoxy versus heresy to a comparison of competing, conflicting, or alternative versions of what it means to be Christian. To posit a theology-in-general is to assume its validity and to place the burden of proof on those who raise questions or pose an alternative. Conversely, to recognize that a received theology-in-general reflects a particular context is to markedly change the burden of proof, which now falls equally on all parties. A theology-in-general no longer has a privileged stance based on number of adherents or length of existence.[64]

I am not saying that the war and violence accommodaters are not Christian. Because I take them seriously as Christians, I challenge their understanding of Christian theology, which lends itself so well to the rationalization of violence. I recognize there are different kinds of Christians, with differing theologies. But, I suggest, the basis for comparing Christian theologies or traditions is a criterion accessible to all, namely the narrative of Jesus. With reference to that criterion I call for the development of a new peace church theology, rather than merely adding a couple of components or trying in some other way to salvage Christendom's violence-accommodating theology. Differentiating Christian theologies with reference to the narrative of Jesus is not an exclusivist or triumphalist stance. It constitutes a more accessible basis for ecumenical dialogue than the assumption that we begin from a supposed common foundation whose character we have not agreed on and which we must characterize differently–calling it incomplete–than do the dialogue partners whose theology it actually is.

The question of violence accommodation is unavoidable. We cannot avoid deciding whether to look at the world from the violence-accommodating perspective of the North American ethos or from the perspective of the violence-rejecting narrative of the peace-church understanding of Jesus. Most

North American Christians make their decision by default: they just accept the violence-accommodating world view without reflection; they do not see the extent to which the received theology-in-general of western Christendom has accommodated war and violence.

One cannot make a decision about Jesus without also making a decision about whether rejection of the sword was intrinsic to his life and work. The question is whether that decision is made by default or with conscious awareness of the issues and their implications. That Jesus is the norm for ethics, that his rejection of the sword is intrinsic to his life and teaching, is not a self-contained idea that is true in and of itself. It is an assumption about what one does with the Jesus we discover in the New Testament. Assumptions about Jesus as the norm of ethics and the rejection of the sword are then understood as a perspective from which to examine all the issues that Christian theology discusses. Theology from a nonviolent perspective is shaped by the assumption that rejection of violence is intrinsic to the reign of God as made visible in Jesus' life and teaching. My challenge to the would-be peace church is to acknowledge consciously and specifically that Jesus means nonviolence, and then to look at our entire theological endeavor from that perspective.[65] The continuation of Mennonites and Brethren as peace churches depends on it.

Notes

[1] I acknowledge the help of John H. Yoder in conceptualizing the problem addressed in this essay.

[2] John Horsch, *The Mennonite Church and Modernism* (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1924), 7-8.

[3] John Horsch, *Mennonites in Europe* (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1942), 325, 370-72, 378-80.

[4] *Ibid*., 373, 359-69.

[5] *Ibid*., 354.

[6] J. E. Hartzler, "Essential Fundamentals of Christian Faith," in *Report of Third All-Mennonite Convention Held in First Mennonite Church, Bluffton, Ohio, September 2-3, 1919*, ed. A. S. Bechtel (Bluffton, OH, 1919), 84.

[7] Horsch, *The Mennonite Church and Modernism*, 74.

[8] *Ibid*., 68.

[9] Daniel Kauffman, "Upon What Fundamentals Should All Christian People Agree?" *Gospel Herald 3*, no. 19 (11 August 1910): 292, 302; *Gospel Herald* 3, no. 20 (18 August 1910): 307,

317; *Gospel Herald* 3, no. 21 (25 August 1910): 325.

[10] Kauffman, "The Mennonite Church and Current Issues," *Gospel Herald* 9, no. 37 (14 December 1916): 682.

[11] *Ibid*.

[12] Kauffman, "Two Kinds of Fundamentals," *Gospel Herald* 12, no. 51 (18 March 1920): 961.

[13] Kauffman, *The Mennonite Church and Current Issues* (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1923), 18-26.

[14] Kauffman, *Current Issues*, 26. Emphasis Kauffman's.

[15] Kauffman, "Unfundamental Fundamentalists," *Gospel Herald* 24, no. 48 (25 February 1932): 1025-26.

[16] Kauffman, "Real Fundamentalism," *Gospel Herald* 34, no. 4 (24 April 1941): 81.

[17] Kauffman's three volumes of Bible doctrines (see below) do not use the language of two lists. However, their outlines follow the pattern of listing general Christian doctrines followed by particular doctrines and emphases of Mennonites. These titles clearly indicate that whatever the internal subdivisions, all contents are necessary as biblical. These volumes also retained the category of "restrictions." Restrictions were negative commands of scripture and contained specifically Mennonite distinctives which when obeyed would keep the Christian saved. They were one element in completing the general gospel borrowed from revivalism and/or fundamentalism. Restrictions included nonresistance, nonconformity to the world, nonswearing of oaths, not suing at law, not belonging to secret societies, and not buying life insurance. For Kauffman on restrictions, see his "Restrictions," *The Gospel Witness* 1, no. 23 (6 September 1905): 178, 184; *Bible Doctrines Briefly Stated*, 2nd ed. (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1922), 27; *Manual of Bible Doctrines, Setting Forth the General Principles of the Plan of Salvation* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Publishing Co., 1898), 12-14; *Bible Doctrine: A Treatise on the Great Doctrines of the Bible* (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1914), 458, 510-87; *Doctrines of the Bible: A Brief Discussion of the Teachings of God's Word* (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1929), 490-544. For John Horsch's discussion of restrictions, see Horsch, *The Mennonite Church and Modernism*, 92-100.

[18] Bender, "The Anabaptist Vision," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 18, no. 2 (April 1944): 74.

[19] Bender, "The Mennonites of the United States," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 11, no. 1 (January 1937): 79.

[20] Bender, "'Walking in the Resurrection': The Anabaptist Doctrine of Regeneration and Discipleship," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 35, no. 2 (April 1961): 102.

[21] Bender, "Anabaptist Vision," 78, 74.

[22] John C. Wenger, *Glimpses of Mennonite History and Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1947), 137, 147.

[23] *Ibid*., 137-47.

[24] *Ibid*., 147-79.

[25] That the distinct Mennonite practices are part of a full-orbed biblical faith is clear in Wenger's *Introduction to Theology*. This book claims the Bible as its foundational reference point and does not distinguish general Christian from Mennonite doctrines and practices. The particular practices of nonresistance, nonconformity, and so on are in a section on "The Nature and Function of the Church," which appears in Part III on "God as Redeemer." See his *Introduction*

to Theology: A Brief Introduction to the Doctrinal Content of the Scripture Written in the Anabaptist-Mennonite Tradition, reprint, 1954 (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1966), 225-27. In the earlier Glimpses, which did present the two lists, Wenger also maintained the category of "restrictions" prominent among Mennonite Church writers earlier in the century. On restrictions, see note 17.

[26] Ronald J. Sider, "Evangelicalism and the Mennonite Tradition," in *Evangelicalism and Anabaptism*, ed. C. Norman Kraus (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1979), 159-68.

[27] *Ibid.*, 149-50.

[28] *Ibid.*, 150.

[29] *Ibid.*, 155.

[30] Ronald J. Sider, *Genuine Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 104-08.

[31] *Ibid.*, 104.

[32] *Ibid.*, 106-07. Quote, 107

[33] Rodney J. Sawatsky, "Defining 'Mennonite' Diversity and Unity," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 57, no. 3 (July 1983): 285-87; Rodney Sawatsky, *Authority and Identity: The Dynamics of the General Conference Mennonite Church*, Cornelius H. Wedel historical series, vol. 1 (North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 1987), 63-66.

[34] For the rise of state church Christendom and the Waldensian alternative which merged into Anabaptism of the sixteenth century, see C. H. Wedel, *Die Geschichte Ihrer Vorfahren Bis Zum Beginn Des Täufertums Im 16. Jahrhundert*, Abriß der Geschichte der Mennoniten, vol. 1 (Newton, KS: Bethel College, 1900). For Wedel's description of the characteristics of *Gemeindechristentum*, see his *Randzeichnungen zu Den Geschichten Des Neuen Testaments* (Newton, KS: Bethel College, 1900), 60-63, 89-90; Abriß I, 4-6, 14-16, 28-30; *Die Geschichte Des Täufertums Im 16. Jahrhundert*, Abriß der Geschichte der Mennoniten, vol. 2 (Newton, KS: Bethel College, 1902), 149-58, 171-76.

[35] Wedel, *Glaubenslehre*, in 4 Hefte (North Newton, KS). For an in-depth analysis of Wedel's theology, see the Wedel sections of J. Denny Weaver, *Keeping Salvation Ethical: Mennonite and Amish Atonement Theology in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1996).

[36] Weaver, *Keeping Salvation Ethical*, 86-91.

[37] Hartzler, "Essential Fundamentals," 88.

[38] *Ibid.*, 88-91.

[39] J. E. Hartzler, "Christian Fundamentals," *The Mennonite* 35, no. 45 (11 November 1920): 4-5; *The Mennonite* 35, no. 46 (18 November 1920): 5; "Christian Fundamentals," *The Christian Evangel* 10, no. 12 (December 1920): 267-69.

[40] J. E. Hartzler, "The Faith of Our Fathers," *Christian Exponent* 1, no. 3 (1 February 1924): 38-39.

[41] *Ibid.*, 38.

[42] J. E. Hartzler, "Philosophy in the Mennonite Tradition," *Mennonite Life* 3, no. 2 (April 1948):44. For a third listing of these principles of Anabaptist faith that are added to the Protestant core, see J. E. Hartzler, "Witmarsum Theological Seminary," in *Report of Fourth All-Mennonite Convention Held in Eighth Street Mennonite Church, Goshen, Indiana* (n.p.: n.p., 1922), 44.

[43] Hartzler's theology was not as liberal as many of his contemporaries believed or feared.

While he was a cultural liberal and accommodater, his specific views on the classic issues was orthodox, if not as sharply defined as fundamentalists wanted. See Janeen Bertsche Johnson, "J. E. Hartzler: The Change in His Approach to Doctrine," unpublished paper (1986).

[44] Hartzler, "Faith of Our Fathers," 38.

[45] Hartzler, "Essential Fundamentals," 89-90.

[46] Edmund G. Kaufman, *Basic Christian Convictions* (North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 1972).

[47] My reading of Kaufman agrees with the analysis of James C. Juhnke, *Creative Crusader: Edmund G. Kaufman and Mennonite Community*, ed. John D. Thiesen, Cornelius H. Wedel Historical Series (North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 1994), 270-73. Quote, 271.

[48] Kaufman, *Basic Christian Convictions*, 201-202.

[49] The materials for *Basic Christian Convictions* came from the course that Kaufman taught for many years at Bethel College. Juhnke notes that "Kaufman both added to, and subtracted from, the materials from his course in ways that made the book more ecumenical and less sectarian. One major subtraction was the unit on 'the Mennonite Church,'" which was reduced to an extended footnote. Juhnke, *Creative Crusader*, 270-71.

[50] Juhnke, *Creative Crusader*, 108.

[51] See note 65 below.

[52] A. James Reimer, "Trinitarian Orthodoxy, Constantinianism, and Theology from a Radical Protestant Perspective," in *Faith to Creed: Ecumenical Perspectives on the Affirmation of the Apostolic Faith in the Fourth Century*, ed. S. Mark Heim (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 131-40.

[53] *Ibid.*, 148, 150-52.

[54] *Ibid.*, 142, 150, 152, 156. Quote, 150.

[55] *Ibid.*, 150.

[56] *Ibid.*, 156-59.

[57] *Ibid.*, 161.

[58] *Ibid.*, 160.

[59] For his conclusions, see Reimer, "Trinitarian Orthodoxy," 160-61. A different form of the problem between a general core and a specific peace church additive appears in Reimer's article of response to Gayle Gerber Koontz. He identified general revelation, ongoing revelation, final revelation, and special revelation. General revelation "is that which is common to all of us," ongoing revelation is an acknowledgment that our truth is "always relative and on the way," final revelation is an eschatological matter, and special revelation refers to Jesus Christ. While Reimer acknowledged that "Jesus Christ is Lord" is a confessional claim, he added that "we need to make this confessional claim in the context of general, ongoing, and final revelation. To do this is to make a general philosophical- theological truth claim." However, this assertion is also problematic. It is at this point, Reimer says, that "our peace theology can become idolatrous. How? By absolutizing the finite understanding of the meaning of Christ of one particular minority group within the Christian and religious world." A. James Reimer, "Response to Gayle Gerber Koontz," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 14, no. 1 (Winter 1996): 88. The primary problem here is the unacknowledged contradiction of claiming that the general revelation common to all is also identified with the particular, special revelation that is Jesus Christ,

which is revelation precisely because it is different from what is common to all.

[60] R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318-381* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 854.

[61] Finger's synthesis, which contains a great deal of helpful historical and analytical data, is *Christian Theology: An Eschatological Approach* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985); *Christian Theology: An Eschatological Approach* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1989). For briefer examples of his methodology, see Thomas Finger, "Donald Bloesch on the Trinity: Right Battle, Wrong Battle Lines," *TSF Bulletin* 9, no. 3 (January-February 1986): 18-21; "From Biblical Intentions to Theological Conceptions: Some Strengths and Some Tensions in Norman Kraus's Christology," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 8, no. 1 (Winter 1990): 53-76; "Still Something Essential in the Creeds," in *Jesus Christ and the Mission of the Church: Contemporary Anabaptist Perspectives*, ed. Erland Waltner (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1990), 106-14; "The Place to Begin Mennonite Theology," *Gospel Herald*, 30 July 1996, 1-3.

[62] See Scott Holland, "Anabaptism as Public Theology," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 11, no. 3 (Fall 1993): 265-68; "Theology is a Kind of Writing: The Emergence of Theopoetics," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 71, no. 2 (April 1997): 227-41; "Intellectual and Aesthetic Freedom in the Anabaptist Academy," for a conference on Church-Related Institutions (Elizabethtown College, 1996).

[63] On tensions of holding together peace church ecclesiology with established church theology, see Weaver, *Keeping Salvation Ethical* and "The Ambiguity of Ecclesiology in 'the Anabaptist Vision': Implications for a Peace-Church Theology," *Faith and Freedom* 6, no. 2 (August 1998): 3-11.

[64] For example, it is quite obvious that since the fourth century, the theology of western Christianity has accommodated war. The formulas of Christology and atonement, which most often supply the heart of the supposed theology-in-general, are the formulations of the church that began to accommodate war. Since the basis of Christian faith is Jesus and not formulas which emerge in and after the fourth century, it is logical to ask why peace church adherents should base their theology on those violence-accommodating formulas rather than on other options based on and shaped more explicitly by the biblical narratives of Jesus.

[65] Current efforts to reconstruct theology shaped at least in part by the assumption of nonviolence include John H. Yoder's analysis of classic creeds and creedal statements in his *Preface to Theology: Christology and Theological Method* (Elkhart, IN: Goshen Biblical Seminary, 1981), 120-58; C. Norman Kraus, *Jesus Christ Our Lord: Christology from a Disciple's Perspective*, rev. ed., reprint, 1987 (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1990), and *God Our Savior: Theology in a Christological Mode* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1991); J. Denny Weaver, "Christus Victor, Ecclesiology, and Christology," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 68, no. 3 (July 1994): 277-90; Weaver, *Keeping Salvation Ethical*; James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Systematic Theology: Ethics, Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986); and *Systematic Theology: Doctrine, Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994); John Dear, *The God of Peace: Toward a Theology of Nonviolence* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994). Gordon Kaufman's reconstruction of theology is clearly shaped by the assumption of nonviolence as well as by concerns for social justice and ecology: *In Face of Mystery: A Constructive Theology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1993). Kaufman's retention of the world as a whole as the venue

of restored humanity and restored community (thus retaining something of Christendom's understanding of the church's relationship to the social order), and his near privileging of western, technological ways of knowing make it arguable that he has not entirely surrendered the idea that there is (or ought to be) a theology-in-general.