Getting to Silence: The Role of System in Mennonite Theology

Justin Heinzekehr

In his outline of the history and future of Mennonite systematic theology, David Cramer identifies four characteristics of a "third wave" that seems to be getting ready to break, if it hasn't done so already. Earlier Mennonite theologies, the nonsectarian and the dialogical, have been perhaps overly concerned with their relationship to the broader Christian tradition. The first group attempts to appeal to a Christian audience rather than a Mennonite one. The authors downplay their particular identity, although "their indebtedness to their Mennonite heritage remains visible in the questions they raise and their approaches to answering them."[1] The second group has the opposite problem: the authors are explicit about their Mennonite roots, but end up defining their theology primarily in terms of some other tradition.

Cramer rightly argues that ecumenism and sectarianism are best seen as two sides of the same coin; to be able to contribute to the broader Christian conversation, Mennonites need to develop theologies from an unapologetically Mennonite perspective. He identifies four characteristics that might help to define the shape of integral Mennonite systematic theologies (hereafter, MST): they will be rooted in Scripture, rooted in the broader Christian tradition, make use of reasoned argument without becoming rationalistic or foundational, and emphasize personal and communal experience as a theological source.

I agree with the direction that Cramer identifies—the possibility and desirability of Mennonite systematic theologies in general and the specific characteristics listed above. But significant questions remain about how or if Mennonite identity can be articulated in a system. After all, most Mennonite thinkers, especially before the 1980s, assumed that Mennonite theology was

[1] David Cramer, "Mennonite Systematic Theology in Retrospect and Prospect," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 31, no. 3 (Fall 2013): 263.

The Conrad Grebel Review 34, no. 2 (Spring 2016): 180-193.

biblical rather than systematic,[2] and contemporary Mennonite theologians, with few exceptions, have stressed that their work can be called systematic only if one gives up the idea of foundational first principles.[3] If systematic theology is defined by coherence and comprehensiveness, to what extent should Mennonites be involved in developing such systems? Is there such a thing as a nonviolent system, even if it is based in the theology of a peace church?

In this paper, I will explore some interesting peculiarities that appear when we examine each of Cramer's four characteristics, and define further what the role of systematic thought might be for Mennonite theology. I argue that if we are to combine these characteristics with integrity, system is both necessary and disposable. As Mennonites develop theologies, we must use systematic reasoning as a tool for selectively demolishing systems and encouraging new ones that draw on voices beyond the borders of our current systems.

From Event to Narrative: Grounded in Scripture and Tradition

Mennonite theology, like Christian theology in general, has its foundation in the events of Jesus' life, teachings, death, and resurrection. But more than some other Christian theologians, Mennonites have always emphasized the particularity of this foundation, the fact that these events occur in a specific time and place, within a specific historical trajectory, and to a specific community.

This insistence on particularity already opens up a potential problem for Mennonite theology: how to reconcile the particularity of the event with the universality (or at least potential universality) of its meaning. If

[2] This is true of the 16th-century Anabaptists as well as 20th-century Mennonite theologians. I make a full case for this statement in Justin Heinzekehr, "The Absent Christ and the Inundated Community: Constructing a Process-Anabaptist Micrometaphysics" (Ph.D. diss., Claremont School of Theology, 2015).

[3] The one main exception is A. James Reimer, who says, "Only an ethic that is grounded beyond itself in the very structure of reality (what I variously call theological ontology or theological metaphysics) can give human action stability and durability in the face of temporary setbacks. . . . I have used the term *foundation* in my title to distinguish the position here put forward from the anti-foundationalism . . . that reigns in much contemporary theology." A. James Reimer, *Mennonites and Classical Theology: Dogmatic Foundations for Christian Ethics* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2001), 15.

we emphasize the particularity of Jesus' ministry—that it happened in *this* context, within *this* history, to *these* people—we are emphasizing the unrepeatability of the event. The same event could not happen in 7th-century Arabia or 6th-century China, nor could it have happened in the same location even a generation before or after it did. Jesus' ministry is constituted by its concrete features: conversations with particular people, relationships to local politics and the Roman Empire, development from particular post-exilic Jewish theologies and ethics, and so on.

The concreteness of the Christian tradition is a strength, because it points toward an experience that can never be fully captured. The philosopher Alfred North Whitehead once said,

> It is difficult to develop Buddhism, because Buddhism starts with a clear metaphysical notion and with the doctrines which flow from it. Christianity has retained the easy power of development. It starts with a tremendous notion about the world. But this notion is not derived from a metaphysical doctrine, but from our comprehension of the sayings and actions of certain supreme lives. It is the genius of the religion to point at the facts and ask for their systematic interpretation.[4]

At the same time, the inability to fully capture an event means that any description of it will be necessarily incomplete or even misleading. When we attempt to describe an event, we inevitably flatten it out so that it can be expressed and understood. In doing so, we lose the vibrancy of the original occurrence and select certain features to emphasize or ignore. John Caputo distinguishes between events and the names that we use to describe them: "Because the name is never the equal of the event that stirs within it, the name can never be taken with literal force, as if it held the event tightly within its grip, as if it circumscribed it and literally named it, as if a concept (*Begriff*) were anything more than a temporary stop and imperfect hold on an event."[5] Paradoxically, this means that the more Mennonite theologians

[4] Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 1996), 50-51. Taken out of context, this makes Whitehead seem more critical of Buddhism than he actually is; in fact he has a deep appreciation for the role that both religions have played in human history.

[5] John D. Caputo, *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana

emphasize the particularity of Jesus' historical context (i.e., define it as an event rather than a concept), the less access we give ourselves to the original experiences that gave rise to Christianity.

However, the transition from event to interpretation is inevitable and swift. Before we can articulate an experience to others, even before we can make sense of it for ourselves, we must fit it into some kind of categorical framework. We need to find some thread of coherence that allows us to link an event with our interpretation of previous events. Unconsciously, we develop narratives that highlight elements running through strings of events, allowing us to find meaning in otherwise isolated experiences.[6] The act of interpretation fixes the event in some way (and therefore kills it), but interpretation is necessary in order to register it as something distinguishable from any other event. It is impossible to keep fragmented events from congealing into coherent wholes, especially within the genre of narrative, but also in the genres of art or poetry.[7] Even the most fragmentary of representations has to situate itself in a linguistic and cultural world that requires certain systems of thought.

Univ. Press, 2006), 3.

[6] "[O]ur moral lives are not simply made up of the addition of our separate responses to particular situations. Rather, we exhibit an orientation that gives our life a theme through which the variety of what we do and do not do can be scored. To be agents at all requires a directionality that involves the development of character and virtue. Our character is the result of our sustained attention to the world that gives coherence to our intentionality. Such attention is formed and given content by the stories through which we have learned to form the story our lives. To be moral persons is to allow stories to be told through us so that our manifold activities gain a coherence that allows us to claim them for our own. Stories and character are interdependent in the sense that the moral life, if it is to be coherent, always has beginnings and endings."—Stanley Hauerwas, "Vision, Stories, and Character (1973, 2001)," in *The Hauerwas Reader*, ed. John Berkman and Michael G. Cartwright (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2001), 168-69.

[7] The same necessity of abstraction applies to theopoetics or aesthetics as well as to narrative. Some postmodern philosophers, such as Jean-François Lyotard, have sought an escape from abstraction through art. Similarly, Scott Holland proposes theopoetics instead of systematic theology as a route toward a more embodied way of thinking. See Jean-François Lyotard, "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde," in *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1988), 89-107 and Scott Holland, "Theology Is a Kind of Writing: The Emergence of Theopoetics," *Cross Currents* 47, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 317-31. However, aesthetics and poetics also abstract from the basic experiences of the artists, only in different forms.

The attractive thing about narrative, from a Mennonite perspective, is that this genre maintains at least some of the particularity of the original events, and can also be communicated and translated across time and culture. Of course we can never reconstruct the exact experiences of the first-century disciples, but we inherit the stories of those experiences. At the intersection of particularity and interpretation that the gospel narratives provide, communication of Christian meaning is now possible. Narrative allows us to synthesize the particularity and universality of Jesus' life. "For our world it will be in [Jesus'] ordinariness as villager, as rabbi, as king on a donkey, and as liberator on the cross," says John Howard Yoder, "that we shall be able to express the claims which the apostolic proclaimers to Hellenism expressed in the language of preexistence and condescension."[8] Yoder's "low road to general validity" is an attempt to find the most concrete level of generalization that can be made from the events themselves.

The communicability of narrative does not exempt it from the more chaotic realm of the event. Every time a narrative makes its way into a new context, even into a new moment of time, it becomes a part of the event occurring in the life of the community that hears it. The parable of the workers in the vineyard, to take an example, sounds different when read in a base community in Latin America than in a wealthy Episcopalian church in the United States.[9] This is true, in more or less obvious ways, whenever a narrative is heard by a community; the context shapes the meaning that the narrative is able to convey, and changes the way that the listener experiences that moment of hearing.

For Mennonite theology, this is important because it suggests that our

[8] John Howard Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 62.

[9] "The analysis of the parable of the workers in the vineyard offered by the theology of liberation includes not only comments about the socio-political structure of first-century Palestine but also comments about that of twentieth-century Britain…. In the modern economy, as in the ancient, many work from day to day without security of employment. In a society which is increasingly recognizing that low-paid, part-time work is as much of a problem as unemployment, the parable of the laborers in the vineyard provides a tradition that can readily be appropriated by those who most need to organize today and yet are often least able to do so."—Christopher Rowland and Mark Corner, *Liberating Exegesis: The Challenge of Liberation Theology to Biblical Studies* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 25-26.

grounding in scripture cannot mean either grounding in the revelational events of Christianity itself, or grounding in a fixed narrative that would hold across any community. First, the narratives in the Bible are already interpretations of events, not the events themselves, as should be clear from the existence of four different gospels. Secondly, every community that reads the Bible makes its own interpretation of the narrative that might differ from the interpretations of other communities.[10] When we talk about the foundation of scripture, we are at the same time talking about the Christian tradition, which includes all individual and communal theological interpretations over the course of Christian history. All interpretation occurs in a context shaped by various theological traditions, whether or not the community refers explicitly to them. I agree with Cramer that "Mennonites have always done theology in conversation with other traditions."[11] I am less certain that we could "assume neither commonality nor tension with particular pre- or non-Mennonite theologies from the outset"[12] in any meaningful sense.

In any case, the transition from event to interpretation involves abstraction from the immediacy of the original event. In forming a narrative (or even a piece of art, a poem, or a literary fragment), we trade some of the spirit of the experience for the ability to articulate that experience and to apply its meaning beyond the immediate context.

From Narrative to System: Reason without Rationalism

How can we represent these foundational experiences in a way that resists the totalization inherent in the movement toward abstraction and universalization? Can we, for instance, avoid constructing the kind of comprehensive frameworks that go into traditional systematic theologies? This concern relates to Cramer's third criterion for integral MST: that it uses reasoned argumentation without resorting to natural theology or

[10] "The Christian scriptures are written records of the normative interpretations of various Christian communities. The Gospel writer (or Letter writer) speaks for and to a community, and in so doing, he himself interprets further the community interpretation. Our scriptures are not the primordial revelational event. They are a witness to the event."—Bernard J. Lee, *The Galilean Jewishness of Jesus: Retrieving the Jewish Origins of Christianity* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 42.

[11] Cramer, "Mennonite Systematic Theology," 271.

[12] Ibid., 270.

foundational knowledge claims. Mennonite suspicion of foundational epistemologies is deeply connected to the Mennonite emphasis on nonviolence. Chris Huebner, commenting on Yoder's work, says:

> The fragmentary and occasionalist style of Yoder's work is often recognized. What tends to be underappreciated is that this way of proceeding is firmly rooted in his understanding of Christian pacifism. Both the temptation to start from scratch and the rhetoric of finality can be seen as forms of epistemological violence in the sense that they constitute a retreat from vulnerability.[13]

The obvious conclusion is that Mennonite theologians should stop short of the goals of comprehensiveness and coherence that drive other systematic theologians. We should rather experiment with "weaker" forms of theological reflection such as narrative, "ad hoc" writing, and theopoetics.

However, just as the emphasis on particularity requires a foray into the abstract, so these weaker theological genres may actually disguise a greater level of violence than more "systematic" genres. Narrative, for instance, always comes with a certain structure that defines a plot, protagonists, antagonists, culture and linguistic settings, and even theories about the purpose and meaning of existence. These are precisely the elements that give narrative the useful ability to translate the meaning of events beyond their immediate occurrence. But these abstractions function in the same way that universals do in other systems. For example, martyr narratives have functioned not only as a vehicle for Mennonite cultural identity, but also for the theology and metaphysics of the 16th-century Anabaptists. The stories make clear-cut distinctions between the Anabaptists and their oppressors—the former sure of their faith, ready to sacrifice their lives, joyful, guiltless, and ready to forgive; the latter confused, illogical, and unable to convince others except through the use of violence. When we identify with the Anabaptist martyrs, we implicitly accept the two-kingdom theology that separates the perfect Christian community from the worldly order. In fact, these narratives communicate an entire worldview that includes all the

[13] Chris K. Huebner, *A Precarious Peace: Yoderian Explorations on Theology, Knowledge, and Identity* (Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2006), 102.

ideas usually found in a systematic theology: reflection on God and Trinity, ecclesiology, anthropology, eschatology, and so forth.

This ought to make us uncomfortable with the idea that narrative provides an escape from system, and therefore from violence. Jean-François Lyotard gives the following description of the genre of mythic narrative (I substitute "Mennonite" for "Aryan" in the original, a change which, unsettlingly, alters the meaning of the passage very little):

> I, a Mennonite, tell you, a Mennonite, the narrative of our Mennonite ancestors' acts. The single name *Mennonite* occupies the three instances in the universes of the narrative phrase. The sense of this phrase is always, directly or indirectly, that of the "beautiful death." We tell ourselves that we have died well. It is an epic of exception. The *s/he*'s, the *you*'s, and the *I*'s are substitutable under a single name, thanks to the *we*. The closed narrative cell operates prescriptively. The imperative is hypothetical: if you are Mennonite, tell, hear, and carry out the Mennonite "beautiful death." But it is not the sense (the beautiful death) that contains the founding potency, it is the mode of linking. If you hear, tell or do. If you tell, hear or do. If you do, hear or tell. The implications are reciprocal. You don't therefore enter into the narrative cycle, you are always already there, or you are never there. Such is the genre of mythic narrative.[14]

The problem that Lyotard identifies is that narrative creates a closed system that must disregard anything which cannot be incorporated into it. This is true of any system, but narrative can hide these inconsistencies better than other genres by the way it uses particular events and characters, rather than explicit argument, to pull the listener into the logic of the system.

Elaine Enns has documented the way that Mennonite narratives of victimhood affected relationships between Mennonites and the Nogai in the Ukraine, and between Mennonites and Cree tribes in Canada. In both cases, the narratives Mennonites used to construct their identity blinded them to the fact that in some respect, they were not simply victims but were actually

[14] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1988), 105.

complicit in violence against native peoples.[15] The truth is complicated: Mennonites were driven out of their own lands by governments that refused to excuse them from participation in state violence, but they ended up settling on land that other governments had forcibly taken from its prior inhabitants. Yet because of the way that Mennonites narrated their own history, only their own suffering could be expressed as meaningful. (This dynamic still haunts Mennonites now.)

The gospel narratives are no exception to this rule. They create structures defining the way that Christians can think about their own identity and their relationships to other groups. Perhaps most harmful is how the gospels (particularly John) portray the difference between Jesus and the "Jews" or Pharisees. John narrates Jesus' ministry through the lens of Platonic metaphysics and messianic dualism, by which he fuses a separation of material and spiritual onto a separation of "this age" and "the age to come." Judaism is identified as the older, more carnal faith and Christianity as the new, spiritual one. "By mythologizing the theological division between 'man-in-God' and 'man-alienated-from-God' into a division between two postures of faith, John gives the ultimate theological form to that diabolizing of 'the Jews' which is the root of anti-Semitism in the Christian tradition."[16] Although these metaphysical structures have remained hidden from most Christians who read the book of John, they still have had a great effect on Christian attitudes toward and treatment of their Jewish neighbors.

One of the strengths of a narrative is its ability to coexist with other narratives. A story does not invite refutation. It may invite other stories to be told, even alternative histories, but it tends to rest content in a multiplicity of interpretations. This is perhaps a type of peace, but it is only possible because of the way that a story (if well-made) conceals its universals in the particularities of its plot and characters. So the majority of us function with multiple overlapping narratives that constitute our identity, but whose underlying worldviews may not be consistent with each other. Only when the

[15] Elaine Enns, "Pilgrimage to the Ukraine: Revisioning History through Restorative Justice," *Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries*, www.bcm-net.org/pilgrimage-to-the-ukraine-revisioning-history-through-restorative-justice-elaine-enns, accessed January 10, 2015.

[16] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1997), 95.

inconsistencies become extreme do we bring the abstractions of a narrative into the open to examine them.

Just as every event collapses into interpretation, every narrative contains within itself the seeds of a system. The question for Mennonites is not how to avoid systematic thinking, but rather how to construct systems, in whatever form, that can respond adequately to various types of experience. If narrative is "perhaps the genre of discourse within which the heterogeneity of phrase regimens . . . have the easiest time passing unnoticed,"[17] then one function of systematic theology is to make the basic theological assumptions of religious narratives explicit so they can become vulnerable to criticism and revision.

From System to Silence: The Priority of Experience

> It is in the nature of a victim not to be able to prove that one has been done a wrong. A plaintiff is someone who has incurred damages and who disposes of the means to prove it. One becomes a victim if one loses these means. One loses them, for example, if the author of the damages turns out directly or indirectly to be one's judge. The latter has the authority to reject one's testimony as false or the ability to impede its publication. But this is only a particular case. In general, the plaintiff becomes the victim when no presentation is possible of the wrong he or she says he or she has suffered.[18]

In itself, the systematization of the theological concepts implicit in our narratives does not alleviate the potential for violence. It is in the nature of systems to try to comprehend all of experience under a particular set of categories, and in the process to neglect certain experiences that cannot be incorporated into this framework. When a system gains power in a community or society, there are always voices silenced in and through that system. The worst thing about this, as Lyotard points out, is that the injustice cannot even be expressed within the system, since no concepts are available to cover the kind of experience being silenced. For example, a native tribe

[17] Lyotard, *The Differend*, 151.
[18] Ibid., 8.

sues the national government for rights to their land, but these rights (and even the concept of land rights), depend on Western law for their authority. Since the tribe cannot produce any evidence of land ownership that would be accepted by the court, it cannot prove its right to the land.[19]

Every theological system has lacunae such as this. The goal of Mennonite systematic theology, then, cannot be to construct a foolproof system. Whereas narrative disguises violence through its particularity, systematic theology is always in danger of disguising violence behind a pretense of finality. Where does this leave us, if it is impossible to avoid abstracting from experience, to keep our interpretations from developing systemic concepts, or to construct an explicit theological system without silencing certain people or experiences? I suggest that we can identify, and take advantage of, the fissures in our theologies by developing systems to the point that they can no longer sustain their own inconsistencies, with the expectation that a break will occur at some point. Such breaks are windows into the silences that the system has been fostering; they provide a starting point for new reflection. Systematic theology is the motor that drives a process through event, interpretation, systematization, and (previously invisible) event.

The goal of Mennonite systematic theology, then, is not convergence on any one system. This is a good thing because, despite the best efforts of theologians to persuade each other, I know of no systematic theologies that are identical. The plurality of theologies is not a matter of theological posturing, but a symptom of genre. Systematic theology opens into what Lyotard calls the "deliberative genre," the realm of the political. In this mode, speakers make specific refutations of one another with the goal of persuading the other. Counterintuitively, the act of argumentation presupposes an unanswered question ("What should we be?"), and therefore fosters greater dissent and diversity, whereas narratives usually imply a presupposition about the identity of a community[20] ("we are martyrs" or "we are pacifists"). Mennonite systematic theology could proceed, I hope, without the vitriol of national politics, but the expectation of critique and defense does raise

[19] Example taken from Bill Readings, *Introducing Lyotard: Art and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2006), 88.
[20] Lyotard, *The Differend*, 149-50.

questions of consistency that might otherwise go unnoticed.

There are thus two reasons why systematic theology is so important in the process of discovering these silences. First, as mentioned, systematic theology is potentially a more "fragile" genre than narrative, especially if it is done with attention to the feeling of uneasiness that may signal a gap in the system. Secondly, because systems, implicit or explicit, work precisely by making it impossible to express injustices, we cannot simply look around and identify such injustices, at least not until someone finds a way to articulate them. Abandoning the effort of systematic thinking would mean abandoning any chance of recognizing injustices that weren't already presentable under our current way of thinking.[21]

Instead of finding truth in consensus, systematic theology should pursue the truth lying outside the borders of consensus. But since this truth may be invisible to us, the only way to discover it is to attempt to map, as well as we can, the boundaries of consensus. When we fail at some point in the process, which is inevitable, we know there is something more worth exploring in that area. We attempt the impossible in order to discover the invisible.

One example of a break in a Mennonite theological system is the recognition of John Howard Yoder's sexual abuse. This is probably the clearest example of a theological system that silenced an entire set of voices, especially through concepts like redemptive suffering, which tends to minimize women's agency in the face of violence, and the Mennonite ideal of personal reconciliation in the church, which required women to confront their abuser directly. Incidentally, it was through a conference on peace theology and violence against women that several of Yoder's victims began to organize themselves to ask for intervention from church leaders,[22] and this conference had the stated goal of calling for "integration and consistency of

[21] Enrique Dussel says something similar: "In order to discover new categories, which make it possible for us to think about ourselves, it is necessary to talk like Europeans and, from there, to find their limitations, deconstructing European thought to create space for the new." *Introducción a la Filosofia de la Liberación*, 5th ed. (Bogotá: Editorial Nueva América, 1995), 138, my translation. Dussel uses this strategy to inform his entire project of liberation philosophy.

[22] Linda Gehman Peachey, "Naming the Pain, Seeking the Light: The Mennonite Church's Response to Sexual Abuse," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 89, no. 1 (2015): 111-28.

theology and practice."[23] Here, the attempt to articulate a more coherent and comprehensive (systematic) version of Mennonite pacifism provided some language to articulate the inconsistencies of current systems, and sparked new theological reflection based on the experiences of those previously unheard.[24]

Doing systematic theology towards silence is one way of being, as Cramer says, "keenly sensitive to the place of experience for theology."[25] Here again, application of this principle is not as straightforward as it might seem, since experience is not simply given, waiting for theologians to come along and recognize it. Experiences are events requiring abstractions for their representation and communication. The systems of thought available to us limit (but do not determine) the way experiences can be told and remembered. Therefore, to be fully sensitive to experience is not only to attend to what is articulated in an interpretation of an event, but to make space for the breakthrough of a new articulation of experience. In this sense, systematic theology is the last step toward the lost event, which, if given the space to do so, overflows rational thought and renews the cycle of interpretation. Ideally, systematic theology produces a spiraling, rather than simply a cyclical, movement that continues to open up more and more uncharted areas of experience, though we may not be able to measure that progress except as an increased level of discomfort or anxiety. Lyotard's diagnosis of the human situation might very well apply to the state of Mennonite theology:

> If humanity were progressing toward the better, it would not be because 'things are getting better' and because the reality of this betterment could be attested through procedures for establishing reality, but because humans would have become so cultivated and would have developed an ear so attuned to the Idea (which

[23] Gayle Gerber Koontz, "Introduction," in *Peace Theology and Violence against Women*, ed. Elizabeth G. Yoder (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1992), 4. The conference was held in October 1991 at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries.

[24] Especially relevant is Carol Penner, "Content to Suffer: An Exploration of Mennonite Theology from the Context of Violence against Women," *Peace Theology and Violence against Women*, Elizabeth G. Yoder, ed., 99-111.

[25] Cramer, "Mennonite Systematic Theology," 272.

> is nonetheless unpresentable) that they would feel its tension on the occasion of the most apparently impertinent, with regard to it, facts and that they would supply the very proof of progress by the sole fact of their susceptibility. This progress could therefore be compatible with the general feeling that 'things are getting worse.' In its aggravation, the gap between Ideas and observable historical-political reality would bear witness not only against that reality but also in favor of those Ideas.[26]

Justin Heinzekehr is Director of Institutional Research and Assessment and Assistant Professor of Bible and Religion at Goshen College in Goshen, Indiana.

[26] Lyotard, *The Differend*, 180.