

Preface

This issue takes “Recent Mennonite Studies on the Lord’s Supper” as its main theme. Guest editor John Rempel has assembled five papers offering varying perspectives and provocative insights, and has also contributed an introductory Foreword and a paper of his own. Readers will find much “food for thought” here. Also included in this issue is a Reflection on the Ninth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, held in February 2006 in Brazil. Longtime WCC observer Thomas Finger reports on the event, and comments on the paradoxes and opportunities that he identifies.

Looking ahead, we will feature in our Winter 2007 issue the Bechtel Lectures delivered at Conrad Grebel University College in March 2006 by historian James Urry, whose subject was “Time and Memory: Secular and Sacred Aspects of the World of the Russian Mennonites and their Descendants.” Also slated for publication soon is the 2006 Eby Lecture, “Law as a Sword, Law as a Shield,” by Lowell Ewert, and papers on a wide array of themes.

As always, we invite comments, submissions of articles for possible publication (see author’s guidelines on inside back cover) and, of course, new subscriptions and renewals.

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As we noted in the last issue, the recent flood of full-length articles accepted for publication in CGR has tended to decrease the space available for book reviews in the print version. For the time being, we direct readers to our website, where the latest reviews are now posted. Visit www.grebel.uwaterloo.ca/academic/cgreview. Book reviews are an integral, important part of the CGR agenda, and we plan to get the present reviews – and a spate of new ones – into print as soon as possible. Meanwhile, let us know what you think of the experiment.

C. Arnold Snyder, *Academic Editor* Stephen A. Jones, *Managing Editor*
Cover art by Susan Bauman

FOREWORD

Recent Mennonite Studies on the Lord's Supper

It has been gratifying to serve as guest editor for this issue of *The Conrad Grebel Review* on the Lord's Supper. This issue seeks to document, for an audience broader than that of specialists in the field, Mennonite participation in the century-old quest within churches in the North Atlantic world to reclaim a balance between word and sacrament in worship. For Catholics this has meant more preaching; for Protestants it has meant more frequent celebration of Communion. Essential to this quest has been the recovery of ancient and sixteenth-century liturgical texts and practices, leading to the conclusion that the Lord's Supper was central to the Reformation in a way that subsequent generations have missed. This process has involved not only reclamation but innovation. One of the most fruitful innovations has been to relate the meaning of bread in Jesus' ministry and in the Eucharist to the church's mandate to offer that bread to the world. These themes shape all the articles in this issue.

The subject of sacraments cannot be broached without addressing the relationship between spirit and matter. Josef Jungmann, a distinguished Catholic liturgical scholar, describes earliest Christianity as a spiritual movement countering the materialist tendencies in the religions around it. But then Christianity was challenged by Gnosticism, with its contempt for the material creation, and countered it with the principle of the incarnation, including an insistence that the spiritual reality of meeting Christ in Communion begins with the material gifts of bread and wine.¹

At the time of the Reformation, Protestants believed that faithfulness to the Gospel required the re-affirmation of its spiritual principle. At the same time this tumultuous break with tradition opened the door to a spiritualism that went beyond the Reformers' intentions. It claimed that the true believer had no need for outward evidences of God's presence in the world. Among the Anabaptists, Pilgram Marpeck was the most comprehensive in making the case for the inseparability of inward reality and outward manifestation.

The perpetual motion between these two principles has continued in almost all denominations. Two aspects of that motion point in opposite

directions. They are instructive especially for Mennonites and all free churches, those communities that emphasize the individual's experience of grace and reject binding forms of worship. Recent scholarship has shown that early revivalism in Britain and the United States was surprisingly sacramental in nature. For example, the culmination of preaching missions was almost always participation in the Lord's Supper.²

A less explored development in relation to free churches is the rise of modern science and its effect on sacramental life. The liturgical churches, with their set forms of worship and a comprehensive theology of sacraments, were better able to preserve a place for the material dimension of Christian faith in a world that was being re-constructed by science. One solution to the conflict between science and religion was to allot the spiritual (meaning private) and inward sphere of life to the church and to make the material and outward realm the domain of science. In the end the Eucharist, the paradigmatic act of the church, was confined to the realm of subjectivity, a private moment of remembering Jesus' sacrifice. It was a staggering reduction in the meaning of the Lord's Supper from the time of the Reformation: the notion of Communion solely as my remembering the cross dates not from the early church or the sixteenth century but from the nineteenth.³ It has as much to do with the rise of science as with theology and piety.

This issue of *CGR* has been assembled as a sampling of historical and contemporary research that enlarges our picture – historically, theologically, and liturgically – of the breaking of bread in Mennonite thought and practice.

Joel Schmidt returns to the best-known and loved (but today seldom read) representative of Anabaptism, Menno Simons. He identifies a late medieval tradition of dissenting interpretations of the Eucharist in the Low Countries, but in the end posits the novelty of Menno's thought, most importantly an ecclesiology that leads to an inverted relationship among Word, church, and ordinance.

Arnold Snyder is well known for his innovative and provocative study of Anabaptist sources. Here he ventures into the almost unexamined field of worship texts. Two recent English translations of the *Ausbund*, one of the earliest hymnals of the movement, make its treasures accessible to a wide audience. Snyder's delving into this signature songbook portrays

the polyvalent meaning of Communion, especially as a communal ethical response to the cross.

Adam Tice follows Snyder's method of looking for a Mennonite theology of Communion in its hymnody. In a comprehensive, careful examination of the twentieth-century English hymnals of the predecessor denominations of Mennonite Church Canada/USA he lays out contrasting and complementary themes.

John Howard Yoder took the ethical impulse in Anabaptist sacramental thought and gave it an egalitarian, communal, and missional interpretation that he presented as the full outworking of the Anabaptist vision. Paul Martens respectfully but frankly raises fundamental questions about Yoder's approach.

Hippolyto Tshimanga broadens the scope of this issue by bringing his identity as a Congolese and now a Canadian, a Catholic and now a Mennonite, to the subject. He contributes a surefooted overview of Eucharistic scholarship and his painful experience as a pastor of seeing Jesus' gesture of inclusion made into a ritual of exclusion.

My own article attempts to draw on current scholarship focused on the Eucharist and mission to build a bridge between those committed to a strong sacramental life, often enclosed in devotional and aesthetic forms, and those committed to a Gospel of peace and justice, often without devotional and aesthetic forms – that is, between two communities for whom 'bread' has very different meanings.

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Notes

¹ Josef Jungmann, *The Early Liturgy* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University, 1977), 109 ff.

² See, e.g., Lester Ruth, *A Little Heaven Below* (Nashville: Kingswood, 2000).

³ I strongly favor devotion to Christ for his sacrifice as a dimension of Communion but within its communal and objective reality.