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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.

The Challenge of Menno Simons' Symbolic View of the Lord's Supper

Joel Schmidt

Introduction

In sacramental Christian traditions there exists a general conviction that Spirit may be mediated by matter, the eternal by the temporal, and the infinite by the finite. More specifically, particular ceremonies are taken to mediate God's power in an especially forceful and direct manner, namely, the sacraments. This theological resolution to the puzzle of the relationship between Spirit and matter has, however, most frequently been perceived to be unavailable to Christians of an Anabaptist orientation. Speaking from within the tradition with which I am familiar, Mennonites from the North American General Conference and Mennonite Church¹ are used to thinking of themselves as decidedly non-sacramental. This is, of course, in contradiction to the general experience of most Mennonites that God is not available just through the Word or the gathered community of believers but more broadly in the world at large. Nevertheless, when it comes to the formal theological or ritualized recognition of many people's general experience, most North American Anabaptist fellowships continue to resist acknowledging the sacramental nature of Christian experience.

One of the most likely places for such acknowledgment is the Lord's Supper. Due to the provocative biblical passages associated with this "ordinance," the direct association of the elements with Jesus, and the clarity of the origin of this rite with his instruction, one might expect it would be here, if anywhere, that Anabaptists could celebrate a sacramental understanding of reality. However, such an expectation is not fulfilled in most contemporary Anabaptist thought or practice. For various reasons, some historical and legitimate and others less clearly either, a fairly strong and widespread resistance remains within Mennonite churches to any notion of an encounter with the "real presence" of Christ in this celebration. For example, in the *Mennonite Encyclopedia* under "Communion," one reads that:

Communion (Lord's Supper, Abendmahl, Nachtmahl) has always had only a symbolic meaning for the Anabaptists and Mennonites and is observed as the ordinance of the Lord and not a sacrament which in itself conveys the grace of God to the participant.²

Statements like this constitute a formidable obstacle to the theological and ritualized acknowledgment of the sacramental nature of reality in everyday experience, since many contemporary Anabaptists feel that making such an acknowledgement would represent a betrayal of their tradition and its theological convictions.³ Given this fact, this paper will seek to examine the theology of a significant sixteenth-century Anabaptist leader, Menno Simons, on the Lord's Supper to determine to what extent his theology of the Supper may accurately be described as "only symbolic," and also to explore some implications of his view for contemporary Mennonite views of Communion.

Historical Background

In order to appreciate Simons' distinctive articulation of the significance of the Lord's Supper, a cursory sketch of some significant elements of his theological context will be provided here.

Regarding the late medieval eucharistic piety that provided the seedbed for many of the Reformers' impulses, Sjouke Voolstra says that "it is not easy for us either to comprehend or describe adequately the magical power ascribed to the host."⁴ On a popular level, partaking of the Eucharist became in many people's minds a necessary means for securing the forgiveness of sin,⁵ and a host of legends developed around miraculous effects stemming from the presence of the Lord himself in the consecrated disc.⁶ For example, those suffering physical ailments were miraculously helped through the host, since in contrast to normal food that becomes transformed into human flesh, the heavenly food of the Eucharist was believed to conform the recipient to its own perfection. Animals too could benefit from the magical healing power of the Eucharist, and there were countless stories of how the Eucharist turned into a child, or bled. Finally, some even believed that one did not age during the time spent attending Mass.⁷

Operating alongside this miracle-cult view of the Eucharist, and in contrast to it, was another tradition of mystical piety that stressed the reality

of the sacrament as the Christian's spiritual nourishment.⁸ We can observe it, for example, in the late medieval writer Wessel Gansfort's distinctive view of "remembrance" as "the stomach of the soul";⁹ in remembering Jesus' life, especially the passion that he suffered for our sake, "we eat and are refreshed,"¹⁰ which spiritual eating nevertheless also involved eating Jesus corporally.¹¹ Or we could look to the distinctive exegesis of the Dutch lawyer Cornelius Hoen, who argued that the word "is" in "This is my body" (from Matt 26:26 and repeated in the Mass), really means "signifies."¹² For Hoen this interpretation provided the foundation for asserting Jesus' physical absence from the Supper which, analogously to his departure from this world via his ascension,¹³ he saw as the very prerequisite for a spiritual encounter of the believer with Christ by "faith active in true love."¹⁴ A third example appears in the writings of the Anabaptist Melchior Hoffman,¹⁵ whose use of the figure of the wedding ring in connection with the Supper gave him a means to affirm a mystical union with Christ in its celebration.¹⁶ In a fascinating echo of a theme we observed in Gansfort, the Christ received in a faith-filled Supper is the entire Christ, including his humanity: "Through belief in the Lord Jesus Christ she [the bride] has physically received and eaten the noble Bridegroom with his blood..."¹⁷

Each of these examples provides a somewhat different angle on a kind of spiritual presence of Christ in the Supper, not necessarily related to the elements of bread and wine, a further variation of which we shall see again in Simons' own writing.

Simons' Theology of the Lord's Supper

An analysis of Simons' theology of the Lord's Supper could be organized in various ways. Using the sections of Simons' 1558 version of the "Foundation of Christian Doctrine"¹⁸ and his 1554 "Reply to Gellius Faber"¹⁹ that address the Lord's Supper, the following analysis will present both his negative and positive agenda.

As noted, two streams of late medieval eucharistic piety prevailed in Simons' time and geographical context. The first focused on the miracle of transubstantiation in the Mass and was accompanied by expectations for miraculous events such as one would associate with encounters with Jesus "in the flesh." The second focused on achieving a spiritual communion with

Christ, perhaps alongside of, but also possibly apart from, the reception of the eucharistic elements.

The initial aspect of Simons' negative agenda comprised a refutation of beliefs supporting the first kind of eucharistic piety. With respect to transubstantiation, Simons rejected the notion that the bread and wine turn into the actual body and blood of Jesus on the basis that Jesus, in his humanity and after his ascension, is seated at the right of hand of God in heaven.²⁰ According to Simons those who held to transubstantiation, with its associated veneration of the host, were guilty of idolatry in exactly the same manner as "the heathens" who once worshipped objects made from wood or stone.²¹ He also echoed the common Reformation critique that in the Supper communicants ought to receive Christ "in both kinds."²²

Second, Simons clearly rejected the notion that the Eucharist constitutes a repetition of Christ's self-sacrifice for sin: "with one sacrifice, I say, with one sacrifice He has perfected forever those who are sanctified."²³ He thus also rejected the popular view that participation in the Supper was necessary for the forgiveness of post-baptismal sin.²⁴ Third, his rejection of transubstantiation and the sacrifice of the Mass required fundamental changes in the piety of the time. In his opinion, the people of his generation were like those with an illness who, inexplicably, continually placed themselves in the care of an inexperienced physician. Afflicted with the sickness of sin, most people sought a remedy in such practices as indulgences, holy water, fastings, confessionals, pilgrimages, and the bread and wine of communion.²⁵ Instead, Simons told his readers they should seek the help of "the experienced heavenly Surgeon and Physician, Jesus Christ," whose healing salve is not the Eucharist but "His powerful Word with which to instruct, and His crimson blood to make atonement."²⁶

All these aspects of Simons' negative agenda could be predicted solely on the basis of his identity as a Radical Reformer. However, the truly distinctive contributions of his theology of the Supper develop out of how his theology was impacted by a concern for the believer's new life in Christ. That this is a central theme of his eucharistic theology is seen in his "Reply to Gellius Faber," in which Simons acknowledges that "if they [Faber and his parishioners] would enter with Christ into newness of life, then I would feel free to admit that that which he has written here concerning the

Lord's Supper, did for the most part, sound not so bad."²⁷ The main point of contention between Simons and his Calvinist interlocutor did not pertain to a dispute about the significance of the elements but to the moral quality of life within the congregation. According to Simons, the Supper is for those born of God, "true Christians who have buried their sins, and who walk with Christ in a new and godly life,"²⁸ and those partaking of the Supper when not living a redeemed life eat themselves unto judgment.²⁹ Likewise, Simons was critical of a Supper celebrated by ministers "who really seek nothing but worldly honor, ease, and the belly."³⁰ Only where both leaders and communicants experience the new being in Christ does the true Supper occur,³¹ and since in Simons' eyes the new being was notably absent from Faber's church, by definition the true Supper could not be celebrated there.

Simons' positive agenda in many ways mirrors his negative one. First, having eliminated Christ's physical presence in the elements, Simons nevertheless left room for a kind of spiritual presence of Christ in the Supper. (This aspect of his theology has not always been acknowledged in academic treatments,³² and while not the central concern of his agenda, it must be noted.) Thus, Simons allowed that in the Supper "hungry consciences are fed with the heavenly bread of the divine Word, [and] with the wine of the Holy Ghost."³³ In support of this view, and like so many others before him, he referred to Augustine's sermon on John 6, in which the African bishop wrote about spiritual feeding on Christ through faith.³⁴ Thus where "faith, love, attentiveness, peace [and] unity of heart and mind" are present in the gathered believers, there Simons said "Jesus Christ is present with His grace, Spirit, and promise, and with the merits of His sufferings, misery, flesh, blood, cross, and death even as He Himself says: Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."³⁵ In addition to noting Christ's spiritual presence Simons here associates with a right celebration of the Supper, it is interesting – and, given his concerns with Catholic piety, an adept theological move – that he adduced the Matthean text "where two or three are gathered" in support of his position rather than any particular biblical promises or statements associated with the elements of bread and wine.

As one might expect, given Simons' concerns about transubstantiation, the precise relationship between the elements of the Supper and this faith-

filled feeding on Christ is not particularly clear. Certainly, eating the bread and wine without the presence of that which is signified did not constitute the true Supper, but what did Simons mean when he said that “where the mystery is joined to the signs for which purpose they are ordained, there the baptism of Christ and the supper of Christ are present”?³⁶ How are the signs joined to the mystery that they represent? Though one should not expect this passage to bear too much theological freight, at least once Simons seems to point to a kind of simultaneity between receiving the elements and spiritual feeding on Christ:

But where the Lord's church, the dear disciples of Christ, have met in Christ's name to partake of the Holy Supper in true faith, love, and obedience, there the outward perishable man eats and drinks perishable bread and wine, and *the inner imperishable man of the heart eats in a spiritual sense the imperishable body and blood of Christ* which cannot be eaten or digested, as was said [italics added].³⁷

In this connection we may briefly observe the formal similarity between Simons' theology of the Supper and his Christology. That is, Simons understood Jesus – including his physical body – to have originated solely from God, while Mary provided the suitable “field” within which this divine seed was sown and developed. “He [Jesus] did not become flesh of Mary, but in Mary.”³⁸ Just as Jesus in a sense came directly from heaven, conceived by the Holy Spirit without taking on the materiality of this world by means of his mother Mary, so too in the Supper Jesus' spiritual presence comes directly from heaven, in the power of the Spirit, without taking on the materiality of the elements of the bread and wine.³⁹

If the question of how the mystery represented in the Supper “is joined to the signs for which purpose they are ordained” is undeveloped in Simons' writing, the question of what is signified in the Supper is repeatedly articulated. Although in the passages noted above Simons does speak of a spiritual presence of Christ, far more significant for him is the reality of the Supper as a memorial to Christ's death, and a time to remember “all the glorious fruits of divine love manifest toward us in Christ.”⁴⁰ Egil Grislis has noted this aspect of Simons' thought, stating that “as in the Passover celebration of the Old Testament so also in the Lord's Supper in the New

Testament ‘the sign signifies the reality.’ Ultimately considered, this ‘reality’ is none other than the atonement of Jesus Christ.”⁴¹

Notwithstanding Grislis’ statement, for Simons the “realities” pointed to by the elements are multiple. In addition to signifying Christ’s atonement, the Supper also signifies the unity of, and harmony among, true believers: “by the Lord’s Supper Christian unity, love, and peace are signified and enjoined.”⁴² Just as in a physical body, members of Christ’s body are to perform their particular tasks to build up the body and to promote its peace and harmony.

Most significantly, the Supper signifies the new life in Christ experienced by true believers. As already noted, the truly distinctive contributions of Simons’ theology here develop out of how it is impacted by a concern for the believer’s new life in Christ. Making the transformed lives of believers one of the Supper’s signified realities is an example of one such distinctive feature. Many passages could be cited to illustrate this point, but a few should suffice. “The Scriptures on every hand require of us true repentance, and the sacramental signs, such as baptism and the Holy Supper, signify, represent, and teach to all true Christian believers a penitent, unblamable life.”⁴³ In another passage from his “Reply to Gellius Faber,” Simons says “the reality and the thing signified in the Holy Supper, [is] namely, the remembrance of the sacrifice of the flesh and blood of Christ, [and] the love of God and their neighbors.”⁴⁴ Later in his reply Simons states that “the signs of the New Testament are in themselves quite powerless and vain and useless if the thing signified, namely, *the new, penitent life*, is not there [italics added].”⁴⁵

Now, having noted the what and how of the mystery represented in the Supper, we may direct our attention to its effects. A noteworthy point here is how the Supper functioned to maintain the church’s purity. For Simons, the community of believers had a role in drawing attention to, and demanding the amelioration of, behavior not reflective of the new life in Christ. Faber accused Simons of hypocrisy, for while the latter often made allegations of “dissension, wrath, and enmity” in the Reformed churches, Faber felt Simons was not equally attuned to the quarrelling within his own fellowship. Apparently, Simons took Faber’s accusation to refer to the practice of the ban in Anabaptist congregations, and in his defence presented

a description of it. Those who willfully followed their own reason rather than the instruction of Scripture were at first reprov'd by the congregation "reasonably and in love." If they did not seek to amend their ways, the fellowship had to separate itself from them until they would acknowledge their faults and return to the congregation with an amended disposition. All of this, which Faber called "contention, enmity, and discord about the articles of faith," was a necessary exercise of "keeping uncleanness from the house of the Lord."⁴⁶ This included keeping insincere believers from participating in communion. For Simons, having rejected any connection between the forgiveness of sins and the Eucharist, making the Lord's Supper a communion of the truly redeemed (as judged by their outward behavior) meant that maintaining the church's purity by means of the ban constituted a major purpose of the Supper.

This is the dynamic indicated when Simons spoke of the Supper being a "communion of the body and blood of Christ."⁴⁷ Far from pointing to a mystical reality, this terminology had a predictably ethical thrust. Only those who by their way of life showed they were "flesh of His flesh and bone of His bone," who were in Christ and had Christ in them, dared partake.⁴⁸ Otherwise, one would be attempting a communion of the resurrected Lord with those who reject him, a situation that could only lead to the judgment and condemnation of those unworthily seeking to be joined with Christ in the Supper. The Supper, and the communion with Christ offered therein, was therefore a kind of spiritual reward for holy living: "For the Lord's Supper is a communion of the flesh and blood of Christ; not to the wicked and perverse, but to the sincere, penitent believers as a gift of reconciliation."⁴⁹ It was thus of utmost importance that the church exercise the discipline of the ban with respect to outward behavior, and that communicants examine themselves (i.e., the moral quality of their lives including their intentions), to determine whether they had actually been made partakers of Christ and were thus worthy to partake.

Analysis of Simons' Theology of the Supper

First, Simons' treatment affirms a "spiritual" presence of Christ in the Supper that shares in the general late medieval and Reformation strand of eucharistic piety mentioned in connection to Gansfort, Hoffman, and to some

extent Hoen. As in Gansfort and Hoffman, in Simons we observe a spiritual presence of Christ that may or may not be joined to the elements of bread and wine, the reception of which is predicated upon the faith (manifested in a transformed life) and desire of the recipient (*ex opere operantis*). Further, in at least one citation – “the inner imperishable man of the heart eats in a spiritual sense the imperishable body and blood of Christ”⁵⁰ – Simons even seems to share with them a conviction of the possibility of spiritually eating Christ’s physical flesh and blood. Interestingly, however, he does not have recourse to his fellow Dutchman Hoen’s distinctive exegesis of the words of institution as a means of protecting against an actual, physical presence of Christ in the Supper.

Considering Simons’s treatment now simply on its own terms, we observed that in addition to the minor theme of affirming a spiritual presence of Christ in the Supper, Simons also spoke of several realities “signified” by the Supper: Jesus’ atonement; the peaceful unity of believers in the church; and the new penitent life. That he spoke of these signified realities distinctly and did not join them with a spiritual presence of Christ may strike us as odd: would not Christ himself be the primary “signified” of the Supper? However, Simons was not the first to make distinctions between Jesus’ “presence” and the Supper’s “significations.” Thomas Aquinas too spoke distinctly about what the Eucharist “contains,” namely Christ, and also its various significations, e.g., Jesus’ atonement, spiritual nourishment, and ecclesiastical unity.⁵¹

What makes Simons unique, with respect to figures like Gansfort and Aquinas, is his identifying “the new, penitent life” as one of the Supper’s significations. This original contribution fits seamlessly with his emphasis on renewed, sanctified life throughout his entire theology, and it makes sense that this theme would also take a central place here. In fact, given the stress on the new, penitent life in his whole theology, this aspect of his view must be seen as at least as important as Jesus’ atonement in being the “signified” of the Supper.⁵² What is the significance of this theological move, and how did it function?

To take the question of function first, as noted earlier the Supper came to play a key role in maintaining the church’s purity by means of the ban. Since according to Simons only the truly redeemed, those who are truly flesh

of Christ's flesh, may participate in a communion of the flesh and blood of the Lord, only such as these could be admitted to the Lord's table. The ban was the ecclesial expression of this requirement with respect to observable behavior, and strict self-examination was the necessary means for individual reflection on one's private intentions.

Next, while the Supper had a crucial role in exhorting or "admonishing" believers to Christlike behavior ("the sacramental signs...signify, represent, and teach"), as has been repeatedly observed in the literature,⁵³ what has not yet been thoroughly considered is whether making "the penitent life" one of the Supper's signified realities exhausts the theological significance of Simons' approach. There are at least two possibilities for interpreting the importance of making the new life a signified reality and stressing it as much as Simons did.

One possibility is that the new life in Christ as the "reality" signified by the bread and wine could result in re-visioning how God's power is mediated in the Supper. Surprisingly, Simons does sometimes speak of God's power being manifested in Communion.⁵⁴ One of the most dramatic examples is the following:

God's work is not keeping a dead letter, an imitation, nor is it the sounding of bells and organs and singing; *but it is a heavenly power; a vital moving of the Holy Ghost* which ignites the hearts and minds of believers.... For this is the true nature and power of the Lord's Word if it be rightly preached, *and of His Holy Sacraments if rightly used* [italics added].⁵⁵

On the basis of such passages, we might be tempted to trace the flow of divine power in the traditional manner from its source in God, through the elements, and to the communicants. However, such an interpretation can be invalidated on two counts. First, we must remind ourselves of Simons' re-situation of the healing help of the physician Jesus from the Eucharist to "His powerful Word." Solely in hearing and obeying this Word do believers experience God's power transforming their lives. Second, since in Simons' theology the elements signify this new transformed life, in this case the path of divine power is curved, leading from God, through the Word, to the communicants, to the elements, and back to the communicants who perceive the symbolism and power of the Supper. From this we may conclude that

any power in the celebration of the Supper is mediated via the believers to the elements, and not vice versa. In Simons' theology, the gathered community of penitent believers, not the bread and wine, is the visible sign of an invisible grace. As a result, any "power" in the Supper must be seen to travel from the believers to the elements, and not the other way.

To extrapolate from Simons' treatment and to try contemporizing his concerns, another way to speak of the "heavenly power" is that in a faith-filled reception of the Supper the elements and actions possess new significance for believers. There is no objective change in the bread and wine but a subjective change in the participants as a result of a lived faith, which yields new meaning for the elements when used in remembrance of Christ. Perhaps the theological neologism "transsignification" could be used to suggest the direction Simons wished to indicate by placing the path of divine action initially through the subject, rather than the elements.⁵⁶

Excursus: On Idols and Icons

A second possible theological implication of placing the "new, penitent life" at the center of the Supper is related to this last observation, and can be illustrated by reference to the philosopher Jean-Luc Marion. In *Dieu sans l'être* (God without Being/God without being God), Marion engages some challenges posed by Martin Heidegger's analysis of "onto-theology." Heidegger critiques western theological and philosophical traditions for presupposing the primacy of theoretical reason in their reflections on Being. The result is that the onto-logical God enters the scene "only insofar as philosophy, of its own accord and by its own nature, requires and determines how the deity enters into it."⁵⁷

For Marion, such a manner of approaching God is idolatrous. In the usual understanding an idol is a false or untrue image of the divine, but for Marion this is not the best way to grasp the nature of an idol. Rather, idols mark "a real, limited, and indefinitely variable function of Dasein [human existence] considered in its aiming at the divine."⁵⁸ They are a "low-water mark" of the experience of the divine, according to the circumstances of a particular perspective, whether of an individual, group, or entire culture.

The essence of idolatry is thus not falsity but partiality, in at least two senses: (1) what is revealed of the divine is restricted to what I aimed

at with my intention; (2) what I see necessarily reflects the trajectory of my desire, what I happen to be partial to. Thus the idol is not the source of the limited gaze but the reflection of it. As a kind of “hidden mirror” the idol reflects the gaze back to its origin, and in its brilliance offers to sight “the trace of the bounce.” Looking at an idol in this way, one sees only “the gaze gazing at itself gazing.”⁵⁹ This analysis of the idol applies equally to both conceptual and physical artifacts.

In contrast to this inevitably partial approach to the divine via the *idol*, Marion enunciates an alternative approach by way of the *icon*. Whereas an idol acts as a mirror, reflecting the aim of its viewer insofar as it aspires to and is able to grasp (constrain) the divine, the icon provides its own gaze,⁶⁰ the “glory” of which is reflected in the face upon which it gazes. Rather than dividing the invisible into what is visible and invisible (literally invisible), the icon serves to make the invisible visible as such. The icon therefore does “not cease to refer to an other than itself without, however, that other ever being reproduced in the visible.”⁶¹

How might Marion’s analysis of the idol and icon apply to Simons’ theology of the Supper? Most briefly, it provides a perspective in which making the “new, penitent life” the signified of the Supper presents the possibility of an idolatry at least as dangerous as what Simons wished to protect his congregations from, with respect to transubstantiation. In presenting Christ in the bread and wine, the doctrine of transubstantiation brings with it the danger of a kind of crass material idolatry. According to Marion’s analysis, however, if Christ as the holy/wholly Other is conflated with a community’s consciousness, a far more insidious and absolute form of idolatry results. Just as no philosophical conditions can dictate in advance the conditions of God’s advent without thereby manufacturing a usurping “God” according to human specifications, no view of God’s presence in the Eucharist can make that presence dependent on the community’s expectations without manufacturing a similar “God.” Of course, this “God” will not be a false god in any absolute sense but it will be an idol: a representation of what the collective consciousness of the community “at a given moment in its ‘progression’” has been able to secure.⁶²

In fact, community consciousness, if it “realizes” what animates it, becomes the only veritable “real” presence without any thing any longer

having to mediate its relation to the eucharistic presence. Then consciousness claims to be immediately the presence of Christ: the idol no longer stems from any representation whatsoever, but from the representational consciousness of self. Thus any gap between self-consciousness and the consciousness/knowledge of Christ among us, between revelation and manifestation, is abolished. The absence of a represented object hence does not eliminate idolatry but establishes the coming to immediate consciousness of eucharistic presence as the insurmountable idol.⁶³

It is into just this kind of idolatry that Simons' treatment, which places the new, penitent life of believers at the heart of the Supper, is at risk of devolving.

Contemporary Implications and Conclusions

The main purposes of this article were to determine to what extent Simons' theology of the Supper may accurately be described as "only symbolic" and to explore the implications of Simons' views for contemporary Mennonite understandings of Communion.

The words "only symbolic" are of course very slippery, and greatly depend upon how one understands the role of language in the construction and experience of reality. In contemporary discussions of signs and symbols, the idea that the phrase "only symbolic" is generally meant to convey tends to be expressed by the terms "sign" and "signified." A sign, such as the elements of bread and wine in a strictly memorial understanding of the Supper, is a separate entity standing for something other than itself. A symbol, on the other hand, "participates directly in the presence and power of that which it symbolizes."⁶⁴ This definition could also serve as a general description of what in Christian theology is referred to by "sacramentality."

With this view of the significance of symbolism, one may safely say that at least two strands of Simons' thinking offer the prospect of affirming the "symbolic" nature of the Lord's Supper. First, there is the spiritual presence of Christ that Simons occasionally describes in the Supper. Keeney has also noted this feature of Simons' theology, calling it "a real, though spiritual, presence in the Lord's Supper."⁶⁵ To the extent that this Christic presence is part of the "mystery" to which the signs of the Supper become "joined,"⁶⁶ we do have a "symbolic" understanding of the Supper

in Simons. But a number of factors militate against such an interpretation. First, there is the relative infrequency with which Simons expresses himself on this topic. Second, when this presence is predicated, it occurs on the basis of the biblical promise “where two or three are gathered” and not on the basis of statements related to the elements of bread and wine. Third, at least one passage (cited previously, regarding the physical man eating the physical elements and the spiritual man eating spiritually) suggests that any spiritual presence of Christ occurs at most alongside and distinct from the physical elements. Considering all these factors, it seems rather more plausible to argue that in Simons’ theology the bread and wine really are signs, not symbols, of Jesus’ presence.

Another possibility for identifying a “symbolic” understanding of the Supper lies in Simons’ naming the “new, penitent life” as one of the Supper’s “signified” realities. He repeatedly stresses that without true faith manifested in a new, penitent life, the sacraments have no power to save or help anyone.

Once more, understand that which I write: Without penitence, neither water, bread, nor wine, or ceremony, avail in Christ; even if they were administered by the apostles themselves. Before Him avail a new creature, a converted, changed, and broken heart, a sincere fear and love of God, unfeigned love of one’s neighbors....Where there is such a new being, there indeed is true baptism and the true Supper.⁶⁷

Thus only when the power of the reformed life is present can this reality be “joined to the signs for which purpose they are ordained.”⁶⁸ With respect to the new life, according to Simons in a true celebration of the Supper this reality truly does become joined to the signs of the bread and wine, in effect transforming them from “signs” to “symbols” (or sacraments). Tracing the path of power in Simons’ Supper leads from God, through the Word, to the believers, and then to the elements of the Supper, which acquire a new power and significance to these same believers.

Such an understanding of the Supper is not necessarily to be expected in Simons. Arnold Snyder expresses the opinion that

... with the exception of Marpeck, all Anabaptists rejected any hint of sacramental power or revelatory participation of the

temporal in the divine. The divine needed to be reached by means of pure immaterial spirit, mediated at best by the Word of God.⁶⁹

Keeney, on the other hand, has said Dutch Anabaptists could not accept the complete spiritualization of the Supper partly “because of their epistemology, which required the communication of the spiritual by means of the material while men are in the flesh.”⁷⁰

In fact, both of these positions are true. What Keeney does not recognize, as far as Simons is concerned, is that the only means by which God’s power is materially mediated occurs via the power of the Word upon believers. The kernel of truth in Keeney’s analysis – not allowed for in Snyder’s remarks – is that God’s power is so great it can even overflow from the believers into material elements. In Simons’ words,

...the external use of the sign is nothing but a false show and hypocrisy if the thing which is invisibly represented is not present with it...But where the mystery is joined to the signs for which purpose they are ordained, there the baptism of Christ and the supper of Christ are present, as the Scriptures teach.⁷¹

Opportunities and Challenges

What are the opportunities and challenges posed by Simons’ theology for a contemporary Mennonite understanding of Communion? As for opportunities, Simons’ theology at least allows for something other than a merely psychological remembering of Jesus in the celebration of the Supper. This is significant for the heirs of the ethically rigorous Anabaptist vision, the high demands of which necessitate a search for spiritual practices empowering them to live on “the resurrection side of the cross.”⁷² Further, Simons’ basing this presence on the promise “where two or three are gathered” offers interesting possibilities for contemporary theological reflection. Finally, the intrinsic connection between the Supper and a transformed life is provocative for contemporary Mennonites.

It is in relation to this latter point that many of the challenges also arise. For example, making Jesus’ presence in the Supper “a gift of reconciliation” – in effect a result of (reward for?) the already transformed, obedient lives of

believers – is problematic. Many contemporary Mennonites find themselves more often than they would like on the tomb side of the cross, dead to the possibilities of new life in Christ they wish to embody. In this context many desire to find in the Supper a source of empowerment for discipleship, independent of their particular success in living that life at a given point in time. To make the “new, penitent life” one of the signified realities of the Supper is, for them, to make the desired end the required pre-condition of its proper celebration instead.

Another difficulty is presented by Simons' inability to articulate how Christ's spiritual presence is linked with the elements of bread and wine. Simons' “divine flesh” Christology posited Jesus' flesh coming directly from heaven without taking on the materiality of this earth, which has proven problematic and even theologically embarrassing for some later Mennonites. Likewise, a spiritual presence of Christ in the Supper that has no necessary connection with its elements poses significant theological difficulties.

On the other hand, Simons had no problem linking the new penitent lives of believers with the Supper: this truly was the “mystery” that when joined to the elements of bread and wine made it a true “sacrament.” The theological difficulties with this aspect of his thought were illustrated above in connection with Jean-Luc Marion. Insofar as believers' new, penitent lives are made a central signified of the Supper on par with Jesus' atonement, a conflation of the consciousness and ethical achievements of the community with Christ is always a possibility. This in turn presents the danger of a far more subtle and pervasive idolatry than any crass materialism. If from a Mennonite perspective a danger of “high church” traditions is that their sacramental and liturgical life functions as an opiate to meaningful ethical engagement with the world, a serious danger in Mennonite circles seems to be substituting the life of the community for God.

I am not the first to observe this danger. For example, in this issue of *CGR* Paul Martens points out the possible secularizing implications of John Howard Yoder's attempt to construct his Anabaptist theology as an analogue to the development of the Yiddish language. John Rempel also notes several significant tendencies in twentieth-century North American Mennonite celebration of the Lord's Supper. First, there has been a dramatic decline in the practice of having a preparatory service in advance

of communion, the theological grounding for which is clear in Simons' vision of a visible, disciplined church. Second, where it is still celebrated the emphasis of the preparatory service has shifted from an "ethically-binding horizontal dimension" to a vertical devotional focus. Third, in the practice of communion itself the vertical dimension of a spiritual presence of, or communion with, Christ "has been replaced by a celebration of relationships among believers."⁷³ The result is a focus on human actions: "the current emphasis is on the Supper as an act of remembrance and as a sign of community. In both cases, the focus has been on human actions."⁷⁴ In Marion's terms, the "gaze gazing at itself gazing."⁷⁵

In relation to all these tendencies Simons' theology presents contemporary Mennonites not only with challenges to be overcome but correctives to be heeded with respect to current practice and belief. For if Simons' emphasis on the new, penitent life always carries the risk of devolving into community-oriented idolatry, at least he maintained the significance of the "otherness" of God approaching the community with concrete ethical demands coming from without by means of the Word. For Simons it really was the "new, penitent life" and not merely the life of the community in itself that was signified in the Supper. Furthermore, and even though it is a minor theme in his theology of the Supper, he also maintained a sense of the holy/wholly Other approaching believers by means of an (admittedly ill-defined) spiritual presence of Christ in the Supper.

With the disappearance of preparatory services before communion and the associated theological shifts that go with it, all too often contemporary Mennonites are left with a practice that simply presents "the life of the community" to itself, without particular reference to God's presence either directly in the Supper or indirectly as evinced in the transformed lives of believers. This is a significant theological problem. Thus, in our current church context the traditional Anabaptist wariness of idolatry related to reverencing the elements of the Supper must be complemented by an equal sensitivity to the dangers of idolizing "the life of the community."

Perhaps the most salient finding from this investigation that can aid in that endeavor is that, contrary to what one might be led to believe, the Lord's Supper has not always had only a "symbolic" meaning for Mennonites (in a narrowly Zwinglian sense); in fact this was not even true for Menno himself!

From this very modest starting point, whatever expression of the relationship between Spirit and matter contemporary Anabaptists articulate must do justice both to the contemporary existential hunger among Mennonites for encounters with God in worship, and to the fundamental insights and commitments of the Anabaptist vision of the Christian life.

Notes

¹ I use this by now anachronistic nomenclature for the ease with which it describes the particular branches of Anabaptism with which I am most familiar.

² Harold S. Bender and C. Henry Smith, eds., *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Vol. I (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1955), 651; subsequently referred to as *Menn. Enc.*, vol. I.

³ Nevertheless, John D. Rempel has been one voice advocating for figures and impulses within the Anabaptist tradition that may not aptly be gathered under the heading or within the spirit of Zwinglian memorialism. See, for example, his 1990 *Mennonite Encyclopedia* article, where he notes three main emphases in traditional Mennonite understandings of the Lord's Supper: 1) an emphasis on the church, its unity, and the accompanying ethical demands of membership therein; 2) a view of the Supper as a meal of remembrance of Christ's suffering sacrifice, and thanksgiving for the same; and 3) a mystical union or "assured participation in Christ's saving presence" in the Supper. This union is unmediated by the elements of the Supper and is rather "the immediate work of the spirit through the response of faith which unites us to Christ." Cornelius J. Dyck and Dennis D. Martin, eds., *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, vol. 5 (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1990), 170.

⁴ Sjouke Voolstra, *Menno Simons: His Image and Message* (North Newton, KS: Mennonite Press, 1997), 61.

⁵ Cornelius Krahn, *Dutch Anabaptism* (Kitchener, ON: Herald Press, 1981): 46; George H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, Third Edition (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, Inc., 1992): 74. *Menn. Enc.*, vol. I, 651.

⁶ Voolstra, 70.

⁷ See Krahn, *Dutch Anabaptism*, 12, on this latter point.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁹ Edward W. Miller, ed., and Jared W. Scudder, trans., *Wessel Gansfort: Life and Writings*, vol. II (London, UK: The Knickerbocker Press, 1917), 17; subsequently referred to as Gansfort.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹² Heiko A. Oberman, ed., *Forerunners of the Reformation* (New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), 269.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 274.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 272.

¹⁵ Hoffman was the founder of the Melchiorite movement, of whose peaceful strand Simons eventually became the most significant organizer.

¹⁶ George H. Williams, ed., *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1957), 193-94.

¹⁷ Ibid., 194. Bailey states that Hoffman may have received influences from Hoen and Gansfort indirectly via Andreas Karlstadt. Richard G. Bailey, *The Melchiorites in the Netherlands: Origins and Development to 1533* (Waterloo, ON: University of Waterloo Press, 1984): 110.

¹⁸ John C. Wenger, ed., and Leonard Verduin, trans., *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons c. 1496-1561* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956), 142-58; subsequently referred to as *Complete Writings*. How far may Simons' theology of the Supper have changed from the first edition of his Foundation to the revised editions of 1554 and 1558?

¹⁹ Ibid., 717-23.

²⁴ Ibid., 156.

²⁸ Ibid., 148.

²⁰ Ibid., 153.

²⁵ Ibid., 156.

²⁹ Ibid., 149.

²¹ Ibid., 154.

²⁶ Ibid., 157.

³⁰ Ibid., 142.

²² Ibid., 156.

²⁷ Ibid., 718.

³¹ Ibid., 719.

²³ Ibid., 152.

³² For example, I state this in distinction to Egil Grislis's treatment, where he tends to see any mention by Simons of Christ's presence in the Supper as reflecting "the ecstatic character" of the experience of the Supper, e.g., Grislis, 130, and rather frames Simons' view as "symbolic" in the Zwinglian sense. "Consistently, the communion with Christ in the Lord's Supper is described symbolically. The elements of the Lord's Supper point to a specific meaning which is perceived by the faithful partaker": Egil Grislis, "Menno Simons on the Lord's Supper," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 10 (1992): 133. While I agree that much of what is going on in the Supper for Simons relates to communicated meanings by means of "signs," I am here also trying to identify some further aspects as well in agreement with other such analyses. See for example W.E. Keeney, *Dutch Anabaptist Thought and Practice* (Nieuwkoop, Netherlands: B. De Graaf, 1968): 102.

³³ *Complete Writings*, 148.

³⁴ Ibid., 155.

³⁶ Ibid., 155.

³⁵ Ibid., 148.

³⁷ Ibid., 153-54.

³⁸ "Brief Confession on the Incarnation 1554," in *Complete Writings*, 432. For more on Simons' Christology see this work (entire text plus editor's introduction, 419-54), and also "The Incarnation of Our Lord 1554," in *Complete Writings*, 783-834.

³⁹ Here I add another layer of meaning to the link between Simons' Christology and theology of the Supper as understood by Grislis, who described the significance as lying in the area of sanctification: "Namely, insofar as Christ's 'flesh' and 'blood,' according to Simons, were of heavenly origin and not from the Virgin Mary, the spiritual participation in Christ now assures the believer that he, too, participates in a heavenly mode of existence." Grislis, 133.

⁴⁰ *Complete Writings*, 144.

⁴¹ Grislis, 132.

⁴² *Complete Writings*, 145. Simons refers to this reality in other writings as well, e.g., "A Kind Admonition on Church Discipline 1541": "Or what does it profit to eat of the Holy Supper of our Lord Jesus Christ with the brethren if we have not the true symbolized fruits of this Supper, namely, the death of Christ, the love of the brethren, and the peaceful unity of faith in Christ Jesus?" Ibid., 413.

⁴³ Ibid., 632.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 690.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 718.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 721.

⁵¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III Pars, Q. 79, article 1, reply.

⁵² This is, I think, contra Egil Grislis. While he correctly notes the demand within Simons' theology of the Supper for ethical human response, he seems to identify Jesus' atonement as the sole "reality" "signified" by the Supper. As cited previously, "One of the meanings of the Lord's Supper is that of a "memorial." As in the Passover celebration of the OT so also in the Lord's Supper in the NT 'the sign signifies the reality.' Ultimately considered, this "reality is none other than the atonement of Jesus Christ." Although Grislis expresses himself here in a general way, the statement occurs in the context of a description of Simons' theology, so I take it to apply to Grislis' understanding of this same theology. Grislis, 132.

⁵³ Namely, chapter 3 in Voolstra, *Menno Simons: His Image and Message* and Grislis' article.

⁵⁴ Simons makes not infrequent, if passing, reference to the "power" of the Supper. See, for example, *Complete Writings*, 151: "Behold, beloved readers, here you have the true instructions concerning the Lord's Holy Supper with its meaning, its fruit, *power*, nature, and the guests, as the mouth of the Lord has ordained...." [ital. added].

⁵⁵ Ibid., 149.

⁵⁶ To learn more about this term and some of its phenomenological background, see Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Eucharist*, N.D. Smith, trans. (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968), 131-33. Note his qualification on p. 150 that transubstantiation and transsignification cannot be conflated without remainder. See also Thomas Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2004), 199-200.

⁵⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 56.

⁵⁸ Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, Thomas A. Carlson trans. (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 28. Rendering Dasein as "human existence" is an attempt at a rough English approximation in what needs to be, for the purposes of this paper, only a cursory and tangential introduction to Heidegger's thought.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 26.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 19.

⁶¹ Ibid., 16.

⁶⁴ Sandra Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishing, 1991), 35-36.

⁶⁵ W.E. Keeney, *Dutch Anabaptist Thought and Practice* (Nieuwkoop, Netherlands: B. De Graaf, 1968), 102.

⁶⁶ See, for example, *Complete Writings*, 155 and 718 for passages where Simons talks of the elements as bound to that which they signify.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 719. There are countless other similar passages in Simons' writing.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 155.

⁶⁹ C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: Revised Student Edition* (Kitchener,

⁴⁷ Ibid., 146.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 146.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 150.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 153-4.

⁶² Ibid., 166.

⁶³ Ibid., 168-69.

ON: Pandora Press, 1997), 347.

⁷⁰ Keeney, 193.

⁷¹ *Complete Writings*, 155.

⁷² I borrow this memorable phrase from an article by Harold S. Bender, “Walking in the Resurrection’: The Anabaptist Doctrine of Regeneration and Discipleship” in *MQR* 35 (1961): 97.

⁷³ John D. Rempel, *The Lord’s Supper in Anabaptism* (Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1993), 210.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 224-25.

⁷⁵ Marion, 26.

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Was the Bread Only Bread, and the Wine Only Wine? Sacramental Theology in Five Anabaptist Hymns

Arnold Snyder

The Lord’s Supper

It is well known that Anabaptists in the sixteenth century denied the Roman Catholic assertion that priestly mediation resulted in transubstantiation. The Anabaptist counter-position was simply and naively stated in countless court testimonies: the bread of the Supper is just bread; the wine of the Supper is just wine.¹ There is nothing of divinity in, with, or under the elements. With this negation the Anabaptists expressed a radically anti-sacramental, anti-clerical critique, much in the manner of unlettered commoners in St. Gall, Switzerland in 1525, one of whom testified that “God has blessed all things. If [a believer] ate a piece of bread or a slice of radish, it would do him as much good as the host.” Another witness testified that when the priest elevated the host, “it is just as if someone elevated a radish slice.” The unfavorable comparison of the host to a slice of radish certainly demystified the sacramental claim lying at the heart of the mass.²

Despite all the radical talk, there is good reason to doubt that the Anabaptists literally meant that the wine of the Lord's Supper remained just wine and the bread remained just bread. If this were literally true, the Supper would have been nothing more than a snack of radish with a sip of beverage, along with some incidental remembering. The entire sacramental action would be trivialized and brought into question. This was emphatically not the case, as is evident from the intense solemnity with which the ordinance was celebrated.

An historical anecdote sets the stage. The *Martyrs Mirror* contains a lengthy and lively exchange between an Anabaptist named Jacob de Roore and a bombastic, blaspheming friar named Cornelius, whose mighty oaths and curses the *Mirror's* editor replaced with asterisks, to spare the tender sensibilities of his pious readers. Eventually, the long debate between Jacob and the cursing friar arrived at the topic of the Lord's Supper. In the midst of numerous deleted expletives, Friar Cornelius did smoke out an inconsistency in Jacob's position on the bread and the wine.

Fr. Corn. "Did not St. Paul say, in the eleventh chapter of his first epistle to the Corinthians: 'Whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord?' And should this be only a bit of common, simple bread, and draught of stale wine? Why does St. Paul make such an exceeding great matter of it...? [I]s it still only a bit of common bread, or a memorial?"

The foul-mouthed friar had touched a crucial point: if the bread of the Supper is only common bread, why does Paul treat it so seriously and insist on "eating worthily"? Jacob replied with no apparent hesitation:

Jac. "The unworthy eating of the bread and the unworthy drinking of the cup of which Paul writes, lies in our conscience; for if I want to unite with the body of Christ, and with many brethren become one bread, and am at variance or in contention with any brother, I eat unworthily of that bread, and drink unworthily of the cup of the Lord... [For if one] comes hypocritically... the same eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning that *the body of the Lord, in the breaking of the bread which we break, becomes for us one communion or participation; and that the cup of blessing, which we bless, becomes for us one communion or participation in the blood of Christ*, as Paul writes in the tenth chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians."

Jacob's reply shifted the focus from the elements to the state of grace of the participants and the communion that results. Do participants have a clear conscience about celebrating unity and communion with the Body of Christ when they eat and drink of the elements in Supper? Are they in right relationship with one another? But friar Cornelius is convinced that he has finally trapped his quarry. He replies:

Fr. Corn. "There you are caught; for if it is a communion or participation in the body and blood of Christ, it is certainly no longer [merely] bread and wine...."³

The friar was onto something, but he missed one key point. When Jacob spoke of "uniting with the body of Christ," he was not speaking of uniting with the "real presence of Christ" in the elements. The Body of Christ to which he referred was the church. Jacob was saying that, yes, there is a worthy participation in the Supper. Worthy eating and drinking is part of a real communion. The bread and the wine seal the union of a person with the church, the Body of Christ. However, this communion or uniting with the Body of Christ does not depend on the elements but on the spiritual and fraternal condition of the communicants. Eating and drinking the bread and wine are an integral part of communion, but the focus is not on the elements as the friar thinks.

All the same, the cursing friar had a point. When Jacob de Roore and other Anabaptists took Paul at his word and insisted that a true Supper would be measured by worthy eating and drinking, they were admitting that the bread had the potential to become more than "a bit of common, simple bread" and the cup more than "a draught of stale wine." In fact, a worthy celebration with bread and wine marked the presence of the true Body of Christ in a unique way. Or, as Jacob said in possibly an unguarded moment, "the body of the Lord, in the breaking of the bread which we break, becomes for us one communion or participation."

Dogmatic theologians – both then and now – wished to know exactly how, then, the Anabaptists explained the relationship of the natural elements of bread and wine to the grace of God and the response of faith. Most Anabaptists did not provide sophisticated theological answers to such questions.⁴ But the Lord's Supper was a tremendously important part of their worship together. Celebrating it "worthily" lay at the heart of their

gatherings, where they not only examined personal and fraternal spiritual relationships but sang hymns explaining what they were doing. Significantly, the hymns were not much concerned to negate sacramentalism, but rather set out to explain the Supper's place within the Anabaptist view of the spiritual process of new birth and faithful living.

Even limiting ourselves to the Swiss and South German Anabaptist traditions of hymnody we possess a rich collection of texts. The Swiss Brethren hymnal, the *Ausbund*, contains two substantial eucharistic hymns; the Hutterites have preserved three. All these hymns were composed in the first half of the sixteenth century. The text to the eucharistic *Ausbund* hymn 92 was written by Hans Betz from a prison cell in the castle at Passau on the Danube. The tune was designated as "O Son of David."⁵ This hymn is still sung in Old Order Amish communities on communion Sundays. The "Danksagung" or "Thanksgiving" hymn was composed by Hans Hut before 1528. It was preserved by the Hutterites and is still sung at every Hutterite communion service.

When we consider all five hymns, we find an interesting melodic connection with the Catholic eucharistic tradition that we would never have guessed simply by looking at Anabaptist antisacramentalism. Four of the five carry instructions that they are to be sung to the tune of the *Pange lingua*, which was a Latin eucharistic hymn, a "hymn of the most blessed sacrament." As practicing Catholics the Anabaptists would have associated this tune with the celebration of the Eucharist. The *Pange lingua* is said to have been composed in the thirteenth century – by none other than Thomas Aquinas – for use during the office of the feast of Corpus Christi. The Anabaptists borrowed this appropriate hymn tune but changed the text to fit their own understanding of the Lord's Supper.

We turn now to an analysis of the content of these Anabaptist hymns. The themes of remembrance and union are central, and provide points of reference for our observations.

Remembrance

That the Supper was one of "remembrance" was axiomatic, but the Anabaptist eucharistic hymns activated several important, surprising layers of meaning connected with remembering and the Supper. The bedrock

“memory” activated by the celebration is, of course, Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, through which forgiveness of sins was offered to humankind. All the hymns in our collection presuppose Christ’s sacrifice, but oddly enough only *Ausbund* hymn 92 spends any time in “remembering” the event. The first eleven stanzas are devoted to explaining how Jesus Christ, the food from heaven, the spotless lamb, fulfilled the Law and established the new covenant.⁶

Christ’s atoning sacrifice lies behind all celebrations of the Supper, and remembering that sacrifice calls for thankfulness. So Hans Hut’s hymn, commonly called the “Danksagung” (thanksgiving) today by the Hutterites, begins with these verses:

1. We give you thanks and honour, O Lord God
For you nourish us all.
You give us food from heaven,
For which we praise you eternally, Lord.⁷

The Lord’s Supper in the Anabaptist tradition shares with the wider Christian tradition the *commemorative* and *eucharistic* nature of the celebration, giving thanks to God while remembering and commemorating Christ’s sacrifice. But what is striking on reading the hymns is not how strong the memorial theme is but how faint it is.⁸ This is odd, since we are used to repeating that the Anabaptists celebrated a “memorial” Supper.

A more typically Anabaptist emphasis emerges at a second level of “remembering.” The hymns incorporate celebration of the Supper into their understanding of the spiritual life – the spiritual process of repentance, faith, rebirth, and new life that together define the Christian walk. After its careful treatment of Christ’s atonement, *Ausbund* Hymn 92, stanza 12 says “Understand! Christ the Lord has become a mercy seat for all who, if they believe, are born in him.”⁹ Here we are entering Anabaptist territory.

Before we trace some steps involved in being “born in Christ,” we must note that for the Anabaptists singing these hymns, the salvation won by Christ is *conditional* upon the faith and rebirth of any given individual. Here the “believers church” nature of the Anabaptist tradition becomes clear. Christ becomes a “mercy seat” only for those who have come to a mature faith and are born again. This understanding is foundational for the Anabaptist view of the Lord’s Supper. *Ausbund* hymn 55, for example,

begins with these words:

1. O God Father on Heaven's throne,
You who have prepared for us a crown,
If we abide in Your Son,
Here with Him bear patiently cross and suffering,
In this life yielding ourselves to Him,
Striving for His fellowship at all times.¹⁰

The phrases “if we abide in Your Son,” “bear patiently cross and suffering,” “yielding ourselves to Him,” and “striving for His fellowship at all times” indicate the human responses necessary for there to be communion and salvation. Christ's death on the cross is the necessary, but not the sufficient, condition for our salvation. Thus the anonymous eucharistic hymn preserved by the Hutterites says:

2. The cup means for us the suffering of Christ
The Holy Spirit will humble us,
So we may become like unto Christ
And carry the cross here on earth
Not turning away from him until the end,
Until he takes us from this misery.¹¹

If we follow the testimony of these hymns, the emphasis in the Anabaptist celebration of the Supper falls not on Christ as the vicarious atonement for sin but on the extension of the atonement to each believer individually. The Spirit must humble each believer so that the believer “becomes like unto Christ” and is ready to bear the cross.

Clearly, what is meant is the power of the Holy Spirit, but the terminology of the hymns is very imprecise. Sometimes they speak directly of the Holy Spirit, sometimes of the Spirit of God, and other times of the Spirit of Christ, with no particular distinction among them. Nevertheless, the point is obvious enough: the process leading from darkness to light is the result of the activity of the Spirit of God, working in people who have recognized their sin, repented, believed in the merits of Christ, and experienced a new birth by the spiritual power of God. Of course, this process pre-dates the celebration of the Supper; the Supper presupposes the process of coming to faith and rebirth. Peter Riedemann's eucharistic hymn notes the sacrifice of the shepherd and then comments,

4. So he helps us out of trouble
 And soon makes us one bread with him,
 If we believe in his name,
 Abandon ourselves to him and trust in him,
 Suffer his work, and strive at all times,
 Then we are members of his Body.¹²

Riedemann alludes here to the common Anabaptist view that in-filling by the Holy Spirit will require a faith that trusts enough to “abandon” itself to God’s power – the favored word to describe this was *Gelassenheit* – and so allow God to work within. This process of self-denial, standing before baptism, is well attested in Anabaptist testimonies.

The role of God’s living Spirit is striking in all of this. Repentance, faith, rebirth, and the new life are the work of the Holy Spirit; remembering this spiritual work is part of what must happen at the celebration of the Supper. *Ausbund* hymn 55 says clearly,

5. The Spirit teaches us to understand the communion
 Of partaking His flesh and blood,
 The old man must completely perish
 with his works, this is certain,
 the Spirit of Christ must work in us.¹³

Ausbund hymn 92, stanza 16 sounds the same theme:

16. The Holy Spirit feeds souls.
 This is the pledge sent for the inheritance.
 He is called a seal
 for your eternal release from pain.
 You should, therefore, praise God
 through Jesus Christ at all times
 for this heavenly food.¹⁴

It is the work of the Spirit to “feed souls.” This spiritual feeding pre-dates the celebration of the Supper but also accompanies it, as we will note later. It was this feeding that led those once in darkness into the light. Thanksgiving for spiritual feeding at the celebration of the Supper is a “remembrance” of an experience shared by all true participants. Remembering and giving thanks for Christ’s sacrifice merges into remembering and giving thanks for the living Spirit’s presence in the souls of those who have been led to

repentance and experienced rebirth.

For the Anabaptists who sang these hymns, the liberation from sin celebrated in the Supper focuses not only on the historical event on the cross but on the actual, incarnational event that has taken place in believers' hearts and lives. The focus is on the renewing work of the Holy Spirit in individuals, and not on the instrumental work of blessed elements.

A third level of remembering indicated by the eucharistic hymns is their harking back to the seal and covenant of the new birth in baptism. Hymn 92 in the *Ausbund* says it this way:

25. God now holds what you have
promised to him in baptism.
According to his command, take the cup,
complete the sacrifice to him.
How it is, then, for us in Jesus Christ
three witnesses decide:
two are called water and Spirit,
the third, blood, that is, suffering.¹⁵

This stanza alludes to the common Anabaptist description of a threefold baptism of Spirit, water, and blood. As celebrants at the Supper sang this hymn, they were reminded they had accepted Christ's sacrifice in their hearts by faith – that is, they had been baptized in the spirit. Further, the act of “eating in memory of Him” also involved “remembering” the covenant made at the event of water baptism, sealed visibly before God and the community. The Supper is a reminder of the commitment made to die to oneself in order to live a new life in Christ.¹⁶ Finally, the commitment made at baptism was also a promise to accept suffering, or the baptism of blood, should it come. Partaking of the bread and wine was thus an occasion for remembering and renewing the deep commitments signified by baptism in spirit, water, and blood.

With the second and third acts of “remembrance,” focusing on rebirth and baptism, the Lord's Supper assumes a particularly Anabaptist shape, linking the celebration with living a new, regenerated life. The *Ausbund* hymn says this:

15. Christ instituted his Supper
with bread and wine for his community

which separates itself from all sin.
 In this way she should
 eat in memory of Him.¹⁷

If we now ask how Christ's work is remembered in the Anabaptist celebration of the Lord's Supper, we see three works of Christ: on the cross, in the hearts of believers by the Spirit, and in constituting his community, which is his Body, through baptism. In this last instance, the earthly Jesus provides the "flesh and blood" example of what believers may also expect. *Ausbund* hymn 55, stanza 4, says:

4. Therefore, O Christian flock so small!
 Let us all consider
 How He went before us here on earth,
 That we also become like Him,
 In joy and grief abiding in His covenant,
 Not shunning here His flesh and blood.

The "flesh and blood of Christ" that must not be shunned has a double meaning. In accepting Christ's flesh and blood here with the elements, one also accepts the suffering of Christ's present body on earth, namely the persecution of his church.

To conclude the theme of "remembrance," asserting that the Anabaptists held to a "memorialist" Supper simply does not go deep enough. On the basis of the testimony of their eucharistic hymns, the recollection that was to occur at the celebration of the Supper was intended to remind celebrants not only of Christ's historic sacrifice and atonement, but more fundamentally of their own personal yielding to the living Christ, namely their rebirth by the power of the Holy Spirit and their becoming members of the Body of Christ by baptism, along with their promise, by the covenant of baptism, to live a new life as fruitful members of the Body of Christ, following in the footsteps of Jesus.

At this point we can begin tracing the theme of unity in these Anabaptist testimonies. This will give us a slightly different angle of vision on the same subject matter.

Union and Communion

The Anabaptists' celebration of the Lord's Supper was not only or even primarily about remembering what had happened in the past. It signified,

pointed to, and visibly enacted the unity of communion in the present, in several dimensions. Whereas the Supper's "memorial" aspects suggest casting one's mind to the past, the examination and celebration of unity brings the present into focus.

Celebration of the Supper points, first of all and most importantly, to the unity of believers with Christ. We may say that the elements point to the *mystical* unity of believers with Christ. Consider *Ausbund* hymn 55 again, stanza 5:

5. The Spirit teaches us to understand the communion
Partaking of His flesh and blood,
The old being must completely perish
With the old works, this must be noted,
The Spirit of Christ must work in us.

We return to the process of repentance, yielding in faith, and rebirth, seen here as an event not in the past but in the present. Communion depends on the death of the old being and the coming to life of a new being filled with the Spirit of Christ. Galatians 2:20 was often alluded to and cited at this point: "it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me." This sentiment appears in *Ausbund* hymn 55, stanza 9:

9. We must lay aside the old garment
And purge out the old leaven,
That He may have His work in us....

And again, stanza 13:

Christ lets His word be poured out,
The fountain of life flows within us,
When we open our hearts to Him....¹⁸

Likewise the second stanza of Peter Riedemann's eucharistic hymn says,

Therefore [God] gave from heaven
The true bread that gives us life,
So that for us who rightly eat it here,
We are made pure in conscience....¹⁹

The all-important verses from 1 Cor. 11:27-29, calling for self-examination prior to participating in the Supper, were heard by Anabaptists as a call to reflect seriously on their present spiritual condition. *Ausbund* hymn 92 says:

19. Whoever, without the Spirit
eats this bread,
walks in hypocrisy, stands in sin,
and will be possessed with the devil,
as Judas ate unworthily
and trod Christ under foot....
20. You must be clean, then, and pure
when you want to partake of it.
You must be fed with God's Spirit.
His body should include you.²⁰

The fundamental union of individual members to the living Spirit of God was to be re-examined carefully at the time of celebrating the Supper. It was not simply a matter of remembering graces past; one needed to re-examine one's true spiritual condition in the present. The threat of eternal condemnation was reason enough for honesty in this matter. Far from being a simple memorial with "mere" bread and wine, celebration with the elements of communion, as instituted by Christ, was laden with spiritual significance. When one took the elements, it was a public pledge and testimony of a clear conscience, of a present, genuine yielding to God and rebirth in the Spirit, a visible pledge of the continuing living Spirit within – and woe to liars, hypocrites, and deceivers.

At a second and equally profound level, celebration of the Supper points to the creation of one body out of many members. Eucharistic hymn 92 in the *Ausbund* uses evocative language pointing to the union of the gathered community with Christ.

14. This community (*G'mein*) is in Jesus Christ,
of his flesh and bones.
The Holy Spirit brought her together,
a united (*gemeine*) body of Christ.
As the vine has many branches,
so the community of Christ
is included in His power.
In this way one partakes of Him.²¹

The Holy Spirit not only regenerates individuals – a mysterious process in itself – but brings those individuals together, like flesh and bones, into

one body – again a profound mystery. The Body of Christ as a whole “is included in Christ’s power,” and the communion celebrated in that Body is a present manifestation of this intimate spiritual relationship.

As with individuals before God, so also with individuals before the community: Paul’s call for “discerning the Body of Christ” demands an honest evaluation of communal relationships. The spiritual union among members of the Body of Christ depends on the Holy Spirit’s work in each member. False members outwardly pretend to be united but inwardly refuse to be “ground” or “crushed” in the process of becoming one Body. The images of grains of wheat being ground for bread, and of grapes being crushed for wine, point to the “submission” (yieldedness), patience, and humility that marked the process of conversion and continued to mark the communion of believers.²² The presence or absence of God’s Spirit will be discerned by the presence or absence of Christ’s love.

Peter Riedemann’s hymn said:

6. In the bread it is prescribed for us,
That we must exercise ourselves in love,
Serve one another for improvement,
We who are members of one body,
With true hearts, truly without deceit....²³

And Hans Hut wrote,

7. Therefore we eat the Body of the Lord,
As we are taught by the Holy Spirit.
If we would truly see God,
Godly love must burn in us.
It makes us into vines, the Spirit gives life,
And in this way the Body of Christ is given to us.²⁴

The bond of Christ’s love creates a united Body out of individual believers. It is this union and communion, based on divine love in action, that is celebrated with bread and wine.

In the third place, celebration of the Supper points to the unity of the gathered community with Christ the Head. Of course, this unity has been implicitly affirmed at both the individual and communal levels already. Eucharistic hymn 55 in the *Ausbund* uses various scriptural images to make the explicit point.

6. He is the Rock and Cornerstone
laid for the house of his community (*Gemeine*)
which is His bride, wife and body
through which He performs His work here.
7. All members of His body
pursue His work here always,
according to His will, unto death.
They are one bread with Christ here.²⁵

Celebration of the Supper with the elements of bread and wine makes visible and testifies to a deeper reality: the Holy Spirit has already done (and continues to do) the work of unity, both within individuals and among individuals in the community, uniting them all with the Head. The spiritual community has already been formed of re-born members, united with Christ, who is the center, the Head, the Bridegroom. The occasion of the Lord's Supper simply gives visible testimony to the profound spiritual identification existing between Christ and the individual and collective members of his Body on earth.²⁶

The process of "becoming bread and wine," the Body of Christ in the world, will require sacrifice. The eucharistic hymns indicate that belonging to this Body will be painful, as it was in Jesus's own life in this world. *Ausbund* hymn 55 in particular sounds this note repeatedly.

16. ... the flesh must suffer
If we want to possess the kingdom with him.
17. The Lamb is eaten with distress,
Covered with bitter salt,
For whoever does not want to suffer with Christ
Shall separate himself from His flesh and blood,
He who is anxious about cross and affliction,
To him the body of Christ remains hidden.

Identification of the present Body of Christ with the Lord must be complete.

18. One must eat the Lamb entirely here,
In all forms, not forgetting anything...
Remaining undivided with Him....
19. You must become a stranger with Him,

- Without citizenship on this earth,
And practice love with patience...
You shall love the enemy...
Bowing your flesh to the dust of the earth.
20. You must also go with Him into the garden,
Awaiting the cup according to the Father's will...
...one must crucify the flesh entirely.

This eucharistic hymn underlines that for the Body of Christ on earth, the bread of unity will be accompanied by the bitter cup of suffering. The communion of the body and blood of Christ, incarnated in earthly members, will be visibly marked by the character and marks of Jesus himself. This communion cannot be simply spiritual or invisible, but will be marked by the witness of bread and wine and lives of love and obedience.

In their effort to be the visible Body of Christ on earth, the Anabaptists celebrated a “closed” Supper. In contrast to a spiritualist view that would have seen the elements as incidental and not important to a “true” celebration, they had a keen sense of the importance of a proper or “worthy” celebration. Communion with the elements was open only to those who had undergone the process of dying to self and rising in Christ, were sealed by baptism, and were tested by submission to fraternal admonition in the community. The bread and wine were not for just anybody.²⁷ The language of *Ausbund* hymn 55 is plain.

11. For whoever is still uncircumcised,
not yet renouncing the earthly kingdom,
not wanting to surrender to Christ,
[such a one] does not live a new life,
limps all the time, stinks of sin,
[and] cannot eat or drink of Him.
12. Only those come to the Lamb
who have received His witness:
His Spirit, the water, and also the blood...²⁸

Far from de-valuing the elements of bread and wine, eating and drinking together with other members of Christ's Body indicates “coming to the Lamb.” The central themes of Anabaptist spirituality – yieldedness to God, faith, humility, spiritual rebirth, baptism, new life, and conformity with Christ

unto death if necessary – are thus concentrated, recalled, examined, and enacted in this celebration. It is this integrated unity, including celebration with the visible elements, that characterizes the Lord’s Supper in early Anabaptism. *Ausbund* hymn 55, stanza 23 says:

23. Just as one bread [is made] from many kernels,
and one drink from many berries,
So all true Christians
are one bread and one drink, without deceit or duplicity,
in Christ the Lord. He nourishes us,
multiplying true love and communion.²⁹

Conclusion

Was the bread only bread, and the wine only wine? When the cursing friar pushed Jacob de Roore to explain the meaning of celebration with bread and wine, recall that Jacob answered:

...the body of the Lord, in the breaking of the bread which we break, becomes for us one communion or participation; and ... the cup of blessing, which we bless, becomes for us one communion or participation in the blood of Christ....

Eating bread and drinking wine becomes a communion and a participation in the body and blood of Christ, Jacob says. *Ausbund* hymn 55 adds that in the celebration of the Supper, Christ the Lord “nourishes us, multiplying true love and communion.” Likewise, an anonymous Swiss Brethren writing that circulated in the 1580s noted that “[partaking] of the Holy Supper with all true Christians and children of God ... feeds, refreshes and quickens the soul to eternal life.”³⁰

At the heart of the celebration with elements of bread and wine is the mystery of spiritual communion with the present, living Lord. This we hear loudly and clearly in the Anabaptist eucharistic hymns. It is the power of the living God, working in the hearts of believers and in their midst, that makes of them the Body of Christ. And it is that power that transforms the plain bread and wine into a spiritual meal that “multiplies true love and communion,” that “feeds, refreshes and quickens the soul to eternal life.” The point is not that this is just bread and just wine, but that, properly understood, this is a spiritual meal that includes bread and wine.

Was there a presence of Christ *in the elements* of the Anabaptist Lord's Supper? The answer is an emphatic "no," if we look for that presence in the accustomed places and with the accustomed explanations. There was no presence of Christ *in* the bread and wine as blessed elements; they were not instruments to convey grace, nor were they blessed by clergy empowered to perform this miracle. But this does not mean the Anabaptists denied the living presence of Christ in and with their celebration of the Supper, only that we are looking for Christ's presence in the wrong places. We make a mistake if we cease looking for that presence just because it is not in bread and wine. The mystery of communion with the living Christ in his Supper comes into being by the power of the Spirit, dwelling in and working through the collected members of Christ's Body.

Perhaps the Anabaptists overcompensated when they denied a complete lack of sacramental efficacy in relation to the bread and the wine, but they knew what they could not agree to. They refused to equate a divine mystery with sacerdotal magic. But they also knew what they wished to keep, and that was the living mystery of union and communion, of the celebration of union between believers and the living Christ, and the union of believers with each other, into a visible Body of Christ. How could such a profound mystery ever be accomplished *instrumentally* by a "slice of radish"? Neither could such a mystery be accomplished in the absence of the visible tokens of bread and wine, co-witnesses and testimonies of God's faithfulness in, with, and through living believers themselves, yielding themselves, eating and drinking at the Supper, and giving visible witness to the working of God within.

When they celebrated "worthily" with bread and wine, Anabaptist congregations looked to the living Christ in their hearts and in their midst, who transformed members and elements together into a mysterious communion, creating his Body in many members, ground like grains and crushed like grapes, into one bread and one drink.

Some believers churches (I speak of Mennonite churches of my acquaintance) seem to have built their celebration of the Lord's Supper on negating the sacramental position and have explained the celebration by a simple biblicism: we celebrate because Jesus said so, and we hope to build community with one another through the celebration. The result can

be a truncated, formalistic ritual focusing on the words of institution and on solemn eating and drinking, with less-than-convincing exhortations to go forth and be the Body of Christ in the world.

If our reading of the Anabaptist eucharistic hymns is correct, what is missing in a formalistic Lord's Supper is the most basic understanding, expectation, and justification for the celebration, namely the mystery of the spiritual presence of Christ among us in the celebration of his meal. We in the believers churches, above all, should expect to meet the living Christ at his Supper, in, among, and with the celebrants and the elements. The living mystery of communion, the Anabaptist experience suggests, should be sought, remembered, cultivated, and celebrated when we break bread together and share the cup. It remains the central point and the only true heart of the exercise.

We will give the last word to Jacob de Roore:

[T]he body of the Lord, in the breaking of the bread which we break, becomes for us one communion or participation; and ... the cup of blessing, which we bless, becomes for us one communion or participation in the blood of Christ...

When breaking bread and sharing wine become a communion or participation in the living body of the Lord, they have indeed transcended mere bread and wine, and have come to share in the mystery of Christ's presence.

Notes

¹ A phrase often repeated; an early example is found in Hubmaier's *On the Christian Baptism of Believers*: "everyone can see that bread is bread and wine is wine, like other bread and wine." Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder, eds., *The Writings of Balthasar Hubmaier* (Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1989), 147.

² "...got hett alle ding gesegnet; wenn er ain brot oder rebschnitz in der mainung nusß, wer glich so vil oder so gut." Heinold Fast, ed., *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer in der Schweiz*, 2. Band, Ostschweiz (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1973), #411, 342. A similar sentiment was expressed by another witness. When a priest says a mass, he has performed a mortal sin, "unnd wer eben, wenn man das sacrament ufhub, wers eben als ob man ain rebschnitz ufhub..." Ibid., 344.

³ Thieleman J. van Braght, *The Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror*, trans. Joseph F. Sohm (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1972), 781.

⁴ See John Rempel, *The Lord's Supper in Anabaptism* (Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1993), which examines the theological positions of Balthasar Hubmaier, Pilgram Marpeck, and Dirk Philips in detail.

⁵ Helen Martens suggests that "O Son of David" may be the same tune as the medieval hymn *Veni redemptor gentium*. On the *Pange lingua* and *Veni redemptor gentium*, see Helen Martens, *Hutterite Songs* (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2002), 120-30, esp. 129, nn. 2 and 10.

⁶ *Ausbund* hymn 55, in contrast, makes only passing reference to Christ's historic atonement on the cross and only one oblique reference to remembrance during the Supper. The reference to the atonement is in stanza 3 which reads, in part: "As Head You have given us Your beloved Son, the pure life, He has prepared the way before us..." Reference to "remembrance" comes near the end of the hymn, stanza 21: "Therewith did Christ at the last institute a communion supper of His body, when he broke the bread with thanksgiving, He gave them to drink out of the cup, therewith to reflect (*denken*) on what he has given us, if we cling to His body." Translation, with modifications, from *Songs of the Ausbund*, vol. 1 (Millersburg, OH: Ohio Amish Library, 1999), 112; 115.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ The one exception here is the first eleven stanzas of *Ausbund* hymn 92, which do reflect on the atonement in some detail.

⁹ *The Earliest Hymns of the Ausbund. Some Beautiful Christian Songs Composed and Sung in the Prison at Passau. Published in 1564*. Trans. Robert A. Riall, ed. Galen A. Peters (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2003), 118.

¹⁰ Translation, with modifications, from *Songs of the Ausbund*, vol. 1 (Millersburg, OH: Ohio Amish Library, 1999), 111, stanza 1.

¹¹ *Die Lieder der Hutterischen Brüder*, fourth ed. Edited by the Hutterian Brethren (Cayley, Alberta: Macmillan Colony, 1974), 40.

¹² *Ibid.*, 453, stanza 4.

¹³ Translation, with modifications, from *Songs of the Ausbund*, vol. 1, 112, stanza 5.

¹⁴ *Ausbund*, hymn 92, stanza 16 in Riall, *The Earliest Hymns of the Ausbund*, 119.

¹⁵ *Ausbund*, hymn 92, stanza 25, in Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 122.

¹⁶ As Hans Denck noted, "one breaks bread many times but is baptized only once...." The reason for this, he said, was that "the realization of the Covenant, which is righteousness, must be constantly practiced and pursued." Clarence Bauman, ed., *The Spiritual Legacy of Hans Denck* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), 195.

¹⁷ *Ausbund*, hymn 92, stanza 15, in Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 119.

¹⁸ Translation, with modifications, from *Songs of the Ausbund*, vol. 1, 113, stanza 9; 114, stanza 13.

¹⁹ *Die Lieder der Hutterischen Brüder*, 453, stanza 2.

²⁰ Also *Ausbund* hymn 55, stanza 24: "For whoever eats this bread unworthily, Eats to himself judgment and death, He who carries guile and mockery in his heart, for him this bread will do harm." Translation, with modifications, from *Songs of the Ausbund*, vol. 1, 116, stanza 24.

²¹ *Ausbund*, hymn 92, stanza 14, in Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 119.

²² The Anabaptists loved this ancient eucharistic image. It is cited in all branches of the movement. Menno Simons wrote: "Just as natural bread is made of many grains, pulverized

by the mill, kneaded with water, and baked by the heat of the fire, so is the church of Christ made up of true believers, broken in their hearts with the mill of the divine Word, baptized with the water of the Holy Ghost, and with the fire of pure, unfeigned love made into one body.” John C. Wenger, ed. and Leonrad Verduin, trans., *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons c. 1496-1561* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956), 145. See also *Ausbund*, hymn 55, stanza 23; hymn 92, stanza 23 and further examples in Walter Klaassen, *Anabaptism in Outline* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1981), chapter 9.

²³ *Die Lieder der Hutterischen Brüder*, 453-54, stanza 6.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 39, stanza 7.

²⁵ *Ausbund* hymn 55, stanzas 6 and 7. Translation, with modifications from *Songs of the Ausbund*, vol. 1, 112. Stanza 22 picks up the theme again: “For by the bread he shows who has His Spirit. Such a person is His own, of His flesh and bone, a member of His body and His community.”

²⁶ Two days before his martyrdom, Mattheus Bernaerts wrote to his two children: “Thus did Christ Jesus institute the Supper with bread and wine, to be used in the Christian assembly, in the name of the Lord, for a token of brotherly love and unity, for a sign that we, through His merits, by faith in His holy name, have become partakers of Christ, the true bread from heaven, as Paul declares....” *Martyrs Mirror*, 948.

²⁷ As with baptism, the Supper could be celebrated falsely, by people who only appeared to have genuine faith and rebirth. Those who celebrated the Supper “unworthily” would not harm the true Body, but would eat and drink to their own condemnation. Pilgram Marpeck wrote, “Where the mouth alone receives the outward sign and the essence is missing in the heart, which has little or no regard to the essence, then it would certainly be better for him if he had never partaken of the sign. Therefore, Paul also says: ‘Let each man examine himself and thus eat of the bread and drink of the wine’ so that he may eat worthy of the Lord (1 Cor. 11:28).” William Klassen and Walter Klaassen, trans. and eds., *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck* (Kitchener, ON; Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1978), 194. See *Ausbund*, hymn 92, stanzas 18 and 19.

²⁸ *Ausbund* hymn 55, stanzas 11 and 12. Translation, with modifications, from *Songs of the Ausbund*, vol. 1, 113.

²⁹ *Ausbund* hymn 55, stanza 23. Translation, with modifications, from *Songs of the Ausbund*, vol. 1, 116.

³⁰ “Ein kurtze einfaltige erkanntnuß....” (ca. 1573), Codex 628, Berner Burgerbibliothek, 13-14. Translation mine.

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

Adam M.L. Tice

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Methodology

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

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

Memorial

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

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

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

Penitence

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

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

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

Thanksgiving

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

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

Intimacy

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

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

Nourishment

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

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

Unity

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

prolonged through time.”²²

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

Verse 1

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

A non-Wesley verse is added:

Verse 3

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

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

Liberation

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

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

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

Eschatological Banquet

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

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

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

Mystery

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

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

Verse 1

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

Verse 3

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

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

Ordinance

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

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

Foot Washing and Passing the Peace

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

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

MENNONITE CHURCH ROOTS

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

worthiness and reconciliation.³⁶

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

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

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

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

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

likely have contained only 4 hymns.

EUCCHARISTIC THEMES LISTED IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE³⁷

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

Church Hymnal, 1927 (MC2)

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

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

EUCCHARISTIC THEMES LISTED IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE

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

GENERAL CONFERENCE ROOTS

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

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

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

Mennonite Hymn Book, 1927 (GC1)

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

EUCCHARISTIC THEMES LISTED IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE

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

Mennonite Hymnary, 1940 (GC2)

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

EUCCHARISTIC THEMES LISTED IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE

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

Convergence and Reaction

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

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

Mennonite Hymnal, 1969 (MH)

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

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

EUCCHARISTIC THEMES LISTED IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE

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

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

Recovery and Expansion

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

Hymnal: A Worship Book, 1992 (HWB)

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

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

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

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

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

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

EUCCHARISTIC THEMES LISTED IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE

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

Conclusions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

10.10.10.10.

Suggested tune: SLANE

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Notes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹³ Rempel, *Manual*, 62.

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

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

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

¹⁷ MC1, 262.

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

¹⁹ MH, 408.

²⁰ HWB, 472.

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

²² Rempel, "Communion," 170.

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

²⁴ Davies, 191.

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

²⁶ MH, 406.

²⁷ HWB, 473.

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

²⁹ Ibid.

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

³¹ MC1 supplement, 434.

³² MC2, 167 and HWB, 2.

³³ MH, 440.

³⁴ GC1, 319.

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

³⁶ Ibid.

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

³⁸ Rempel interview.

³⁹ Ibid.

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

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

⁴² Rempel interview.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

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

⁴⁶ Rebecca Slough personal interview, 15 January 2004.

⁴⁷ Rempel interview.

⁴⁸ Slough interview.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

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

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

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The Problematic Development of the Sacraments in the Thought of John Howard Yoder

Paul Martens

In recent years the later texts of John Howard Yoder's body of work have increasingly gained an audience through Mark Nation's biographical study and the efforts of scholars like Michael Cartwright, who has been integrally involved in the recent editing and publication of Yoder's *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*.¹ As readers "discover" the texts published after *The Politics of Jesus* (1972) and *The Priestly Kingdom* (1984), familiar issues like pacifism and Constantinianism frequently resurface, while new or latent themes also find a voice. For example, "the Jeremianic turn" and the notion of sacraments both emerge to play pivotal roles in Yoder's late writings.

In this paper my limited intention is to examine one of these shifts – the emergence of the sacraments – in order to begin to indicate a much larger innovative development in Yoder's thought.² I want to illuminate and critically engage Yoder's progressive development of the sacraments from their humble, original appearance in a 1967 edition of *Concern* as ordinances for church discipline through to the secular social processes found in *For the Nations* in 1997.

Although my own position vis-à-vis Yoder's will be clear, I do not believe all the questions I raise are settled. I do believe, however, that a potentially critical posture may need to be adopted about certain developments in Yoder's thought that point in a direction undermining the very basic Christian convictions he seems to hold dear.

The Historical Progress of Sacraments as Social Process

Much is intentionally and unintentionally gained and lost in Yoder's account of the sacraments, but this is often difficult to see without attending carefully to how his thought develops over time. For this reason, I will briefly trace Yoder's emerging position through a diachronic analysis of his published writings that explicitly and intentionally address the sacraments. One can divide his writing on the sacraments into three distinct chronological periods.³

Stage 1: Pre-1979

Unless one has read his later descriptions of sacraments, one would never guess that Yoder was already laying their foundation in two issues of *Concern* appearing in the late 1960s: “Binding and Loosing” (1967) and “The Fullness of Christ” (1969). These essays are endeavors in scriptural interpretation for the purpose of addressing internal church issues of paramount importance.

The first essay clarifies and (re)defines church discipline by focusing on Matt 18:15-20. Yoder’s primary contribution here is to intimately intertwine forgiveness and moral discernment, presupposing and including both in the practice of binding and loosing.⁴ He goes on to claim that this is the central working of the church, and the Holy Spirit is promised only to the church that practices binding and loosing. Following the Reformers, he also refers to binding and loosing as “the rule of Christ.”⁵ At the conclusion of the essay, Yoder suggests that wider implications of this practice might include the following: (1) the witness of the church always includes and may center upon the quality of personal relationships that even the outsider may observe;⁶ (2) we should not be surprised to discover that Christian duty, in this sense, is also secular good sense;⁷ and (3) forgiveness is not a generally accessible human possibility but the miraculous fruit of God’s own bearing the cost of man’s rebellion.⁸

Two years later, “The Fullness of Christ” appeared, making explicit the anti-hierarchical, anti-specialist sentiments latent in “Binding and Loosing.” To make his case for the universality of ministry, the priesthood of all believers, Yoder appeals to a wide variety of texts within the Pauline corpus. In essence he argues that all members of the congregation are gifted by the Holy Spirit and, on this basis, all should minister according to the specific grace they have been given. Taking a cue from the business world, he notes that if division of labor is at the heart of the efficiency of business, why should it not be realistic in the congregation?⁹

These two definitional essays, unlike any others, carefully develop Yoder’s early position on (what will become known as) sacraments. Although each essay addresses a single sacrament and Yoder himself draws no attention to their relationship, their formal similarities are striking; practices demanded by both ordinances are: biblical; interpersonal; enabled

by the Holy Spirit; internal to the church yet observable by those outside; missional; critical correctives to historical and contemporary practices; individualizing in the service of the covenant community; and, in short, absolutely necessary for the church to be the church.¹⁰ Yet Yoder explicitly identifies neither process as worship or sacramental.

In 1979 this changed. At the Society of Christian Ethics¹¹ annual meeting, Paul Ramsey presented “Liturgy and Ethics,” and in 1980 an entire issue of the *Journal of Religious Ethics* was devoted to this topic with Ramsey’s paper headlining the issue.¹² Yoder quickly took steps to address the relation between liturgy and ethics from his own idiosyncratic perspective. During the second stage of his writings on the sacraments – 1979-91 – he penned three very different articles that try to address that relationship. Sacramentality begins to receive serious consideration.

Stage 2: 1979-91

In answering Ramsey’s challenge, Yoder began to graft concerns for worship into work already in progress. This is most evident in “The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood” (1982),¹³ where he makes two advances and a further entrenchment. First, he articulates an account of practical moral reasoning that provides the appropriate context and constraints for binding and loosing and the universality of charisma. Yoder refers to this process, in which every prophetic voice is heard and every witness evaluated as suggested in 1 Cor 14, as “dialogical liberty.”¹⁴ Logically and practically, binding and loosing and the expression of individual gifts of the Holy Spirit occur only under the assumption of the existence of dialogical liberty, communal discourse that is not prematurely censured or restricted.

The second very tentative advance Yoder makes is relating these church processes to worship. Although he affirms the unity of worship and morality, and thereby worship and practical moral reasoning (dialogical liberty, etc.), he goes no further than defining worship in essentially moral/empirical terms: “Worship is the communal cultivation of an alternative construction of society and history.”¹⁵ But this step is substantial in that it opens the door for all the sacraments described thus far – impetuses for “alternative constructions of society” – to be included under the broad umbrella of worship. Finally, the further entrenchment of the notion that

sacraments are visible phenomena significantly aids the integration of sacraments into the task of worship.¹⁶

Two years later, in 1984, Yoder makes his most monumental developments: for the first time, he applies the notion of sacramentality to binding and loosing, and he also places binding and loosing alongside baptism and the eucharist. In “The Kingdom as Social Ethics,” Yoder, leaning heavily on Barth, explicitly claims that the church as an alternative community has a modeling mission. This, too, is new. As a “firstfruit” of the kingdom, the church exemplifies sacramentality, which Yoder cryptically describes by stating that “meanings which make sense on an ordinary level make more of the same kind of sense when they are embedded in the particular history of the witness of faith.”¹⁷ He follows this claim with an affirmation that the church is a sacrament because the empowerment undergirding her witness and presence in the midst of society is not accessible in the same way to the wider society.¹⁸ Whether these claims are the same (or even compatible) is debatable;¹⁹ his point is that the specific practices of the sacraments suggest what the world can and should be. For example, baptism could again become the basis of Christian egalitarianism, as it was in the New Testament, and the Lord’s Supper could again become an expression of sharing bread between those who have and those who have not.²⁰

While Yoder mentions only baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and binding and loosing in “The Kingdom as Social Ethics,” this essay truly prefigures the position that solidifies later in the 1990s. Before moving to the final configuration of five sacraments, Yoder briefly returns to the original three ordinances again in 1990. In a lecture in honor of James McClendon’s retirement, entitled “Catholicity in Search of Location,” he articulates the marks of catholicity.²¹ Although the term sacrament does not appear here, Yoder is clear that the authority of the Holy Spirit would be functionally discernable where every member would know herself bearer of a particular charismatic empowerment (universal charisma) and where everyone would have the authority to take the floor in a meeting (dialogical liberty). In addition, he reaffirms that the Holy Spirit is working wherever the church practices binding and loosing. Here, locally, is where catholicity is located.²²

In sum, Ramsey’s instigation in 1979 produced an important initial response from Yoder, yet his notion of the sacraments also developed

significantly in the subsequent decade. First, although he has not yet sorted out their formal similarities, he has examined all five future sacraments. Second, he has definitively described worship as a communal phenomenon that can be empirically verified. Third, sacraments are not only for the church but signal what the world can and should become. Still, some confusion exists about whether they are fully understandable only by those in the church, or whether they make sense in a way discernable by the wider world.

Stage 3: 1991-94

In “Sacrament as Social Process,”²³ Yoder again (re)turns to Ramsey’s reflection on liturgy and ethics, as well as to alternative responses that also emerged in the intervening years. Challenging all these options, he states:

What these varied efforts have in common is that they begin with problem of the qualitative distance between the two realms of liturgy and ethics and maintain that a bridge of some kind needs to be built.... I propose to set beside them a simpler account.²⁴

With that, Yoder launches into a description of the commonality underlying all five practices already discussed as concerned with both the internal activities of the gathered Christian congregation and the ways the church interfaces with the world.

Over the next three years he wrote on the sacraments three more times (aside from “Sacrament as Social Process”), but because of space limitations here I will focus on “Firstfruits: The Paradigmatic Role of God’s People” as representative of this entire stage.²⁵

Throughout each stage of his authorship, Yoder builds incrementally upon the previous stages. In this last stage, the possibility of the church modeling what the world can and should become turns out to be the critical issue. His justification for this centralizing focus is rooted in the theological claim that Jesus Christ is Lord not only of the church but of the whole cosmos.²⁶ In the face of this claim, the self-imposed challenge Yoder attempts to meet is to purify, clarify, and exemplify the church’s witness so that the world can perceive it to be good news without having to learn a foreign language.²⁷ Elements of this have emerged previously, but the

innovation here is its placement as the central concern around which the sacraments are servile.

In their first appearance in “Firstfruits,” Yoder labels the sacraments “marks of the church” that make evident the unity of the message and medium of the first Christians.²⁸ The list includes all five: baptism, the rule of Christ, the eucharist, dialogical liberty, and universal charisma. Upon closer examination, however, by the time he is finished the sacraments are no longer merely marks of the church but “sample civil imperatives”: egalitarianism, socialism, forgiveness, the open meeting, and the universality of giftedness.²⁹ Let me illustrate at least one transition or, perhaps, translation.

Yoder does not begin to discuss baptism as “a sign of [a believer’s] cleansing from sin” or as “a pledge before the church of their covenant with God to walk in the way of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit,” as one might expect from a Mennonite theologian.³⁰ Rather, he starts to describe baptism as the reconciliation between Jew and Gentile, male and female, and so forth. This, he claims, is the early Christian root of egalitarianism. He then goes on to refer to it as trans-ethnic inclusivism. He completes the translation as follows:

Our world still needs to learn that the reason every person and every kind of person must be seen with equal respect is not that their culture is equally healthy, or that they have earned equal treatment, but that equal dignity is ascribed by virtue of a divine bias in favor of the Other.³¹

In sum, “neither the substance nor the pertinence of the vision [practiced in the sacraments] is dependent on a particular faith.”³² Nothing stands in the way of: sharing bread being a model for Social Security and negative income tax; dialogical liberty explaining why the Japanese make better cars than Detroit; dialogue under the Holy Spirit functioning as the ground floor of democracy.³³

Throughout all four texts in this stage, Yoder tirelessly reduces the sacraments to social processes he hopes will avoid Catholic sacramentalistic and Zwinglian symbolic/rationalistic temptations.³⁴ The former is simply unbiblical and useless for social ethics; the latter is too individualizing and explains symbolic, not social, behavior. Yoder applies the notion of paradigm as a means to circumvent these false options. He argues for

the paradigmatic because most communication works not by projecting and then reassembling a maximum number of atoms of information, or by axioms and maxims, but by pattern recognition.³⁵ Language and text are rejected; empirical and sociological practices remain the only possible means of uninhibited communication. If the sacraments are merely social processes, they mesh perfectly with this notion of paradigmatic. The expected result, therefore, is that they can be communicated without the wider world having to learn a foreign language (i.e., Christian theology or the Christian narrative) but simply by recognizing the obvious efficiencies and values of the form of the church's social community as polis. There is nothing "esoteric" or opaquely ritualistic about the sacraments; "they lend themselves to being observed, imitated, and extrapolated."³⁶ In this way Yoder cleanly and effectively concludes his development of the notion of sacraments in the final stage. He has now moved some distance from his initial beginnings in 1967.

Whether Yoder ever pursued any of the sacraments for their own sake is doubtful, but somewhere along the way they became pawns for a specific purpose (or group of purposes) that warranted his continued interest. I propose that their final appearances are a means of supporting what I call "Yoder's Yiddish Experiment," and I will turn our attention briefly to this project as a critical conclusion to my analysis.

Re-examining Yoder's Yiddish Experiment

In the "Introduction" to *For the Nations*, the book that contains his last two writings on the sacraments, Yoder states:

This collection may be described as an analogy to the development of Yiddish. I am expositing, not in my own ancient in-group language but in my own variant of the common idiom, the claim that the position I represent is the line of the gospel.³⁷

Yoder's claim that *For the Nations* is analogous to the development of Yiddish is interesting but puzzling. Looking at his brief own elaboration (see above), it seems to me that by "ancient in-group language" Yoder means Anabaptist Christianity, and by "common idiom" the language of the wider world (which could also apply to other "Constantinian" Christian or secular

languages). If I am right thus far, the most qualified candidate for “my own variant” seems to be his construal that the social processes of the church as polis “represent the line of the gospel.”

But is this analogous to the development of Yiddish? At the most basic level, Yiddish is a language that emerged in the early second millennium in central Europe among a group of Ashkenazi Jews. It is not linguistically related to Hebrew though it uses the Hebrew alphabet; it is not German though it shares 70-80 percent of its vocabulary. Of course, its origins are contested, but at certain times in history it did become a language capable of bridging diverse, often persecuted Jewish communities around the world. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, amidst revolutionary upheavals in the life of the Jewish people and its redefinition of selfhood, Yiddishism (the Yiddish language movement, the Yiddish cultural movement, or both) emerged as a modern expression of Judaism.³⁸

I believe Yoder appeals as much to the analogy of Yiddishism as to the development of Yiddish. For example, his paradigmatic language is anti-authoritarian (as Yiddishism challenged the domination of Hebrew among the Jews), anti-establishment (as Yiddishism challenged the centrality of the synagogue and the medieval Church), and anti-Constantinian (as Yiddishism challenged the aspirations of Zionists and German nationalists). What Yoder does not counter, however, is that along with anti-clericalism, Yiddishism also sought to graft secularism onto Judaism.³⁹ And, although Emanuel Goldsmith argues that the secularism of the Yiddishists was mostly a dogmatic illusion that detached them from the deepest emotions of Jewry and robbed them of the “sustaining power of the religious regimen and religious symbolism,” he freely acknowledges that “the truth of the matter is that Yiddishism was for many but a stepping stone to assimilation.”⁴⁰

At this point I return to Yoder to ask just how far the analogy of the development of Yiddish applies. Of course, he intends significant ecumenical and missional gains with his interpretation of the sacraments. But at what cost? Are there unintended gains one ought to be aware of, or even be wary of?

Conclusion

Intended Gains

As Yoder's authorship advances, he employs the practices of the sacraments for several intended purposes. First, the practices, right from the start, are communal; Yoder acknowledges the social nature of humans and his account of redemption therefore includes the fact of human interdependency. Secondly, as he rejects derogatory definitions of passive or apolitical sectarianism (such as those leveled by H. Richard Niebuhr and James Gustafson), he also tries to move beyond Troeltsch's nonjudgmental objective/descriptive account of sectarianism. By claiming the Christian distinctiveness of the sacraments, Yoder desires to demonstrate that these are the most intentionally relevant social processes not only for the church but for the wider world. He also seems to reject Hauerwas' version of Christian community that refuses to theorize about the wider world for this same reason.

Thirdly, and related to the above, his later construals of the sacraments are clearly intended to be understandable to other Christians and non-Christians alike. By defining the sacraments merely as empirically discernable phenomena, one needs no special gnosis or esoteric insight to understand or practice them. In defining them thus, one can also appreciate Yoder's ecumenical intentions. Fourthly, Yoder intends to articulate the possibility of concretizing the Lordship of Jesus by both the church and the wider world. He intends his five practices to incarnate the kingdom tangibly and visibly.

Therefore, if one accepts that the sacramental practices (as variants of the common idiom) are the good news (the line of the gospel) for the wider world, Yoder's experiment appears to succeed. But what if there is more to the good news than the sacramental practices? This would pose a significant problem for Yoder. Another pressing difficulty, however, is the possibility that a further option is true: that he is merely presenting a form of Christianity that is but a stepping stone to assimilation into secularism. With the possibility of this strong claim in mind, allow me to suggest some problems with the role of the sacraments in Yoder's "Yiddish Experiment."

Other Intentional and Unintentional Gains

First, how far does Yoder remain faithful to his own Anabaptist tradition? The question is not whether he intended to reject Anabaptism or not, but whether the consistent refusal to speak the “in-group” language explicitly leads to an implicit revision of “in-group” practices and reflections about them. I think it does, and the very fact that nothing Yoder writes remotely addresses much of what Anabaptist and Mennonite confessions of faith have always claimed about the sacraments indicates something is amiss.

Second, and related, I have serious questions about Yoder’s assumption that the church is important only as a secular social community. This element is not present in the early writings under discussion here, but it is another of Troeltsch’s ideas that is present early in Yoder’s thought and works itself out powerfully in the later writings.⁴¹ Is there no mystery in the church? Is there any divine activity that is unexplainable? Is there something that is not relevant solely to community concerns? Is there something important to the church that is either non-ethical or non-empirical? If the answer is yes to any of these questions, would these features not be important in their own right? How can we rule them unimportant a priori?

Third, again relating to the first and returning to the question of language, why is Yoder so quick to give up Christian theological language, an “in-group” language, in favor of sociological descriptions? Must we translate all theological – or dogmatic, to use his more derogatory term – language, without remainder, into sociological language? How is sociological language the key to the church’s definition and mission? Even if the occasional use of sociological language has some merit, must we translate everything into the “common idiom?”

Lastly, in the final stage of his authorship, does Yoder end up presenting a demythologized or reductionist Christianity? Granted, the Holy Spirit may still be functionally observable in the practices; but the force and frequency of claims that neither their substance nor pertinence depends on a particular faith seems to leave us with very little specifically Christian and very much reduced to social ethics. Craig Carter, an enthusiastic admirer of Yoder, speaking about baptism, self-consciously backs away from the charge of reductionism. Yet he notes that Yoder’s account of baptism is incomplete

and needs to be incorporated into a systematic believers' church theology.⁴² I too am still nervous about asserting this charge, but I believe we need to consider the possibility that Yoder's ethical thought may be a stepping stone (like Yiddishism) for Anabaptist assimilation into a form of secular ethical discourse.

Perhaps these questions would not matter so much if Yoder had quit writing in the mid-1980s, if he had not achieved the stature that he has, or if his position was not simply and unequivocally conflated with Anabaptism as a whole all too frequently. But none of these hypothetical conditions applies. We are, therefore, forced to wrestle with Yoder's substantial legacy, a task that is merely beginning.

Notes

¹ John Howard Yoder, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, ed. Michael G. Cartwright and Peter Ochs (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003).

² My focus in this context is merely to indicate that there is change in Yoder's thought, and I have made very little effort to historicize or psychologize this change.

³ The specific stages that I suggest here apply only to Yoder's writings on the sacraments. And, although I do believe there is a general progression in Yoder's thought driving the writings on the sacraments, attention to other themes may produce different stages or groupings of texts.

⁴ John Howard Yoder, "Binding and Loosing," *Concern* 14 (February 1967): 4-7. This essay also appears in *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*, ed. Michael G. Cartwright (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1994), 327-29. Subsequent references are formatted as the *Concern* page number/*The Royal Priesthood* page number.

⁵ "Binding and Loosing," 15/338.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 30/351.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 30/352.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 30/352.

⁹ John Howard Yoder, "The Fullness of Christ," *Concern* 17 (February 1969): 91. See also *The Fullness of Christ: Paul's Vision of Universal Ministry* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 1987), 102. On the oscillating direction of sacraments, see also note 20.

¹⁰ By church (*ekklesia*), Yoder means "the assembly, the gathering of people into a meeting for deliberation or for a public pronouncement;" not "a specifically religious meeting." See "Binding and Loosing," 9/332.

¹¹ Yoder was president of the Society of Christian Ethics in 1987.

¹² See Paul Ramsey, "Liturgy and Ethics," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 7 (1979): 139-71.

¹³ Yoder, "The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood: A Protestant Perspective on Practical Moral

Reasoning,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 10.1 (1982): 40-67. Yoder directly refers to Ramsey’s essay on page 54.

¹⁴ “Hermeneutics of Peoplehood,” 46. This clearly continues the anti-hierarchical, anti-specialist trajectory present in the earlier writings.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 46. Although Yoder recognizes that Ramsey initiates the larger discussion by linking ethics and *liturgy*, he always reverts to framing the question as the relation between ethics and *worship*. It appears that the term “liturgy” is unhelpful because of its ritualism, its association with a hierarchy (or at least a single specialist), its insinuation of mystery, and its resistance to public expression. In this way, Yoder believes his use of “worship” avoids the alleged false externality of liturgy while also avoiding its excessive interiority.

¹⁷ *The Priestly Kingdom*, 93.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ The logic becomes even more convoluted when Yoder claims that “Sometimes this sacramental quality is read in the direction of saying about the church what one says about the rest of society” (93).

²⁰ *The Priestly Kingdom*, 93.

²¹ See *The Royal Priesthood*, 316-18.

²² *The Royal Priesthood*, 318.

²³ Yoder, “Sacrament as Social Process: Christ the Transformer of Culture,” *Theology Today* XLVIII (1) (1991): 33-44. See also *The Royal Priesthood*, 359-73. Both paginations are included below.

²⁴ “Sacrament as Social Process,” 33/360-61.

²⁵ Yoder, “Firstfruits: The Paradigmatic Public Role of God’s People,” in *For the Nations: Essays Evangelical and Public* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 15-36. The other two writings are *Body Politics* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1992), which presents five sample ways (the “good news”) in which the church is called to operate as a polis in ordinary human language; and “The New Humanity as Pulpit and Paradigm” (*For the Nations*, 37-50), which expresses the functional necessity of the church speaking paradigmatically, that is, through pattern recognition.

²⁶ “Firstfruits,” 24.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

³⁰ These are parts of the first two sentences in the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, published jointly by the General Board of the General Conference Mennonite Church and the Mennonite Church General Board (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1995), 46.

³¹ “Firstfruits,” 30.

³² *Ibid.*, 32. Yoder uses this particular phrase in the context of his discussion of the eucharist, but it is certainly applicable to all other sacraments.

³³ *Body Politics*, 77-78.

³⁴ See “Sacrament as Social Process,” 36-37/364-65.

³⁵ One could think here of what this might imply about some of his other early writings, such

as *The Christian Witness to the State* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1964), 71-73.

³⁶ *Body Politics*, 75.

³⁷ *For the Nations*, 4.

³⁸ Emanuel Goldsmith, "Yiddishism and Judaism," in *The Politics of Yiddish: Studies in Language, Literature and Society*, ed. Dov-Ber Kerler (London: AltaMira Press, 1998), 11. See also Emanuel S. Goldsmith, *Architects of Yiddishism and the Beginning of the Twentieth Century: A Study in Jewish Cultural History* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickenson University Press, 1976). Admittedly, one might challenge my interpretation and application of Yoder's cryptic reference to "the development of Yiddish." But Yiddishism is the dominant social and cultural culmination of the development of Yiddish, a fact that would not have escaped Yoder when he appealed to this particular analogy.

³⁹ Goldsmith, "Yiddishism and Judaism," 15.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴¹ This emphasis is prevalent already in Yoder's dissertation, where he summarizes his project: "[T]he course of our research has established that it is possible to recognize a 'true Anabaptism,' with its own pre-history and own organic development, in a completely different way. The Anabaptists who first introduced believers' baptism, who established ordered church communities, who held out despite persecution; the Anabaptists who repeatedly engaged the reformers in dialogue, show themselves to be a unified group with definite boundaries." See *Anabaptism and Reformation in Switzerland: An Historical and Theological Analysis of the Dialogues Between Anabaptists and Reformers*, trans. David Carl Stassen and C. Arnold Snyder (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2004), 135. Notice the verbs in this citation: Anabaptists "show themselves;" we "recognize." Notice also the activities of the Anabaptists: they baptize; order communities; face persecution; dialogue; maintain defined boundaries. In short, their meaningfulness lies in their observable actions. Formally, it is clear right from the outset of Yoder's corpus that the appropriate language to describe the Christian community is through socio-political or functional language.

⁴² *The Politics of the Cross: The Theology and Social Ethics of John Howard Yoder* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2001), 199.

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Communion as a Missional Ordinance

Hippolyto Tshimanga

For years I was engaged in ministry as a priest in the Roman Catholic Church. For the first six years of my priesthood, I served as assistant priest in a popular parish in Latin America. We had a number of volunteers there, among them two men in their forties. Both had been serving the church as catechists and community leaders for many years. But each one had a story in his past. The first was married when he was still very young. In the few years he had lived with his wife, he had seriously misbehaved, which led to her leaving him and emigrating to another country. Repentant, he had tried to reconcile with her without success. After some twenty years, he finally fell in love with another woman and civilly married her. As for the second man, he was living with a young woman who had been previously married in the church and was divorced. Together, they were blessed with two beautiful children.

The drama for these two community leaders, baptized and faithful Christians, was that according to the law of the Catholic Church, they were not allowed to approach the Table of the Lord. Though they had taught catechism to more people than any priest I have ever known, though they were loved and respected leaders, they were doomed to suffer the consequences of banishment from the sacrament they had been taught was their means of salvation.

On several occasions they spoke to me about their willingness to regularize their situation with the church. But I could do nothing for them. From the viewpoint of the Catholic Church, they had to decide between the women they loved and the church's rules. Seventeen years have passed since I left South America, but I still hear the echo of the voice of one of them begging me: "Father, I wouldn't like to die without receiving the body of Christ."

I have never doubted that in many instances the church, in all its denominations, responds to human needs in a manner worthy of its call. Following the example of its Founder, it goes about doing good. All over the world, Christian institutions and individuals have done, and continue to

do, wonders for the human community. However, when it comes to cases like those mentioned above, one cannot help but wonder how the church understands the Lord's declaration, "I have come for sinners." Christian denominations exclude each other from the Lord's Supper, divorcees are kept at arm's length. Even theologians who question certain church policies are excommunicated. Why does the church exclude people who think differently, people who struggle with the truth of some doctrines? Is the church oblivious to their spiritual pain? If not, why does it turn a deaf ear to their cry?

Lord's Supper, Eucharist, or Communion?

The answer to all these questions may lie in the different names that different Christian denominations choose to give to the memorial of the Lord's Supper. Indeed, from the beginning of Christianity, a number of names have been used to identify that special meal Jesus shared with his disciples. The Apostle Paul called it "the Lord's Supper," *Coena Dei* in Latin (1 Cor 11:20). Luke speaks of the "breaking of the bread" (Acts 2:42,46; 20:7,11; 27:35). In Tertullian's writings in the late second century, we find a broader list: "sacrament of the Eucharist," *Eucharistiae sacramentum* (De Cor. 3; Marc. 4.34); the "sacrament of the bread and the cup," *Panis et calicis sacramentum* (Marc. 5.8); the "body of the Lord," *Corpus Domini* (De Idol. 7; De Orat. 19) and "the Lord's Supper" *Coena Dei* (De Spect. 13).¹

However, from the very early post-apostolic Christianity, the term Eucharist (thanksgiving), which translates the Greek *Εὐχαριστία*, seems to have taken precedence. It was coined after the phrase "when he had given thanks" that pertains to the text of the institution (Luke 22:19; 24:30,35, Matt 26:27; Mark 14:23).

The name "Eucharist" was already present in the *Didache* or *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* (60 and 200 AD), one of the earliest non-scriptural materials, which speaks of Christian doctrine. Ignatius of Antioch also uses the term in his letter to the Smyraeans (Ign. Smyr. 8: 1-2). Writing by the middle of the second century, Justin the martyr says the Church in Rome held a regular Sunday service of word and table. He gives the order of the liturgy and declares: "We call this food 'thanksgiving'; and no one may partake of it unless he is convinced of the truth of our teaching, and has

been cleansed with the washing for forgiveness of sins and regeneration, and lives as Christ handed down” (Justin, *Apol.* I, 66, 67).²

These different names are still used for Christ’s meal. However, each Christian denomination prefers one of them. These preferences can be a good indicator of the theologies justifying our different doctrines, decision-making processes, and attitudes toward a variety of vital questions. It is not bad for different denominations to focus on one or another aspect of the Lord’s Supper. However, the essential question remains about Jesus’ original intention. What did he really want to tell his disciples while eating that particular meal with them? What message did he want to convey when he instructed them to continue holding this rite in his memory? To reflect on this event, we must re-read the foundational texts in the New Testament.

If we take a closer look at the narratives leading to the institution of the Lord’s Supper, we find that all the redactors seem to have been working within a common framework when it comes to Jesus’ final period of life and ministry. They all start with his entry into Jerusalem (Mark 11:1-11a; Matt 21:1-10; Luke 19: 28-46; John 12:12-19), building through his various teachings and run-ins with Scribes and Pharisees. They tell of his Last Supper, arrest, trial, and execution at the hands of the Roman authorities. As for the narrative on the institution of the Lord’s Supper itself, the synoptic gospels and Paul give a similar version of the events that took place before Jesus was arrested, judged, and put to death. On that Thursday, while sitting at table with the closest circle of his disciples, Jesus instituted a new rite, identifying the bread they were to eat with his body and the wine they were to drink with his blood as a new covenant.

Unlike the synoptics and Paul, John gives no account of the institution. Instead, he provides details that otherwise would have gone unnoticed. More reflective than narrative, John’s gospel reports that when they were at table Jesus got up. He removed his outer garments, took a towel, and wrapped it around his waist. He then poured water into a basin, and began to wash his disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel. When he had finished, he asked his disciples: “Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Master and Lord, and rightly; so I am. If I, then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you must wash each other’s feet. I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you” (John 13:4-15).

By telling this other story without saying anything else about the meal, did John intend to ignore the Supper itself? Did he judge the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the same cup less significant? John did not likely consider the Supper insignificant. In fact, in his narrative on the discourse on the “bread of life” at Capernaum, he has Jesus addressing the crowd, “I am the bread that comes down from heaven....if you do not eat the flesh of the son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Anyone who does eat my flesh and drink my blood has eternal life, and I shall raise that person up on the last day” (John 6:33,41,52-54). Such language would be nonsense if John had no knowledge of the institution of the sacrament. Thus I concur with Delbert Burkett that this language “most likely presupposes the community’s understanding of the Lord’s Supper, in which the bread represented the body of Jesus and the wine his blood.”³ John did not intend to ignore the whole of the Supper. To the contrary, by telling the incident of washing the feet, he intended to point to a reality beyond the mere symbols of the broken bread and the sharing of the cup. He wanted to lead his readers to the core of what Jesus wanted to convey when celebrating this meal with his disciples.

Do This in Remembrance of Me: a Mandate for a Mission

“Do this in remembrance of me.” What did Jesus intend to tell his disciples when he gave them this ordinance? What are his followers supposed to remember when they break the bread and share the cup?

Let us begin saying that cross-cultural translation can be misleading. Just as we use the word “peace” to render the richer Hebrew “shalom,” the Western words “memory,” “memorial,” and “remembrance” are unfortunately other examples of the limit of translation. These words translate the Greek *anamnesis*, which renders the Hebrew *zikkaron*. But “memory,” “memorial,” or “remembrance” do not convey all the power and shades of meaning of *zikkaron*.

To grasp the meaning of “Do this in remembrance of me,” we should first try to grasp the meaning of *zikkaron* in the context of Jewish mentality and culture. There is no better way of doing so than by examining the meaning of this word in the context of the liturgy of the Passover (Seder of Pesach), the liturgy the evangelists seem to have used as background for their respective narratives.

The Seder of Pesach

The liturgy of the Pesach celebrates the liberation of the sons and daughters of Israel from the land of Egypt. The theme of the “memorial” (zikkaron) plays a central role in the order (*seder* in Hebrew) of this ceremony. The telling of the story of the Exodus (*maggid*) from Egypt is prompted by a series of questions asked by children not only about the strange character of this celebration but the unusual food and some unexpected ways of behaving: Why is this night different from all other nights?⁴ [Why is it] that on all nights we may eat either chametz or matzah,⁵ and on this night we may eat only matzah? [Why is it] that on all other nights, we may eat any kind of vegetables, and on this night, we may eat only marror⁶?

The head of the family would then explain that the Jewish people were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, but God delivered them with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, and brought them out from there. The Haggada (homily) makes it clear that this remembrance of the Exodus event is an obligation for all Jewish people, whatever their rank: “It is written in the Torah: ‘That you may remember the day when you came out of the land of Egypt, all the days of your life’” (Deut 16:3).

The extraordinary power of the celebration of Pesach is that it calls upon every Jewish man or woman, old or young, to undergo a personal Exodus from Egypt. Every son and daughter of Israel is asked to make of this event a proper experience. This is why the head of the family retells the story of Exodus as if it was he who had been liberated from slavery. The Haggada is emphatic that in every generation one must regard himself as though he had gone out from Egypt: “You shall tell your son on that day, because of this God did for me when I went out from Egypt.”⁷ Refusing to do so makes one a *kofer be-ikar*, one who denies the very foundations of Judaism.

Thus, the Seder of Pesach is more than a simple remembrance of an historical event. It is a memorial (zikkaron). Eloquent in this respect are these words pronounced before the sharing of matzah:

This is the bread of affliction that our fathers ate in the land of Egypt.

All who are hungry, come and eat!

All in need, come and join in celebrating *Pesach*!

This year we are here, next year we are in the land of Israel!
This year we are slaves; next year we will be free men!

From the Pesach to the Coena Deo

This description of the Seder of Pesach leaves us with a series of questions: Was Jesus' Last Supper a Passover meal? What did he intend to celebrate? Why did he want his disciples to make of this meal a zikkaron?

There are discussions among exegetes as to whether the Last Supper took place on the 14 Nisan in the Jewish calendar, the official date of the celebration of the Passover, and whether this was a Passover meal. The majority agree that the authors of the NT clearly intended it to be understood as a Passover meal.⁸ The synoptic gospels say it took place in Jerusalem on the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover had to be sacrificed (Mark 14:1-2, 12-17; Cf. 1 Cor 5:7). Although none of these texts mentions the eating of the Passover lamb, they all speak of the sharing and eating of the bread, the drinking of the cup of wine, and the singing of the psalms (Mark 14:22-26; Matt 26:26-30). These elements are in themselves an eloquent testimony of the Passover background of the Last Supper (Exodus 12:14; 13:9; 17:24; Deut 16:2-3).

Predicting his "Handing Over"

Jesus' teaching in Galilee and in the whole of Judea was undoubtedly causing increasing irritation and uneasiness among the Jerusalem religious and civil authorities. Jesus would have been extraordinarily naive had he not seen where his teaching and actions, and the opposition they were raising, would likely end. The imprisonment of John the Baptist, his herald and mentor, was so recent that Jesus would have been completely blind to think his fate would be different. It is then no accident that the Evangelists report he predicted his "handing over" by one of his followers, his arrest and judgment, and even his death. More than once the gospels testify that Jesus predicted his handing over and execution: "The Son of Man will be delivered into the power of men; they will put him to death" (Mark 8:31a; 9:31a; 10:33-34; parallels in Matthew and Luke).

The Last Supper

The sharing of meals seems to have been a marked feature of Jesus' ministry. The gospel narratives indicate that some of his teaching, not only within the inner circle of his disciples but among the tax collectors and public sinners, took place in the context of meals. However, the heightened significance given to the meal shared with his disciples on that specific Thursday encourages us to think that Jesus likely sensed this would be his last meal with them.

“This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me”; “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Whenever you drink it, do this as a memorial of me.” These words that Jesus pronounced at the occasion of that meal seem to have made a lasting impression on those who sat to eat with him. Paul confirms the “Lord’s Supper” to be part of the core foundational tradition he had received and in turn passed on when he established the church in Corinth (1 Cor 11: 23-25). Acts testifies that after Jesus’ death and resurrection, the Apostles, together with those who joined them in the early Christian community, remained faithful to the “breaking of the bread” (Acts 2: 42). Nevertheless, the question remains: How are we to comprehend Jesus’ command, “Do this in memory of me”?

We Remember Your Death, O Lord!

There exists a tendency in Christianity that explains Jesus’ mission solely in terms of his passion and death on the cross. It is as though God had deliberately sent his Son into the world to be persecuted, judged, and crucified to redeem the world. We profess that when we eat the broken bread and drink the blessed cup, we proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes again. Indeed, there can be little doubt that this interpretation is based on the Scriptures. Paul seems to have favored it when he wrote, “Whenever you eat this bread, then, and drink this cup, you are proclaiming the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Cor 11:26). But what do we really mean when we so confess our faith in Jesus’ death? What did Paul intend when he wrote these words? Why would such a death have a special meaning for humanity?

It is unlikely that Paul intended to speak of Jesus’ death *per se*, but rather of the meaning of this death for us. It is not so much Jesus’ death that made him become bread of life for us but whatever he taught and did that gives meaning to such a death. Jesus would not have been the bread of life

if he had not become a human being like us. His death would have been of no significance to us had he not spoken about God and about human life in a specific way. By persisting unto death in preaching the kind of gospel he preached, he sealed his gospel of liberation with his own life for the world's redemption.

Augustine seems to have had a good grasp on this when he spoke of "the love that carried Jesus on to death." Commenting on John 13:1 he says: "Perhaps the words, 'He loved them unto the end,' may have to be understood in this way, that He so loved them as to die for them. For this He testified when He said, 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.' We have certainly no objection that 'He loved them unto the end' should be so understood, that is, it was His very love that carried Him on to death."⁹

The truth is that Jesus did not quietly die of a natural death. His death was not an accident. It was not the result of a misunderstanding in judgment. Jesus died because he went to the limit of his commitment; he said and did things that the masters and lords of this world did not want to hear. The Teacher made a point in advance about the tragedy he saw coming: "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.... The Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me; I lay it down of my own free will...." (John 10:17-18).

Jesus' Alter Ego: "You are this bread that you receive"

In Western theology, one school of thought puts much emphasis on the sharing aspect of the Lord's Supper. Thus Xavier Léon-Dufour says the bread is for the purpose of "sharing" and thereby brings to expression the unity of the community in Christ. When Christians read the Scriptures through this narrow lens of unity, the result is a one-sided perspective on the biblical witness, in which what is desired or perceived is lifted up at the cost of what is the heart of the matter. Eventually, the longing for the unity of the church eclipses the core of the gospel message, which is the search for God's kingdom.

Despite the controversial and polemic character of his writings, John Calvin provides a better view of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. In

his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, he argues that “The Lord intended the sacrament of his body and blood to be a *kind of exhortation*, to urge us to live in purity and holiness of life, in charity, peace and concord. [He] committed his body so that he may become altogether one with us and us with him. He makes us partakers in his one body so that by participation we may all become one body.”¹⁰ In another passage we read, “We are to regard those words as a *living sermon*, which is to edify the hearers, penetrate their minds, being impressed and seated in their hearts, and exert its efficacy in the fulfillment of what which it promises.”¹¹ Balthasar Hubmaier concurs with Calvin when he says the Supper is not only a devotional contemplation of the crucifixion of Christ but an ethical summons to imitate Jesus’ surpassing act of self-giving. Just as Jesus offered himself for me, I offer myself for others.¹² The words Jesus pronounced at the Last Supper are indeed his last instructions. Like a parent who reveals her last will to her children at the sunset of her life, so did Jesus in the evening before his death. He wrote his will on a piece of bread and a cup of wine.

“Take, eat, drink. This is my body, which is broken for you: this is my blood, which is shed for the remission of sins.” Calvin comments: “We ought carefully to observe, that the chief, and almost the whole energy of the sacrament, consists in these words, it is broken for you: it is shed for you.... It would not be of much importance to us that the body and blood of the Lord are now distributed, had they not once been set forth for our redemption and salvation.”¹³

In so speaking, Calvin joins with Augustine in recognizing the remembrance of the Lord’s Supper to be a call to become Jesus’ *alter ego*. Because the Bishop of Hippo had already written, “One must accept to become what one receives. Through the grace that redeemed you, you are this bread that you receive. You respond ‘Amen’ to what you are.”¹⁴ Obviously, Augustine intended to prompt faithful communicants to look beyond the elements made of wheat and grapes. He wished them to see the broader framework of Jesus’ work of salvation. Jesus’ command to celebrate his Last Supper as a memorial was intended to instruct his followers to live and act as he lived and acted, to become his own *alter ego*. The sacrament of the broken bread and the sharing of the cup is truly a *zikkaron*, a meal for a mission.

The *Epiclesis* for Sanctification of the Partakers

“To become Jesus’ *alter ego*,” is likely the understanding that the early Christian communities had of this sacrament. Louis Bouyer has shown that the earliest *epicleses*,¹⁵ the prayers through which the consecration is realized were said not to transform the eucharistic elements as such but to sanctify (set apart) the faithful partakers at the Table of the Lord.

Thus, the main character of the *epiclesis* was to stress the agency of the Holy Spirit as the means by which Christ nourishes his faithful communicants. It was the church’s understanding that the Spirit of God enables partakers at the Lord’s Supper to become responsive to what they receive; the bread and wine bear testimony to Christ’s liberating gospel. When Christians partake in the sacrament, they receive the transforming power of the Spirit of God that enables them to live and act as Jesus of Nazareth, the Holy One of God, lived and acted during his life. When we call this gesture “sacrament,” we simply acknowledge that it is the Spirit of God who acts in these simple signs to make them effectual for our salvation. A sacrament is precisely the point where God’s offer of grace and the faith of believers intersect. Grace and faith are the conditions *sine qua non* without which no “real presence” is possible in the eucharistic elements.

Understanding and Living the “Real Presence” of the Lord in the Broken Bread

Menno Simons, Dirk Philips, Balthasar Hubmaier, and Peter Walpot were right to oppose the medieval theology in which the repetition of the words of institution brings about the transformation of the bread and wine into Christ’s body and blood, the so-called doctrine of transubstantiation. Simons denounced the idolatrous behavior of seeking salvation in outward elements. But his exegesis of 1 Cor 10 still considered the Lord’s Supper as “a communion of the body of Christ.”¹⁶ What the radical reformers opposed was the rationalization that the words of consecration automatically brought about transubstantiation of the elements. Bread remains bread. At the same time, many reformers affirmed the immediate work of the Holy Spirit through the response of faith that unites believers to Christ. The Spirit was seen as the agency that renders communion effectual. John D. Rempel notes that the emphasis on the Spirit as the agent of Christ’s presence, especially in Hans

Denck, Heinrich Rol, and Dirk Philips leads to a view of the Supper as the believer's mystical communion with Christ's body and blood.¹⁷ Like the authors of the earliest epicleses, these reformers held that the transformation is that of the people responsive to the admonition of the Spirit, not that of the elements. This is also the case with Conrad Grebel and Pilgram Marpeck.¹⁸

The Spirit of God guided Jesus in everything he said and did. All the authors of the gospel narrations agree; they depict him as someone upon whom the Spirit of God rested (Mark 1:9-11; Matt 3:13-17; Luke 3:21-22. 4:18-19; John 1:32-34). When Christians partake in the Lord's Supper, they graft themselves into Christ. Having already in baptism received the same Spirit of Christ, they re-affirm their unity with him, and each can say with Christ: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me.... He has sent me...."¹⁹

The eucharist is a *zikkaron* of Jesus' life as human being, a prophet who went about doing good, a shepherd who gave his life for his flock. Therefore, it cannot be understood in terms of a mere symbol or a simple souvenir, nor can it be interpreted in the sense of a mere sharing of the bread and the cup for our individual salvation. It is a call to re-actualize Jesus' mission of healing compassion for all God's children. Its aim is to transform all partakers so that they too may become broken bread and poured cup for the salvation of the world. The sacrament of the body and the blood of Christ is really the life of Jesus of Nazareth itself as it is received, carried on, and continued in the personal and collective life of those who want to be his members. Therefore, by virtue of the principle of the imitation of Jesus, it is axiomatic for Christians to live within the framework of God's love, a love that is spontaneous, unconditional, and undeserved, and that radiates God's own healing compassion. Through the centuries the question the world asks remains the same: What does the reception of this sacrament do to you who believe?

The overlooked dimension of the mystery of the Lord's Supper consists in our imitation of Christ. This is not just one dogma among many others to be believed! In my opinion, it is the core of the biblical spirituality of the eucharist. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor has it right:

The community mediates Christ to the world. The word that he spoke is not heard in our contemporary world unless it is proclaimed by the community. The power that flowed forth from

him in order to enable response is no longer effective unless manifested by the community. As God once acted through Christ, so he now acts through those who are conformed to the image of his Son and whose behavior-pattern is in imitation of his. What Christ did in and for the world of his day through his physical presence, the community does in and for its world.... In order to continue to exercise his salvific function the Risen Christ must be effectively represented within the context of real existence by an authenticity which is modeled on his.²⁰

A short text attributed to St. Teresa of Avila speaks this very language: "Christ has no body now but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which Christ's compassion must look out on the world. Yours are the feet with which He is to go about doing good. Yours are the hands with which He is to bless us now."²¹

To follow Jesus' footsteps requires us to move beyond the visible eucharistic signs to the core of the Gospel message, to get involved in Jesus' ordeal, becoming broken bread that is shared as we reach out to our fellow humans, most of all the downtrodden, with love and concern. Calvin speaks of imitating Christ with zeal, of following his example, and of being prepared to give oneself to one's brothers and sisters, regarding them as members of one's own body; to love, cherish, defend, and assist them as Christ has loved, cherished, and defended us until death.²² In another passage of *The Institutes* he says:

We shall have profited admirably in the sacrament, if the thoughts have been impressed and engraved in our minds that none of our brethren is hurt, despised, rejected, injured, or in any way offended, without ourselves, at the same time, hurting, despising, and injuring Christ; that we cannot have dissension with our brethren, without at the same time dissenting from Christ; that we cannot love Christ without loving our brethren; that the same care we take of our own body we ought to take of that of our brethren, who are members of our body, that as no part of our body suffers pain without extending to the other parts, so every evil which our brethren suffer ought to excite our compassion.²³

Searching for a Specific Way to Follow Christ

“This is my body, this is me, this is my life, this is my blood which will be shed for you. Here the sacrifice was no longer a symbolic gesture but became a personal gift, a physical commitment, a life genuinely laid bare and offered.”²⁴ Therefore, the memorial (*zikkaron*) of the Lord’s Supper cannot be a mere repetition of what Jesus did once and for all, but instead a commemoration that actualizes Jesus’ work of salvation in today’s world. Just as all sons and daughters of Israel in every generation are called during the Seder of Pesach to regard themselves as though they personally had gone out from Egypt, so every Christian is called to partake in the Lord’s ministry. No one partakes in the eucharist if he cannot see himself as broken bread that reveals to others the gospel of Jesus. No one really partakes in the Lord’s Supper if he does not seriously search for a specific way he must walk to follow Jesus.

The meal of Christ was a symbol that pointed to a deeper meaning. The gift of the broken bread and the shared cup represents a whole life dedicated to announcing the reign of God. It is not the bread and wine that makes Jesus become for the first time a sacrament, but whatever the man Jesus said and did, and even endured, to give us life. Therefore, sacramental symbols cannot be severed from a history of a life that gives them their meaning. Christ gave himself daily as he announced the gospel that he knew would lead him to the supreme sacrifice. In the sacred symbols of his Supper, he seals his gift of love, expressing symbolically what he had been accomplishing all along – giving life, and giving it in plenitude (John 10:10).

Henri Nouwen wrote, “When we break the bread together, we reveal to each other the real story of Christ’s life and our life in him.” No Christian really celebrates the Lord’s Supper if she cannot see herself as broken bread, if she does not seriously search for a specific way she must walk to follow Christ.²⁵ Only when our heart is touched by what happens in other people’s lives does our eucharistic celebration acquire all its meaning.

Today, Salvation has Come to this House

Jesus of Nazareth lived his life on earth with tolerance and kindness. He did not go about judging and excluding people. He showed God’s compassion and mercifulness by what he taught and did, who he approached and embraced,

and not who he excluded. Jesus was consistent with his own teaching. He ate and drank with tax collectors and public sinners (Matt 9:10). He touched those considered untouchable, like the hemorrhaging woman, the lepers (Mark 1: 41), and the dead (Mark 5:24; Luke 7:14). Jesus did not only teach and feed; he also forgave the sins of many, allowing them to restore their broken relation with their community and with their God.

Jesus' sojourn in Zaccheus' house allowed Zaccheus to come out of the prison of corruption. Zacchaeus is no longer retained in the slavery of a questionable life. From now on he is to see himself in a new light. He is also a son of Abraham, the father of those who "keep the way of Yahweh by doing what is upright and just" (Gen. 18:19). As for the woman caught in the very act of adultery, Jesus does not identify her with her weakness or her shortcoming. In his eyes she is not "the adulterous woman." He still calls her "woman" (*isha*), a female person created in the image of God. "Woman" is the same word he used to address his own mother at the wedding feast at Cana (John 2:4).

It is no wonder that the Lord shows compassion for the sinners. Had he not declared that he had come for the downtrodden? "It is not those that are well who need the doctor, but the sick. I have come to call not the upright but the sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:32; Mark 2:17). For this reason sinners should not be barred from the sacrament that keeps Jesus visible to their eyes. To do so betrays the Lord's message of hope.

This seems to have been how the church of the first centuries understood participation at the Lord's Table. In fact, it was considered an act of unfaithfulness for believers not to commune. Calvin gives many examples that confirm this practice. In the ancient canons of Anacletus and Calixtus, all were to communicate who did not wish to be outside the pale of the church. Those who did not partake were to be corrected. The Council of Antioch decreed that those who enter the church and hear the Scriptures but abstain from communion are to be removed from the church until they amend their fault. In the first Council of Toulouse this was mitigated, but even here non-communicants were to be admonished, and if they still abstained after admonition, excluded.²⁶

In his Epistle to the Ephesians, John Chrysostom writes, "It was not said to him who dishonored the feast, Why have you not taken your seat? But how camest thou in? (Matt 22:12). Whoever partakes not of the sacred

rites is wicked and impudent in being present: should anyone who was invited to a feast come in, wash his hands, take his seat, and seem to prepare to eat, and thereafter taste nothing, would he not, I ask, insult both the feast and the entertainer? So you, standing among those who prepare themselves by prayer to take the sacred food, profess to be one of the number by mere fact of your not going away, and yet you do not partake. Would it not have been better not to have made your appearance? I am unworthy, you say. Then neither were you worthy of the communion of prayer, which is the preparation for taking the sacred mystery.”²⁷

It is not to those who claim their worthiness, but those who – like Isaiah, Peter, and Paul – recognize their sinfulness that the Lord entrusts his work of salvation. Jesus came for the sinners. Precisely by welcoming everybody, however much of a sinner they may have been, Jesus proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God. Therefore, the concern for the sinners, the downtrodden, and the poor should be at the center of the memorial (*zikkaron*) of his life, death, and resurrection. It is a duty for all Christian churches to consider themselves as a community; a community of the poor coming to a benevolent giver, of the sick to the physician of their soul, of the sinful to the author of righteousness, and finally of the dead to the giver of life.²⁸ The only worthiness that is ours to claim is the worthiness of our faith.

The dread of unworthy partaking is not exclusive to Catholics; even today, many Protestant denominations, Mennonites included, are still trying to overcome the medieval dread of unworthy partaking that led to the practice of once or twice yearly communion. It is good to say we partake in the communion of Christ not because we are worthy; we approach his Table by faith. We lean on the gospel of mercy that Jesus not only preached but translated into concrete acts. Jesus tells us: “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (John 6:53). We lean on him because that is what faith is all about. The Lord’s Supper nourishes and sustains us along the way. The blessed bread and blessed cup are spiritual food and drink that we eat only by faith. Augustine expresses it beautifully: “Prepare not the jaws, but the heart; for which alone the Supper is appointed. We believe in Christ when we receive him in faith: in receiving we know what we think: we receive a small portion, but our heart is filled:

it is not therefore that which is seen, but what which is believed, that feeds” (Augustine. Cont. Faust. Lib 13: c. 16).²⁹

The Lord’s Supper is the zikkaron of Jesus’ life, of his teachings and deeds, and even of what brought about his death. The church needs to celebrate it more frequently to remind itself that it ought, at the example of its divine Founder, to go across the street and around the world preaching the good news of the kingdom of God, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, consoling the afflicted, and curing all who have fallen into the power of the devil (Acts 10: 38). Jesus was a missionary of hope and joy; let his church be like him.

Notes

¹ Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids, eds., *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments. A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship* (Downers Grove / Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 686-64.

² *Ibid.*, 690-91.

³ Delbert Burkett, *An Introduction to the New Testament and the Origins of Christianity* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 227.

⁴ Gérard Garouste and Marc-Alain Ouaknim, *Haggadah* (New York: Assouline Publishing, 2001), 50.

⁵ The *chametz* is fermented bread made of wheat, spelt, barley, oats, and rye. Some Jewish groups also add rice, millet, beans, and lentils, which they call *kitniyos*. *Matzah* are the non-fermented breads normally used for the seder.

⁶ *Marror* are bitter herbs, like horseradish etc.

⁷ Garouste and Ouaknim, *Haggadah*, 79.

⁸ James D.G. Dunn, *Christianity in the Making*, Vol. I. *Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2003), 796-97.

⁹ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 597.

¹⁰ John Calvin, *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, trans. John Beveridge (Albany, Oregon: Sage Software, 1996), 1553.

¹¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1554.

¹² Eleanor Kreider, “Communion as Storytime,” in *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology*, 2.1 (Spring 2001): 27. See John D. Rempel, “The Lord’s Supper in Anabaptism: A Study in the Christology of Balthasar Hubmaier, Pilgram Marpeck, and Dirk Philips,” in *Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History* 33 (Waterloo, ON and Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1993), 48.

¹³ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1508-09.

¹⁴ Sermon pour la Paque, Morin II, 554 , quoted in Jean-Marie Tillard, *Leçon sur le Mystère de l'eucharistie. Pars prima (Notes de cours)*. (Ottawa: Collège Dominicain de Philosophie et de Theologie, 1998), 60.

¹⁵ The word “epiclesis” derives from the Greek *Ἐπικαλέω*: to call upon the deity for any purpose (Rom 10: 12; 2 Tim 2: 22, etc.).

¹⁶ John D. Rempel, “The Lord’s Supper in Mennonite Tradition,” in *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology* 2.1 (Spring 2001): 7.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁹ Jean-Noël Bezançon, *A Man Called Jesus*. Trans. Robert Nowell. (Slough, England: St. Paul Publications, 1990), 117-19.

²⁰ Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, *Becoming Human Together* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier Press, 1977), 203.

²¹ Quoted in Ronald Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality* (New York/Toronto: Doubleday, 1999), 73.

²² Calvin, 1555.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Jean-Noël Bezançon, *A Man Called Jesus*, 81.

²⁵ H.J.M. Nouwen, *The Only Necessary Thing: Living a Prayerful Life* (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 177.

²⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1553.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 1559-60.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 1557.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1548.

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On False Distinctions: The Body of Christ, Mystical and Sacramental

John Rempel

The meal encounters in Jesus' ministry enacted his mission. At the heart of his table fellowship was Jesus' offer of himself. Not only the Last Supper but all his acts of sharing bread with others foreshadowed the cross, his ultimate act of self-emptying (Phil 2).¹ The sacrifice of his life was completed in his death. The cross and the resurrection are the Christian's hard evidence that fear, hatred, and vengeance will not have the last word. Trust, love, and forgiveness have come within reach. To put it into a single phrase, Jesus' mission was reconciliation, the breaking down of walls separating us from God and one another. In Ephesians, this all-encompassing intention of God for a fallen creation finds its most sublime expression: "For Christ is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us...that he might create in himself one new humanity" (2:14,15).²

"Peace" in the New Testament is the reality that comes into being to transform into mutual solidarity the antagonism that makes us enemies of God, one another, and ourselves. "Justice" is the composite of social, economic, and legal actions and structures by which peace is brought about. The two move in a benign circle and reinforce each other. Peace begins to happen when conflict is suspended and reconciliation is started. It provides an open space for a just process of change in redistributing power and possessions. Peace as a positive, perpetual state of affairs, rather than merely the absence of war, is the fruit of justice.

What is it that thwarts the church in actualizing the gift of reconciliation in history? Our conference theme places the words "Eucharist," "peace," and "justice" in the same sentence. Yet our secret fear is that it is an oxymoron! The courage to utter these words in a single breath of meaning states not only the problem but its potential solution. What then is that problem? My thesis is that we make a fundamentally false distinction between what we do when we gather to worship and what we do when we scatter. I limit myself to two reasons that account for this split down the

middle of reality: one reason is sacramental, the other is moral. The two often reinforce each other.

What do we mean when we speak of “a sacrament”? Sacraments are the church’s holiest rituals. They actualize the past and the future, the memories and the promises that ground a community. Like all rituals, sacraments stylize emotion, condense reality, act out memory, and make meaning tangible. When they function in graceful ways, sacraments are a foretaste of what might be: they have a utopian edge. John Howard Yoder emphasizes the futuristic role of NT ritual by asserting that the common meals of the early church were not the creation of an other-worldly realm of ritual but an organic extension of Jesus’ table fellowship.³ Sacramental living is both the concentrated moments when the cup of salvation is held and drunk, and the dispersed moments when it is poured out for the world. In this light we see the radicality of Jesus’ transcendence of conventions, hierarchies, and conditions in his creation of community.

The density of the gathered encounter is essential to our well-being as individuals and groups. Participation in worship refines the agonizingly ambivalent experience of life into its utopian essences – loving, forgiving, and belonging. It offers us unequivocal yet multivalent gestures that reunite us, individually and collectively, with what is most true about our existence. Christ comes to us with bread and wine, and makes us one with himself and one another. “Here, O my Lord,” confesses the Presbyterian communion hymn, “ I see thee face to face, here would I touch and handle things unseen.”

We all long for and live out of such pure encounter, out of those experiences that transcend the limitations of time and space. We’re instinctively tempted to enclose this work of grace within a protective domain, the way medieval societies enclosed their cities within fortresses. Who are the culprits in this separation of cultic and literal reality, this insistence that sacraments be idols and not prototypes? Among them are the would-be architects of ritual activity – people like myself, who become so invested in perfecting the sacred moment that God’s presence is conceived of chiefly in aesthetic categories. Clergy and church musicians are often romantic personality types, prone to absolute distinctions between sacred and profane, art and life. Our danger is to recognize the coming reign of

God, if anywhere, in the cultic moment. The world outside that aesthetic realm is on its own and left to fend for itself.

I realized I was in danger of making this split some years ago at a Mennonite conference on the Lord's Supper, when I found myself rankled by an ethicist's proposal that we celebrate Communion as a potluck meal as a matter of normal practice. At first I thought he was exaggerating to make his point. But he was really proposing that the Sunday assembly move from the Liturgy of the Word in the church proper, to the Liturgy of the Table in the fellowship hall. The meal was to consist of plain but full courses, framed by a simple prayer of thanks for food, and in particular for the loaf and cup, according to the Jewish berakah pattern as we know it from Jesus' day.

I accused him of not understanding the nature of ritual actions (which I still think is true). But his proposal also exposed my narrow view of them. I was bothered by the thought of tables of adults caught up in neighborhood gossip and noisy children unable to concentrate on anything beyond their momentary diversions. I was unable to imagine the grace of Christ taking form among ordinary people gathered around a profane meal. What would happen to people's devotion and concentration? Would the primal gestures and words of the sacred rite be obscured in such an unsacred setting? I still see the realm of ritual action differently from my colleague, but his warning, that we confine what Jesus offers us to holy forms and places at the cost of its relevance for the everyday world, is well taken.

A second culprit in the separation of cultic and literal reality is the estrangement of the gathered and dispersed dimensions of life. To analyze this estrangement, William Crockett talks about "ideological" ritual (legitimizing the existing order) as opposed to "utopian" ritual (proposing an alternative).⁴ Ideology is commonly understood as the sum total of concepts, assumptions, and practices that legitimate – or overthrow – the existing order of things. Conscious and unconscious sleights of hand are part of it, whatever one's worldview. For example, in much Western thought worship and piety is regarded as private and inward practice, and therefore apolitical. But the effect, if not always the intention, is for it to bless the web of social relationships as they are.

Take for instance, the political situation in the Deep South of the United States early in the civil rights movement. African-Americans were

demanding full admission to U.S. society, inclusion in the social and religious institutions existing for the benefit of the white majority. Black people started attending white churches. In some they were shunned and frozen out with silence. In others police were called in to remove intruders on the grounds that the sacred assembly could proceed only once the impediments to its ritual purity had been removed. The ideological role of segregated worship in hallowing the status quo is too plain to miss.

The real problem, then, is not that of separating religion and its rituals from life, because you can't really do that. The underlying question is the use to which ritual is put, utopian or ideological. Like it or not, clergy are the chief public wielders of the power of ritual for either purpose.⁵ People of all stripes fear what religion might do once you let it out of its corner. The heirs of communist and other secular schools of thought fear it will function like opium, dulling people to their true condition. The proponents of global capitalism dread it will spawn a wild-eyed egalitarianism set to overrule the autonomy of commerce.

The ministry of Jesus, of which the breaking of bread is the supreme icon, is not so much aimed at establishing a fixed set of institutions as at setting up a dynamic in church and society in which relationships and arrangements can be changed to effect greater sharing and greater inclusion. A pregnant insight from Russian Orthodox philosopher Nicholas Berdyaev makes the point: bread for me is a material matter; bread for my neighbor is a spiritual one.

I have found two noteworthy models of a dynamic of sharing to which the Lord's Supper as act and type is foundational. Enrique Dussel presents Bartolome de las Casas, the 16th-century Roman Catholic missionary to the Caribbean, as a model for just eucharistic fellowship.⁶ He ultimately found himself unable to celebrate the Mass because the bread it used was ill gotten. His slaves labored not for their gain but for that of their master. His response to the wrongness of the situation was to put a symbolic moratorium on celebrating the eucharist, and to set his slaves free. The goal of both actions was to liberate people to reap the fruit of their labor.

What he saw was the identity between the bread-product of everyday work, changed and exchanged, respected or stolen, and the bread of the altar. The bread contains the objectified

life of the worker...and...what was being done was taking this bread from him unjustly and offering it to God. For this bread to become the very 'body' of the lamb that was slain, it has to be...the bread of justice.⁷

The second model of eucharistic justice is found in William Cavanaugh's *Torture and the Eucharist*, a provocative if convoluted attempt to relate torture in Chile during the Pinochet regime to Christ's mission. Cavanaugh does so by positing an identity between the victim's body and Christ's body, both mystical and sacramental. His argument is that "in the Eucharist...Christ Himself, the eternal consummation of history, becomes present in time."⁸ Essential to his case is the patristic use of *corpus mysticum* (the Supper) and *corpus verum* (the church), Christ's ritual and literal presence as two manifestations of the same reality. In the view of this Catholic theologian, the tragedy of his church in Chile, and of the Catholic Church everywhere, was its failure to live out this indivisible reality.⁹ The literal or historical body of Christ is by nature visible. It cannot but identify itself with the victims of torture: it suffers these afflictions in its own flesh (Col 1:24). The disappeared re-appear as members of the body of Christ; they remain members of the visible church.¹⁰ And this body of Christ must excommunicate the perpetrators of torture. By torturing they exclude themselves. If the church fails to do both of these, it forfeits its nature.¹¹

This is a hard saying indeed. But its accusations have an ancient theological pedigree. The uses of the concept of the "body of Christ" in Augustine's age can guide us in making sense of Cavanaugh's stunning challenge. In more than one of his sermons, Augustine exhorts the congregation to "become what you eat." This is a declaration that in the Lord's Supper we are offered the communion of Christ's body and blood, his very life both mystically and relationally. In his elegant history of the Eucharist, Crockett¹² places Augustine's sentence in context, noting that in the Patristic period "the term, 'body of Christ,' meant primarily the church, in the tradition of Paul and Augustine. In the Middle Ages [it] came to mean primarily the sacramental presence of Christ in the elements of bread and wine on the altar."

That is, in the early church the Lord's Supper was seen as the form of Christ's mystical presence and the church community as his sacramental

presence; in the Middle Ages these references were reversed. This reversal led to a preoccupation with a localized presence of the historical body of Christ in the elements of sacrament of the altar, all the while relinquishing the body of Christ as his presence in the world by means of the community of believers who prolong his incarnation.

This theological inversion was a watershed in the church's sacramental and missionary life. It led people to conclude that Christ's sacramental presence is found only on the altar and not in the community. It reinforced the commonly held notion of sacramental reality as a kind of sequestered and heightened dimension of encounter. In other words, I receive Christ the way I listen to Dvorak's cello concerto: I am caught up in an exquisite harmony that stands over against the noisiness of life. I prize the transcendent moment precisely because its sacredness participates in a plane of reality utterly removed from everyday life.

When he urged his fellow believers to become what they eat, Augustine was saying much more than that. The sacramental moment is not the end of the encounter with grace but the means to its realization; it is not the abandonment, but the transformation, of the ordinary. Participating in worship is like going to a chiropractor: there the bones of the body of Christ are reset. Arms can reach out to their full length, and backs can stand erect.

The transformation that happens in ritual, as Christians understand it, is not so much an immediate experience as it is a mark left on our hearts and wills that changes our disposition. Collectively and individually we grow in grace and become more Christ-like. The literal change taking place in communion is not that of bread and wine but of people. This insight is one of the overlooked reclamations of the Reformation. Zwingli, limited though he was in matters sacramental by his rationalistic cast of mind, contemporized Augustine's dictum in attempting to preserve the sacrament as a transformative encounter without being locked into a futile search for what happens to the chemical make-up of the bread. This became an insight shared by Reformed, Anglican, and Mennonite eucharistic thought in the 16th century. The Holy Spirit comes upon the congregation so that it can become what it eats: the mystical manifests itself historically.

This perception of reality enables us to transcend a theologically false and morally untenable distinction between cultic activity and everyday life,

between what we do and who we are, when we gather to worship and when we scatter to work. These are two different forms of life but not two different realities. Liturgy is not a pure, transcendent reality whose afterglow is all that we can take along into ordinary time, like wistful memories of Dvorak's cello piece or a luminous sunset over St. Mark's Square in Venice. Longing is a seductive and integral part of such a split understanding of reality. What remains where art and life are held to be opposite realities is absence – an absence capable of calling forth yearning, perhaps, but not of changing how we live. Underneath this longing is the assumption, or at least the fear, that what we experience in the stylized events of the liturgy is incapable of being carried beyond it – that the hard realities of the fallen world will simply overwhelm the fragile plane of redemption.

It is not hard to be seduced by this chilling apprehensiveness. Let me illustrate. At Communion we're invited to pass the peace of Christ to our neighbor, and in the congregational prayer we're invited to pray for our enemies. Suppose that one Sunday I happen to be in the same service as a colleague I can't get along with at work. In worship the confines of my life are miraculously opened: I am able to release my resentment and offer acceptance to my estranged co-worker. But when we meet at work the next day, we both still need to come to terms with the fact that our personalities grate on each other and that our priorities are at cross purposes. I begin to doubt our ritual encounter can carry over into everyday life.

The way beyond this moral pessimism is incarnational realism. Christ lived our life and died our death. The ritual moment we experience together in worship is also a literal moment. Something has happened to our relationship. We have already been delivered from the lie that nothing can be done to overcome our conflict, that we are stuck being enemies. Think of the significance this revelation can have for the strife between classes, races, and nations. Christ's real presence in the sacrament is God's proximity to the material world. The breaking of bread is the amazing demonstration that the created order, the stuff of everyday life, is the latent bearer of grace.

The point is wonderfully simple. When the Pharisees and tax collectors met at table with Jesus, their very act of passing bread to one another, however profanely they thought of it, actualized reconciliation (Luke 14:7 ff, 15:1 ff). When the five loaves and two fishes were shared among five

thousand – whichever version of the miracle one finds most compelling – people who had little and hoarded what they had became a community where all had enough (John 6:1-15, esp.13). It is a daring but entirely consistent development in the early church for it to move from the sharing of one’s immediate provisions to the economic community found in the record of the Jerusalem church in the first chapters of Acts. The institutional narrative in the Fourth Gospel is cut from the same cloth. An astonishing theology of the eucharist is presented in chapter 6, but the author seems to conclude it requires completion. (It can be seen as foreshadowing the impulse of Martin Luther and Pilgram Marpeck to make love of neighbor the twin sacrament of the eucharist.) Therefore, in place of the Last Supper as recorded in the Synoptics, we find the rite of footwashing, flesh touching flesh with grace, servanthood as a posture that readies us for everyday life.

The task of the faithful church in a world where everyday reality is broken is to safeguard the primal human need for unequivocal gestures of blessing, for moments where everything we need is present. Mennonites have much to learn here. But these gestures of blessing must be offered in a way that makes them the starting point of the new age rather than the boundary marker of the old – the prototype of engagement with daily life, not a refuge from it. In order to do so, we must trust that the reality we encounter in worship is sturdy enough to be taken beyond the church door. When we look in on ourselves, we wonder whether the sharing of bread and wine among such an odd, unchosen cross-section of humanity as we are is not a precarious undertaking, perhaps even an impediment to the sacredness of the sacrament. On the contrary, the church’s oddness and unchosenness is precisely its glory, the reason for its being.

For Christians ritual is the agent of a realized eschatology, the appearance of the kingdom now, the future age at work in the one that is passing. The Lord’s Supper is the initial link in a chain of actions stronger than fate. The reconciliation my co-worker and I experienced in the eucharist was a heightened, but not an isolated, moment. It was the stuff of which new relationships are made. At its best, ritual reality is the spot on a pond from which ripples expand ever outward. The stone setting the ripples in motion is the eucharist. At the close of his “Form for the Lord’s Supper” of 1527, Balthasar Hubmaier declares, “As Christ gave up his life for me, so I go

forth to give up my life for others, for my sisters and brothers in faith, my neighbors, my enemies.”¹³

I conclude with a story of love expressed in the giving of bread and then of bread given as an expression of love. In the late 1990s when I was Mennonite Central Committee liaison to the UN in New York, I had occasion to travel to Iraq to see first hand the malnutrition and other forms of deprivation the civilian population had endured for years. I went there, as many have, to see if the bread that ex-patriot nongovernmental organizations and the UN Oil for Food Program supplied was adequate to the nation’s hunger. (Questions of guilt, responsibility, and strategy abound when one is in such a setting but are beyond the limits of our present subject.) Without sentimentalizing the situation, it dawned on me that providing for the necessities of the civilian population was a direct extension, and in fact a replication, of what we do at the Lord’s Table. We happened to be in Basra on a Sunday and attended the Chaldean Catholic Church. We were caught up in its heartfelt singing of 6th-century Aramaic chants. It was the closest thing there could be to hearing the voice of Jesus himself. Yet even more unforgettable was the priest standing beside the bishop at the Lord’s Table, arm raised in a beckoning gesture, calling above the singing to this group of Protestants from an enemy country to come and receive the Bread of Life. We had gone there as outsiders to give bread. In the end we were offered bread and became insiders.

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the “Eucharist, Peace, and Social Justice” conference held at St. Deiniol’s Library in Hawarden, Wales in November 1999.

Notes

¹ See Eugene LaVerdiere, *Dining in the Kingdom of God: The Origins of the Eucharist in the Gospel of Luke* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1994) for a meticulous and evocative exposition of all Jesus’ meal settings.

² For a careful and imaginative exegesis of this text see Thomas Yoder Neufeld, *Believers Church Bible Commentary: Ephesians* (Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2002), 106-37.

³ John Howard Yoder, *Body Politics* (Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2003), 17.

⁴ William Crockett, *Eucharist: Symbol of Transformation* (New York: Pueblo, 1989), 247.

⁵ Tissa Balasuriya, *The Eucharist and Human Liberation* (New York: Maryknoll, 1979), 116ff.

⁶ Enrique Dussel, "The Bread of the Eucharist: Celebration as a Sign of Justice in the Human Community," in Mary Collins and David Power, eds., *Can We always Celebrate the Eucharist?* (New York: Seabury, 1982), 56-65.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁸ William Cavanaugh, *Torture and the Eucharist: Theology, Politics and the Body of Christ* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 223.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 233.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 277.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 243.

¹² *Op.cit.*, 107.

¹³ Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder, eds. *The Writings of Balthasar Hubmaier* (Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1989), 404.

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REFLECTION

The Ninth Assembly of the World Council of Churches Porto Alegre, Brazil (14-22 February 2006)

Thomas Finger

To someone dropped out of northern snowdrifts into sunny mid-summer in southern Brazil, it could seem that Mardi Gras, which was just round the corner, was already underway at the worldwide Assembly of the World Council Churches in Porto Alegre. Brightly colored exhibits and posters, rhythmic songs and dances breaking out here and there, the multi-hued costumes and skin colors of the participants – all seemed right at home in this “land of continuous carnival.”

This Assembly, the ninth since the WCC’s founding in 1948, provided opportunities for celebration: creative worship each morning and evening, a rhythmic Latin American evening, spontaneous fellowship with friends old and new. But it also focused attention on some of the world’s most complex and heart-rending problems. For me, privileged to represent Mennonite Central Committee and Mennonite Church USA, the Assembly provided insight and encouragement but also apprehension and discouragement, a familiar mixture during my 23-year involvement with the WCC and the National Council of Churches (NCC) USA. To sketch that paradox, below I will discuss two developments that are positive and four that raise cautionary questions, and link these two categories by pondering possible future directions. Though I am aware of ecumenical developments among Canadian Mennonites and among other U.S. and Canadian Anabaptists, I will comment mainly from the U.S. Mennonite perspective.

The Decade to Overcome Violence

At the eighth Assembly in Harare in 1998, a small group of Historic Peace Church participants gathered several times. This Assembly marked the climax of the WCC’s “Decade in Solidarity with Women.” This prompted the HPC visionaries to dream an improbable dream: “What if the Council would dedicate the whole next decade to overcoming violence?” Unlikely

as such a program seemed, a proposal for it was submitted through a German Mennonite delegate, Fernando Enns. On that Assembly's last day, it was announced that this proposal, among many others, had been received and that it would be referred to a committee for consideration.

Amid the 1,000 or so participants packing the hall, Fernando made his way to one of several open microphones, only to arrive about twelfth in line. Not until time had nearly expired did he finally reach the mike. Then, quite unexpectedly, he proposed that so extensive a program should not be referred to a committee but be decided right there when all the delegates were together. Confusion immediately broke out, punctuated by protests that the motion was out of order. But it was not. When a vote was taken, around 70 percent of the delegates committed the Council to this decade-long venture (2001-2010)! The tiny, flickering flame of early Anabaptist vision and courage had suddenly flared up again.

Ever since its founding in 1948, the WCC has considered "War as a method of settling disputes incompatible with the teaching and example of our Lord Jesus Christ."¹ For several decades, however, three different perspectives jostled uneasily among member churches: (1) some wars could be sanctioned by just war criteria; (2) no modern wars could be sanctioned by just war criteria; (3) no wars could be sanctioned by any criteria.² By about 1990 support began shifting towards the third option,³ and the Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV) has accelerated that momentum.

At Porto Alegre in 2006 it was clear that Mennonites, whether from WCC member churches or not, are expected to take some leadership in the Decade. At present, Hansuli Gerber, a Swiss Mennonite, heads the DOV. Other Mennonites have filled a large share of DOV positions since the beginning. The WCC has held two major consultations on violence with the HPCs: in Biennenberg, Switzerland in 2001⁴ and in Nairobi, Kenya, in 2004.⁵ Another is planned for Indonesia in 2007, hopefully followed by consultations in Latin America and North America. Ecumenical interest among Mennonites in many places, though quite still small, has escalated over the last few years, due in no small part to The Decade.

However, when someone asks me what the DOV is doing, I find it a bit hard to answer. Like many other WCC ventures, the Decade does not plan and operate its own projects nearly so often as it links up with

existing programs, links some of these to each other, and lends visibility to their efforts.⁶ Sometimes, indeed, the WCC conveys the impression that it is doing more than it really is. However, as an ecumenical organization, its main function is to encourage churches to undertake mission tasks and to help draw these efforts together. This means, even for non-member denominations, that the DOV might well assist and enhance their existing programs and help them launch new ones. The door to this kind of WCC involvement is ajar, but those who want to enter may need to take the initiative and knock.

In any case, the WCC is doing much to render visible on a global scale the horrors of violence and the possibilities of nonviolent approaches. It has consistently and publicly opposed US involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq, and numerous forms of violence in many other places. The WCC is inviting Anabaptist/Mennonites to involvement in the Decade, even if their interest in the Council should extend no further.

Globalization

The WCC well understands globalization's impact on the social ills it opposes. At Porto Allegre, this was evident in many plenaries and workshops, and in the booths of numerous sympathetic organizations. The Council's work with uprooted and indigenous peoples, with human rights, sexism, and racism, and with disarmament, economic justice, and the environment all express this sensitivity.⁷ (Again, it is not always clear how directly the WCC is involved in each project it lists.)

The ideology and processes of unbridled consumerism, capitalism, and militarism now seem to encircle the globe unopposed.⁸ Until about 1990, a rival existed that could critique some of these theoretically. But most of the Communist world collapsed under the weight of its own failures and internal contradictions. Today the most visible social alternative is probably Islamic – conservative, yet far milder than the militant extremes. But despite its opposition to consumerism, individualism, and immorality, and its moderate missionary success, it feels quite alien to many nations and peoples.

Can any other alternative to economic and military globalization become visible? The WCC's voice is audible and respected in many lands.

Roman Catholics, though not official Council members, participate in many of its activities, and the Vatican's perspective is taken seriously in many places. Pope John Paul II could tell George W. Bush to his face that he opposed the Iraq war. What if these two large bodies, together with the Orthodox and the world's fastest-growing Christian movements – Pentecostals and Evangelicals – could truly work and speak together in the name and the strength of Jesus? What if they could oppose the disastrous undertakings of globalizing and anti-globalizing powers, and construct viable alternatives inspired by a truly Biblical vision, rather than by competing ideological, political, and nationalist agendas?

One might reply that such an alliance would really affect globalization very little. I would counter, with John Howard Yoder, that the Church's primary task is witness, not effectiveness. Yet I would add, with Duane Friesen, that authentic witness means aiming for effectiveness whenever we can.⁹

Scripture and Theology

The WCC's strengths still lie more in the social than in the personal or spiritual realms. Nevertheless, spirituality was often emphasized at Porto Allegre. Small group Bible studies convened once and lively worship services twice each day, and WCC literature claimed that all WCC programs were rooted in Biblical and theological reflection. Yet I found little evidence of the latter.

WCC theology is often called "liberal" in the nineteenth-century or "modern" (Enlightenment) sense.¹⁰ Many people with this orientation suppose that co-operation with those of other religions or none is best achieved by invoking values they all share. Specific references to Jesus, Scripture, or distinctive Christian teachings are generally considered counterproductive.¹¹ This was confirmed by the scarcity of Biblical or theological references in documents processed at the Assembly, and in the humanistic cast of other documents, or sections thereof, that were called theological. I was able to deal with this issue in one concrete way.

At the beginning of this Assembly 15-20 HPC representatives gathered, as they or their predecessors had at the previous one. A document on the "Responsibility to Protect" was in committee, headed for the

Assembly floor. The main issue was this: When vulnerable populations are at great risk (as in Darfur), should WCC churches support limited military intervention? The current state of interaction between pacifist and just war influences was nowhere clearer than in this document. Though less than 24 hours remained to suggest revisions, several of us leaped to the task.

The document distinguished two groups among WCC members: those who can support violent intervention at times and others who never can. First, we altered negative descriptions of our views into positive ones. To replace the existing description, I wrote: “others can only support intervention by creative, non-violent means.” This rendering, along with several others, survived four more revisions into the final draft. Second, we sought to remedy the near absence of Scripture and theology. One of the document’s two brief Biblical references was to Jesus’ call to “love our enemies.” Mention of humankind’s capacity for evil followed, presumably implying that we must sometimes shoot our enemies. Directly after “love our enemies” I added: “This is based on the loving character of God, revealed supremely in the death of Jesus Christ for his enemies, absorbing their hostility, and exercising mercy rather than retributive justice (Rom 5:10; Luke 6:36).” This also passed through all revisions unscathed.¹²

Another attempt fared less well. The draft based “the primacy of non-violence” on God’s image in everyone. While I agree, “God’s image” in WCC documents often connotes no more than human dignity. So I added that everyone “shares the human nature assumed by Jesus Christ in his incarnation, which was raised into eternal life by his Father through the Holy Spirit.” While the first phrase made it through, the second was axed early on. Yet it was the only Trinitarian phrase in the document, and the Council staunchly claims to be Trinitarian. This sort of gap between professed theology and social pronouncements continues to bother the Orthodox immensely, and arouses Pentecostal and Evangelical suspicions as well.

Non-Christian Religions

The tendency to downplay a Biblical outlook and to emphasize more widely shared beliefs and values also affects the WCC’s approach to other religions. This orientation, however, was not the only one voiced at Porto Allegre. In a

plenary address Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, characterized Christian identity as inhabiting the “place that Jesus defines for us,” shaped by the unique biblical narrative and its transmission through the Church. Williams called for “utter commitment to the God who is revealed in Jesus and to all those to whom his invitation is addressed.” From this “place” and from what we see there, Christians can begin to interact with non-Christian neighbors. Sometimes, Williams added, we will glimpse in their eyes “a reflection of what we see; they do not have the words we have, but something is deeply recognizable.” His Christocentric orientation acknowledged some similarities and points of contact among religions.

Another, perhaps more prevalent, WCC perspective emerged in a discussion led by WCC staffer Hans Ucko and former InterFaith Director Wesley Arajah. Beginning from the definition of “ecumenical” as “the whole inhabited earth,” they argued that restricting the term to Christians is narrow and that the ecumenical movement should include other faiths. (I have observed “ecumenical” shifting from *intra-Christian* towards *inter-faith* for at least 15 years.)

However, intra-Christian ecumenical gatherings, where many participants still disagree with or hardly know each other, do provide crucial common reference points for interaction. Everyone involved claims allegiance to Jesus Christ and the Scriptures at the least. These provide sources and standards for challenging and learning from each other. In such gatherings, too, the Source can be not only discussed but experienced through worship, prayer, and mutual encouragement. However, if inter-faith ecumenism replaced intra-Christian ecumenism, such gatherings would be far less frequent. What would provide common reference points for discussion and action? The Ucko-Arajah outlook posits a universal religious awareness that includes common moral implications, much as does standard Protestant liberalism. Not surprisingly, it emphasizes social, ethical, and rational commonalities rather than Christian distinctives.

In my view, Anabaptism’s stress on following the radical Jesus has more in common with Rowan Williams’ approach: starting with God’s revelation in Jesus, and from that “space” interacting with other religions. Witnessing through deeds, especially through communal life, enables Christians to move into and share socio-cultural spaces occupied by other

religions. It helps them share a Christ who is not modeled after Caesars and empires, but who is concerned about the marginalized and reverses worldly values. This is the Lord who became a Servant and whose lordship differs greatly from the dominating lordships of this world. Those who follow this Servant-Lord as servants will take time to learn from others about their cultural and religious spaces, and interact with them in those contexts.¹³

The world needs radical, visible alternatives to economic and military globalization. These appear far more concretely and vividly in Jesus' teachings, person, and kingdom than in general humanistic affirmations, however valid. Christians who start from there can find contact points with many values in other religions. They can converse in those vocabularies whenever appropriate. Unless they express their convictions too loudly or insensitively, and too little through attitudes and deeds, most non-Christians will probably respect them for their authenticity. A recent example is the enormous outpouring of support throughout the Muslim world for the four Christian Peacemaker Team members abducted in Iraq.¹⁴

Baptism

Although this subject was not very visible at the Assembly, WCC literature calls it quite important. Baptism was thoughtfully addressed in a WCC-Catholic Working Group Report made available to all participants,¹⁵ but apparently not much discussed. The Council's own study, "One Baptism: towards Mutual Recognition of Christian Initiation," underway since 2001, was supposed to reach completion shortly.¹⁶

The WCC has long recommended that recognition by all other churches of the baptisms performed in every church provides a basis, or even the primary basis, of Christian unity. Recognition means far more than acknowledging that some folks baptized as infants turn out to be fine Christians. Unless the forthcoming study changes things, it means accepting *all* baptisms performed by all other churches as valid. It means affirming their standard practices, not simply some of their products.

Nevertheless, WCC documents affirm that believers' baptism was the New Testament practice.¹⁷ Many mainline churches now recognize it was widely prevalent until the fourth century, and as a result they now affirm only one sacrament of initiation: baptism itself.¹⁸ Moreover, most

mainline churches today recognize the need for committed members who can articulate their faith. Some of their leaders, though still allowing infant baptism, accept that it belonged to a bygone “Christendom model” of society and recommend believers’ baptism for much the same reasons as Anabaptist/Mennonites do.¹⁹

Although State Churches are much less common and less powerful than in the Reformation, I still feel that acceptance of all baptisms as true baptisms permits too much identification of the Church with the status quo, too great a blurring of its distinctive character. At this time, then, I find it especially inappropriate to minimize or surrender baptismal convictions for ecumenical unity; but quite appropriate to challenge others to reconsider the value of believers’ baptism.²⁰ Still, as long as WCC studies remain semi-obscure and Mennonites are not members of the World or National Councils, it may remain difficult to make our voice heard.

Evangelicals and Pentecostals

Evangelical presence was conspicuous at the previous two Assemblies, where numerous participants not only identified themselves as such but produced “Evangelical Responses” to those gatherings and raised critical concerns. Hailing mostly from member denominations, they assessed some things positively and were neither as militaristic nor as fundamentalist as many U.S. evangelicals. No such presence was visible at Porto Alegre, though a few WCC press releases spun things otherwise.

Since Harare, the WCC has endeavored to “widen the table” and dialogue with many non-member churches. Its centerpiece has been a “Global Forum,” with high non-member participation, that aims to become “a truly representative global Christian gathering” by its next meeting in 2007.²¹ Had North American Mennonites the interest and finances, they could have been involved already, as Forum Director Hans Ucko has indicated to me since Harare.²² Some evangelicals have participated in the Forum and in recent WCC mission consultations, and have become friendlier with Council agencies. However, their near invisibility at Porto Alegre suggests they may be no closer to joining the WCC than before.

Pentecostals have been courted even more zealously since Harare. Yet while Norberto Saracco, an Argentinian Pentecostal, addressed a plenary at

Porto Alegre, their presence was hardly more visible than evangelicals'. But Brazil sports an enormous number of Pentecostal churches. Several, accommodating 2,000 and more worshippers, are very near the hotel where many Assembly participants stayed. However, on Sunday, when local congregations invited Assembly attendees to worship, only one relatively small Pentecostal church signed on. Nearly as many WCC visitors, including important leaders, as church members showed up.

The Future?

From the opening address by Moderator Aram I (Armenian Apostolic Church), WCC leaders often admitted that the Council and its structures were becoming antiquated and losing relevance. Yet despite frequent calls for radical renewal, I witnessed little besides business as usual. To be sure, youth gained a greater voice, indigenous programs a new impetus, and the DOV increasing visibility. Consensus decision-making was adopted, largely in fairness to the Orthodox minority, but no controversial vote tested it. Once again the budget was trimmed and personnel were cut.

Over the decades, however, the World and most National Councils have acquired considerable momentum that will not soon be exhausted. Their openness to new participants is genuine, despite relatively little response. Their openness to at least a few novel programs is witnessed by the DOV.

Many more opportunities now exist for Anabaptists and Mennonites to be involved, as individuals and organizations, and as members and non-members. Many WCC members want to learn more about us. We need neither hide nor compromise our distinctives, for these often arouse the greatest interest. At the same time, we can learn much from others. Amidst today's economic and military globalization, the WCC voices another alternative, potentially amplified by other worldwide voices. Since we can be creatively involved in various World and National Council tasks without unwelcome limitations, we should look for opportunities.

Still, I hardly expect ecumenism's further sweep to be restricted within old-line, mainline movements. My own involvement has coincided with rising interest among communions outside them even as insider enthusiasm has waned. Non-member denominations sometimes seem to outweigh

members in my own Faith & Order Commission, NCC USA. Separatist traditions everywhere are recognizing the desirability, and experiencing the joy, of closer relations with those they used to suspect. Co-operation among these groups will surely spread, much of it beyond old-line channels.²³

How and where, then, might Anabaptist/Mennonites be involved? Though it sounds somewhat counter-intuitive, it might be partly with Pentecostals. Two weeks after the Assembly, the Mennonite World Conference meetings in Pasadena devoted a program block to global Pentecostal-Mennonite possibilities. Pentecostal participants expressed great interest in Mennonites, and it turned out that around 70 percent of Mennonites worldwide worship mainly in a Pentecostal style.

In June 2004, Mennonite Church USA decided to initiate the first formal approach to another denomination by North American Mennonites, so far as I know, and decided on Pentecostals. In May 2005, three of us met with three representatives of the Church of God in Cleveland, Tennessee. It marked the first time that an American Pentecostal denomination approved conversations with another denomination. Moreover, Jim Schrag, MC USA's Executive Director, considered this step important enough to be in the original threesome.²⁴ A subsequent meeting of about 20 persons, including at least one Church of God Executive Board member, was slated for September 8-10, 2006, in Evanston, Illinois.

Why should Pentecostals and Mennonites be interested in each other? Many Mennonites desire a dose of Pentecostal energy and enthusiasm, especially in mission. As Jim Schrag outlined to Church of God representatives, MC USA seriously intends to become a more missional church. Some Pentecostal leaders, alternatively, worry that their movement, especially in North America, has sunk too deeply into middle- and upper-middle class mores, materialism, and militarism.

About a century ago, at their origins, Pentecostals were lower class, marginalized folks, as were the original Anabaptists. Also like Anabaptists, they expected converts to live on a high spiritual and ethical plane, and to reject "worldly" behaviors. Moreover, though most Pentecostals no longer know it, the great majority of these founding groups were pacifist. Some Pentecostals are now rediscovering those roots. A (pan-)Pentecostal Peace Fellowship, despite some initial opposition, is growing rapidly.²⁵ Some

Church of God in Christ leaders recently founded “The Life Together Institute for Peace,” whose vision and commitments resonate strikingly with Anabaptists.²⁶ To be sure, the likelihood of Anabaptist/Mennonites even slightly slowing the materialistic and militaristic momentum within the gigantic Pentecostal movement can seem extremely improbable. However, ten years ago the possibility of the WCC devoting a whole decade to overcoming violence would have seemed preposterous.

Today, Anabaptist/Mennonites are being invited to play a role in shaping the world’s fastest-growing Christian movement, which already plays, and undoubtedly will play, a significant role in the ecumenism that will mainly flourish, if I am right, outside mainline ecumenical channels.

It would be foolish to glamorize Pentecostals and ignore tendencies that irritate Mennonite sensibilities: not only materialism and militarism, but emotionalism and prophesyings that sometimes surge beyond control. And, as some MWC leaders at the Pasadena meetings complained, proselytism that sometimes aims, underhandedly, at members of their own and other congregations. As well, a complete prognosis of Mennonite ecumenical prospects would have to consider the burgeoning relationships with Catholics,²⁷ formal meetings with Lutherans,²⁸ initial contacts with the Orthodox,²⁹ and many other recent events. For now, I hope that these reflections on the Ninth WCC Assembly have provided some information, inspiration, and cautions for those interested in such ventures.

Notes

¹ See Salpy Eskidjian, ed., *Overcome Violence: a Programme of the World Council of Churches* (Geneva: WCC 1997), 11.

² *Ibid.*, 13-17.

³ *Ibid.*, 18-23.

⁴ For the papers, see Fernando Enns, Scott Holland, and Ann Riggs, eds., *Seeking Cultures of Peace* (Geneva: WCC, 2004).

⁵ See Scott Holland, “A Peace Church in the World,” *Messenger* (Church of the Brethren), December 2005, 8-10. For an overview see Fernando Enns, “The Peace Church: Dialogue and Diversity,” *The Conrad Grebel Review* 23:3 (Fall 2005): 15-18.

⁶ Updated information on the DOV and its activities is available at www.overcomingviolence.org.

⁷ For an overview, see *From Harare to Porto Allegre, 1998-2006* (Geneva: WCC, 2005).

⁸ I am critiquing “unbridled” capitalism, not capitalism in every conceivable form.

⁹ Duane Friesen, *Artists, Citizens and Philosophers* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 2000), 39-42.

¹⁰ I use “liberal” because the WCC’s guiding theology hails, in significant measure, from 19th-century liberal Protestant theology and its American offshoot, the “social gospel.” Though I critique some of its tenets, I do not mean to characterize liberal theology or liberalism of other kinds negatively in all respects.

¹¹ A good example is the “Programme to Overcome Violence: Assumptions and Principles” itself (in Eskidjian, 24-29).

¹² To humankind’s capacity for evil, I added that this capacity affects even those who seek to make peace, and that therefore Scripture presents a new anthropological norm, Jesus’ peaceful way, and urges us to work towards it through the Holy Spirit. Not surprisingly, none of this was accepted.

¹³ For fuller explanation of this approach, see my *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 275-89; and my contribution to a National Council of Churches USA symposium, “A Mennonite Theology for InterFaith Relations,” in Mark Heim, ed., *Grounds for Understanding* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 69-92. During eight of my years on the NCC Faith & Order Commission I have been in Study Groups on InterFaith relations.

¹⁴ I traveled to Iraq in December-January, 2002-2003, on a Christian Peacemaker Team that included Jim Loney, one of the four captives. For Muslim response, see, e.g., “Action and Activism: a week of Palestinian calls for the release of CPT hostages in Iraq” (Press Release, *International Solidarity Movement*, December 8, 2005 [<http://electroniciraq.net/news/printer2217.shtml>]). On Jim Loney, see Scott Marratto, “Two Photographs,” *Common Dreams News Center*, January 30, 2006 (<http://www.commondreams.org/views06/0124-20.htm>).

¹⁵ “Ecclesiological and Ecumenical Implications of a Common Baptism: a JWG Study” in Eighth Report of the *Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches* (Geneva-Rome: WCC Publications, 2005), 45-72.

¹⁶ Briefly described in *From Harare to Porto Allegre*, 42-43.

¹⁷ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Geneva: WCC [Faith & Order Paper #111], 1982), 4.

¹⁸ That is, not baptism plus, or later completed by, confirmation. In baptisms of believers, what is now called confession would take place at the baptismal service.

¹⁹ Especially Aidan Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1978). In contrast to the “Christendom model,” believers’ baptism “does not presuppose the state at all: it was, in fact, developed historically not only without recourse to state benevolence but often in opposition to its pretensions.” (197) Kavanagh calls infant baptism “a benign abnormality” (109-10).

²⁰ See my discussion in *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology*, 170-84.

²¹ *From Harare to Porto Allegro*, 26.

²² Mennonite World Conference has sponsored a few participants from other continents.

²³ A good current example is the launching of Christian Churches Together in the USA, combining Catholic, Orthodox, Pentecostal, Evangelical, Ethnic and main-line Protestant communions. Mennonite Church USA is likely to join in a few years. The NCC has not only

been polite towards CCT, but its General Secretary and its Faith & Order Director were on the founding board. The two organizations will likely co-exist, and their members overlap somewhat, for some time.

²⁴ MC USA representatives were Jim Schrag, Gilberto Flores, and I. We met at the Church of God Theological Seminary in Cleveland, TN, May 26-27, 2005.

²⁵ The website is www.pentecostalpeace.org. The director is Paul Alexander.

²⁶ The website is www.templecogic.org. The director is David Hall.

²⁷ Between 1998 and 2003 representatives from the Mennonite World Conference and the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity met five times. The final report, "Called Together to be Peacemakers," is available at www.bridgefolk.net/theology/mwc-pcpcu.php. An abridged text of the same title including discussion questions and other features was published by Pandora Press (Waterloo, ON) in 2005. The Catholic-Mennonite organization "Bridgefolk" publishes a magazine, facilitates communications, and organizes several events, most notably an annual Conference first held in 2002.

²⁸ MC USA held the first formal ecumenical bilateral conversation of any Mennonite group in North America, so far as I know, with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Representatives convened five times between 2002 and 2004. See the final report, "Right Remembering in Mennonite-Lutheran Relationships" (ELCA and MC USA, 2004). Available at www.interchurchrelations.org/RRALR.pdf.

²⁹ "Traveling the Tradition," the first discussions between North American Mennonites and Eastern Orthodox, so far as I know, took place on a local level. Session I was held in Reading, PA, in March 2004; Session II convened in Lancaster, PA, on April 15-16, 2005. Each drew about 50 participants, approximately half from each group, many of them laity.

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