

Anabaptist Witness

*A Global Anabaptist and Mennonite Dialogue
on Key Issues Facing the Church in Mission*

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Editorial

This issue of *Anabaptist Witness* explores many understandings of worship and expressions of witness.

To witness is to observe a statement or action or to profess one's religious beliefs. We can witness God's work in the world or humans' good and harmful deeds. We can proclaim our beliefs, in words and actions, to one another within and beyond our faith communities.

*Voices Together: Worship Leader Edition*¹ explores three uses of the word "worship," each of which can relate to witness in many ways:

1. "Worship describes *a way of relating to God*, which includes expressions of praise and adoration, and also worshipping God through lives of loving service to others" (viii).

For example:

- *A young adults' group embarks on a reading week trip to Florida to participate in a Mennonite Disaster Service project.*
- *A community adds an LGBTQ+ symbol to their church sign, making it clear that their worship welcomes everyone.*
- *Individuals take meals to neighbors or other community members in times of difficulty.*

2. Worship is "*the gathering of a faith community*—a worship service—and everything that is part of that gathering, including singing, preaching, praying, reading Scripture, engaging with visual art, celebrating communion, and more" (viii).

For example:

- *A local congregation chooses music for worship that newcomers from their community can easily learn by ear.*
- *A church choir holds their choir practice in a local park, inviting bystanders to join in familiar songs.*
- *A live Christmas pageant draws thousands of local visitors who hear the story of Jesus's birth.*

¹ Sarah Kathleen Johnson, ed., *Voices Together: Worship Leader Edition* (Harrisonburg, VA: MennoMedia, 2020).

3. Worship refers to “a specific part of a contemporary worship service that is focused on *praising God through singing*, perhaps accompanied by prayer or movement” (viii).

For example:

- *A pastor ends their sermon with a call to commit or recommit one’s life to Jesus, inviting congregants to enter a new stage in their relationship with God.*
- *The local Chinese-speaking congregation and a predominantly white English-speaking congregation gather together for worship, where both communities teach each other new contemporary worship songs that express praise to God.*

This issue of *Anabaptist Witness* contains insights on each of these three facets of worship and the multitude of ways that they overlap with witness. The essays can largely be divided into two sections: those that closely relate to congregational life and those that go beyond a more traditional understanding of worship.

The first essay, by Janie Blough and James Krabill, provides a foundation by introducing a history of global Anabaptist worship as it relates to witness. After examining worship practices and ideas about mission since sixteenth-century Anabaptism, the authors interrogate the lasting effects of mission on Mennonite worship around the world today.

Tim Schmucker’s article on worship as reconciliation is an examination of Toronto United Mennonite Church’s process of becoming LGBTQ+ affirming—a journey that produced both harm and reconciliation. Schmucker analyzes the writings of ecumenical and Mennonite missiologists to understand how they position reconciliation within the mission of the church. He concludes that the congregation’s journey toward LGBTQ+ acceptance, and the subsequent reconciliation that occurred during worship, has been foundational to their church’s mission.

Jason Barnhart’s piece on the Lord’s Supper considers the political impacts of communion in Brethren circles, drawing on understandings of the Lord’s supper as a common meal that enacts a radical counterculture. He argues that when communion celebrates the gathered community as the body of Christ, national identities and other differences are set aside and the city of God is performed.

In the next article, Jonathan Minchala argues that the Spirit shapes Christian language and desire through the liturgy. This desire orients us to the beauty of God and a peaceable openness to creaturely diversity. At the same time, Minchala cautions that worshippers need rituals, speech, and music that both celebrates one’s culture and history and calls forth justice.

Several prayers included in this edition are available as practical resources to draw together worship and witness. The two prayers offered by Carol Penner help us consider how congregational listening and thanksgiving are forms of witness. Focusing on witness as people's lives in relationship, Joanna Harader creates readings for worship that facilitate meaningful connections between people and God. The "All Saints Prayer" by Joel Miller invites congregations to use the confluence of All Saints Day and US elections to consider our clouds of witnesses.

Amy Yoder McGloughlin explores the meaning of worship beyond the scope of a "worship service," in public protests for immigrant justice. Drawing on her own experience at protests, she explores dimensions of enacting one's faith and convictions in a public and political sphere.

As Robert Thiessen and Anne Thiessen question the traditional view that the primary intent of missions is to produce worship, they express concern that such worship too often is culturally imposed. They support more recent models that relate mission to contextualized worship from which local congregations live into their own unique expressions of the fullness of the kingdom of God.

Debbi DiGennaro stretches the definition of worship in her study of yard signs as lived religion. She suggests that yard signs are one way of connecting beliefs to everyday life while also engaging neighbors through the public statement of values.

Marcos Acosta's interview with Almendra Fantilli discusses her documentary *El Culto* on the worship practices of four evangelical congregations in Argentina. They discuss how Anabaptist ideas are evident in this documentary even though the communities represented are not themselves Anabaptist. Acosta and Fantilli consider how worship relates to culture, politics, and history and how the history of missionizing influences has left its mark on congregations today.

Five book reviews at the end of this issue address liturgy, traditional rituals, climate change, racism in Indigenous-Settler relationships, and Indigenous religious freedom.

This issue does not reflect a systematic definition of worship and witness; rather, it presents intersections of a multiplicity of those concepts. As you read, you may consider how worship and witness are enacted and intertwined in your own communities.

Katie Graber, guest editor

Anneli Loepp Thiessen, guest editor

Worship and Mission in Anabaptist Perspective and Practice

Janie Blough and James R. Krabill

Alan Kreider and Eleanor Kreider, in their work on *Worship and Mission after Christendom*, offer this insightful observation about the relationship of worship to mission for much of the history of Western Christianity:

During the Christendom centuries, the phrase “worship and mission” occurred rarely, if ever. Worship was what the church in Christendom existed to do; worship was its central activity. Mission, on the other hand, was peripheral and rarely discussed. Mission took place “out there,” in “regions beyond,” in “mission lands”—beyond Christendom.¹

Not surprisingly, substantial differences in understandings of the relationship between worship and mission have continued to persist throughout the years. More often than not, the two are viewed as disparate aspects of the

Janie Blough served in ministry in Paris, France, for forty-five years under the auspices of Mennonite Board of Missions and its successor organization, Mennonite Mission Network. She completed a Doctorate in Worship Studies at the Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies (Jacksonville, Florida) in 2014. She has authored various writings related to worship and worship praxis—the vast majority in French—including Dieu au centre! (Éditions Mennonites, 2014). She continues to write; lead worship at the Châtenay Mennonite congregation (Châtenay-Malabry, France); and teach in theological schools, continuing theological education programs, and congregations throughout France, Switzerland, and beyond.

James R. Krabill served for forty-two years with Mennonite Board of Missions and its successor agency, Mennonite Mission Network, as a Bible and church history teacher among African-initiated churches in West Africa and an administrator for mission communications and global ministries. He completed a doctoral dissertation on African hymnody at the University of Birmingham, U.K. (1989) and has since authored and edited various works, including Music in the Life of the African Church (Baylor, 2008) and Worship and Mission for the Global Church (William Carey, 2013). He currently serves as Senior Editor for the journal Global Forum on Arts and Christian Faith, and as Core Adjunct Faculty at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana.

1 Alan Kreider and Eleanor Kreider, *Worship and Mission after Christendom* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 2011), 23.

church's faith and life. This perception has led to compartmentalization of worship and mission and, on occasion, provoked vigorous discussion about the role of each. Current approaches to this debate can be summarized by three emerging views:

1. **Traditional view.** The first and more conventional approach affirms an understanding wherein believers are “gathered” for the edification of the body in order to be “sent out” into the world as disciples in God’s reconciling mission.
2. **Contemporary view.** The second view focuses primarily on nonbelievers via “seeker services,” wherein worship content is adapted to appeal to the unchurched. The worship service is thus primarily considered a platform for evangelization.
3. **Integrated view.** With either of the two previous views, however, unanswered questions remain. Is it not artificial, for example, to separate worship and mission in this manner? Can the church not cultivate a more integrated approach that bridges the gap between the two? Might there be a third way of understanding mission and worship that would enhance and unify the church’s worship and its missional purpose?²

Mennonite missiologist John Driver has argued that this latter, integrated approach is more in tune with Anabaptist theological commitments. In his view, what interested these radical reformers was “the prospect of ‘walking in newness of life,’ thanks to a regeneration experienced through the marvelous grace of God that expressed itself in the integration of faith and works, of the individual *and* the community, *and* of service *and* witness.”³

The following essay is our modest attempt to join this important conversation. We will begin by examining worship components and mission commitments present in the wide variety of early sixteenth-century Anabaptists in continental Europe. From there, we will explore the interrelatedness of worship, culture, and mission in contextualized Majority World Anabaptist/Mennonite communities around the globe today. To conclude, we will highlight some reflections from a handful of newer Anabaptist voices and the manner in which they are integrating and contextualizing the faith in their life settings and places of ministry.

2 Thomas H. Schattauer develops this view in “Liturgical Assembly as Locus of Mission,” in *Inside Out: Worship in the Age of Mission* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 1–22.

3 John Driver, *Life Together in the Spirit: A Radical Spirituality for the 21st Century* (Walden, NY: Plough, 2015), 30. Kreider and Kreider hold the same view in *Worship and Mission*, 53–55.

Looking Back: Worship Components and Mission Commitments in Early Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism

From the very beginning, God’s people were called out and sent forth as a *missional* people (Gen 12:1–3). This is at the heart of the church’s identity and is the very soil out of which the church was birthed. The Anabaptist genius in the early sixteenth century, according to Wilbert Shenk, “was to recognize that the Christendom concept of the church was at odds with the apostolic vision.”⁴ Jesus’s final commission to his disciples, in Anabaptist understanding, defined the church’s permanent responsibility to the world and called for concrete action. Thus, baptism was meant for adults, writes Shenk, “because it involved an unconditional commitment to discipleship expressed in witness to the gospel in all circumstances.”⁵

Likewise, worship was a fundamental part of Anabaptist life. Its essence was rooted in the work and teachings of Jesus and in discipleship that resulted from a commitment to “observe all things” as Jesus had commanded (Mt 28:20).⁶ Worship for Anabaptists involved a tri-dimensional dialogue of the collective assembly: to come together for the interconnected purposes of (1) praising and adoring the triune God, (2) mutual edification of its members, and (3) strengthening its two-directional commitment and practice of mission in both *inward* and *outward motions*.

With rumblings of the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant in Christ as foundational backdrops, worship and mission were creatively and integrally intertwined in the thought and practice of early Anabaptism. The movement itself was, in fact, initiated through a missional act of worship—the community practice of adult baptism—which included, as John Driver has pointed out, a commission directed to the baptismal candidate “to participate in God’s saving mission in the world.”⁷ This combined commitment to both “missional worship” and “worshipful mission”⁸ expressed itself in Anabaptist worship praxis, prayers, sermons, and hymn texts as well as in the members’ passionate

4 Wilbert R. Shenk, “Why Missional and Mennonite Should Make Perfect Sense,” in *Fully Engaged: Missional Church in an Anabaptist Voice*, eds. Stanley W. Green and James R. Krabill (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald, 2015), 20.

5 Wilbert R. Shenk, “Jesus and Mission,” in *Jesus Matters: Good News for the 21st Century*, eds. James R. Krabill and David W. Shenk (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 2009), 195.

6 A portion of this article is adapted from an earlier, shorter essay by the same authors and published as “Worship and Mission,” in *God’s People in Mission: An Anabaptist Perspective*, eds. Stanley W. Green and Rafael Zaracho (Bogota, Colombia: Mennonite World Conference, 2018), 113–25.

7 John Driver, *Life Together*, 37.

8 This playful formulation is actually the title of Ruth A. Meyers’s book *Missional Worship, Worshipful Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014).

obedience to Jesus's final words of commission to make disciples by "teaching all things" and by baptizing.⁹ The Anabaptists' submission to both of these activities became key elements of their "practical theology" of integrating worship components with mission commitments.

With regard to the specific worship patterns and practices of early Anabaptists, we should note that in reaction to the lavish pomp and pageantry of the state-sponsored church worship services of their day, Anabaptists wished to return to simpler patterns observed by the early church. At least one Anabaptist leader, Conrad Grebel, reportedly agreed with Swiss Reformer Ulrich Zwingli that all church music, including singing, should be eliminated from corporate worship services.¹⁰ Yet, despite these rather harsh views, early accounts by the 1560s record at least 130 Anabaptist hymn composers by name, indicating that "the singing and reading of hymns was practiced both in congregational worship services and in private and personal devotions."¹¹ Of additional significant note in the 1562 Dutch Anabaptist collection of hymns, the *Lietboecxken van den Offer des Heeren*, is the large number of women hymn composers.¹² This collection, along with the contemporaneous publication of the *Ausbund* hymnbook, provided continental Anabaptists with ways and means of singing their theology in worship settings as well as in the marketplace and from their prison cells as a form of public witness.¹³

One particularly insightful description of early Anabaptist worship patterns suggests that "when Anabaptists came together, they read the Bible, prayed, chose leaders, exhorted one another to be faithful in persecution, broke bread together, baptized, and debated with non-members in their midst"¹⁴—all acts

9 For more on the Anabaptists and Jesus's final commission to the disciples, see the lecture by Malcolm Yarnell, "The Anabaptists and the Great Commission" at Southeastern Seminary (October 2, 2018), accessed February 7, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7uEXnA1bOe0>.

10 This view was shaped by two factors: (1) a kind of biblical literalism held by many Anabaptists and (2) Zwingli's reaction to and rejection of medieval singing only by clergy and in Latin.

11 Paul Wohlgenuth, "Anabaptist Hymn," *Direction* 1, no. 3 (July 1972): 92.

12 C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora, 1995), 268.

13 See Beverly Durance, "The Unifying Power of Song: The Swiss Anabaptist *Ausbund* as a Voice of Convergence in a Divergent Movement" (master's thesis, University of Calgary, 2007), 43–49. Another important resource describing the songs inspired by the early martyrdom period is Gerald J. Mast's article "Suffering Mission in the Passau Songs of the *Ausbund*," *Anabaptist Witness* 4, no. 2 (October 2017): 15–35.

14 Citing John Howard Yoder in Alvin J. Beachy, "The Theology and Practice of Anabaptist Worship," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 40 (July 1966): 166.

of worship, we might note, that are fundamentally connected in the Anabaptist perspective to the Great Commission. In accordance with their commitment to simplify worship rituals, “sacred hours, vessels, or places were not elevated above the rest of life because all of life was sacred.”¹⁵ Consequently, Anabaptists “felt no need to set aside a special time or place for this activity. Thus, they met at different times and places throughout the week when led by the Spirit.”¹⁶

Anabaptists’ deep passion for openly sharing their faith was the starting point for their understanding of the church to which all members were bound as a kind of “lay apostolate.”¹⁷ One person who exemplified this kind of simple gospel communication was Peter Ehrenpreis of Urbach, who in 1596 is said to have won the favor of his neighbors, drawing them to his way of living “with his Anabaptist songs which he is accustomed to sing in his vineyard and elsewhere.”¹⁸

According to Paul Wohlgenuth, Anabaptist hymnody used four primary sources of tunes: Roman Catholic liturgy, German Protestant hymn tunes, pre-Reformation German sacred folk songs, and secular folk tunes. Most akin to Anabaptist hymns were the sixteenth-century grassroots and culturally popular German *Volksliederen*—folk songs—known for expressing emotions of sorrow, love, and loneliness while describing daily life, national events, and heroes to local celebrations, parties, and festivals.¹⁹ “It is not strange, then,” notes Rosella Reimer Duerksen, “that members of the Anabaptist group should express their experiences, as well as their innermost feelings, through the medium of the Volkslied, and it is consequently this genre, with its acknowledged debt to the product of the *Meistersinger*, that one must consider the immediate soil from which the Anabaptist hymn sprang and by which it was nurtured.”²⁰

Not surprisingly, early Anabaptists’ mission fervor and the harsh persecution that followed significantly shaped the movement’s worship practices and prevented the emergence of a well-regulated congregational life. Much worship in the early days took place at night in the forest, on remote farms, in isolated

15 Paul M. Miller, “Worship among the Early Anabaptists,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 30 (1956): 245.

16 Edward L. Poling, “Worship Life in Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism,” *Brethren Life and Thought* 37 (Spring 1992): 122.

17 This concept is more fully developed by Wolfgang Schäufele, “The Missionary Vision and Activity of the Anabaptist Laity,” in *Anabaptism and Mission*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1984), 70–87.

18 Harold S. Bender, “Hymnody of the Anabaptists,” in *Mennonite Encyclopedia* 2 (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1955–59): 870.

19 Wohlgenuth, “Anabaptist Hymn,” 93–96.

20 Rosella Reimer Duerksen, “Anabaptist Hymnody of the Sixteenth Century” (PhD diss, Union Theological Seminary, New York City, 1956), 12–13.

mills, or sheltered in huge rock caves, far from authorities—and in hushed tones to avoid being detected. Mennonite historian Christian Neff writes:

A flood of religious songs poured over the young brotherhood like a vivifying and refreshing stream. The songs became the strongest attractive force for the brotherhood. They sang themselves into the hearts of many, clothed in popular tune. They were mostly martyr songs, which breathed an atmosphere of readiness to die and a touching depth of faith.²¹

Some worship gatherings served as commissioning services for out-going missionaries, in which candidates gave testimony to their calling and received prayer, counsel, and encouragement for the dangers ahead. One remarkable twenty-five-stanza hymn used in an early commissioning service recognizes the realistic possibility that those being sent forth might well “taste sword and fire” and never return:

And if thou, Lord, desire
 And should it be thy will
 That we taste sword and fire
 By those who thus would kill
 Then comfort, pray, our loved ones
 And tell them, we’ve endured
 And we shall see them yonder—
 Eternally secured.²²

Nearly five hundred years subsequent to these dramatic sixteenth-century events, Anabaptists from across the globe gathered in Canada in the summer of 1990 in Winnipeg, Manitoba, for the twelfth Mennonite World Conference (MWC) assembly.²³ A book of songs compiled as a resource for the worship services at that gathering included a piece titled “We Are People of God’s Peace,” taken from previous MWC songbooks. It was written by David Augsburg and adapted by Esther Bergen. The text of this song was a versified translation of the writings of Dutch Anabaptist church leader and movement founder, Men-

21 Christian Neff, *Mennonitisches Lexikon* (Frankfort and Weierhof: Hege; and Karlsruhe: Schneider, 1913–1967), 2:86.

22 Hans Kasdorf, “The Anabaptist Approach to Mission,” in *Anabaptism and Mission*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1984), 63.

23 Beginning in 1925 and for the next fifty years, these gatherings took place in either Europe or North America. In the past five decades, international settings have been chosen where large Anabaptist populations are located—Brazil, Zimbabwe, India, Paraguay, and Indonesia.

no Simons (1496–1561), based on some of his favorite biblical texts—Romans 14:19, 2 Corinthians 5:17–19, and Ephesians 2:14–18.²⁴ The hymn text declares:

We are people of God's peace as a new creation.
Love unites and strengthens us at this celebration.
Sons and daughters of the Lord, serving one another,
A new covenant of peace binds us all together.

We are heralds of God's peace for the new creation;
And by grace the word of peace reaches ev'ry nation.
Though we falter and we fail, Christ will still renew us.
By the Holy Spirit's pow'r, God is working through us.

We are children of God's peace in this new creation,
Spreading joy and happiness, through God's great salvation.
Hope we bring in spirit meek, in our daily living.
Peace with ev'ryone we seek, good for evil giving.

We are servants of God's peace, of the new creation.
Choosing peace, we faithfully serve with heart's devotion.
Jesus Christ, the Prince of peace, confidence will give us.
Christ the Lord is our defense; Christ will never leave us.

This hymn brings together a number of themes important to sixteenth-century Anabaptists and to the one and a half million global members of the MWC body today.²⁵ In these four stanzas, Anabaptists clearly identify themselves as participants in God's reconciling mission in the world, "spreading joy and happiness, through God's great salvation." They are "heralds of God's peace" for the new creation that God is bringing about. Achieving God's purposes will not happen by the mighty forces of human effort. Rather, it is by God's grace that "the word of peace reaches ev'ry nation." Despite human faltering and failing, "Christ will still renew us." For "by the Holy Spirit's pow'r, God is working through us."

The communal sense of belonging to God's people is a deep value for Anabaptists. *We* are heralds. *We* are servants. *We* are children. *We* are people of God's peace. God has called forth *a people* to be the primary model and mes-

²⁴ Bergen's original three-stanza hymn has a fourth verse (stanza 2) added in hymn no. 797 in the newly released North American Mennonite hymnal *Voices Together* (Harrisonburg, VA: MennoMedia, 2020).

²⁵ As of 2018, MWC membership included 1 international association and 107 Mennonite and Brethren in Christ national churches from 58 countries, with baptized believers in about 10,000 congregations. Over 80 percent of these believers are African, Asian, or Latin American, with less than 20 percent located in Europe and North America. See "Mennonite World Conference" website, accessed February 8, 2021, <https://mwc-cmm.org/about-mwc>.

senger of a cosmic project to reconcile all things in Christ (Col 1:20), recruiting and naming members of this people as nothing less than “ministers of reconciliation” and “ambassadors of Christ” (2 Cor 5:18, 20).

If reconciliation is the *message* of God’s project, it is also its *method* of delivery, characterized—as the song text affirms—by faithful service, meekness of spirit, devoted hearts, lives of peace, generosity toward evildoers, and confidence in Christ’s abiding presence at all times and in all places. Such were the desired characteristics of early Anabaptists—many of them simple folk with limited education, “sons and daughters of the Lord” bringing hope in daily living and “serving one another” in “a new covenant of peace” that “binds us all together.”²⁶

Harold S. Bender confirms this view in citing nineteenth-century German historian Rochus Liliencron on Anabaptist hymn texts:

Love is the great and inexhaustible theme of [Anabaptist] hymnody; for love is the sole distinguishing mark of the children of God. . . . For the brethren, love is the “chief sum” of their being. . . . So, these hymns immerse themselves in the concept of the love which is all in all, which takes up its cross with joy, which gives everything in the service of God and the neighbor, which bears all things, and out of which flows all humility and meekness, mercy, and peace.²⁷

Looking Forward: Worship and Mission Practices and Challenges for Twenty-First Century Anabaptists

One of the identifying signs of Anabaptist faith communities is reflected in the life together of a reconciled and unified body of worshipers gathered around and sent forth by The Reconciler, God incarnate in Jesus Christ.²⁸ As referenced earlier, worship and mission are thus integrally related and inseparable components in God’s project of the redemption of all creation.

N. T. Wright points out, “The key to mission is always worship. You can only be reflecting the love of God into the world if you are worshipping the true

²⁶ Additional reflections on the content of this hymn and a deeper analysis of major themes in Anabaptist missiology can be found in my chapter, James R. Krabill, “Characteristics of Anabaptist Mission in the Sixteenth Century,” in *Sixteenth-Century Mission: Explorations in Protestant and Roman Catholic Theology and Practice*, eds. Robert L. Galagher and Edward L. Smither (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2021), 188–207.

²⁷ Bender, “Hymnody of the Anabaptists,” 870. The author to whom Bender refers—Rochus Wilhelm Traugott Heinrich Ferdinand Freiherr von Liliencron—was a Germanist and historian, known in particular for his collection of German *Volkslieder* (folk songs) published in five volumes over a four-year period from 1865 to 1869.

²⁸ See Rom 5:10–11; 2 Cor 5:18–19; Eph 2:14–16; and Col 1:19–22.

God who creates the world out of overflowing self-giving love. The more you look at that God and celebrate that love, the more you have to be reflecting that overflowing self-giving love into the world.”²⁹

Worship encompasses and joins together redemption in and through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Facets of this worship include peace and justice; the enactment of reconciliation with God and one another through confession, forgiveness, baptism; and communion, unity in diversity, harmony, and community.

The gospel in all its full-orbed richness must be announced (*kerygma*), lived (*koinonia*), and shown (*diakonia*). These three aspects are united in mission.³⁰ In this interplay, corporate worship—via the Holy Spirit—forms and transforms us to do God’s purposes in our personal lives, in the church, and in the world.

When worship and mission are reconceived in this way, mission takes its place at the center of worship, and God’s people are reminded—in the words of Kreider and Kreider—that “when our worship glorifies God, it does so by praising God for God’s actions and attuning us to God’s missional purposes. When God through our worship sanctifies us, God conforms us to God’s missional character and empowers us to participate in the *missio Dei*.”³¹ In this inner and outer synthesis of worship and mission, God’s reconciling project becomes an integrated whole in the understanding of the life and nature of the church.

In this way, writes Mark Labberton, “worship sets us free from ourselves to be free for God and God’s purposes in the world. The dangerous act of worshipping God in Jesus Christ necessarily draws us into the heart of God and sends us out to embody it, especially toward the poor, the forgotten and the oppressed.”³² God’s mission forms the church’s worship. And worship, in turn, motivates and empowers the church for God’s mission.

Culture Interacts with Worship and Mission in Four Principal Ways

As newly forming Anabaptist communities are born and shaped in diverse sociocultural contexts around the world, they will encounter significantly different challenges than did their sixteenth-century spiritual ancestors. Will Euro-North American Anabaptists be able to muster the humility, patience,

29 N. T. Wright, “Mere Mission,” *Christianity Today* interview, January 2007, 41.

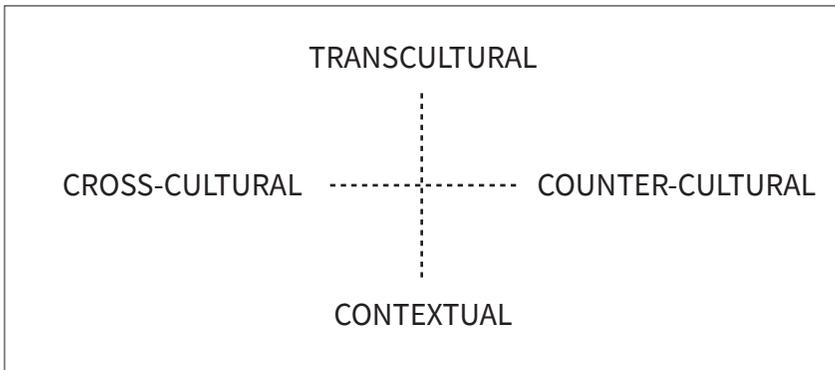
30 For more here, see J. G. Davies, *Worship and Mission* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1966), 36.

31 This expression, *missio Dei*, is a Latin term meaning “the mission of God” or “the sending of God.” For the quote, see Kreider and Kreider, *Worship and Mission*, 255.

32 Mark Labberton, *The Dangerous Act of Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 14.

and creativity necessary to walk alongside them on this journey? That is yet to be seen.

In the meantime, perhaps some insights from the Lutheran-generated “Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture”³³ can facilitate this effort. The statement highlights four fundamental principles that can and should relate dynamically to all settings worldwide—including Anabaptist ones—in the understanding that faithful worship and accompanying missional activity are to be (1) *transcultural*, (2) *contextual*, (3) *countercultural*, and (4) *cross-cultural*. Adapted to Anabaptist communities, this might mean the following:



Transcultural. The church is a worldwide family. Regardless of the culture, the basic gospel content remains the same for everyone everywhere. There is unity in our diversity because of the person and work of Jesus Christ, who is the central driving force of our faith, life, and witness of the church. We read the same Scripture and celebrate baptism and the Lord’s Supper in an Anabaptist perspective. We believe the church is service oriented and missional inside and outside.

Contextual. The characteristics of the cultural context, specific questions, language, biblical insights, gestures, song, and dress are valued and reflected in each church’s worship patterns and ways of sharing the good news in the world. The Word needs to “become flesh” in each and every culture and context.

Counter-Cultural. While each cultural context reflects the beauty of God’s creation, it also has its sinful, selfish, greedy, warmongering false gods that clash

³³ The full text of the 1996 document by the department for Theology and Studies of the Lutheran World Federation is available at <https://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/nairobi-statement-on-worship-and-culture-full-text> (accessed February 8, 2021).

with and compromise faithful gospel truths and practices. Even as it affirms the positive aspects of culture, missional worship also names and denounces the multi-layered dynamics of all idols in any given culture that do not conform to the values and purposes of God's reign. It further teaches believers how to resist them in ways that reflect Jesus's life and teachings and equips them to share with others God's desire to redeem and transform the world.

Cross-Cultural. The celebration of Creation and Pentecost reminds us of the richness of unity in diversity. Our church life reflects this richness when we incorporate in our worship experiences songs, prayers, and arts from faith communities in other cultures within our own neighborhoods and from across the Anabaptist and broader Christian family worldwide. Such practices help break down the cultural walls and ethnocentrism that often separate us. More importantly, they point us to the missional future that God is preparing—when people of every tribe, tongue, and nation will gather in worship around the throne of God and of the Lamb (Rev 7:9).

One current attempt to contextualize worship and mission principles in an Anabaptist perspective can be found in the Châtenay Mennonite Church in the urban setting of Paris, France. There, people from many nations and cultures are seeking to give a positive, visible witness to the gospel message and the nature of Christ's church as a multicultural body. This congregation's life—though far from perfect—can serve as an example of how worship and mission in a post-Christendom context can be part of the same large reality of the *missio Dei*.

The Châtenay faith community began in the early 1950s with five people meeting in a bus parked in a working-class suburb on the outskirts of Paris. At its origins, the congregation was almost exclusively white and middle class. Its members were primarily local Christians of various denominational backgrounds and people from families that had been Mennonite for many generations in Eastern France, who had moved to the capital city for jobs.

As migration from the Global South increased over the years and the demographics of the neighborhood shifted, so too did the "face" of the faith community. With an influx of African, Haitian, and other immigrants, the church has transitioned into a multiracial, multicultural, and multigenerational urban congregation. Such change has meant that the congregation must develop concrete expressions of the gospel call to become a visibly unified and hospitable community amid great diversity in a highly secularized French context.

Small in its beginnings, the gathered group has grown into a thriving congregation. The desire for biblically based worship and unity in diversity are high priorities for its members. The very composition of the congregation and the multicultural nature of the surrounding neighborhood encourage members to become acutely aware of the importance of becoming a visible sign of God's call

to be a reconciled community where the walls of hostility—caused by differences in culture, language, color, gender, or age—are being broken down.

The ever-present challenge of the missional call remains how to visibly affirm and harmonize this biblical mandate in a common worship experience with believers of different Christian traditions and cultural backgrounds. How can one best learn that all have something to learn and understand from one another without forsaking beliefs, convictions, and missional worship practices in an Anabaptist perspective?

There are several ways in which Châtenay Mennonite Church attempts to take the necessary steps to achieve this purpose. The first and foundational one is holding in common a belief in God's Story recounted in Scripture. The biblical account of God's people is indispensable in defining the congregation's identity and critical for an understanding of worship and mission, *inside* and *outside*. In this sense, missional worship and worshipful mission become one because The Story told in worship informs and transforms believers into missional disciples who flow into God's missional project for the world. As Mennonite missiologist Wilbert Shenk says, "The missionary disciple must be thoroughly immersed in the missionary message and ministry of Jesus."³⁴ Scripture readings used as in-between words to introduce the different elements of worship enrich this mission of transformation.

Another way the congregation seeks to become an intentional and mutually inclusive missional worshipping community is through the conscious choice of church leadership and preachers who mirror the congregation's heterogeneous group of believers. In turn, leaders from different cultural contexts deliberately cross frontiers in worship practices, enriching worship through use of intercultural and multilingual prayers and songs. In addition, active participation of all members is encouraged, according to their gifts and style, including both prepared and spontaneous participation.

In the spirit of Colossians 3:16, Ephesians 5:18b–20, Romans 14:19, and 1 Corinthians 14:15–26, the congregation's singing constitutes an important element of worship. The musical plurality of the Châtenay congregation reflects the diversity of its members and gives broad expression of unity in a meaningful way. Efforts are made to encourage the inclusion of worship songs that reinforce the corporate and global nature of the church as a people of God as well as reflect the particular context and musical center of the congregation and its Anabaptist heritage.

These efforts are strengthened by intentional teaching on central biblical principles and key Anabaptist values of tri-dimensional worship—praising

³⁴ Wilbert R. Shenk, "An Anabaptist View of Mission," in *Anabaptism and Mission*, eds. Wilbert R. Shenk and Peter P. Penner (Schwarzenfeld, Germany: Neufeld Verlag, 2007), 58.

God, edifying the gathered community, and sending worshippers forth better equipped to participate in God's reconciling work in the world.

The New Testament Frees the Global Church to Develop Missional Worship Patterns That Are Culturally Appropriate to Their Contexts

If global Anabaptist communities open themselves to worship and mission practices rooted within the cultural contexts where God has planted them, they will witness a flourishing of creative expressions that stay faithful to the central message of God's reconciling work in Christ and, at the same time, will also build on the rich cultural gifts God has showered upon them in their specific local and national settings. We see such freedom and liberty being given to God's people in increasing, incremental steps throughout the biblical story.

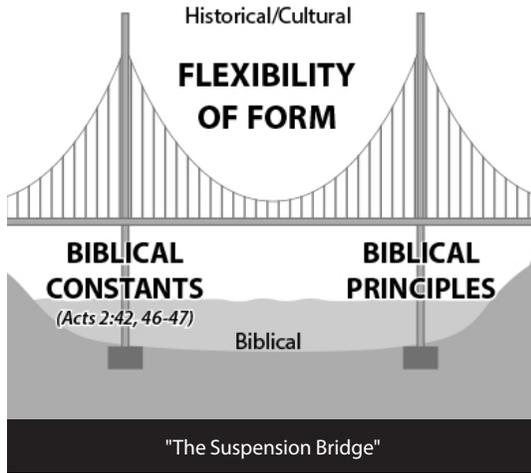
The Old Testament is packed full of very specific laws and requirements on virtually all aspects of life. With regard to worship, the text addresses worship spaces (the tabernacle and Temple), worship times and feasts (Sabbath and Passover), worship furnishings (bowls, incense, and the Ark of the Covenant), worship officiants (priests and Levites), worship rituals (water cleansings and sacrifices), worship garments (ephods, breastplates, and turbans), worship instruments (harps and cymbals), worship artists and composers (Bezalel, the sons of Asaph, and King David), and worship songs and liturgy (the Psalm collection and the public reading of the Law).

Mission itself was closely related to these worship patterns, for there was coming a day, proclaimed the prophet Micah, when peoples from all the surrounding nations would stream up to the Lord's house in Jerusalem, learn of God's ways, and sing Yahweh's songs on Mount Zion (4:1–2). "Mission accomplished" for the Hebrew people would happen in worship, in the Temple, and in Jerusalem—the veritable center of Yahweh's universe.

This all begins to change in the life, ministry, and "Great Commission" of Jesus, who sent his followers *out* of Jerusalem to the nations. "Mission accomplished" for the New Testament church would happen when groups of believers—as small in number as two or three—in every corner of the known world would gather in Jesus's name and worship God "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).

Now, there will necessarily be some biblical constants in this worship, as we see modeled in early church practice—proclamation of God's Word, fellowship, prayer, praise, Christ-centeredness, the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42, 46–47)—as well as key biblical principles—God-focused, Christ-centered, Spirit-enabled, dialogical between worshippers and God, multi-voiced, participatory, and ed-

ifying both for individual worshippers and for the corporate body, equipping them for more effective participation in God’s mission.³⁵



Aside from these biblical constants and principles, the amazing freedom and flexibility that the New Testament grants to local communities of faith in developing their own forms and patterns of missional worship is nothing short of stunning. There appears to be little interest in the many objects and patterns of Old Testament worship, as if to encourage emerging congregations to find or create within their own widely dispersed and varied settings the worship places, times, dress, furnishings, and songs that build the local body of Christ in culturally appropriate, yet faithful ways. This dramatically transforms the missionary mandate of God’s people, reminding them never to lock the gospel treasure of new life in Jesus Christ in any particular cultural pattern but rather to encourage the creative work of the Holy Spirit in the lives and witness of local believers, in every time and place where the seeds of the good news are planted.

Worship and Witness through Various Stages in Mission History

“All worship is contextual,” write Mark Charles and Soong-Chan Rah, “but there may be an underlying assumption of European American primacy in worship and the failure to recognize the captivity of the church to European

³⁵ These observations and the accompanying chart are adapted from the work of Ron Man in his chapter, “‘The Bridge’: Worship between Bible and Culture,” in *Worship and Mission for the Global Church: An Ethnodoxology Handbook*, ed. James R. Krabill, with Frank Fortunato, Robin Harris, and Brian Schrag (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2013), 17–25.

American norms.”³⁶ There is no doubt that many Western missionaries carried with them this attitude of “primacy” and unawareness of their own cultural “captivity” to peoples and cultures they encountered around the world.

Because of this, many, if not most, Anabaptist faith communities have passed, or are currently passing, through a number of stages on their way to developing missional worship expressions and practices they consider truly “their own.” Such stages might include *importation*, *adaptation*, *alteration*, *imitation*, *hybridization*, *exportation*, and *internationalization*.

To be clear, these stages should not be thought of as some kind of chronological evolution—as a movie passing sequentially from frame to frame. Movement can and actually does pass in both directions—forward and backward—at any given moment. It is more helpful to consider these stages as photos—still-life snapshots capturing the missional worship patterns at a particular moment in time in the life of a congregation or denomination.

Certainly, not all churches will experience every one of the following stages, but these particular ones appear often enough to be helpful for our reflection here. If we apply these stages specifically to music development and implementation in the context of Majority World churches, we might make the following observations:

Importation—*where song tunes, texts, and rhythms originate in Western-style music sources.* For much of mission history, both past and present, the hymns of Watts, Wesley, Crosby, Gaither, or Hillsong Worship have simply been embraced and reproduced as accurately as possible by new believers in Majority World contexts. In some instances, local faith communities have come to genuinely cherish these musical styles and consider them as “their own.” Hymn tunes in particular are regularly featured in church services as well as at wakes, burials, and other situations where they offer solace and comfort. For other local believers, however, there persists a lingering, underlying sense of alienation, of “spiritual unsuitability,” with this imported musical legacy. The integrity of the church’s witness is likewise affected. Importing Western musical styles as the only ones employed by a Majority World faith community communicates to local “outsiders” that the religion itself is imported, “foreign,” thus creating an obstacle to the church’s mission. For these and other reasons, changes are often made to adapt or alter imported music to better fit the aesthetic sensibilities of the local context.

Adaptation—*where imported song tunes, texts, or rhythms are in some way contextualized by rendering them more suitable or intelligible to worshippers in a given setting.* In the adaptation process, nothing is substantially changed with import-

³⁶ See Charles and Rah, *Unsettling Truths: The Ongoing Dehumanizing Legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2019), 86.

ed songs. But an effort might be made to adapt tunes to the context of a particular faith community by introducing the use of locally produced instruments such as whistles, drums, rattles, or cowbells, for example. Or again, the decision might be made to translate song texts from a Western language into a locally spoken one. We should note here, however, that translated hymns—though perhaps more fully understood than those remaining in a “foreign” or imported language—are often little more than “shortcuts,” “temporary stopgaps,” and “from the point of view of their art, not the best.”³⁷ One common predicament is that many words in local languages based on tonal patterns have their tones—and meanings!—altered when they are translated and sung to Western tunes.

Alteration—*where some part of the imported song (tune, text, or rhythm) is replaced or otherwise significantly modified by an indigenous form.* What happens in the alteration process is more than a simple “translation” of imported tunes (with whistles) or texts (with language) into a local idiom. Some part of the song receives a substantial alteration or total substitution of tunes, texts, or rhythms of indigenous composition or flavor. Examples of this more radical modification might include: (1) retaining imported tunes but writing new, local texts to replace the original ones;³⁸ or (2) retaining original texts to put to new, locally composed tunes.³⁹

Imitation—*where tunes, texts, and rhythms are locally composed or performed but in a style that is inspired by, or replicates in some way, an imported musical genre.* Ten years ago, Charlina Gozali, an Indonesian researcher,⁴⁰ compiled the texts of over two hundred songs used regularly in churches known to her in Indonesia. The musical style was what one might generally classify as contemporary praise and worship, accompanied by guitars, drums, and keyboards rather than local indigenous musical instruments. Though familiar in sound to Western ears, over 80 percent of these songs were in fact composed by some sixty Indonesian songwriters who had produced worship music in an imported style they had learned to love. Similarly, from a West African ethnomusicologist, Asante Darkwa, comes the observation that “nearly all the well-known

37 J. H. Nketia, “The Contribution of African Culture to Christian Worship,” *International Review of Missions* 47 (1958): 274.

38 See W. J. Wallace, “Hymns in Ethiopia,” in *Practical Anthropology* 9 (November–December 1962): 271.

39 See Mary Key, “Hymn Writing with Indigenous Tunes,” *Practical Anthropology* 9 (November–December 1962): 258–59. The lively debate among Roman Catholics about the adaptation of the liturgy to new contexts of ministry would also provide examples of this process.

40 Charlina Gozali was a master’s level student in a 2011 class that I (James Krabill) taught on “Theology of Song” at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California.

Ghanaian composers, as well as students, have tried to write hymn tunes.⁴¹ One of the most famous of these composers was Dr. Ephraim Amu, an expert in Ghanaian indigenous music who also studied at London's Royal School of Music from 1937 to 1940. He eventually composed and published a collection of forty-five choral works.⁴² Illustrations abound throughout the Majority World of musicians who have composed songs for worship in the styles of nineteenth-century revivalist hymns; southern gospel; four-part male quartet arrangements; and, increasingly on the contemporary music scene, in the popular genres of country and western, hip-hop, reggae, and rap.

Indigenization—*where tunes, texts, and rhythms are locally produced in indigenous musical forms and styles.* Many first-generation Christians around the world have either been taught or have chosen to resist using indigenous tunes, languages, and instruments in worship because of the emotional and spiritual associations these tend to conjure up from their former lives. What is also true, however, is that nothing inspires more and brings to life much of the church in Africa, Asia, and Latin America than singing and dancing the indigenous “heart music” of their respective cultures. Whenever such music is introduced into local worship experiences, something almost magical immediately sets in. “At once,” observes E. Bolaji Idowu, “every face lights up; there is an unmistakable feeling as of thirsty desert travelers who reach an oasis. Anyone watching . . . will know immediately that [the] worshipers are at home, singing heart and soul.”⁴³

Indigenous, locally composed music does not need to be the *only* diet for the church. But a healthy church will produce and encourage such music as a central goal, nonetheless; for “when a people develops its own hymns with both vernacular words and music, it is good evidence that Christianity has truly taken root.”⁴⁴

41 Asante Darkwa, “New Horizons in Music and Worship in Ghana,” *African Urban Studies* 8 (Fall 1980): 69.

42 Ephraim Amu, *Amu Choral Works*, vol. 1 (Accra: Waterville, 1993).

43 E. Bolaji Idowu, *Towards an Indigenous Church* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 30–31.

44 Vida Chenoweth and Darlene Bee, “On Ethnic Music,” *Practical Anthropology* 15 (September–October 1968): 212. One of the most remarkable examples of this approach applied in mission is the posture taken by the Liberian evangelist William Wade Harris during his phenomenally successful West African ministry (1913–1915) described in two publications by James R. Krabill: *The Hymnody of the Dida Harrist Church, 1913–1949* (Frankfurt/M.: Peter Lang GmbH, 1995), and “Gospel Meets Culture: A West African Evangelist Provides Clues for How It’s Done,” in *Is It Insensitive to Share Your Faith? Hard Questions about Christian Mission in a Plural World* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2005), 88–102.

Hybridization—*where the tunes, texts, and/or rhythms of a particular musical style or genre are blended with the tunes, texts, and/or rhythms of other musical styles or genres to produce a new and unique musical creation.* There is no perfect English word to describe what is happening in this process. Blending. Merging. Melding. All of these point to mixing differing musical styles or genres of varied origins together into new artistic creations. Elsen Portugal prefers the term “fusion” over “hybrid”⁴⁵—something more akin to a thick creamy soup than a mixed salad. Uday Balasundaram refers to “indigenous cosmopolitan music” for what is emerging in many urban church contexts.⁴⁶

Whatever words one uses to describe this process, Christian artists, music bands, and worship teams are increasingly experimenting with artistic compositions developed from an amalgamation of features and styles with origins in previously established genres. One well-known example of how this happens is the emergence of jazz from ragtime, folk music, spirituals, work songs, blues, and various West African cultural and musical expressions.

Exportation—*where indigenous song tunes, texts, and rhythms are exported from Majority World churches and incorporated into the worship services of churches in the West or elsewhere in the global family.* In 2003, the international assembly of Mennonite World Conference took place in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. At that gathering, the worship team taught a song in the Shona language—“Hakuna wakaita sa Jesu” (“There’s No One Like Jesus”)—to conference participants. It became a favored selection at the conference and eventually a kind of theme-song for the worshippers gathered from dozens of countries around the world. Six years later, this song followed conference participants to the 2009 MWC gathering in Asunción, Paraguay, and after that assembly, the song traveled to the 2015 conference in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Many participants at these gatherings carried “Hakuna wakaita” with them back home and taught the song to worshipping fellowships in their local communities.⁴⁷ As cultural interactions increase through travel, social media, and digital resources, artistic expressions of all kinds will most certainly be migrating in multiple directions and finding new homes in faith communities far beyond their contexts of origin.

45 See Portugal’s doctoral dissertation, “Fusion Music Genres in Brazilian Indigenous Churches: An Evaluation of Authenticity in Xerente Christian Contexts” (Irving, TX: B. H. Carroll Theological Institute, 2020), esp. 16–19.

46 See Uday Balasundaram, *Creativity and Captivity: Exploring the Process of Musical Creativity amongst Indigenous Cosmopolitan Musicians (ICMs) for Mission*, American Society of Missiology Monograph Series 51 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2021).

47 “Hakuna wakaita” is now in *Voices Together*, the denominational hymnal for Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada.

Internationalization—*where tunes, texts, and rhythms from the global faith family beyond the West or other imported sources and one’s own local context become incorporated into the life, worship, and witness of the church.* This stage is a logical outworking of afore-mentioned intercultural encounters and dynamics. In contrast to “contextual” music—referenced above in the 1996 Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture—this music is of the “cross-cultural” variety.⁴⁴ On any given Sunday morning in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, at the Cocody Baptist Church, one can experience music selections from Nigeria, Martinique, the Congo, and South Africa, along with praise and worship contributions from Switzerland, African American sources, Israeli folk tunes, and revivalist-style choruses from the early twentieth-century inherited French hymnbook, *Sur les ailes de la foi*.⁴⁸

This international worship diet will most certainly be “the” encounter of the twenty-first century, vastly broader and richer than the bilateral relationships that have characterized so much of the colonial experience between Western and Majority World churches up until now. Already present and practiced in many urban, multicultural, and immigrant-shaped congregations, this music moves us ever closer to the biblical vision captured by the evangelist John in Revelation 7:9–10, where all history is headed.⁴⁹

Three MWC Member Churches Reflect on Music in Worship

It would be fascinating to begin documenting all of the many and diverse patterns of missional worship taking place in Anabaptist communities in almost one hundred countries worldwide. As a timid beginning to a much more comprehensive research project still waiting to happen, we asked representatives

⁴⁸ *Sur les ailes de la foi, chants anciens et nouveaux* (Paris: Hachette, 1928).

⁴⁹ Yet another category should be referenced here—one we might simply call “Revelation.” In some instances, churches consider their music to be of divine origin rather than a result of cultural encounter. For some members of Africa’s largest independent church—the Congo’s “Church of Jesus Christ on Earth through the Prophet Simon Kimbangu”—the movement’s hymns are seen as not humanly composed by those with musical gifts but rather “captured” (*captés*, in French), received by revelation, under inspiration or “coming from above.” See Gordon Molyneux, “The Place and Function of Hymns in the EJCSK,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 20, no. 2 (June 1990): 153ff.; Wilfred Heintze-Flad, *L’Église kimbanguiste: Une église qui chante et prie* (Leiden: Interuniversitair Instituut voor Missiologie en Oecumenica, 1978); and Aurélien Mokoko Campiot, *Kimbanguism: An African Understanding of the Bible* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania University Press, 2017), 221–27. One finds a variation of this view in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tāwahido Church. Here, some historians ascribe to a supernatural revelation of sixth-century patron Saint Yared—composer and pioneer of Ethiopian religious music—in which he was transported to the garden of Eden in heaven by three angels disguised as white birds, to learn the plainsong of Paradise; see Ephraim Isaac, “Ethiopian Church Music,” in *The Ethiopian Orthodox Tāwahido Church* (London: The Red Sea Press, 2013), 103–7.

from three MWC member churches to reflect on music in the lives of their worshipping communities. Here is a brief summary of those reflections:

Ethiopia⁵⁰

During the time of the early missionary influence in the 1950s, the Ethiopian church sang mostly Western songs translated into the Amharic language. These were often awkwardly sung and disappointing to some of the foreigners who were familiar with the songs in their original contexts.

Then, in the 1960s, with the Semaye Birhan revival, young people began composing their own songs with traditional, culturally appropriate tunes. Western songs disappeared, and the new songs took center stage.

Today, the church sings their own indigenous songs in local languages, with tunes in the pentatonic scale but accompanied by Western musical instruments. Only a few indigenous instruments—such as the *begena* (harp), *washint* (flute), and *kebero* (drum)—are in use. This is a problem for the church’s mission, since, as a result, many local onlookers view the church as a Western religion.

Indonesia⁵¹

Dutch Mennonite missionaries arrived in Indonesia in the mid-nineteenth century, bringing with them their European worship practices. *Kidung Pasamuwan*—a collection of Western hymns translated into Javanese—was published in 1887 and is still in use today. Keyboard accompaniment is the general rule for these songs, though youth prefer drums and guitar.

Over the years, three branches of the Mennonite church have emerged in Indonesia: (1) the “Javanese Evangelical Church” (GITJ), with hymns sung mostly in Javanese, occasionally in Indonesian, and accompanied for special occasions by indigenous instruments; (2) the “Muria Christian Church of Indonesia” (GKMI), rooted since the 1930s in the resident Chinese population, employing primarily translated Western hymns in Indonesian, though original compositions are emerging; and (3) the “Christian Congregation in Indonesia” (JKI), a 1970s charismatic offshoot of GKMI. This group, youthful and urban, sings contemporary praise and worship music styles in Indonesian and English and makes use of both imported global selections and their own indigenously composed contemporary styles.

50 Nine church leaders of Ethiopia’s Meserete Kristos Church (“Christ is the Foundation Church”) shared reflections with us August–October 2020: Tariku Wondimu, Getachew Tegegne, Ahmed Ahmed, Frew Tuke, Girma Bossen, Sisay Worku, Desta Debele, Teferi Setena, and Henok Mekonin.

51 Our informant here, interviewed on October 30, 2020, was Andios Santoso—church leader in the Gereja Kristen Maranatha Indonesia (GKMI) and currently a student at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana.

One Jakarta-based JKI congregation has exported via social media its own original compositions to churches across Indonesia, to Japan and Thailand, and beyond. In Indonesia—the world’s most populous Muslim country—the worship practices of the church often communicate that Christianity is an imported religion.

Zimbabwe⁵²

The first Brethren in Christ (BIC) missionaries arrived in Zimbabwe in the late 1890s. Rather than translating Western hymns into the local siIndebele language, they made use of and adapted an existing Zulu-language collection of European hymns, *Amagama Okublabelela*, produced in South Africa.⁵³

Dr. Barbra Nkala recast the classic hymnbook into colloquial siIndebele, incorporating additional music pieces from other church traditions. The project never blossomed, however, because of a general preference for the classic hymnbook, and widespread financial challenges that hindered BIC congregants from purchasing a new hymnal.

Indigenous drums and singing with dance have generally been forbidden or discouraged over the years for fear of syncretistic influences. The country’s ever-deepening cycles of economic indebtedness and the church’s patriarchal leadership have done little to encourage indigenous creativity, though choral competitions and special music groups occasionally produce and perform new compositions.

Most importantly, South Africa’s powerful presence on the southern border has continually shaped music in Zimbabwe through its spiritually inspired resistance anthems to Apartheid and the constant flow of worship songs and recordings that Zimbabwean youth find more attractive than focusing on music of their own creation. Young Zimbabweans currently are producing very little worship music, and their music is not being assimilated into the mainstream worship of BIC churches. The spark, however, for potential hymnodic shift is there!

⁵² Sibonokuhle Ncube, a member of Zimbabwe’s Brethren in Christ church, is currently studying at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana. On October 30, 2020, she graciously shared with us these reflections.

⁵³ *Amagama Okublabelela: Zulu Hymnal* was published in 1911 for the Zulu Mission in Natal, South Africa, by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, Boston, Massachusetts. It is still in print and available from The Mission Press, P.O. Box 37088, 4067, Republic of South Africa.

“Remembering Forward:” A Few Concluding Thoughts

Sixteenth-century Anabaptist leaders could never have imagined that in five hundred years the “Western” branch of the Anabaptist faith story would be in the minority alongside burgeoning—and sometimes persecuted—faith communities in African and Asian contexts in what is becoming a truly global conversation. As we all prayerfully discern and attempt to faithfully live out our commitment to the gospel and the Anabaptist stream of faith, we have so much to learn from one another about what worship could, should, and will look like for missional faith communities with Anabaptist commitments.⁵⁴ Our reflections in this essay will hopefully contribute to an exciting new chapter of research and discovery opening up before us. *Que la rencontre commence!* May that encounter begin!

⁵⁴ A good start for this awareness is the MWC website, under “Publications and Resources” (<https://mwc-cmm.org/publications-resources>), which posts a wealth of multi-language material on global worship, study tools, and intercultural encounters. See, for example, *Transmission 2020*, the French Mennonite video and study guide on Mennonite church life and worship in Ethiopia, <https://mwc-cmm.org/resources/transmission-2020-ethiopia>, accessed February 8, 2021. (Video is 10:14 in length.)

Mission as Reconciliation Embodied in Worship

One Congregation's Journey toward Reconciliation

Tim Schmucker

“We welcome people of all sexual orientations,” proclaims the worship leader of Toronto United Mennonite Church (TUMC) in opening worship each Sunday.

Fifteen years ago, these words of inclusion were not part of the congregation's worship welcome statement. Now numerous congregants in the congregation identify as LGBTQ.¹ Many are in various leadership positions, including pastoral ministry.

Becoming an LGBTQ-affirming congregation was a lengthy and arduous journey. At times, it was deeply painful for many congregants. Relationships were strained and broken. Division increased. The journey toward reconciliation “required the work of the Spirit and many acts of grace.”² It was marked and expressed in worship at many steps along the way. Reconciliation grew between members who had wounded each other, between the congregation and its LGBTQ congregants, and then with the larger LGBTQ community. As the Apostle Paul proclaimed, “God, who reconciled us to [God] through Christ . . . has given us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:18, NRSV).

Tim Schmucker graduated from Goshen (Indiana) College and Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries (Elkhart, Indiana) in the 1980s and served for twenty-five years with several Mennonite organizations. Currently finishing a ThM program at Toronto School of Theology, he explores (de)colonialism in congregational contexts. He and his spouse, Jacqueline Barreto, are members of Toronto United Mennonite Church. They also own and operate an organic grocery store.

1 Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer.

2 Toronto United Mennonite Church, “TUMC and Human Sexuality: A Timeline” (Unpublished paper, 2018; commissioned by the TUMC Board, researched and written by TUMC leadership “in consultation with remembered experiences, documents, and the LGBTQ people referred to in this document”), introduction.

In this article, I investigate the writings of various leading ecumenical and Mennonite missiologists for four reasons:

1. to understand where the missiologists locate reconciliation in the mission and witness of the church;
2. to listen for whether the missiologists frame reconciliation as the healing of relationships between groups of people—the oppressor and the oppressed—and whether that healing emerges out of liberation for the dominated and inclusion for the marginalized;
3. to look for what role the missiologists posit for the local worshipping congregation on journeys of missional reconciliation;
4. to explore how these theological themes are expressed and nuanced in Toronto United Mennonite Church’s journey from division and broken relationships toward reconciliation in welcoming all who identify as LGBTQ.

I. A Postcolonial Mission Paradigm: Mission as Reconciliation, Embodied in Worship

During the second half of the twentieth century, a new postcolonial missiological paradigm emerged, supplanting the theory and practice that had arguably been part of European Christianity’s imperial partnership with Europe in their overseas colonization project in which they imposed their culture and religion. Five leading ecumenical twenty-first-century mission theologians contribute significant and compelling emphases to this new paradigm.

South African missiologist David Bosch’s 2011 magnum opus, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, both describes and exemplifies this postcolonial missiology.³ While the church’s “ministry of reconciliation” is not a major focus for Bosch—surprising, given his location in post-apartheid South Africa—he concludes with soaring theological soundbites that encapsulate the new paradigm: “Mission means serving, healing, and reconciling a divided, wounded humanity,” and “Mission is, quite simply, the participation of Christians in the liberating mission of Jesus. . . . It is the good news of God’s love, incarnation in the witness of a community, for the sake of the world.”⁴

United Church of Canada theologian Marilyn Legge locates reconciliation firmly in mission’s core and offers an unambiguous nexus of mission as justice and reconciliation. Mission, she insists, must give focused attention to the pervasive suffering that exists throughout the world, as well as to the longing for justice, healing, and mutual relationships. Mission, moreover, must name

3 David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011), 377–532.

4 Bosch, 505, 532.

the sources of pain and oppression, and show how “healing, transformation and reconciliation are connected.”⁵ She asserts that reconciliation must also involve listening to those who have suffered and show evidence that victims have been heard through acknowledgment of wrongdoing and concrete steps of repentance and reparation. Legge has a robust focus on mission as healing and reconciliation, although for her, like Bosch, the church is primarily the national denomination.⁶

Carlos Cardoza-Orlandi, evangelical professor of World Christianity, attempts to expand the emerging paradigm by developing his missiology from a Latin American perspective of being missionized, a frame of reference that merits attention. Reconciliation between groups of people is core to mission, he declares; it must seek to “heal the wounds of those involved in ethnic wars, racial oppression, gender exploitation, and any kind of injustice and violence that harm human communities.” He insists that reconciliation cannot happen without justice. At the same time, his discussion of how mission practices “take flesh” in local congregations focuses primarily on short-term cross-cultural mission trips. Moreover, his integration of mission in congregational worship is limited to the Lord’s Table as a symbol and practical expression of God’s welcome of all peoples. He turns the task of integrating mission and worship over to academic disciplines to develop ways that create missiological expressions in worship that lead to reconciliation and liberation.⁷

Catholic missiologists Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder augment this article’s focus with extensive treatments of mission as reconciliation along with robust integrations of mission in worship. They declare that in a world of increasing violence the church must witness to and proclaim the possibility of reconciliation.⁸ Expressing poignant concern for oppressed and marginalized peoples who have suffered violence and pain, they call the church to be “God’s minister of reconciliation.”⁹ Rather than focusing on strategies, they ground the journey in a spirituality that embodies the truth that “reconciliation is the work of God . . . and is offered first and foremost by the victims of injustice and

5 Marilyn J. Legge, “Negotiating Mission: A Canadian Stance,” *International Review of Mission* 93, no. 368 (January 2004), 121.

6 Legge, 119–30. Jeremy Bergen expands on the theology and practice of church repentance and apologies in his 2008 PhD dissertation, *Ecclesial Repentance: The Churches Confront Their Sinful Past* (New York: T & T Clark, 2011).

7 Carlos F. Cardoza-Orlandi, *Mission: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 85–86, 93–99, 104–5.

8 Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today* (Maryknoll, Orbis, 2011), 70.

9 Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Orbis, 2004), 390–91.

violence.” They define this spirituality as missional dialogue in “deep encounter” with others, starting with “the poor . . . and any marginalized people.” Such dialogue must be rooted in vulnerability and humility, as it shapes “the way the church . . . engages in its ministry of reconciliation.”¹⁰ Bevans and Schroeder also challenge local faith communities to develop new ways of “ritualizing God’s reconciling action,” where the Eucharist is “the result of, a preparation for, and an act of mission.” The church thus engages in acts of reconciliation in the same way it worships and prays.¹¹

Mennonite missiologists and worship scholars have also integrated these themes in various degrees in their writings on mission, reconciliation, worship, and witness. Given Anabaptists’ missionary zeal in the sixteenth and twentieth centuries, along with Mennonite congregational ecclesiology, it is instructive to explore several influential twenty-first-century Mennonite theological voices.

II. Twenty-First-Century Anabaptist Integration of Mission as Reconciliation and as Embodied in Worship

John D. Roth, Mennonite church leader and Anabaptist history professor at Goshen (Ind.) College, solidly roots Christian mission in the life and worship of local congregations, declaring that mission is “simply worship made visible in the world” and that “worship and witness are inseparable.” He also weaves together mission as reconciliation, shaped and embodied in congregational worship: “Worship spills over into the world around—worship becomes missional—when Christians actively participate with God in ministries of healing and reconciliation.”¹² He asserts that mission—a witness to the world of Christ’s way of love and compassion, healing and generosity—begins with worship practices that become embodied in Christians’ daily lives. In traditional Mennonite *die Stillen im Lande* form, he suggests that the most relevant missional witness consists in the Christian community’s life together, in its “beauty of holiness.” This living witness “helps the world to recognize its own alienation from God” and thus invites the entire world to repentance and transformation.¹³

Irma Fast Dueck, professor of practical theology at Canadian Mennonite University (Winnipeg, Manitoba), also interweaves mission, reconciliation, and congregational worship. With Bevans and Schroeder, she adds a strong focus on worship as the formative activity that shapes congregations to be vibrant expressions of missional reconciliation. She argues persuasively that worship

10 Bevans and Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue*, 19–39, 70–71.

11 Bevans and Schroeder, 17, 27, 65–67, 71.

12 John D. Roth, *Practices: Mennonite Worship and Witness* (Herald, 2009), 81–82, 96–97.

13 Roth, 157–67, 218–19.

empowers God's people to live out an "alternative vision that leads to both a disruptive and a transformative involvement with the world." Echoing Roth's "practices," she elaborates that worship "shapes God's people to incarnate the character of Jesus Christ" and inculcates the "perspectives of God's actions" toward the world.¹⁴ She recognizes the liminal space of worship that forms congregants into embodied expressions of missional reconciliation; Christians gathered in worship "stand in the threshold" of the social structures of society on the one hand and life within the Christian community on the other. The latter embodies a quite different set of norms shaped by Jesus's way of peace and justice, reconciliation and forgiveness. Thus, for Dueck, "acts of confession and reconciliation bind worship and ethics together" and remind congregants that God's liberating forgiveness in worship is paradigmatic of practicing forgiving love and reconciliation in the world.¹⁵

Two additional Mennonite voices to consider are Alan Kreider and Eleanor Kreider, who build on Roth and Dueck by extending worship to witness in practical terms. As missiologists, liturgists, and missionaries, Kreider and Kreider give comprehensive attention to the varied components of missional worship. Shaped by worship, Christians as both individuals and congregations embody the gospel and their faith within the world. Active reconciliation, then, is core to worship-infused lives that "creatively address painful, divisive issues in our societies."¹⁶ Exemplifying missional reconciliation through inspiring stories of missional reconciliation between individuals and groups, of forgiving and embracing enemies, and of justice-making and relationship-building with socioeconomically marginalized people, they conclude that "people whom God forms in worship to make peace and pray can dismantle walls and reconcile enemies."¹⁷

In summary, these four Mennonite missiologists' vigorous congregational ecclesiology engenders their centering of God's mission and ministry of reconciliation in the worship of local faith communities. For their part, Legge, Bevans, and Schroeder contribute a robust understanding of the implications of mission as reconciliation in situations between groups of people where injustice, harm, and marginalization have been inflicted and suffered.

I now turn to the journey of Toronto United Mennonite Church (TUMC) from division, marginalization, and broken relationships toward reconciliation

14 Irma Fast Dueck, "A Critical Examination of Mennonite Worship and Ethics" (ThD diss., University of Toronto, 2006), 8–10, 84.

15 Dueck, 151, 198–99.

16 Alan Kreider and Eleanor Kreider, *Worship and Mission after Christendom* (Herald, 2011), 184.

17 Kreider and Kreider, 170, 184–88.

in embracing all LGBTQ people—a case study that both illustrates the missiology we have explored and suggests important nuances within it.

III. Case Study: Mission as Reconciliation in Toronto United Mennonite Church’s Congregational Worship

I begin with several preliminary comments. First, TUMC has been my congregation for over twenty-five years. During this case study’s time frame, I served in various leadership capacities, including as a member of the Preaching Team and as Board Chair. I am thus neither a dispassionate observer nor an unfamiliar researcher. At times I use first-person plural pronouns to refer to the congregation in order to avoid frequent repetition of nouns. I am also a straight, white, cisgendered male, and, while I attempt to represent the experiences of LGBTQ congregants on this journey, my descriptions are, at best, incomplete.¹⁸

Second, the Christian church has ostracized and marginalized the LGBTQ community and its members for centuries. The Mennonite church has been no exception. As historian Rachel Waltner Goossen declares, people identifying as LGBTQ “have long faced stigmatization and discrimination in many North American Mennonite churches and institutions.”¹⁹ Pieter Niemeyer, a former Mennonite pastor, now ministers to LGBTQ Anabaptists “suffering from the church’s ostracism, marginalization, and emotional abuse.”²⁰

Third, congregational worship is commonly understood as the space and time—often Sunday morning—when the church gathers for hymn singing and prayer, scripture reading and teaching, fellowship and support. In this case study, I expand the definition of worship to include meetings of task forces, committees, and the congregation. Leaders and congregants described these meetings as worshipful, Spirit-infused spaces. Indeed, meeting facilitators directed these as worship, opening them with hymns and prayers and asking for the Spirit’s presence and guidance. These meetings thus were also significant components of the congregation’s reconciliation journey and its embodiment in worship.

18 This case study is limited to TUMC and to congregants there at the time of my research. I did not communicate with former members, straight or LGBTQ, who left the congregation, with one exception (see note 29).

19 Rachel Waltner Goossen, “The Rise of LGBTQ Mennonite Leaders,” *Anabaptist Historians: Bringing the Anabaptist Past into a Digital Century*, February 21, 2021, <https://anabaptisthistorians.org/2021/02/02/the-rise-of-lgbtq-mennonite-leaders/>.

20 Pieter Niemeyer, personal conversations. Niemeyer was commissioned in 2019 by several Toronto-area Mennonite congregations to a ministry of walking with LGBTQ Anabaptists.

Fourth, the TUMC journey toward reconciliation is complex, as four distinct sets of fractured relationships were interwoven in both rupture and healing:

1. Straight congregants experienced brokenness among themselves, both between individuals who disagreed and between the two groups in opposition to each other.
2. LGBTQ congregant relationships with TUMC were wounded; many experienced deep pain at various times along the journey.
3. LGBTQ congregants experienced rejection from some straight individuals who took positions limiting inclusion.
4. The broader Mennonite LGBTQ community along with the local LGBTQ Christian community watched TUMC's discernment process from afar and close by. They experienced rejection by and alienation from the church.

This case study's primary focus is on the first two sets of relationships.

Lastly, I ground the following narrative and analysis in my own lived experience; personal conversations and correspondence with both straight and LGBTQ congregants;²¹ written reflections by senior pastor Dr. Gary Harder²² and by theologian Dr. Lydia Neufeld Harder, who is married to Gary;²³ and on a TUMC human sexuality timeline²⁴ commissioned by the Board. The timeline was written by key leaders in consultation with the LGBTQ people whose stories it narrates. Although I attempted to hear the experiences of all LGBTQ congregants who were part of this journey, not all were able to share their voice. This narrative is not comprehensive but rather recounts the journey's primary themes and steps in order to explore the role of mission as reconciliation embodied in worship.²⁵

* * *

In the mid-1940s, Mennonites from Ontario's Niagara Peninsula began TUMC, having relocated to Toronto to pursue university studies and employment. Currently a diverse congregation of around 175 adults and children, TUMC opens Sunday worship by welcoming people of all cultural and ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientations and gender identities, generations and abili-

21 Those whose stories I narrate here have given me permission to share them in this article.

22 Gary Harder, *The Pastor–Congregation Duet* (Friesen, 2018).

23 Lydia Neufeld Harder, "Wrestling with God through the 'Messy' Process of Discernment: A Case Study" (unpublished manuscript, 2016).

24 "TUMC and Human Sexuality."

25 For the parallel journey in Mennonite churches in Canada, see Harder, *The Pastor–Congregation Duet*, 228–48.

ties.²⁶ The congregation aspires to be a family of faith that worships together and supports one another while following Jesus’s example of working for peace and justice. Including an unequivocal public welcome to those of all sexual orientations was the result of a long journey fraught with disagreement, pain, and fractured relationships. The marginalization and pain of LGBTQ congregants often extended to the larger LGBTQ Mennonite community.²⁷ The congregation’s reconciliation journey required prayer, humility, commitment, and forbearance that grounded steps of conversion and forgiveness. Marking and embodying these steps in worship was a crucial part of the journey.

During the 1980s, at least two young people from TUMC families shared about their same-sex orientation and eventually left the congregation. In 1993 an adult education class dedicated three months to human sexuality, during which one of the young people who had left returned to share her experience as both a Christian and “homosexual.” She later became a United Church of Canada minister, fulfilling a call that had not been open to her in the Mennonite church. During this time, congregants became increasingly aware of discontent among themselves regarding the gap between the Mennonite church’s ethical teaching—sexual intimacy for married heterosexual couples only—and members’ ethical conduct. Additionally, within TUMC a range of opinions existed regarding what needed to change—church teachings or congregants’ behavior.

Nevertheless, by the turn of the millennium, TUMC was a growing and thriving congregation, professional and progressive with dynamic leadership in programs and worship, a church that enjoyed being church together. Then, in April 2002, through a statement prepared with leadership support, TUMC’s associate pastor revealed at a Sunday morning worship service that she was in a same-sex dating relationship. Thus, the congregation embarked on a congregation-designed and -led discernment process, confident in its abilities to work through any challenge with specially formed teams and committees.

Despite these new processes put in place, fourteen months later, in June 2003, after three sequential “seasons” of listening, education, and discernment, the process imploded in mistrust, suspicion and anger, pain and recrimination. While the congregation did agree, albeit not unanimously, at a congregational meeting that all people, regardless of sexual orientation, were welcome as members who offered all their gifts to the church, TUMC could not reach agreement on renewing our pastoral ministry covenant with the newly out pastor, and so she was fired. Nor could we agree on blessing same-sex marriages or calling an LGBTQ person to pastoral ministry.

The congregation’s carefully crafted process had failed, leaving the TUMC community deflated, distressed, and broken. LGBTQ congregants had once

²⁶ The exact wording is not prescribed, so the welcome can vary.

²⁷ Niemeyer, personal conversations.

again experienced rejection and marginalization from their faith community. Senior pastor Gary Harder’s “heart was broken,” and he was so immobilized that he was unable to pray to close the congregational meeting.²⁸

Shortly after this, the congregation formed a Healing and Reconciliation Team, composed of people with diverse perspectives on LGBTQ inclusion. Chairing this team was the TUMC woman who had returned in 1993 to share her experience as an LGBTQ Christian; in 2003 she had become a congregant once again. This points to the profound courage of LGBTQ congregants who stayed engaged during this journey, accepting a level of vulnerability that involved substantial emotional cost as “their identities, their very personhood, their belonging in the community, and their faithfulness [would be] challenged, while straight people only [had] to have their ideas and understandings of faith challenged.”²⁹ Straight congregants did not, and still cannot, fully understand the courage required to have one’s personal identity and worthiness before God discussed for years on end.

At this point, TUMC leadership prepared a statement—“Towards a Statement of Beliefs on Human Sexuality”—that delineated what the congregation had agreed on and where we still disagreed. It ended with a congregational covenant to remain in community in spite of disagreements, with a commitment to continued dialogue and discernment.³⁰

Further steps led to expressions in worship with mixed results. The Healing and Reconciliation Team spoke individually with eighty congregants and then wove together a psalm of lament composed solely of words from these pain-filled conversations. This litany was read in four voices in Sunday morning worship, “express[ing] to God and to each other our deepest concerns” and acknowledging the congregation’s pain, anger, confusion, and despair.³¹ After the service, one congregant blurted out to pastor Harder, “That was the worst worship service I have ever attended.”³²

A month later, TUMC said a formal goodbye to the associate pastor in Sunday worship. The congregation attempted to apologize and affirm her gifts. In the midst of what some remember as incongruence, we prayed for her and her future ministry. A significant part of this attempt at apology and the affirmation of her gifts was providing funds for her to pursue an MDiv degree, although it came from a group of congregants rather than the congregation as a body.³³

28 Harder, 252.

29 Svinda Heinrichs, personal correspondence and conversations, February 2012.

30 TUMC archives.

31 “Litany of Acknowledgment,” Introduction, TUMC archives.

32 Harder, 241.

33 Gary Harder, personal correspondence with author, November 12, 2018; Lydia and Gary Harder, personal conversation with author, December 9, 2018; personal conver-

The Healing and Reconciliation Team, led by an LGBTQ congregant, continued its work through additional conversations with approximately 150 members. Making worship and prayer a significant part of their meetings,³⁴ the team prepared eight recommendations to (1) address TUMC's commitment to improve and ensure respectful and loving dialogue when in disagreement, and (2) to further the congregation's agreement to continue dialogue on steps toward LGBTQ inclusion. An Implementation Team was formed to develop and put into effect these recommendations. This led to a printed welcome statement that included LGBTQ persons via the weekly church bulletin and the TUMC website. With a phrase that recognized "we do not always agree with each other," the statement affirmed our commitment to "Christ and a desire to be his followers."

In the fall of 2007 during a Sunday morning adult education series, participants discussed the congregation's welcome of LGBTQ individuals. LGBTQ congregants and allies then formed the Welcoming Committee Working Group that advocated for LGBTQ inclusion during the significant processes of congregational visioning and pastoral search. Some Preaching Team members offered sermons with biblical and theological foundations for full inclusion. In 2009 TUMC formed an Inclusion Team, giving the group a mandate to work on various situations of inclusion and welcome, including those of LGBTQ people.

The activities of these two groups received significant visibility in the three yearly congregational meetings and occasionally in worship services. During this time, the TUMC journey toward full inclusion of LGBTQ people was becoming more overt in worship. In 2010 an openly gay person became a member; she referred to her wife during the membership ritual in the worship service. Congregants also began to acknowledge Pride Sunday in worship services by wearing rainbow bracelets, pins, and flags. In addition, worship leaders started mentioning Toronto's Pride Sunday and Pride Week in their comments.

Momentous steps on the journey continued. In 2011 the former associate pastor whom TUMC had fired in 2003 returned with her partner and their children to worship with the TUMC community. Although they did not quickly become involved in leadership, many congregants experienced their return as a significant step in the journey toward healing and reconciliation. Then, about a year later, two women members asked TUMC's pastor to participate in their marriage service. The Board could not grant full consent because the congregation had not yet given pastors permission to marry same-sex couples. Instead, it granted a restricted ministerial role that excluded signing a marriage document or pronouncing the couple as spouses. LGBTQ congregants once again experi-

sation with the former associate pastor, February 16, 2021.

³⁴ Gary Harder, personal correspondence with author.

enced TUMC's welcome as limited—a painful reminder that the congregation's embrace of them came with restrictions.

After that difficult experience, the Board proposed at the 2013 Annual General Meeting that the congregation revisit the possibility of allowing pastors to marry same-sex couples. After worshipful prayer, the congregation agreed, forming a task force to lead the discernment process. Two years later, the congregation agreed by consensus that while “we are not fully of one mind, we trust our pastors to discern carefully and make the appropriate decision” regarding marrying same-sex couples.³⁵ Equally important, the congregation assured the pastors of their support in whatever decision they made.

Subsequently, the TUMC welcome statement printed in the weekly Sunday bulletin started being read at the beginning of many Sunday worship services: “We welcome people of all . . . gender identities and sexual orientations.” This full welcome was expressed dramatically during two Sunday morning worship services: (1) the congregation blessed the marriage covenant of an LGBTQ congregant and his partner, who had been married in a civil ceremony; and (2) we blessed the marriage of the two women who had earlier been married in a ceremony in which TUMC's past had a limited role. During this latter worship service, the pastor stated that the congregation needed to right a wrong we had committed, and then TUMC formalized that same-sex union through the pastor signing their marriage certificate. Both worship services were joyous and celebratory events, with applause and cheers of praise to God bursting out around the gathered community.

The matter of whether TUMC would hire a pastor who identified as LGBTQ still remained, however. This question took on charged immediacy in mid-2016 when our lead pastor revealed her newfound realization of her LGBTQ identity and the dissolution of her heterosexual marriage—a union that had been celebrated in TUMC Sunday worship four years earlier. An intense discernment journey ensued.³⁶ Once again, LGBTQ congregants showed profound courage and vulnerability by “opening themselves up again and again to having their identities, lives and choices examined, critiqued, discussed and wrestled with in a way that few who are not queer ever experience.”³⁷

Five months later, the congregation agreed by consensus that “just as TUMC welcomes people of all races, ethnicities, gender identities, sexual orientations, faith backgrounds, physical capacities and gifts to be members of our

35 Some congregants' hesitation grew out of respect for Mennonite Church Canada and its discernment process on LGBTQ inclusion. They advocated proceeding in step with the denomination while continuing to press for LGBTQ marriage.

36 I was chairperson of the TUMC Board during this time.

37 Marilyn Zehr, personal correspondence and conversation, February 17, 2021.

community, we extend the same level of inclusion to the calling of pastors.”³⁸ This step, however, was not without struggle and pain. Some harsh words were exchanged between straight congregants and between straight and non-straight people, resulting in damaged relationships and wounded people. In these and other contentious conversations, while some straight congregants received direct challenges to their ideas and attitudes, LGBTQ congregants experienced challenges to their identity, their personhood, their worthiness before God. The pain experienced by LGBTQ people receiving harsh words was exceedingly more harmful.

Moreover, the lead pastor eventually resigned as a result of the emotional, mental, and physical cost of her vulnerability. In her words, “Coming out and reorienting my life so publicly was the hardest thing I have ever done.”³⁹ Her departure evoked sadness and lament among the congregation; some recognized the heavy toll the process had exacted. Also, one straight couple who had been pillars of the congregation for decades eventually disassociated themselves with TUMC.

Still, TUMC continued the journey toward inclusion and reconciliation. In a November 2017 congregational meeting, the congregation agreed to join the Brethren Mennonite Council for LGBT Interests’ Supportive Communities Network, a move that LGBTQ congregants and allies had encouraged for many years. Then in mid-2018, TUMC attached rainbow identifiers to outdoor signage, and the congregation openly and wholeheartedly celebrated Pride Sunday in a moving worship service led by LGBTQ congregants. Tears of sorrow and repentance flowed as we recognized in litany the rejection, pain, and hurt LGBTQ persons had suffered in society, in the church, and even at TUMC. Tears also flowed as we celebrated liturgically the righting of wrongs and the reconciliation that can follow repentance.

The journey toward healing and reconciliation then reached another high point in worship in a November 2018 membership rite. Three long-term congregants, now assured that TUMC’s LGBTQ welcome and inclusion held no limitations, formally became members. The former associate pastor and her spouse officially joined the congregation; they also participated in a parent-child dedication service for themselves and their children. The third person, together with her spouse and children, had been a fully engaged congregant for over two decades but had been unable to formalize membership until the congregation extended full and unequivocal inclusion.

One year later, TUMC hired a pastor who identified as LGBTQ.

38 TUMC Bylaw No. 1 (as revised November 11, 2013); provides details regarding Article V “Organization and Administration of the TUMC Constitution.”

39 Marilyn Zehr, personal correspondence and conversation, February 17, 2021.

* * *

Throughout the journey toward reconciliation, TUMC echoed, adapted, and extended the theological voices described in Section I above. While the congregation was not following a written missiological framework, its theologically trained leadership, both ordained and not ordained, were rooted in an Anabaptist-Mennonite congregational ecclesiology and in a biblical understanding of gospel as good news of peace and reconciliation. These foundations informed the congregation on its journey. Paraphrasing Paul, TUMC, having been reconciled to God through Christ, took seriously the ministry of reconciliation they had received. Mission as reconciliation and embodied in worship resounded throughout the congregation's journey.

When TUMC's discernment process failed in 2003 and fractured relationships resulted, the congregation did not shunt the pain and brokenness off to be managed administratively. Rather, they fully expressed and embodied the hurt, brokenness, and despair in congregational worship. During the months after the discernment process implosion, compassionate listening to congregants' anger and pain shaped two worship services that formed the congregation's reconciliation trajectory in momentous ways.

The first of these two services included a litany that named congregants' pain and fear, distrust and disagreement. While at least one person experienced it as the "worst service ever," in former pastor Harder's words, "That lament Sunday marked the beginning of a remarkable healing journey." Without having named our "pain and brokenness as a congregation . . . we would have floundered much longer." Neufeld Harder adds that the service brought both "the whole process and us as a broken people before God so that our fears were no longer hidden." Many congregants experienced the worship service as a holy moment as we presented our pain to God for forgiveness and healing.⁴⁰ In this worship service, TUMC offered a poignant application of Bevans and Schroeder's spirituality for the journey—one of vulnerability and humility, listening and prayer.

These are the worship practices that Roth says become embodied in Christians' daily lives and engender mission. Bevans and Schroeder elaborate how worship enacts reconciliation; every worship service is an act of reconciliation, they declare, as the worship restores the gathered assembly to right relationship with God and with one another. TUMC's experience, however, shows that each worship service is not a completed act of reconciliation and restoration. Rather, during a journey toward reconciliation, each service is part of the whole and but one step on the journey. Thus, many worship services together over time

⁴⁰ Harder, 241; Gary Harder, personal correspondence with author; Neufeld Harder,

become intertwined acts of restoration and reconciliation. As Dueck elaborates, worship forms God's people to incarnate Jesus's character.⁴¹

Legge adds that lamentation is part of the journey toward reconciliation. While she writes about processes of reconciliation between groups where one has wronged the other, TUMC's service of lament was a diverse expression of pain and grief that encompassed varied perspectives of the broken relationships. Legge also insists that listening to the experiences of oppressed and marginalized people and then naming the harm done are part of the journey toward reconciliation, along with acknowledging wrongdoing and showing concrete steps of repentance and redress. TUMC's second momentous worship service after the discernment process implosion demonstrated some of these. This worship contained the associate pastor's farewell, where the congregation honored her ministry among us. This was especially significant for the youth she had pastored. Although painful, the service gave congregants the opportunity to express directly and in worship their gratitude to and appreciation of her. The funds from a group of congregants to help finance her MDiv pastoral ministry training formed a significant part of the congregation's attempted apology along with their affirmation and reparation, although the apology was more implied than explicit.⁴²

TUMC's Sunday worship services were, of course, public; anyone could attend. And they did, even joining in the "worst service ever." TUMC was unaware of how the beginning of a painful journey of reconciliation would also become one of missional witness in worship; two people visiting from the neighborhood that Sunday morning decided to become congregants, saying, "If a church can be this honest about their failures and pain, then we can be a part of it."⁴³

As Dueck describes, along with Bevans and Schroeder, worship is formative acts that shape congregations to be vibrant outward-looking expressions of missional reconciliation. Kreider and Kreider agree, declaring that Christians, both as individuals and as congregations, embody the gospel and their faith to and in the world. Worship is, these missiologists concur, the primary locus of God's mission, where congregations celebrate, enact, and participate in God's reconciling love for the world. This occurs even when the congregation is not aware of worship's witness.

During the years that followed, TUMC primarily expressed apology and repentance for the exclusion and rejection of LGBTQ persons through changed

41 Dueck, "Mennonite Worship and Ethics."

42 Gary Harder, personal correspondence with author; Lydia and Gary Harder, personal conversation with author; Neufeld Harder, 10; personal conversation with former associate pastor, who does not remember an explicit apology, February 16, 2021.

43 Neufeld Harder, 10–11, 18.

behavior rather than verbal statements.⁴⁴ These behavioral changes were embodied in worship. For example, the presence of LGBTQ people among the congregation, both in leadership and as part of worship, slowly became normalized. One LGBTQ congregant remembers that “openness to the leadership gifts and acknowledged presence of LGBTQ people” were significant parts of our journey toward healing and reconciliation.⁴⁵ Another member remembered how in his quiet coming out to the congregation as a gay man he was warmly affirmed and later discerned to be part of the preaching team. He also reflected that these worship occasions indeed moved TUMC toward healing and reconciliation. Additionally, the joyous celebrations in worship of babies born to LGBTQ couples, of the subsequent parent-child dedication rites, and of the announcement of a same-sex couple’s engagement and marriage were also vital to the congregation’s healing and reconciliation process. TUMC embodied Kreider and Kreider’s vision that engaging societies’ painful and divisive issues in worship is core to being a reconciling community of God. Those whom God forms in worship, they proclaim, are a reconciling and reconciled people who dismantle walls.

Bevans and Schroeder extend Kreider and Kreider’s vision by adding that to be God’s reconciling community and to facilitate God’s grace-filled action in the midst of widespread violence and tragedy, congregations must become communities of acceptance, honesty, and compassion. TUMC exemplified this in forbearance. Undergirding the growing embrace of LGBTQ people were the respect and forbearance that sustained discernment processes along the journey, which then gave rise to specific symbolic and concrete actions of inclusion and reconciliation. Some congregants, impatient for TUMC to be more overtly affirming and inclusive, advocated at congregational meetings for further concrete actions. While these proposals were not immediately approved, neither were they dismissed entirely; the congregation gave the proposals to a committee or study group for further discernment and action. One lifelong member who is straight reflected that we “have been willing to forbear different positions on LGBTQ welcome because we respect each other.”⁴⁶ This forbearance also played a significant role in the journey toward reconciliation between straight congregants whose relationships had fractured in the 2003 discernment process.

Forbearance, however, meant a longer drawn-out process. I saw the heaviness, dejection, and pain in the faces of LGBTQ members when a decision was delayed or needed further discernment; I heard their pain and resignation—

⁴⁴ Two exceptions, when TUMC used words, were 1) blessing the marriage of two congregants whose earlier ceremony had limited role for TUMC pastor and 2) Pride Sunday litany.

⁴⁵ Peter Haresnape, personal correspondence with author, November 15, 2018.

⁴⁶ Tobi Thiessen, personal correspondence with author, November 13, 2018.

and, at times, determination—in their voices. While forbearance was a positive force among straight congregants, it was not positive for LGBTQ siblings.

During these years, the various committees and task forces carried out their mandates with seriousness and comprehensiveness. They presented recommendations not with a sense of urgency or deadlines but “in a studied, loving way, and encouraged us to move along together.”⁴⁷ Former pastor Marilyn Zehr, who came out as LGBTQ in 2016, remembers the crucial importance of “listening, listening and more listening . . . to every single voice . . . honouring resistance as well as affirmation” as the congregation moved carefully toward supporting our pastors to marry same-sex couples.⁴⁸ That was the lasting impact of the 2003 sexuality statement that ended with a congregational covenant to remain in community in spite of hurts and disagreements, with a commitment to continued dialogue and discernment.

Zehr identifies how TUMC’s practice echoed Bevans and Schroeder’s focus on Spirit-led listening and dialogue infused with humility. Congregational listening circles were crucial during the 2016 journey when the lead pastor revealed her LGBTQ identity. The former associate pastor attended one such circle where she experienced worship and heard an apology: “Near the beginning of the circle someone said, ‘We did it wrong 13 years ago, and I don’t want to make that mistake again’ looking right at me. That felt like an apology.” Almost all in the circle referenced wanting to right past wrongs.⁴⁹

TUMC’s welcome statement—“We welcome people of all sexual orientations”—is another example of the respect and forbearance that sustained discernment processes. Gradually becoming prominent in worship services, the welcome signaled the move toward fuller LGBTQ inclusion, while at the same time confessing that the congregation was still on the journey. Its framing—“although we don’t always agree with one another, we share a belief in Christ and a desire to be his followers”—turned out to be very valuable. One congregant reflected that it allowed some to “hold a minority view but still feel part of the community.”⁵⁰ At the same time, Neufeld Harder suggests, the statement did not “encourage us as a congregation to become a strong advocate for LGBTQ persons by joining a more activist movement.”⁵¹ This again required forbearance by those who desired such a level of inclusion and welcome. Eventually the congregation dropped the caveat that we don’t always agree with one another.

47 Thiessen.

48 Marilyn Zehr, personal correspondence with author, November 19, 2018; Thiessen, personal correspondence.

49 Personal communication with the former associate pastor, February 16, 2021.

50 Tobi Thiessen, personal correspondence.

51 Neufeld Harder, 8.

Solid forbearance and trust along the reconciliation journey resulted in the later conflict-free decision to allow TUMC pastors to marry LGBTQ couples. The Board led careful dialogue with both individuals and the congregation in formal meetings as they developed the proposal. When the Board finally presented it to the congregation for a decision, a microphone was passed along all the rows of chairs for everyone to give their response individually. Neufeld Harder recalls: “As I heard person after person say: ‘I agree,’ my eyes filled with tears. Some of these persons had been very opposed 13 years ago. I also heard a few say that though they personally did not agree, they would not stand in the way of the decision. There was a holy moment when consensus was reached.”⁵² Numerous LGBTQ congregants and allies wept with a mix of relief, sadness, and joy.

A holy moment, indeed, and it was remembered as such by many congregants.⁵³ And worship was central to every step on this holy journey toward healing and reconciliation. As former pastor Harder reflected, “In the end, we all (people on both sides of the issue) came to the realization that our worship of God through Jesus, was more basic and more important than were our differences and disagreements . . . no matter how upset we were with each other.” He suggests, “Our worship held us together when our theology and our reading of the Bible didn’t.”

The missional witness implications of this realization are not to be minimized. As Cardoza-Orlandi, Roth, Dueck, and Kreider and Kreider correctly proclaim, worship is the core of all mission and witness. Moreover, Harder suggests that the congregation’s brokenness and pain laid and confessed before God has made TUMC “a much stronger congregation now than we were then.” He concludes, “Our worship is a key part of that strength.”⁵⁴

Another holy worship-filled moment was hiring a pastor who is LGBTQ, whose same-sex marriage TUMC had celebrated. This step on the journey was heard across the North American Mennonite LGBTQ community and in the LGBTQ Christian community in Toronto⁵⁵ as it echoed Bevans and Schroeder’s passion for justice and reconciliation between oppressed and marginalized peoples and those who for centuries have oppressed and marginalized them. In contrast, the Mennonite missiologists explored in this article focus primarily on individual reconciliation—with God and with others—and thus are less helpful in framing theologically how missional worship extends the ministry of recon-

⁵² Neufeld Harder, 11.

⁵³ “On the Way Café (adult Christian education class), November 25, 2018, author’s notes.

⁵⁴ Gary Harder, personal correspondence with author.

⁵⁵ Pieter Niemeyer, personal conversation.

ciliation to broken relationships between groups where historic injustice and harm have been inflicted and suffered.

While the hiring of a pastor who identified as LGBTQ declared loudly that the congregation's inclusion was full and unfettered, TUMC would do well to remember Bevans and Schroeder's witness that reconciliation is "offered first and foremost by the victims of injustice and violence."⁵⁶ Embracing this truth could require, for example, that TUMC ask LGBTQ congregants what else is needed on the journey toward reconciliation. Have we listened deeply enough to their pain of rejection, their courage amid profound vulnerability when we straight congregants examined, discussed, and critiqued their identities and lives? While we as a congregation have shown numerous concrete steps of repentance, I wonder if we have fully heard our LGBTQ siblings' experiences of rejection and marginalization by the church. We expressed our repentance and apology primarily in changed behavior; perhaps a comprehensive repentance and apology along with a request for forgiveness expressed explicitly in worship would be another step on our journey of reconciliation with our LGBTQ siblings. Whatever the next steps are, we as the church are called to, in Bevans and Schroeder's words, "witness in its life and proclaim in fearless hope that God's grace *does* heal."⁵⁷

IV. Mission: Reconciliation as a Journey

Reconciliation has been a journey for TUMC rather than a well-defined process. The work of the theologians explored in this article—other than Legge, and Bevans and Schroeder—portray reconciliation as restored relationships that happen as a matter of course. TUMC's journey shows the need for significant missiological nuance. In addition, the congregation's journey involved several sets of broken relationships, as delineated in the case study introduction. This presents complexity that the missiological voices did not address in their treatment of reconciliation in worship.

TUMC took numerous solid steps along the journey while omitting or not completing other necessary ones. Legge is alone among the theological writers in noting the various crucial components in moving toward right relationships: truth telling, lamentation, repentance, and reparation are some of them.⁵⁸ TUMC could have benefited from a comprehensive framework of a reconciliation journey, especially on the importance of deep listening to the wounded, and of explicit apology.

56 Bevans and Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue*, 70–71.

57 Bevans and Schroeder, 70–71.

58 See also Bergen, footnote 8.

Along the journey, the congregation embodied steps of reconciliation in worship. Bevans and Schroeder, along with Dueck, best articulate TUMC's lived experience with the symbiotic relationship of worship and reconciliation. TUMC's journey also exemplifies Bevans and Schroeder's counsel that the path toward reconciliation requires a spirituality rather than a strategy. TUMC lived our spirituality out in worship in Sunday morning services and in many leadership meetings during the week.

Observing TUMC as a case study, in the context of a more expansive definition of worship, we can see these steps and leaps toward reconciliation as central to the church's mission and witness as Paul first articulated in 2 Corinthians 5:18–19: “All this is from God, who reconciled us through Christ—and made us ministers of that reconciliation. This means that through Christ, the world was fully reconciled again to God, who didn't hold our transgressions against us, but instead entrusted us with this message of reconciliation.”⁵⁹

⁵⁹ *The Inclusive Bible: The First Egalitarian Translation* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2009), slightly adapted by the author.

“Do This in Remembrance of Me”

A Brethren Understanding of the Lord’s Supper as an Alternative Political Witness

Jason Barnhart

While all the versions of the kingdom of the world acquire and exercise power over others, the kingdom of God, incarnated and modeled in the person of Jesus Christ, advances only by exercising power under others. It expands by manifesting the power of self-sacrificial, Calvary-like love.¹

—Gregory Boyd

This article explores the political ramifications of the Brethren understanding of the Lord’s Supper. The Brethren is a movement that began in the early 1700s with a blending of Anabaptism and Radical Pietism. The Radical Pietist side stressed the necessity of a personal (though not private) relationship/experience with Christ. The Anabaptist witness balanced this with the importance of community visible through the corporate, relational gathering of the body.

Unfortunately, in an all-too-common narrative of churches in America in the early twentieth century, several splits occurred. The struggling Brethren, reeling from the fundamentalist/modernist split, aligned themselves entirely with a growing expression of American evangelicalism,² which stressed many of the virtues of the Pietist witness to the exclusion of the Anabaptist socially minded witness.

Two Anabaptist practices of the Brethren that have stood the test of time are (1) our understanding of the Lord’s Supper as three-fold—footwashing, Eucha-

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¹ Gregory Boyd, *The Myth of a Christian Nation: How the Quest for Political Power Is Destroying the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 14.

² I realize that defining “evangelical” is a work unto itself. For the sake of this essay, I separate evangelical, meaning “bearers of good news,” from American evangelicalism, the particularly distorted understanding of evangelical that has been wrapped up with American politics. It is with this latter philosophy/theology that this essay takes issue.

rist, and love feast—and (2) baptism by trine-immersion (posture of kneeling and being immersed three times forward). This essay will focus on the Lord’s Supper and how this practice helps the Brethren recapture a rich, yet lost, Anabaptist witness—specifically Mennonite—that is constitutive of our historic identity.

Recognition of this lost connection with Anabaptist witness prompted the idea for this article’s examination of the Lord’s Supper from a Brethren-Anabaptist perspective, drawing on the work of John Howard Yoder.³ The richness of the Brethren tradition comes in its attempt as a church body to be as close to the biblical narrative as possible. And out of that anchoring in the New Testament comes a voice to a larger audience within Christianity, particularly in the West.

This essay explores the Lord’s Supper as understood from an Anabaptist tradition and examines the political implications that it sheds on our very modern understanding of national identity (i.e., North American). It does so by bringing this specific tradition into conversation with various theologians and political philosophers, both from within and without the tradition, and many from the Catholic tradition.

The central argument of this essay is that the common fellowship, as experienced in the Lord’s Supper, or communion, is a radical challenge to the state’s orientation of “common space,” “common identity,” and “common good.”

Language of Lord’s Supper: What Do We Mean by Such a Title?

When Jesus gathers his disciples in the upper room, they are not preoccupied with the big question that dominates later Christianity (especially after the twelfth and into the sixteenth century) as to what happens to the elements of the Eucharist. As we approach this scene, detailed in all the Gospels, we must attempt to get into the minds of those first followers.

The elements of the Eucharist have traditionally been understood one of two ways: (1) as sacramental (Catholicism and Lutheranism), where the bread

³ The writings of John Howard Yoder sought to assist Mennonites, along with other Anabaptists, to return to the particulars of their faith and to bring those distinctives into conversation with the larger catholic church. In *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World*, Yoder examines five distinct Mennonite practices grounded in the narrative of the New Testament and explores the political significance of those practices for the church today. (Note: The use of Yoder brings challenges related to his known sexual violence against women. Acknowledgment in this essay of the contribution that Yoder offered in the recovery of Anabaptist thought is in no way intended to ignore or minimize the harm caused to his many victims. For further study into Yoder’s maleficence and the decades-long work of church discipline to censure him, see Rachel Waltner Goossen, “Defanging the Beast?: Mennonite Responses to John Howard Yoder’s Sexual Abuse,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 89 [January 2015]: 7–80).

and the wine *become* the body and blood of the Lord through the process of transubstantiation or consubstantiation; (2) as symbolic (Zwingli and most of Protestantism), where the bread and the cup *remind* us of the body and blood of Christ.

The historic Brethren position is a third way between these two positions. While Brethren hold that the elements are not sacramental, they do believe there is a real presence of Christ manifested by the gathering of the believing community as the community reenacts the story of John 13 to remind itself of the common story that binds all its members together around the Lord’s Supper.

When we remind ourselves of our common story, we realize that the extraordinary power of this meal comes in rather ordinary, non-flashy packaging. Jesus was simply sharing a meal with his followers. They were not partaking of Mass or the Eucharist or even the Lord’s Supper. They were simply sharing a common meal together. Furthermore, we are told repeatedly that the disciples struggled with the true identity of Jesus. They wouldn’t even have realized at that point that this would be their “last” supper with Jesus.

John Howard Yoder shares this understanding when he writes, “What Jesus must have meant, and what the record indicates that his first followers took him to mean, was ‘whenever you have your common meal.’ The meal Jesus blessed that evening and claimed as his memorial was their *ordinary* partaking together of food for the body.”⁴

A different understanding of the significance of the Lord’s Supper is emerging with Yoder’s comments and the larger Anabaptist perspective. Although Jesus’s statements about his body and blood certainly merit theological inquiry, attending to the gathered people changes the focus of the questions. Instead of a conversation about what happens to the elements during the service, we have a broader conversation of what type of people are created by the Lord’s Supper and what trajectory such a meal places disciples on as they gather for it.

In agreement, the late Vernard Eller, Church of the Brethren historian and theologian, affirmed this understanding of the Lord’s Supper:

The first implication to be noted is that things can’t be both ways at once. If the Lord’s Supper is what we suggest it is, it cannot at the same time be what the church has regularly taken it to be. . . . We will not find Scripture supporting the sacramental view that the Supper accomplishes some sort of self-operative transaction between God’s divine sphere and our human sphere through the vehicle of consecrated, divinized elements or objects. No such “mystical transformations” are involved.

Neither is there involved a “presence of Christ” that is any different in kind from his personal presence as we experience it at other tables, in other compa-

⁴ John Howard Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 2001), 16.

nies, on other occasions. No, we remember him there by the same operations of memory used in remembering him (or remembering others) in all kinds of situations. The communion service is designed simply to make us more aware of and sensitive to that unmediated presence of Jesus which is available any time and any place without the office of either priest or element.⁵

The Lord's Supper, as celebrated by the church (twice a year among Brethren) is but an ultimate reminder of the real presence of Jesus at all meals, indeed at all times. Because of the importance of the Lord's Supper as the common meal shared among disciples, Eller argues vehemently against a sacramental understanding of the Lord's Supper. Such a view, he states, transformed "table fellowship" into an aspect of worship liturgy that does not emphasize the community gathered as constitutive of the revelation of Christ in the meal. About this truncated understanding, Eller argues,

It makes no difference whether the participants (better: recipients) know one another—or even *want* to know one another. But how can we claim to be commemorating and perpetuating *the table fellowship of Jesus* (calling it "the Lord's Supper"), when our practice retains not so much as one point of likeness with his?⁶

And because the Lord's Supper was originally "table fellowship," a common meal in the same vein as the Jewish Passover, the church ate the meal together as a participating, and re-creating their story, in Christ.⁷ Eller continues:

Equivalently then, it seems clear that, regarding the earliest Christians, as often as any number of them gathered for the honest purpose of eating together because they were hungry—this common meal *was* in fact also a Lord's

⁵ Vernard Eller, "Could the Church Have It All Wrong?" House Church Central, accessed November 2, 2011, <http://www.hccentral.com/eller9/chap5.html#a>.

⁶ Eller.

⁷ Eller is also quick to speak to the uniqueness of the Lord's Supper from the Jewish Passover meal. Eller believes that the Gospel accounts of Jesus's last supper with his disciples offer inconclusive evidence, at best, that Jesus is in fact sharing a Passover meal with them. In this same work Eller contends,

We are unnecessarily complicating the matter when we try to make it hinge upon a detail of dating—as to whether Jesus' Thursday evening meal did in fact coincide with that year's regular date for the Jewish Passover meal. The problem of chronological calculation comes about in this way: All three of the synoptic Gospels have Jesus talking with his disciples about preparing the upper room for "Passover." Luke goes a step further and also has Jesus, in the room, at the supper, call it a "Passover." However, the Fourth Gospel has things a bit different in saying that the supper occurred "before Passover"—so that the death of Jesus coincided with the slaughtering of the lambs (which would be eaten, presumably, on the Passover occasion of what would have to be Friday evening).

Supper. It was supposed to be a conscious extension of *his* table fellowship and a bread-and-cup remembering of *his* story. Both Passover and the Lord’s Supper are *meant* to be integral strands in the religious fabric of everyday family life. If it showed no other traditional influences at all, the Lord’s Supper would still stand as a remembrance, a recital, of the table fellowship practiced by the Lord Jesus.⁸

This only begs the question, why is the Lord’s Supper best understood as “table fellowship” and not the more common Eucharistic understandings that have developed over the centuries? The first response is quite simple: the “table fellowship” understanding is better supported by the example of Jesus in John 13. But what about the understanding of the Lord’s Supper within the Synoptic Gospels or the Apostle Paul’s understanding? Are they in agreement with the Lord’s Supper being understood as a common meal?

To get at the answer to this, we have to ask what the *common meal* really means. In other words, why would Jesus use a common meal to be the reminder for the future of the movement of his life, death, and resurrection?

Importance of the Lord’s Supper as Common Meal

New Testament theologian Peter Lampe explores what it means to “proclaim” Christ’s death in a very participative understanding of the Eucharist:

What, then, does it mean to “proclaim” Christ’s death in the Eucharist? In the Eucharist the death of Jesus Christ is not made present and “proclaimed” (1 Cor. 11:26) only by the *sacramental acts* of breaking bread and drinking wine from one cup. In the Eucharist, Christ’s death is proclaimed and made present by means of our giving ourselves up to others. Our love for others represents Christ’s death to other human beings. Only by actively loving and caring for others does the participant in the Eucharist “proclaim” Christ’s death as something that happened for others.⁹

Lampe calls for a communal—rather than a traditional sacramental—understanding of the Lord’s Supper, where the gathered body itself becomes a sort of sacrament.¹⁰ If the sacraments have historically been a way for the presence of

⁸ Eller.

⁹ Peter Lampe, quoted in Dale R. Stoffer, ed., *The Lord’s Supper: Believers Church Perspectives* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1997), 125.

¹⁰ Pilgram Marpeck (1495–1556) develops this idea further. See Pilgram Marpeck, *Confession of Faith, Commentary and Pastoral Application* (Hillsboro, KS: Kindred, 2000), 148. Marpeck is an important voice in this discussion as his exposition on the Lord’s Supper is a guide for an exploration toward an Anabaptist ecclesiology constituted by the Lord’s Supper. For a more detailed study of Anabaptism and the Lord’s Supper, see

Christ, the very divine life, to be administered or made present among us, then why couldn't the gathered church itself be a sacrament?¹¹

C. C. Pecknold, a theologian at the Catholic University of America, speaks in a similar vein (albeit within a sacramental tradition):

When Christians are drawn together, gathered in the body of Christ through the sacrament of our unity, when we are signed with one Spirit, we have access to God in Christ. It is here that people gain a share in divine power by becoming not only members of Christ's body, but in doing so we become members one of another, where each of us shares in the good of the others.¹²

The phrase "sacrament of our unity" is very important for this conversation as Pecknold ties it to the work of Henri de Lubac, a twentieth-century Jesuit theologian whose works are considered an important catalyst to Vatican II. In his book *Corpus Mysticum*, de Lubac operates with this central thesis: "The Eucharist makes the Church when the Church makes the Eucharist." His central claim is that as the church gathers to partake of the bread and the cup, the real presence of Christ is manifested through the unity created around the elements. The sacraments unite the individual members of the church to manifest the presence of Christ to the watching world.

This understanding of the Eucharist has similarities to the Brethren understanding of the Lord's Supper. While Brethren hold that the elements are entirely symbolic—a point of departure from de Lubac's understanding—they also believe that the real presence of Christ is manifested in the body united around the elements, including footwashing and the love feast.¹³

John D. Rempel, *The Lord's Supper in Anabaptism: A Study in the Christology of Balthasar Hubmaier, Pilgram Marpeck, and Dirk Philips* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1993).

11 A side conversation to the one on "sacraments" is the Brethren understanding of "ordinances" as those things that Christ ordained us to do. Brethren have traditionally rejected the language of sacrament, finding the term A) not supported by Scripture and B) tied to a problematic praxis within sacramental theology. Dale Stoffer's book, *The Lord's Supper: Believers Church Perspectives*, is a great resource for this topic and others regarding the Lord's Supper from a Believers Church perspective.

12 C. C. Pecknold, *Christianity and Politics: A Brief Guide to the History* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2010), 141.

13 Brethren, in their quest to live as closely to the New Testament example as possible, believe that footwashing is just as important to the Lord's Supper as are the elements known as the Eucharist. There is no question that in John's account of the Lord's Supper, Jesus initiates the footwashing. The significance of this act is apparent in four ways in John 13: 1) footwashing is seen as an image of Jesus's atoning death, calling to mind the cleansing of the believer through Jesus's blood. It is also a reminder of daily dying to self through mutual submission to one another; 2) footwashing (vv. 14–17) is to be contin-

Thus, each element of the Brethren Lord’s Supper has a vertical (upward to God) and horizontal (outward to neighbor) meaning and purpose as sketched below:

Part of Service	Vertical Meaning	Horizontal Meaning
Footwashing	Cleansing	Mutual submission
Love Feast	Jesus’s love for disciples	Love for one another
Eucharist	Jesus’s sacrificial death	Unity within the body of Christ ¹⁴

At a Brethren communion service, an important passage is from the tenth chapter of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. It speaks to the communal and participative nature of the Lord’s Supper:

The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. Consider the people of Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices partners in the altar? What do I imply then? That food sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be partners with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Or are we provoking the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he? (1 Cor 10:14–22, NRSV)

The context for this passage is Paul’s warning against eating sacrificial meals at pagan temples. Paul argues that as pagans sacrifice to demons and idols, the harm isn’t the idols themselves. Instead, as people sacrifice to the idols, they are *partnering* with the demons associated with those idols. In the same way, as the church gathers corporately around the meal that commemorates the sacrifice of Christ, they partner with Jesus. They become members of the one “loaf” that is the body of Christ. In a communion service, the gathered body proclaims at the same time, in unison, “The bread which we break is the communion of

ued in Johannine communities (as explicit in perpetuation as the words of institution); 3) footwashing appears in a sacramental context, and some early Christian writers even saw it as a sacrament; 4) John methodically details the footwashing (for example, Peter’s remarks) and even tells us that it happened out of place from what was customary; instead of being done as soon as the disciples arrived, the footwashing interrupted the meal. For more on this, see John Christopher Thomas, “Footwashing within the Context of the Lord’s Supper” in Stoffer, *The Lord’s Supper*, 184.

¹⁴ Stoffer, *The Lord’s Supper*, 58.

the body of Christ; the cup which we bless is the communion of the blood of Christ.”

Brethren (and Anabaptists) have historically used this passage in their discourse on the Lord’s Supper because it speaks strongly to a communal understanding of the tradition. Indeed, a Brethren understanding of the Lord’s Supper is entirely corporate, embodied in each of the three parts as noted in the chart above. The reality of Christ is manifested in the believer and their neighbor as we are all gathered together in Christ.

The question that emerges from the Brethren understanding of the Lord’s Supper could also be the same question asked of Jesus in the famous parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke’s Gospel: “Who is my neighbor?” (10:29). Is it simply my neighbor in the church—the person sitting right next to me at a communion service—or is it broader than that?

In Acts 2 we read the following:

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. (vv. 42–47 NRSV)

This picture of the early Jerusalem church offers us a significant window into the importance of this act called the Lord’s Supper, or “the breaking of bread.” Mentioned twice in this passage, “breaking of bread” is a key part of the larger gathering and the more intimate gatherings inside the home. It is also an economic act of selling all property and possessions and giving to “anyone who had need.”

The picture of Acts 2 is a fulfillment of the promise of Deuteronomy 15:4 and the Sabbatical Year (every seventh year): “There will . . . be no one in need among you (NRSV). The risen Lord had radically shifted the priorities of this first-century church, and, because of the implications of breaking bread—the sharing of common meals together—the poor among them were given provision.

This explains the Apostle Paul’s rebuke in 1 Corinthians 11:

In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God’s approval. So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord’s Supper you eat, for when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private

suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry and another gets drunk. Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing? (vv. 17–22, NIV)

The rebuke regards economic abuse. In first-century Corinth, if you were wealthy you could afford to pay hired hands to take care of the job site and could thus arrive to the service of the Lord's Supper early. If you were poor, you were more than likely working for one of the wealthier individuals, which meant you arrived later to the meal because of your duties on the job site.

The abuse arising from this was that the wealthier individuals arrived early, drank too much wine, and were gluttons before any of the poorer workers could arrive. As these workers arrived, the wealthier individuals were already inebriated and the common meal was ruined because of their greed.

Yoder locates this scene in its larger textual context:

Requests for guidance have to do with table fellowship: with meat that has been offered to idols (chapters 8 and 10) and with class segregated tables (chapter 11). If their meal failed to reflect the overcoming of social stratification, Paul told the Corinthians that the participants would be celebrating their own condemnation (1 Cor. 11:29). In celebrating their fellowship around the table, the early Christians testified that the messianic age, often pictured as a banquet, had begun.¹⁵

The messianic age, the “kingdom of God at hand,” to borrow Mark's language, was revealed through the table fellowship of the early church. To the watching world, a peculiar people revealed a potent reality that showed no poor among them. As they broke bread, ate a common meal, and quite possibly washed feet, they testified to the presence of the kingdom of God in the present and revealed their collective hope of the grand consummation of that kingdom still in the future.

Transformation of the “Common” Meal

The early church understanding of “common,” as apparent through the Lord's Supper practiced as table fellowship, even appears in extra-biblical works like the *Didache*, an early manual of church practice and discipline. The author writes, “The *Didache* counsels *synkoinonein*, which is to *co-koinonize*, to copartner in all things: ‘thou shalt not turn away from him that is in want, but thou shalt share (*synkoinonein*) all things with thy brother, and shalt not say that they are thine own.’”¹⁶ Up until the second century, this understanding of “synkoi-

¹⁵ Yoder, *Body Politics*, 18.

¹⁶ Lee C. Camp, *Mere Discipleship: Radical Discipleship in a Rebellious World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2003), 178.

nonein,” manifested through the common meal, was seen as remembrance and eschatological hope of a kingdom yet to be fully realized.

By the second century, however, table fellowship and Eucharist had been separated. Everett Ferguson, professor emeritus at Abilene Christian University, offers an explanation for this separation:

[Communicating the gospel with the Hellenized world] required Christians to make many adjustments and reinterpretations in their effort to communicate with their society. The interpretation of the Lord’s Supper was included in those matters influenced by new ways of looking at things. A major aspect was a shift from Jewish thought in terms of function and relationships, to Greek philosophical thought about ontology (or being, where Plato had directed his attention) and substance (where Aristotle had made important analyses).¹⁷

Writings of theologians from the second through fourth centuries attest to this shift in understanding. Justin Martyr in his *First Apology*, which he wrote in the second century, shows the new understanding of Eucharist as separated from table fellowship:

We do not receive [the Eucharist] as common bread and drink. In the same manner as Jesus Christ our Savior became flesh through the word of God and had flesh and blood *for our salvation* (emphasis added), so also the food for which thanks was given through the prayer of the word that is from him, from which our blood and flesh are nourished by metabolism, we have been taught to be the flesh and blood of that Jesus who became flesh.¹⁸

This shift in practice reflected a shift away from understanding the Lord’s Supper as a perpetuation of the table fellowship of Jesus through a common meal. Beginning in the second century, the elements of the Eucharist were separated from the common meal and understood as elements “for our salvation.” This new understanding became increasingly engrained as the conversation shifted from table fellowship to what occurs to the elements themselves, as noted by Cyril, bishop of Jerusalem (ca. 349–378):

The bread and the wine of the Eucharist before the holy invocation of the worshipful Trinity was simple bread and wine, but when the invocation is done, the bread becomes the body of Christ and wine the blood of Christ.¹⁹

17 Everett Ferguson in Stoffer, *The Lord’s Supper*, 23.

18 Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 1.66.2.

19 Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogical Catechesis*, 1:7.

As this shift in conversation took place, the alternative political witness of the church, through their understanding of “common” around the table, became increasingly accommodated to the empire by the eleventh century.

The Lord’s Supper as Alternative Political Witness

Up to this point, this article has traced the understanding of the word “common”—namely, what is “in common”—from the New Testament understanding of the Lord’s Supper as table fellowship. A central question for the remainder of this essay is, How did we get to a place where the Eucharist is understood sacramentally, separate from table fellowship, with a mediator to administer it?

The Brethren have always understood the Eucharist as a *part* of the three-fold communion service, which also includes footwashing and the love feast. For a moment, though, let’s step back and briefly trace the changing understanding of the Eucharist.

Throughout the patristic era and the development of the Imperial Church, church and empire increasingly blended together. With this blending, the Lord’s Supper as table fellowship no longer made sense, and the shift in understanding regarding this central practice began.²⁰ When the church was a persecuted minority, the Lord’s Supper constituted this community as they shared a common meal in the already/not yet tension of the kingdom of God. When Christianity became a national religion, the common meal was no longer necessary for the social cohesion of the group’s peculiar identity. The larger empire now understood itself as a new Christian common.

The hierarchical structure of the Imperial Church gave way to an understanding of the Lord’s Supper as Eucharist, which was seen as the *medicine of salvation* to the sinfulness of humanity.²¹ The Eucharist became separate from the common meal of which it had been a part, and the church’s understanding of “common” was forever altered.

De Lubac persuasively argues that prior to the twelfth century, the reference *corpus mysticum* (mystical body) described the sacramental elements of the Eucharist, while the *corpus Christi verum* (true body of Christ) described the

²⁰ By the second century, the Eucharist was being separated from the agape meal in certain circles within Christianity. The increasingly blended nature of church and empire under the reign of Constantine only served to exacerbate this separation. While Constantine’s reign cannot alone be blamed for these shifts in understanding of the Lord’s Supper, his reign serves to perpetuate this truncated understanding by making this distortion of Christianity and its practices the “official” religion of the Roman Empire.

²¹ The church had hierarchical structures as early as Ignatius of Antioch in the second century, but Constantine’s reign would come to wed this hierarchy with the Roman Empire in what is known as the Imperial Church.

gathered (ecclesial) body.²² By the twelfth century, “these terms were reversed, and the church came to be called *corpus mysticum* while the Eucharistic elements were designated *corpus Christi verum*.”²³

This tracing of the historic development of the Eucharist in de Lubac’s tome, *Corpus Mysticum*, shows that once the understanding of the Eucharist developed to accommodate the empire, it opened the door to a slippery slope that led to a major shift in how the church was understood in relationship to power (hear “empire”). While de Lubac does not seek to associate the Eucharist with a “common meal” understanding, his writings are beneficial to show the ongoing dissolution of the common meal throughout the medieval era; and he offers his critique while remaining within the Catholic/Jesuit tradition (a source of tension before Vatican II).

The downfall of de Lubac’s project is much the same as Luther’s; namely, to what point are we attempting to return the conversation? It seems that de Lubac, like Luther, is unwilling to reexamine the understanding of Eucharist as part of a more common meal but instead supports a return to a quasi-sacrament of community understanding (like Marpeck but minus table fellowship).²⁴

The subsequent shifts in understanding of the Eucharist (over and against the common meal) are further exacerbated by changing sociopolitical understandings of empire and sovereignty with the rise of the nation-state. Prior to the sixteenth century, nations or states, as we know them, did not exist. Territories were loosely connected under the larger identity of empire. The development of the idea of the sovereign state and the spread of the Protestant Reformation both, in various ways, show a reaction to a centralization of ecclesial power.

Catholic theologian William Cavanaugh in his provocative book *Migrations of the Holy: God, State, and the Political Meaning of the Church*, traces the awkward history of the relationship between church and state from the sixteenth

22 See Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006).

23 Bryan C. Hollon, *Everything Is Sacred: Spiritual Exegesis in the Political Theology of Henri de Lubac* (Theopolitical Visions) (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009), loc. 1337, Kindle.

24 According to de Lubac, the waning of the communal nature of the Eucharist began in the eleventh century with the controversy over Berengar of Tours. Details of the actual controversy have prompted significant debate. It is possible that Berengar did not deny the real presence but argued against transubstantiation. Regardless, he publicly recanted any views counter to transubstantiation in his 1059 confession, in which he argued that “the bread and wine which are placed on the altar are after consecration not only a sacrament but also the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the senses not only sacramentally but in truth are taken and broken by the hands of the priests and crushed by the teeth of the faithful” (Paul F. Bradshaw and Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Eucharistic Liturgies: Their Evolution and Interpretation* [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012], 225).

century forward. He describes the sixteenth-century shift from “complex spaces” to a “simple space” as defined by a sovereign nation-state:

What takes place in the modern era—not complete in some places until the late nineteenth century—is a reconfiguration of space that is much more profound than the creation of an expanded common space through the gathering up and coordination of formerly scattered elements into one. What happens is a shift from “complex space”—varied communal contexts with overlapping jurisdictions and levels of authority—to a “simple space,” characterized by a duality of individual and state. There is an enfeebling of local common spaces by the power of the center and a simultaneous parochialization of the imagination of Christendom into that of the sovereign state. To say that the state “creates” society is not to deny that families, guilds, clans, and other social groups existed before the state. Rather, the state “creates” society by replacing the complex overlapping loyalties of medieval *societates* with one society, bounded by borders and ruled by one sovereign to whom allegiance is owed in a way that trumps all other allegiances.²⁵

This gathering up of complex, common spaces into one simple, common space is but another nail in the coffin of the church as an alternative community that manifests an understanding of common that is contrary to the ways of the world. With this gathering up of spaces (including churches), the newly formed state develops an idea once attributed to God—namely, sovereignty. Cavanaugh writes, “The conceptual leap that accompanies the advent of the state in the sixteenth century is the invention of sovereignty, a doctrine that asserts the incontestable right of the central power to make and enforce law for those people who fall within recognized territorial borders.”²⁶

As the state continues to centralize power via the myth of common identity, purpose, and good, power and rights continue to be relinquished by the individual to serve the purposes of the state. The myth throughout history is that there actually is such a thing as a “common identity” or “common good” that the state seeks to protect. The seventeenth-century philosopher Thomas Hobbes argues that what is “common” is not actually good but a “shared evil.” Cavanaugh elaborates:

The foundation of the state in Hobbes is not a common good but rather a shared evil: the fear of death. Each person is possessed of a “perpetual and restless desire of power after power that ceaseth only in death.” Individuals in the state of nature do not occupy a common space, for each has a *jus in omnia*, a right over everything, and that makes them enemies, locked in the war of all against all. The only way out of this condition is for each to surrender

25 William T. Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy: God, State, and the Political Meaning of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 18.

26 Cavanaugh, 19.

his or her will to the sovereign, who gathers up the many into one.²⁷

In light of this “shared evil,” one must ask how the state deals with pluralities like the church. Especially a church whose Lord tells his followers not to fear death and that he, himself, has actually conquered death. In response to such pluralities, the state enters into a sort of dance of give and take. According to Hobbes, the church must be absorbed by the state so as not to challenge the state’s power. Later philosophers called for a sort of privatization of the faith as the state had to seek to centralize power all the while offering the illusion of diversity (seen as a gift from the all-powerful state). Cavanaugh traces the developments of the conversation from Hobbes’s absorption of the church by the state to the privatization of the church away from the state in the writings of seventeenth-century English philosopher John Locke:

What Hobbes accomplished by absorbing the church into the state, Locke accomplished by privatizing the church. Peace would never be attained if essentially undecidable matters such as the end of human life were left open to public debate. What is common is therefore redefined as follows: “The commonwealth seems to me to be a society of men constituted only for the procuring, preserving, and advancing their own civil interests. Civil interests I call life, liberty, health, and indolency of body; and the possession of outward things, such as money, lands, houses, furniture, and the like.”²⁸

Cavanaugh continues, “When the church is viewed as particular—as one of the many in civil society—and the nation-state is viewed as universal—as the larger unifying reality—then it is inevitable that the one will absorb the many, in the putative interests of harmony and peace. Indeed, war becomes a means of furthering the integration of the many into the one: we must all stand together when faced with an enemy.”²⁹ In other words, for the state to maintain and perpetuate its existence, pluralities like the church must be absorbed or privatized. And in both cases, it is the larger unifying understanding of the state that calls the shots. Already we see a very exclusive understanding of “common” developing in the guise of the state.

Pecknold develops this history a little further for us and shows how even the foundation for our liberal democracy takes shape precisely in this developing conversation of church and state:

The ideas that order our Western political imagination and form the structure for modern liberal democracy were formed out of the patterns of thinking that developed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Those patterns began to draw on theological imagery and meaning to bolster their self-con-

²⁷ Cavanaugh, 20.

²⁸ Cavanaugh, 21.

²⁹ Cavanaugh, 68.

sciously secular ideas about government.³⁰

Political philosopher Sheldon Wolin affirms this by discerning a series of historic shifts from the medieval common good to Luther’s individual conscience to Calvin’s collective conscience and, finally, to Locke’s social conscience. The latter is easily transcribed to economic terms when “personal interest” is subordinated to what is in the “public interest.”³¹ By the time eighteenth-century Genevan philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau bases democratic freedom on the individual freed from social constraints, the Lockean “social conscience” gives way to the need for community expressed primarily in economic terms³²—for example, Locke’s language of “work” and “sacrifice.”³³

Wolin concludes, “In retrospect the long journey from private judgment to social conformity appears as the desperate effort of liberals to fashion a substitute for the sense of community that had been lost.”³⁴ As he understands it, “The fugitive character of democracy is directly related to the fact about it that Aristotle emphasized: democracy’s politics is the creation of those who must work, who cannot hire proxies to promote their interests, and for whom participation, as distinguished from voting, is necessarily a sacrifice.” Democracy, for Wolin, is radically participatory and demands, as Pecknold noted earlier on the Lockean inheritance, “work and sacrifice (words with a theological memory).”³⁵

And in all of this, Cavanaugh calls us back to the power of the state shaped for the “common good” in relationship to pluralities like the church. He argues, “Pluralism [as in churches] will always be a crisis for the liberal state, and the solution to the crisis of pluralism is to rally around the nation-state, the locus of a mystical communion that rescues us from the conflicts of civil society.”³⁶ The state must always elevate an exclusive understanding of common that will

30 Pecknold, *Christianity and Politics*, 122.

31 Luther elevates the role of individual conscience in his desire to provide a corrective to the centralization of ecclesial power. He then de-politicizes the church and elevates the role of the individual will. Calvin recognizes that both church and state serve a collective role in shaping the common good, which he understood to be God. Calvin, for a time, favored theocracy. Locke understands the role of the state as protector of a social contract. Like Hobbes, Locke believes that the state secures individuals’ rights to pursue their own interests. The highest of these, for Locke, was the right to property. Locke’s works were influential for Thomas Jefferson, and Lockean language is evident in the *Declaration of Independence’s* understanding of the “pursuit of happiness.”

32 Pecknold, 129.

33 Pecknold, 134.

34 Pecknold, 130.

35 Pecknold, 134.

36 Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy*, 22.

centralize and solidify its dominance over all pluralities. It does this all while creating the appearance of beneficence and altruism.

Alasdair MacIntyre comments on the duality of centralization and beneficence by the nation-state in the following memorable quote:

The modern nation-state, in whatever guise, is a dangerous and unmanageable institution, presenting itself on the one hand as a bureaucratic supplier of goods and services, which is always about to, but never actually does, give its clients value for money, and on the other as a repository of sacred values, which from time to time invites one to lay down one's life on its behalf. . . . It is like being asked to die for the telephone company.³⁷

Augustine and “Theo-Drama”³⁸ as Political Witness

It sounds bizarre to argue for a reclaiming of a Brethren understanding of the Lord's Supper by using Augustine's *City of God* in defense. (The title of this section is even more bizarre since “Theo-Drama” was a concept created by Hans Urs von Balthasar, a Catholic theologian of the twentieth century.) Augustine, however, offers us a lot as we seek to recapture the practice of the Lord's Supper as found in the narrative(s) of the New Testament.

As we explore the nature of democracy, Augustine's inclusion makes a little more sense. Pecknold argues:

Like humanity itself, democracy is restless. That restlessness is a sign, Augustine tells us, of not only a political problem in our nature, but also a theological problem. The restlessness of democracy, like the restlessness of the human heart, also signals to us that there is a peace that we all seek. The desire for human communion is writ into the fabric of democracy, a long-lost memory of what humanity is destined for: participation in the truth that

37As quoted in Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy*, 23.

38 For more on “theo-drama,” see Hans Urs von Balthasar's five-volume work titled *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989). Balthasar was a prominent Swiss-Catholic theologian of the twentieth century. Many in Catholicism consider him one of the most important theologians of that century. In his tome, Balthasar works on his Christology and soteriology as he seeks to recapture the “theological dramatics” of Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday.

Theo-Drama is the second of a three-part, sixteen-volume systematic series by Balthasar entitled *Trilogy*. The first part, entitled *The Glory of the Lord*, is dedicated to “theological aesthetics” in a seven-volume series. The third part, *Theo-Logic*, explores the nature of Christology to ontology. Theological Dramatic Theory was an attempt by Balthasar to allow theology to rise above the reductionist tendencies of modernity that centered too much on humanity and lacked a place for the beauty and mystery inherent in theological discourse.

makes us free. In other words, the teleology that we have forgotten can also be remembered and proclaimed afresh in ways that produce a genuine Christian politics that can make the resistance of evil subordinate to the love of the good that we seek.³⁹

What humanity is destined for is the true city of God. According to Augustine, our hearts are restless until they find their rest in God. Therefore, the restless nature of democracy should serve as a reminder of the vision of the city of God about which Augustine speaks.

For Augustine, the earthly city is a distorted picture of the city of God. As is also true of the city of God, it is less a *polis* and more a performance, as Cavanaugh develops further:

For Augustine, however, the stage is the world on which the one drama of salvation history is being enacted. The earthly city and the city of God are two intermingled performances, one a tragedy, the other a comedy. There are not two sets of props, no division of goods between spiritual and temporal, infinite and finite. Both cities are concerned with the same questions: What is the purpose of human life? How should human life be ordered to achieve that purpose? The difference is that the city of God tells the story that we believe to be true, that God in Christ through the Spirit has saved us from the tragedy of inevitable violence.⁴⁰

The city of God is not a space but a performance.⁴¹ As such, Augustine captures the tension of church and state when he speaks of this performance since the two share props, stage space, and actors and actresses. What in the world will differentiate them if not space?

The difference is the story each is telling as manifested through their practices. Each acts differently. Each uses props differently. It reminds one of the Old Testament prophecy of Isaiah 2:4: “They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks” (NRSV). The city of God, manifested through the church, picks up props used for violence and destruction (i.e., swords and spears) and repurposes those props to cultivate good in the world (i.e., ploughshares and pruning hooks). Cavanaugh writes, “As Christ’s body, the church is ontologically related to the city of God, but it is the church not as a visible institution but as a set of practices.”⁴²

And to a state that wants to eliminate the complexity of common space by offering the illusion of a simple space (consider the term “American”), Augustine offers these words of rebuke: “The city of God, while it sojourns on earth,

³⁹ Pecknold, *Christianity and Politics*, 141.

⁴⁰ Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy*, 64.

⁴¹ Cavanaugh, 59.

⁴² Cavanaugh, 59.

calls citizens out of all nations, and gathers together a society of pilgrims of all languages, thus reversing the effects of the Fall. In doing so, far from rescinding and abolishing these diversities . . . it even preserves and adapts them.”⁴³

As noted earlier, the state’s understanding of “common” is exclusive. It must perpetuate this understanding to maintain its identity and purpose in the world. The church, however, operates with an entirely different—that is, inclusive—understanding of “common.” While only believers are to take communion, this is still radically more inclusive than how the state understands common. And while you have to be an American to be considered part of the common space that is the United States of America, to participate in the common meal that is the Lord’s Supper, you do not need to come from a particular national, ethnic, or socioeconomic background (to mention a few).

What of the People Called “Brethren”?

Throughout this article I have attempted to understand the Lord’s Supper as the common meal that believers share together, not as a practice based on the lofty understandings of the Eucharist that have dominated much of the conversation over the centuries. I believe the Brethren are positioned for both of the following: (1) to capture the original meaning of the Lord’s Supper offered to us through the New Testament witness and (2) to have a unique positioning in understanding this historic practice in a way that develops a robust alternative political theology to the ways of this world.

Using the language of much of this paper, the church testifies to an alternative “common space” that is manifested in the peculiar practices of peculiar people. The kingdom of God is a radically new creation of common space that Jesus, at the beginning of Mark’s Gospel, declares is now “at hand.” As such, the Kingdom pushes back on the artificial barriers the state creates. And the church reminds the state that it (the state) is not an end in and of itself. There is a grand telos wrapped up in our understanding of God’s Kingdom, to which the state is subordinate.

The church in the present period bears witness to this great end of days; it is an eschatological witness to the world. Practices like the Lord’s Supper are our language—really, our metaphors—in describing the beauty and unity that is the kingdom of God.

James McClendon speaks to this vision:

The vision can be expressed as a hermeneutical motto, which is a shared awareness of *the present Christian community as the primitive community and the eschatological community*. In other words, the church now is the primitive

⁴³ Augustine, *City of God*, XIX: 17, as quoted in Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy*, 61.

church and the church on the day of judgment is the church now.⁴⁴

The Brethren Church proclaims the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ Jesus as they wash one another’s feet, break bread, and share a love feast together. As they “perform” these three practices, they testify to the wedding feast of the Lamb—the “eschatological community”—of the Book of Revelation.

Brethren envision themselves, through the drama of the Lord’s Supper, humbly submitting to one another and their saving Lord through footwashing. They share the “common” presence of Jesus through the Love Feast. And they are unified in Jesus Christ through the taking of the Eucharist. The practice of the Lord’s Supper makes a people of the eschaton who always live out the already/not yet tension of the Kingdom. This all occurs around a common table and is constitutive of a people called “Brethren.”

The pushback to such an understanding of the Lord’s Supper, along with an elevation of historic practices as language, comes from those who view this as a sectarian understanding of the church. Such a charge is an interesting one, and the one making the accusation usually has the upper hand in the conversation. For the one being accused of sectarianism must now go on the defense. Anyone on the defense is always seen, to some degree, as the underdog.

Augustine responds better than anyone else. The imagery of the two cities speaks against what Cavanaugh calls “the monolithic conception of a single public space.” The church is not competing for a space with the empire or state. A charge of sectarianism, however, seems to operate with a related assumption of competition. For Augustine there are no set boundaries for either city since, as mentioned earlier, these distinct practices and performances share a stage that is the world. The world’s practices are tragic and the other comic. Cavanaugh writes, “[For Augustine], the task of the church is to interrupt the violent tragedy of the earthly city with the comedy of redemption, to build the city of God, beside which the earthly city appears to be not a city at all.”⁴⁵

Practices like the Lord’s Supper are theological memory. They remind us of the way the world was intended to operate and how the most significant moment in history was not in 1776 but 2000 years ago when our Lord and Savior was crucified and then resurrected. This event happened within history, within space and time, and our practices are the theological memory to such tragedy and comedy.

As the same practice is done over and over again through the centuries, it somehow is always different because it’s always the same. The dilemma of evangelicalism, to use Stanley Hauerwas’s oft-quoted line, is that “evangelicals think they get to make God up.” Theology is not conquered or learned by competing

⁴⁴ As quoted in Stoffer, *The Lord’s Supper*, 125.

⁴⁵ Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy*, 63.

with the world or trying to get the state to give us space. Theology is received, and practices like the Lord's Supper perpetuate a memory of what truly is common in a world, an empire, and a state that can only offer the illusion of common. Cavanaugh reminds us:

The church is not a merely particular association, but participates in the life of the triune God, who is the only good that can be common to all. Christians, especially through the Eucharist, belong to a body that constantly challenges the narrow particularity of the nation . . . and is also eternal, the body of Christ that anticipates the heavenly polity on earth. Salvation history is not a particular subset of human history; it is simply the story of God's rule, not yet completely legible, over all of history. God's activity is not, of course, confined to the church, and the boundaries between the church and the world are porous and fluid. Nevertheless, the church needs to take seriously its task of promoting spaces where participation in the common good of God's life can flourish.⁴⁶

This is what we are to embody as a people of the Lord's Supper—a "heavenly polity" where the life of God can flourish. Against the state's understanding of a very exclusive "common identity," the Brethren embody a practice that is not bound by the barriers we call nation, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or even age but rather establishes a heavenly polity amid the temporal powers of our world.

Establishing "Gemeinschaft"⁴⁷

This heavenly polity is embodied in the Brethren understanding of the Lord's Supper as *Gemeinschaft*, often translated as "community." Eller develops this idea further in his conversation of the "two socialities" in the work of Søren Kierkegaard. In his book *Kierkegaard and Radical Discipleship: A New Perspective*,⁴⁸ Eller dialogues with the work of Kierkegaard on this very topic.

Kierkegaard is a fascinating philosopher whose works have been at the foundation of many contemporary theologians' work. Much of his writing targets the nominal Christian masses of his day that were associated with the state Church of Denmark. He is suspicious of truth claims or, more importantly,

46 Cavanaugh, 45.

47 *Gemeinschaft* is a German term that, simply stated, is the voluntary identity of individuals with a group whereby the group identity takes precedence over the individuals' identity. *Gemeinschaft* is often translated as "community." This is different from the German understanding of *Gesellschaft*, often translated as "society" or "civil society." In this scenario, the larger association does not take precedence over the individuals involved.

48 This was originally Eller's dissertation.

ways of knowing truth that are so state-oriented that they devalue the role of the individual’s experience of faith and truth.

Kierkegaard is known as an existentialist philosopher and theologian who sought to elevate the individual—*den Enkelte* in Danish—and their experience of faith over and above a state-determined faith based on citizenship. He argues, “Religiously speaking, there is no such thing as a public, but only individuals. . . . And insofar as there is, in a religious sense such a thing as a ‘congregation,’ this is a concept which does not conflict with ‘the individual,’ and which is by no means to be confounded with what may have political importance: the public, the crowd, and the numerical.”⁴⁹

Kierkegaard sees a purpose for these “individuals” to gather but is ever mindful of a) not devaluing the individual’s experience of the faith and b) not endorsing the contrived understanding of church as displayed by the Church of Denmark. Kierkegaard understands two “socialities”—one rejected and one approved. Eller explains better:

The terms that denote the two types are “church” (the rejected sociality) and *Gemeinde* (the approved sociality). We should pause to clarify this terminology. *Gemeinde* (German), *Menighed* (Danish), and “community” (English) would seem to be precise equivalents in the three languages. Each is constructed over the root that means “common” and points toward the definition: “a group of persons drawn together on the basis of something they have in *common*.”⁵⁰

The question that Eller is exploring in this part of his work is, What exactly does “in common” within the *Gemeinde*, or approved sociality, mean for the church? He elaborates:

It follows that the quality of *Gemeinschaft* will be in proportion to the extensiveness, intensiveness, and evaluation of the common factor that constitutes the group. Thus, a community based solely on the geographical proximity of its residents is not likely to be very strong in *Gemeinschaft*; one based upon a common concern for the public school, such as a PTA, gives promise of being somewhat stronger. The *Gemeinde* that should display the most profound *Gemeinschaft* is that based upon the commonality of a redemptive relationship to God in Jesus Christ, i.e., the Christian church. Therefore, although etymologically speaking *Gemeinde* and *Gemeinschaft* have no necessary religious connotations, we will proceed to use them in a highly religious sense.

49 As quoted in Vernard Eller, “Kierkegaard and Radical Discipleship: A New Perspective,” House Church Central, accessed November 2, 2011, <http://www.hccentral.com/eller2/part11.html#community>.

50 Eller, “Kierkegaard and Radical Discipleship.”

Ultimately, Christian *Gemeinschaft* amounts to “the love of the brethren,” the love of the brethren for one another, which is consequent upon God’s love for them and upon the mutual love they hold for Him. Obviously, true *Gemeinschaft* necessarily involves the intimate, face-to-face relationships of comparatively small groups sharing “life together”; the mere recitation of a common creed or attendance at a common service of worship can hardly represent *Gemeinschaft* at its deepest level. By its very nature *Gemeinschaft* cannot be a purely formal concept; it must exist as an existential reality or not at all.⁵¹

For Eller (and to a degree, Kierkegaard), the *Gemeinschaft* is a network of individuals (to be faithful to Kierkegaard) who voluntarily allow the identity of the group to supersede their own because of a common system of beliefs and/or morals. For Eller, the ultimate expression of this type of community is the church, the brethren, who gather together around a common meal and recall the sacrificial love of their Lord and Savior and anticipate the great feast of the Lamb yet to unfold in human history.

This understanding of “common” is of the utmost importance to our conversation about the role of the church through her historic practices in the ever-changing world in which we live. And the church’s understanding of common, the *Gemeinschaft*, is a challenge to the state’s understanding of “common.”

The tension occurs when the state makes claims that it creates a “common language” and a “common identity” all for the “common good” because it alone is the author of a “common space.” In this scenario, those who are citizens—those who fall within the geographic borders called the “nation”—are safe and protected. Those outside are always viewed as outsiders.

In this vein of conversation, how we understand communion—whose root is the same word from which we get “common,” or the Lord’s Supper—is incredibly important in being a *Gemeinschaft* that challenges competing understandings of common. And as the church gathers around the Lord’s table, it creates an inclusive understanding of common in Jesus as people of various backgrounds proclaim in unison, “The bread which we break is the communion of the body of Christ; the cup which we bless is the communion of the blood of Christ.” For Brethren then and now, rather than wielding the sword to coerce an arbitrary common, we submit to our neighbor, stoop down, take a towel and a basin, and wash their feet. Counter to the kingdoms and fiefdoms of this world, the water of the basin reminds us of King Jesus and his call to “do this in remembrance of me.”

51 Eller, “Kierkegaard and Radical Discipleship.”

El lenguaje del Espíritu

Liturgia y deseo

Jonathan Misael Minchala Flores

Los cristianos anabautistas han dejado claro que no se puede limitar el cristianismo a un conjunto de creencias, debemos comprenderlo fundamentalmente desde las prácticas. Sin embargo, el cristianismo desde una perspectiva anabautista tampoco se puede entender simplemente como un conjunto de prácticas si a ellas no se las entiende como tecnologías y disciplinas que dan forma a nuestro deseo. Es decir, estas prácticas además de fundamentarse en una narrativa comunitaria, en una tradición enraizada en el acontecimiento de Cristo, responden a una forma-de-vida que concibe al ser humano principalmente como un animal deseante, como un ser litúrgico. Defino la liturgia de la mano de James K. A. Smith, como esas prácticas formativas, sagradas o «seculares» que forman los más fundamentales deseos del ser humano y nos hacen el tipo de persona que somos.¹

Durante los últimos años, en ciertos ámbitos teológicos se ha enfatizado el hecho de que el ser humano es un animal racional, comunitario y narrativo pero se ha dejado de lado que durante siglos se consideró fundamentalmente al cristianismo como una religión que trata con nuestro deseo. El teólogo metodista Daniel M. Bell afirma que esta forma de concebir el cristianismo viene de algunas órdenes monásticas que además podemos encontrar en «algunos grupos reformados radicales o en el antiguo metodismo británico o en los asilos católicos del siglo xx».²

Así que en este texto me quiero concentrar en un aspecto fundamental para comprender las prácticas cristianas como formadoras del deseo, en el lenguaje litúrgico. Michel Foucault comienza su texto sobre el Orden del discurso dicién-

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1 James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 24.

2 Daniel M. Bell Jr., *Teología de la liberación tras el fin de la historia* (Granada: Nuevo Inicio, 2009), 197.

do que «más que tomar la palabra, habría preferido verme envuelto por ella».³ Como cristianos, podemos hablar de dejarnos envolver por ese «Verbo» que se hizo carne, transforma nuestros deseos, habita y habla a través de nosotros por medio del Espíritu Santo. Es importante también notar que liturgia y evangelio están íntimamente unidos. Como nos recuerda Nancy Bedford: «La buena noticia del evangelio de Jesús no tiene que ver con una “soberanía” divina expresada como poder bruto, sino con la “belleza y dulzura” que caracterizan a la Santísima Trinidad».⁴ Si el lenguaje construye realidades, como cristianos debemos dejarnos envolver por un lenguaje litúrgico que nos enseña a través de la belleza del cristianismo a mirar (nos) de una manera redentora.

El cristianismo como tecnología de deseo

Como «tecnología» me refiero, siguiendo a Foucault, a ese conjunto y procedimientos que disciplinan y regulan nuestras subjetividades y que comprenden, conocimientos, instituciones, personas, sistemas de juicios, de educación, edificio y espacios. Foucault menciona cuatro tipos de tecnologías:

1) tecnologías de producción, que nos permiten producir, transformar o manipular cosas; 2) tecnologías de sistemas de signos, que nos permiten utilizar signos, sentidos, símbolos o significaciones; 3) tecnologías de poder, que determinan la conducta de los individuos [...] y 4) tecnologías del yo, que permiten a los individuos efectuar, por cuenta propia o con la ayuda de otros, cierto número de operaciones sobre su cuerpo y su alma, pensamientos, conducta, o cualquier forma de ser, obteniendo así una transformación de sí mismos con el fin de alcanzar cierto estado de felicidad, pureza, sabiduría o inmortalidad.⁵

Daniel M. Bell une dos conceptos, «tecnología» de Foucault con «Ontología del deseo» de Deleuze para hablar sobre el cristianismo como una tecnología de deseo.⁶ Me parece necesario usar este concepto y no solo el de «prácticas» porque es fundamental dar cuenta de la dimensión social y no solo individual. Recordemos la advertencia de John Howard Yoder cuando nos recuerda que no podemos vivir sin estas estructuras religiosas, intelectuales, morales y políticas

3 Michel Foucault, *El orden del discurso* (México: Tusquets, 2010), 11.

4 Juan José Barreda, y Edesio Sánchez Cetina, *Arte, liturgia y teología* (Bogotá: Puma, 2013), 129.

El tratamiento de este artículo relaciona liturgia, deseo y el Espíritu Santo. Para un tratamiento sobre las enseñanzas, vida y obra de Jesús se podría profundizar en los escritos de Nancy Bedford que ha abordado extensamente el tema.

5 Michel Foucault, *Tecnologías del yo y otros textos afines* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2008), 48.

6 Bell Jr., *Teología de la liberación tras el fin de la historia*, 86.

y que esas estructuras no son «una mera suma total de los individuos que las componen. El todo es más que la suma de sus partes. Y ese “más” es un poder invisible, aunque no estemos acostumbrados a hablar de ellos en términos personales o angélicos».⁷ Estas estructuras crean un imaginario social y organizan los cuerpos de las personas, tal como William Cavanaugh nos recuerda al hablar sobre la tortura y la eucaristía en la dictadura de Chile en el siglo xx:

...igual que la liturgia no es un mera formación ‘espiritual’ que luego tiene que ser aplicada al mundo físico, la tortura no es un asalto a los cuerpos meramente físico, sino la formación de una imaginación social. Hablar de imaginación no es hablar de una fantasía irreal. Tal como yo uso el término, ‘la imaginación social’ de un grupo es la visión de que organiza a los miembros de ese grupo en una serie de representaciones coherentes...⁸

El cristianismo no opera simplemente en un ámbito espiritual que luego tiene repercusiones políticas. El cristianismo es una práctica encarnada profundamente política. La vida buena que pone a disposición el cristianismo no está subordinada a un partido o corriente política progresista, conservadora, de izquierda o derecha. El cristianismo tiene sus propias reglas en el ámbito político y las pone en práctica de manera muy concreta en una polis redimida por Cristo, a la cual llama: Iglesia. En este sentido, ética, liturgia y política van íntimamente unidas. Pero, además de asumir que el cristianismo proporciona formas concretas de vida que son políticas, Daniel M. Bell nos recuerda que el cristianismo también debe ser visto como una tecnología del deseo. En su libro *Teología de la liberación tras el fin de la historia* afirma que:

El cristianismo no se manifiesta como custodio apolítico de unos valores morales desencarnados, como el “amor”, ni como depositario religioso de una gramática [...] el cristianismo se reivindica como una realidad plenamente material o encarnada (“la Palabra se hizo carne”), cuyas prácticas —tales como el bautismo, la catequesis, la Eucaristía, la disciplina, la oración y el discipulado— no median simplemente “ideas” y “valores” sino que más bien transforman las circunstancias materiales de la existencia cristiana [...] el cristianismo se reivindica como un conjunto de tecnologías que reforman o conforman el deseo.⁹

Traigo a colación esta reflexión de un teólogo metodista vinculado a la corriente teológica conocida como «Radical Orthodoxy» porque creo que como anabau-

7 John H. Yoder, *Jesús y la realidad política* (Buenos Aires: Certeza, 1985), 107.

8 William T. Cavanaugh, *Tortura y eucaristía. Teología, política y el cuerpo de Cristo* (Granada: Nuevo Inicio, 2017), 39.

9 Bell Jr., *Teología de la liberación tras el fin de la historia*, 170–71.

tistas podemos conectar de muchas maneras con su visión del cristianismo.¹⁰ Me parece muy interesante cómo esta manera de concebir el cristianismo pueda llevarnos a emprender un diálogo ecuménico que va más allá de discutir creencias y doctrinas proposicionales, sino que pasa a enfocar el diálogo en las formas de vida que tenemos como cristianos de diferentes denominaciones y en el lenguaje que impregna todas aquellas prácticas que son constituyentes de la fe cristiana.

En nuestra cultura occidental, el capitalismo, el consumismo y las filosofías del «éxito», que en palabras de Michella Marzano¹¹, nos «programan para el triunfo», han distorsionado nuestros deseos. La liturgia puede reconfigurar esto, enseñándonos un lenguaje cristiano que nos permita ver, juzgar y actuar de una manera cristiana en la sociedad donde vivimos. Daniel M. Bell se ha tomado al pie de la letra la exhortación de Deleuze cuando dice «o bien se construye una máquina revolucionaria capaz de hacerse cargo del deseo y de los fenómenos del deseo, o bien el deseo seguirá siendo manipulado por las fuerzas de opresión y represión».¹² Pues bien, esa máquina deseante para Bell, es el cristianismo, o más bien la polis de la iglesia que a través de sus prácticas y liturgias resiste al poder capitalista y configura el deseo. Se puede analizar y profundizar en muchos aspectos sobre el deseo y el cristianismo, pero mi propósito principal ahora es situar este proyecto de transformación del deseo, en el lenguaje litúrgico, ese lenguaje que nos capacita para ver la belleza de Cristo, belleza que para Hans Urs Von Balthasar es el primer valor de la triada de Platón, que da forma y sentido a los otros dos: verdad y bondad.¹³

Para hacer el primer acercamiento a este tipo de lenguaje, debemos recordar que «... la expresión lingüística y la experiencia intuitiva son inseparables. Vemos haciendo, hacemos viendo».¹⁴ El lenguaje, la mirada y la experiencia no pueden ser separadas de la expresión litúrgica. Para no caer en la simplificación de que «no hay nada más allá del lenguaje», John Milbank nos recuerda que «la expresión lingüística y la experiencia intuitiva son inseparables [...] [la] liturgia es más fundamental para la teología que el lenguaje y que la experiencia, y que, no obstante, es a la vez lingüística y experimental».¹⁵ Para los anabautistas la mirada y el lenguaje son formadas en una comunidad que es en sí misma políti-

10 Si quiere profundizar en las relaciones que existen entre la Ortodoxia Radical y la Reforma Radical hay un excelente libro editado por Chris K. Huebner y Tripp York, *The Gift of Difference: Radical Orthodoxy, Radical Reformation* (2010).

11 Michella Marzano, *Programados para triunfar* (México: Tusquets, 2011).

12 Gilles Deleuze, *Conversaciones*. (Valencia: Pre-textos, 2014), 33.

13 Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Gloria. Una estética teológica. La percepción de la forma* (Vol. 1). (Madrid: Encuentro, 1985).

14 John Milbank, y Adrian Pabst, *El pensamiento de John Milbank. Una introducción a la «Radical Orthodoxy»* (Granada: Nuevo Inicio, 2011), 25.

15 *Ibid.*, 24–25.

ca, donde «Jesús es el centro de nuestra fe, la comunidad es el centro de nuestra vida y la reconciliación con Dios y el prójimo es el centro de nuestra misión».¹⁶ Estas prácticas configuran el lenguaje cristiano anabautista y nos permiten entenderlo de manera muy diferente a como lo conciben otras tradiciones que ven en el lenguaje solo una forma de comunicar proposiciones y prescripciones de manera dogmática o, por otro lado, tratar todo lenguaje de la historia bíblica como un mito que debe ser traducido a un lenguaje moderno entendible para cualquier persona sin que esté vinculada a la comunidad y a la historia a la que ese lenguaje sirve.

Debemos preguntarnos, ¿cómo podemos reconfigurar y liberar el deseo que ha sido cautivado y (de)formado por diferentes sistemas políticos, económicos y culturales? La respuesta que brinda el cristianismo es, por medio de la liturgia. Siguiendo a Daniel M. Bell y Talal Asad, la liturgia, además de rehabilitar el deseo, funciona «como una tecnología del deseo mediante la recomposición de la memoria».¹⁷ De esta manera se puede redireccionar el deseo, un deseo que, como ya nos advertía Gilles Deleuze, es principalmente movimiento. La memoria se la fabrica, muchas veces a gusto del gobierno de turno. Mario Montalbetti nos hace detenernos frente a la conocida frase «hacer memoria» para evidenciar lo frágil y subjetiva que puede ser la memoria. Entonces, en primer lugar, debemos desarrollar un lenguaje litúrgico que pueda ser capaz de hablar del pasado de la manera más veraz y fiel posible y no que esté al servicio de ningún poder estatal.

Pensemos en todas las historias de guerra y de héroes patrióticos que nos contamos como ciudadanos para afirmar y justificar el Estado-Nación. En mi país, Ecuador, tenemos la historia de un joven héroe nacional, llamado Abdón Calderón que luchó contra los españoles en la batalla del Pichincha por la independencia de su pueblo en 1822. Supuestamente mientras le disparaban y herían, él seguía sosteniendo la bandera, incluso arrastrándose con ella. Los historiadores reconocen su participación en la guerra pero afirman que murió de disentería y no en el campo de batalla. Esta historia es un claro ejemplo de cómo podemos distorsionar la historia y enseñarla en el salón de clases, con el fin de crear «héroes» e incluso ídolos que dan forma a las identidades nacionales y que inspiren a jóvenes a ser ciudadanos leales al Estado-Nación.¹⁸

Ahora quisiera pasar a hablar de otra forma en que opera la liturgia, esta es, la transformación del deseo por medio de la mirada hacia el futuro escatológico de la plena realización del Reino de Dios que ya ha sido inaugurado por Cristo.

16 Palmer Becker, *La esencia del anabautismo: Diez rasgos de una fe cristiana singular* (Harrisonburg: Herald Press, 2017), xi-xii.

17 Bell Jr., *Teología de la liberación tras el fin de la historia*, 188.

18 Enrique Ayala Mora. *Mentiras, medias verdades y polémicas de la historia* (Quito: Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, 2020), 121-23.

Para profundizar sobre el tipo de lenguaje que el Espíritu Santo nos da, quisiera centrarme brevemente en dos historias bíblicas.

De Babel a Pentecostés

Y sobre mi columna vertebral, los tronos bíblicos de Babel.

Alfredo Gangotena

Afuera, el cataclismo, y llega pentecostés a la ciudad.

Alfredo Gangotena

Y fueron todos llenos del Espíritu Santo, y comenzaron a hablar en otras lenguas, según el Espíritu les daba que hablasen.

Hechos 2:4

En Pentecostés, cuando el Espíritu Santo desciende y se apropia de los cuerpos otorgándoles la capacidad para entender y hablar otras lenguas, no les da un mismo lenguaje a todos los cuerpos sino la capacidad para comprender y hablar diferentes lenguas. De allí que el don de lenguas es un don de la unidad en la diversidad. El hecho de que las personas puedan hablar diferentes lenguas en el relato de Babel no es un castigo sino un don.¹⁹ El propósito del castigo en Babel no es hacer que los seres humanos no se entiendan sino evitar que instrumentalicen el lenguaje para unirse y ganar más poder, ubicándose al mismo nivel de Dios.²⁰

Antes de la confusión de lenguas en Babel, Dios ya había ordenado que el pueblo se dispersara, lo cual no sucedió. Diferentes pueblos unidos en diferentes lugares, con diferentes prácticas, etc., iba a dar como resultado el desarrollo de diferentes lenguas. Pero, al no obedecer el mandato, Dios decide otorgarles la diversidad de lenguas para que se dispersen y no logren su cometido: terminar la torre. El castigo es la división por evitar la diversidad y por buscar imponer un único lenguaje, el lenguaje del imperio tecnocrático que quiere construir una infraestructura para llegar a Dios y ponerse en su lugar para ejercer el control. Si el castigo hubiera sido la diversidad de lenguas, entonces en Pentecostés se hubiera invertido este problema y se hubiera otorgado, no la posibilidad de entender diferentes lenguas, sino la creación o unión de una sola lengua. Sin

19 Stanley Hauerwas, *War and the American difference: Theological reflections on violence and national identity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 117–33.

20 José Severino Croatto, *Exilio y sobrevivencia: tradiciones contraculturales en el Pentateuco (Comentario de Génesis 1:1–12:9)* (Buenos Aires: Lumen, 1997).

embargo, en Pentecostés se brinda la posibilidad de entender a ese otro que habla en una lengua extraña. Pentecostés resalta la diversidad de lenguas, la entiende como un don y como algo bueno en sí mismo, pero sin el problema de que no puedan entenderse. Pentecostés nos brinda la posibilidad de reordenar, entender y buscar la unidad sin dejar de lado la diversidad de voces y tradiciones. Podemos escuchar e interpretar el mundo bajo una mirada compartida pero no totalizante. Pentecostés no ofrece soluciones, respuestas y alivios, pero sí nos otorga la capacidad para expresar las dudas, la angustia, esperanzas y sueños, y sobre todo compartirlos con otros.

La música es uno de esos espacios en nuestra liturgia donde podemos situar nuestros anhelos, dudas y tristezas a la luz del Dios trino. En los salmos y en toda la tradición de los «lamentos» podemos encontrar un tipo de liturgia donde no se buscan soluciones fáciles o respuestas absolutas, sino la oportunidad de dirigir nuestros sentidos y expresar nuestros sentimientos en comunidad ante aquél que está con nosotros sufriendo. La pregunta que podemos plantear aquí en relación con Pentecostés podría ser la siguiente: ¿Cómo podemos reconocer, dar espacio y unirnos al sufrimiento de aquellas personas con voces y experiencias diversas a las nuestras? Uno de los desafíos pendientes en nuestras iglesias es la creación de música que exprese la esperanza cristiana desde la tradición anabautista. Muchas veces en nuestras iglesias nos conformamos con hacer meras traducciones de la música que nos viene del norte del continente. Muchas de esas canciones expresan una visión limitada o distorsionada de cómo se vive el cristianismo en Latinoamérica. Algunas iglesias anabautistas, por ejemplo la Iglesia Menonita de Quito, Ecuador, ha incorporado en su liturgia canciones de la Misa Campesina o de artistas indígenas como Tino Picuasi. A menos que reconozcamos las pisadas de Dios en otras culturas y tradiciones ancestrales podremos ser fieles a Pentecostés y no caer en una suerte de neoconstantinismo litúrgico.

Aprendiendo la gramática del Espíritu

*La imagen del Espíritu Santo se inflama
detrás de las vidrieras;*

*Sus bordadas alas de amor penden de las
extremidades del dintel,*

Y las umbelíferas sombras de miel me abrasan y me penetran.

Alfredo Gangotena

Una gramática es un «conjunto de reglas por las cuales somos capaces de dar sentido a las cosas».²¹ Ahí donde nos faltan las palabras, las imágenes religiosas pueden agitar nuestra imaginación y nuestro cuerpo y devolvernos el habla y la capacidad para expresarnos. Hablar es tomar conciencia y crear realidades que muchas veces pueden llevarnos a la angustia, pero a veces donde están el sufrimiento, la desgarradura y el dolor, también están el deseo, el placer y la redención.

El filósofo y teólogo anabautista español Antonio González nos recuerda que «para los anabaptistas, la comunidad cristiana era entendida como una comunidad del Espíritu».²² Y un papel fundamental del Espíritu Santo es ser agente de «reconciliación entre la poesis divina y la poesis humana».²³ El lenguaje poético y el lenguaje del Espíritu no están separados. Una de las características principales que los une es que ambos trabajan con los deseos y el sentido. Además, mientras el Espíritu Santo reconoce que la identidad del ser humano está en constante transformación por medio de la santificación, la poesía hace lo mismo con el sentido, no encerrándolo en un significado sino permitiéndole estar siempre abierto a nuevas significaciones.²⁴ ¿Cómo podemos entender este fluir e indeterminación del sentido, sin totalización y sin caer en la violencia?²⁵

Quiero introducir el concepto de «redención» para este análisis, pero no partiendo de una idea mística, vinculándola a una especie de inmortalidad sino,

21 Terry Eagleton, *Materialismo* (Barcelona: Península, 2017), 135.

22 Antonio González, «Hermenéutica anabaptista y educación teológica», en *Cristianismo anabautista*, 10 de agosto de 2009: https://www.menonitas.org/publicaciones/hermeneutica_anabaptista..pdf.

23 Milbank y Pabst, *El pensamiento de John Milbank. Una introducción a la «Radical Orthodoxy»*, 49.

24 Mario Montalbetti, *El más crudo invierno* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2016).

25 John Milbank, *Teología y Teoría Social* (Barcelona: Herder, 2004), 21.

tal como lo hace el filósofo Anthony Pinn²⁶, a un proceso de transformación de la identidad que va a tener lugar frente a las estrategias de normalización por parte del poder. Pinn conecta la redención con la conversión y la define de la siguiente manera: «...conversión como proceso de realización —el proceso por el cual uno se enfrenta a sí mismo (los límites, las deficiencias y las posibilidades de uno mismo)— dentro de un contexto de normas impuestas».²⁷ El término teológico «redención» es útil para este análisis: porque apunta a una conversión, a un proceso de «nuevo nacimiento» donde se transforma la identidad. Esta transformación se da cuando se aprende a mirar el abismo de muerte y la inevitable relación que tenemos con ella, es decir, cuando se aprende a morir. Una vez comenzado este proceso, se aprende a mirar y captar las diferentes formas del mundo. La redención permite enfrentar los límites y deficiencias, en este caso, el habla, por medio de un acto reconstituyente de la libertad y de conversión hacia la realización de nuevas capacidades, de esta manera se crea un «yo» renovado. La redención, entonces, cuestiona esas identidades fijas limitantes y nos permite hablar y clamar de otra manera que no clausure el sentido y no nos abandone ante la nada absoluta.

Después de la redención, ya no somos los mismos de antes porque ahora tensionamos nuestras limitaciones por medio de nuevas estrategias para mirar e interpretar el mundo. Este tipo de lenguaje que condiciona nuestro mirar, nos permite ir más allá de las identidades fijas y de todo sentido cerrado o agotado, abriendo nuevas posibilidades de apropiarnos y darle sentido al mundo. La novelista y pensadora Iris Murdoch nos dice que «nosotros desarrollamos el lenguaje en el contexto del mirar»²⁸, un mirar ético que nos lleva a actuar. Por su parte, el teólogo Stanley Hauerwas reformula esta declaración y aclara que, «nosotros solo podemos ver lo que hemos sido entrenados para ver a través de lo que aprendimos a decir».²⁹ El lenguaje cristiano es el lenguaje de la adoración y oración al Dios trino. Este lenguaje entrena nuestra forma de mirar a Cristo en toda su belleza. Debemos encarnar el proceso de aprender a mirar por medio del decir para ver lo que no tenía nombre. A este proceso le damos el nombre de liturgia, que va a englobar tanto el mirar y el decir. Aunque los sufrimientos y las desgarraduras sigan presentes, ya no podrán inhibir el poder creador y redentor de la «palabra».

El lenguaje que como cristianos debemos aprender no es solamente escrito, proposicional o normativo es un lenguaje vital, vivificante y litúrgico que

26 Anthony B. Pinn, *Embodiment and the new shape of Black theological thought* (Vol. 7). (Nueva York: New York University Press, 2010).

27 Pinn, 124.

28 Iris Murdoch, *La soberanía del bien* (Madrid: Caparrós, 2001), 39.

29 Stanley Hauerwas, *Wilderness Wanderings: Probing Twentieth-Century. Theology and Philosophy* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 156.

nos capacita para enfrentarnos a la angustia a través de la belleza de Cristo y para ver de manera más fiel, clara y honesta el mundo, al prójimo y a Dios en nuestra vida cotidiana.³⁰ Además Nancy Bedford nos recuerda que: «La verdad de Dios (así como su santidad, justicia y sabiduría) siempre está vinculada a su belleza, mientras que la hermosura de Dios transmite verdad, justicia, santidad y sabiduría».³¹ Por eso decimos que también podemos trabajar por la justicia, la paz y buscar la sabiduría desde el lenguaje litúrgico que nos muestra la belleza de Cristo operando y trabajando a través de su Iglesia.

Una manera práctica de incorporar un lenguaje litúrgico que nos permita ver las injusticias en nuestra sociedad patriarcal es adoptar un lenguaje no sexista que incluya a otros géneros. A menudo nuestras oraciones están cargadas de un lenguaje masculino de un «Dios guerrero». Este tipo de lenguaje no sólo invisibiliza otros cuerpos sino que resalta ciertas virtudes violentas, como la imagen de un Dios sanguinario. En algunas iglesias menonitas se ha comenzado a usar en la liturgia términos masculinos y femeninos para referirse a Dios como padre y madre. Estos pequeños cambios en el lenguaje pueden aproximarnos a ver otras características del Dios que adoramos y además hacer partícipes a otros cuerpos de personas que han sido invisibilizadas durante siglos. Aprendemos viendo y para apreciar la belleza y diversidad de Dios debemos primero cambiar la manera de referirnos a la deidad.

Reflexiones finales

En la actualidad, tenemos tantos tipos de lenguajes. Los gobiernos, ciertos grupos religiosos, instituciones académicas, las redes sociales, el marketing, el derecho, grupos militares, etc., manipulan el lenguaje y cierran sus sentidos para poder controlar la mirada de la gente. Desde una perspectiva anabautista, el lenguaje cristiano está abierto a nuevas posibilidades creativas para evitar caer en el vicio de la venganza, competencia, manipulación, etc. Podemos aceptar la diferencia y la diversidad dentro del logos cristiano que impregna todo el cosmos.³² El lenguaje que se nos otorga en Pentecostés es un un tipo de lenguaje que nos

30 “While (in)capacities of language are absolutely crucial to this question, we think a focus on incapacities and capacities of being that are engendered in the liturgies of everyday life is of greater significance: both because it is difficult to imagine how people thoroughly engaged in the liturgical work of shopping malls, television, exploitative labor, and the studied movements of gated geographies would cultivate capacities for richer languages, and because the sense, textures, and intensity of such languages will only be learned in relation to our engagement in a set of counter-practices through which our bodies acquire the vitality of better possibilities.” (Hauerwas 177–78).

31 Barreda y Sánchez Cetina, *Arte, liturgia y teología*, 130.

32 Gavin D’Costa, *La unicidad cristiana reconsiderada. El mito de una teología de las religiones pluralista* (Bilbao: Desclée de Brouwer, 2000), 39–53.

permite escuchar y dialogar con el «otro». Y esto es así porque es un lenguaje del Espíritu Santo que es «simultáneamente el vínculo del deseo y la libertad de la caridad».³³ Un lenguaje que siempre está abierto a nuevas posibilidades y que nos va transformando desde nuestros deseos. Entonces, este tipo de lenguaje litúrgico opera transformando la manera en cómo hablamos y miramos los conflictos sociales, pasados y presentes, bajo una luz cristiana. Tal vez muchas diferencias y conflictos contemporáneos dentro y fuera de la Iglesia podrían ser vistos bajo una nueva luz, si en lugar de apropiarnos indiscriminadamente de los lenguajes que nos brinda el mundo nos dejamos impregnar por el lenguaje litúrgico que transforma nuestros deseos y mirada, para luego actuar de una manera más fiel y real en la historia que solo es posible por Cristo.

³³ Milbank y Pabst, *El pensamiento de John Milbank. Una introducción a la «Radical Orthodoxy»*, 141.

Congregational Prayer as Witness

Carol Penner

Constant Calling Congregational Prayer

Great God,
thank you for the constant call we hear from you every day:
the wind whispering around our ears,
the birds singing to us from the trees,
rain pinging on the window,
the good earth inviting our steps.
We hear that call again and again,
through kind hands and warm hearts around us.
Open our ears to your call,
which is as expansive as the world,
and as particular as a poor man walking a dusty road
to a cross on Calvary.
Like him, help us to live our love, not just in word but also in deed:
love for our neighbors who are hard to love,
love for newcomers in our community,
love for people who are cast out by others.
Forgive us for the times we have failed to share your love,
choosing to hoard what is freely given,
fearful that we have limited resources, limited time . . . we're too tired.
Thank you that even then your consoling voice calls us.
Help us respond with cheerful hearts as we do your work.
Strengthen those among us who face heavy burdens;
some of us are living with pain—physical, emotional, spiritual.
Some of us live with injustice, and we need your help.

Carol Penner teaches practical theology at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo, Ontario. Her blog of worship resources can be found at <https://leadinginworship.com>.

Holy Spirit, bind us together as a community
to sing your chorus of love faithfully, heartily.
Help us stick together even when harmony eludes us.
Multiply your call in us and through us.
In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.

Congregational prayers can be mundane in that we hear them, or say them, every Sunday. They look simple, but they bear witness in a lot of ways.

In this prayer we bear witness to a God who created our beautiful world. I almost always try to begin a congregational prayer with vivid, tactile images that people can picture and “touch.” Prayers can shape us into thankful people, so whenever we pray, we want to give thanks.

The theme of calling is also a witness. It reminds us that God is communicating with us, inviting us to follow. By the end of the prayer, we are the ones doing the calling, reaching out to others.

In a congregational prayer, I try to be honest. I know, for instance, that sometimes I am too tired to be good and that I can be terribly selfish. That’s part of the human condition. We lay it before God. There is so much to pray about, we could fill our whole congregational prayer with petitions. In this prayer, I chose just a couple of things—pain and injustice. Naming our needs bears witness to our faith that God hears our cries.

I often try to end a congregational prayer by focusing on the community rather than the individual. We are praying communally, witnessing to the connecting power of the Holy Spirit. Our congregation is far from pitch perfect, but God can still use us.

It’s a simple prayer, quite mundane, but it is what we’ll say this week. It expresses who we are, and it shapes who we are as followers of Jesus.

Big Picture Congregational Prayer

Thank you, God, for everything under us;
 for these chairs on which we sit,
 for this church's firm foundation,
 for the soil with its burrowing animals and insects,
 for the rock down under that, layered by the sea in ancient times,
 for the water that flows in subterranean channels far beneath us,
 and for the miles upon miles of bedrock
 (unknown and unexplored by all but you),
 all the way down to the living heat of our planet,
 the molten rock deep in the heart of the earth.

Thank you God for everything above us;
 for this solid roof that shelters us,
 for the wind swirling and birds soaring skyward,
 for the airplanes and clouds high above,
 for the upper atmosphere and the stratosphere,
 for satellites orbiting, for meteors whizzing,
 for the moon and the planets of our solar system,
 for asteroids and comets and supernovae and black holes,
 for galaxy upon galaxy stretching away into the vastness of space.

The wide span of your work is a mystery we cannot fathom.
 You are beneath us, you are above us, God of creation!
 We pause now in silence as you hear what's within us . . .
 we bring our confessions and concerns.

[silence]

Thank you that even though we are so small in the scheme of things,
 you hear our prayers, you answer our prayers.
 Bless our church, and help us to be people who point others to you.
 Help us to be a faithful part of your big picture.
 In Jesus's name we pray, Amen.

I love this congregational prayer because it takes us somewhere. It's a very simple prayer without pretensions. It just takes the congregation down, and then it takes them up, with God. And then we go inward for some moments of silence. After the silence, I name the reality: we feel small. But God hears our prayers.

People have talked to me about how meaningful this prayer was for them. It helped them connect with God.

The prayer ends with the church. I emphasize the word “our”—we aren’t just on individual journeys. We are praying together, seeking to live into our call to bear witness, or point, to God. I can bear witness to the power of God who meets us even on a journey as small as this prayer.

Feel free to use or adapt these prayers; in a bulletin, a credit line could read “Carol Penner <http://www.leadinginworship.com>.”

On Words and Witness

Joanna Harader

When you come to appear before me,
who asked this from your hand?
Trample my courts no more;
¹³ bringing offerings is futile;
incense is an abomination to me.
New moon and sabbath and calling of convocation—
I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity.
¹⁴ Your new moons and your appointed festivals
my soul hates;
they have become a burden to me,
I am weary of bearing them.
¹⁵ When you stretch out your hands,
I will hide my eyes from you;
even though you make many prayers,
I will not listen;
your hands are full of blood. (Isa 1:12–15, NRSV)

As an English major, I care a lot about words. I want desperately to choose the right words, the beautiful words, the powerful words that provoke a smile or a gasp or a few tears. Until, that is, I read Isaiah’s admonishment and remember that worship is not about getting the aesthetics right. It’s about getting our lives in line with God’s Life.

*Rev. Joanna Harader serves as pastor of Peace Mennonite Church in Lawrence, Kansas. A few of her liturgical writings appear in the new Mennonite hymnal, *Voices Together*, and many more can be found on “Together in Worship” (<https://togetherinworship.net/Home>), a curated collection of online worship resources from Anabaptist sources, and her blog <https://spaciousfaith.com/>.*

Isaiah is not the only biblical writer who condemns false piety and showy prayers. It's enough to give a preacher and liturgy writer pause. And yet, when Jesus's disciples ask him how to pray, he doesn't say, "The words don't matter." He doesn't say, "Just speak from the heart." He says, "Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name" (Matt 6:9).

Our words for worship do matter—but not for their own sake. The words themselves are not the witness. The witness is the lives people live in the world because of the relationships they have with God. And worship can—and should—be a key place, a key time when those relationships are formed and strengthened. The words we preach and pray and sing in worship can draw us closer to God and point us toward greater faithfulness in the world.

World Communion Sunday Lament¹

Reader 1: We gather for World Communion Sunday in a world where women face restrictions to their freedom and threats to their bodies. Sexual intimidation and assault—against all genders—is used as a weapon of war and a means of establishing power. Survivors of sexual assault who dare to report are too often disbelieved, blamed for the “incident,” and otherwise demeaned.

Reader 2: This table is our prayer for all who suffer in silence and for all who dare to speak out.

Congregation: God, lead us to a place of mutual respect and equality.

Reader 1: We gather for World Communion Sunday in a world where over sixty-five million people are displaced. The policies of the United States government keep those in desperate need out of our country, and many families have been separated at the border.

Reader 2: This table is our prayer that all will find welcome.

Congregation: God, lead refugees to a place to call home.

Reader 1: We gather for World Communion Sunday in a world where millions have been affected by recent hurricanes, earthquakes, and tsunamis—trying to manage life with no electricity, to connect with distant loved ones, to repair destroyed buildings, and to mourn the dead.

Reader 2: This table is our prayer that lives will be made whole.

Congregation: God, send to those facing destruction peaceful skies, solid ground, and aid to rebuild.

¹ This piece was written in October 2018. While some words for worship are relevant across different times and contexts, there can also be power in words that attend to a particular time and place.

Reader 1: We gather for World Communion Sunday in a world where over 20 million people are enslaved, and more than 10 million people are incarcerated—with the United States having the world’s largest percentage of imprisoned people.

Reader 2: This table is our prayer that all people will be free.

Congregation: God, grant justice for those in prison and in slavery.

Reader 1: We gather for World Communion Sunday in a world where white supremacists are increasingly public in their hatred; in the United States, people of color face systemic racism in education, housing, employment, and police treatment; in many European countries, race-based anti-immigrant sentiments are loudly proclaimed; in Burma, the Rohingya are being terrorized, driven from their homes, and killed.

Reader 2: This table is our prayer that racism and ethnic oppression will give way to justice.

Congregation: God, change our systems; root out prejudice, let justice roll down like waters.

Reader 1: We gather for World Communion Sunday in a world where same-sex intimacy is outlawed in seventy-two countries—eight of which are United Nations member countries where same-sex relations are punishable by death; where violence is directed against LGBTQ people all over the world—some of it perpetrated by hateful individuals and much of it sanctioned by institutions and governments.

Reader 2: This table is our prayer that all love will be honored.

Congregation: God, move communities and churches to embrace the bodies and love of our LGBTQ siblings.

Reader 1: So friends, let us gather around this table of respect, this table of welcome, this table of wholeness, this table of freedom, this table of justice, this table of love.

Reader 2: Let us gather around this table of God’s abundant provision, where the last are first, the lowly are lifted up, and the hungry are filled with good things.

Reader 1: Let us gather in lament for the brokenness around us and within us.

Reader 2: Let us gather in hope for the fulfillment of God's promises.

*Congregation: God, we pray for the holy transformation of our world.
Amen.*

Blessing: Hope

I know how much hope you hold in your heart:
for yourself and for those you love;
for your neighbors and for our world—
hope for health,
for peace,
for justice,
for a return to the glorious normal of our lives.
These hopes are good and holy
and also not the reality in which we live.
Not yet.
And maybe not ever—in this life.
So under all of the good you hope *for*,
I pray you are grounded in the Good you hope *in*.

May you feel the solid ground of God beneath your feet
And root your true hope,
 your healing hope,
 your life-giving hope,
not in what you think humans might be able to accomplish
but in who you know your God to be:
All-powerful Creator,
All-loving incarnate One,
Ever-present Guide and Shelter.
This is our Advent hope.
May you know it.
Claim it.
Cling to it.

On Ancestors and Elections

Joel Miller

In the United States, election day most often follows the first Sunday of November, when many Christian congregations observe All Saints' and/or All Souls' Day. In our congregation, we light candles to remember loved ones who have died. The prayer below combines gratitude for ancestors with prayers for the well-being of the nation. While elections are focused on leadership and change in the coming months and years, this prayer invites the church into a wider scope of time and concern. The first half of the prayer could be used any time of year as a lead-in to a pastoral prayer, and the second half could be adapted for the wider election season.

O Great Love, Eternal flame, who lit the stars,
who ignites the passion of prophets,
whose incandescence shone through Jesus,
whose blaze persists:

We give thanks for the life we hold within us,
for breath and awareness, for thoughts and aspirations;
for the glow of relationships, the affection of family, friends, and
pets,
the warmth of sanctuary.

We give thanks for these lights, lit:
lives that touched our own,
ancestors from whom we draw wisdom and strength.
May they continue to be a blessing, and may we join them in blessing
the world.

Joel Miller is the lead pastor of Columbus (Ohio) Mennonite Church. This prayer was informed in part by his training and participation in Peacekeepers at the Polls, an effort in Ohio to staff clergy and others trained in de-escalation tactics at voting locations to ensure safe and fair elections in 2020.

We pray for our world.
Where there is injury, we pray for healing.
Where there is violence, a just peace.

We pray for our nation.
With election day nearing, our prayers are for the common good,
for fair access to voting.
We pray for poll workers and vote counters putting in long hours.
We pray for humility and wisdom for ourselves.
We pray for courage to stand up.
We pray that our partisanship might be with the poor and with the planet.
We pray for all the officials who will serve in the year to come. May they lead with integrity.

May we never simply rely on election results to bring about hoped-for change.

May we continue to cultivate beloved community
within the conflicted parts of ourselves,
within our congregation,
within our neighborhoods and city.

Have mercy on us, O God, according to your steadfast love.

We pray all these things in the strong and enduring Spirit of Jesus that is with us even now. Amen.

Permission is granted to use and adapt this prayer.

Protest as Worship

Amy Yoder McGloughlin

“With what shall I come before the Lord,
And bow myself before God on high?
Shall I come before God with burnt offering,
With calves a year old?
Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
With ten thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgressions,
The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”
God has told you, O mortal, what is good;
And what does the Lord require of you
But to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with God.
(Micah 6:6–8 NRSV)

Christian worship, broadly defined, is an experience of reverence for God. This has, in many White Mennonite circles, been practiced in a tightly orchestrated worship service in the sanctuary, with a liturgy that flows seamlessly from praise to confession to proclamation, sharing, and prayer.

But worship can be expressed well beyond the liturgy and outside traditional worship spaces. And in the past several years, I’ve been stretched to understand public protest as an act of worship.

Preparing for Worship

In December 2015, leaders of the New Sanctuary Movement (NSM) of Philadelphia—an immigrant justice organization—asked me to participate in an act of civil disobedience.¹ The mayor of Philadelphia, Michael Nutter, was plan-

Amy Yoder McGloughlin’s relationship with activism began when she was serving as pastor of Germantown Mennonite Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, from 2010 to 2018. That relationship continues in her work in suburban Philadelphia with the folks at Frazer Mennonite Church.

1 Max Marin, “Anti-deportation Protest Gets Physical Outside City Hall,” *Al Día*, December 11, 2015, <https://aldianews.com/articles/politics/immigration/anti-deportation-protest-gets-physical-outside-city-hall/41461>.

ning to lift the sanctuary status of the city, a shocking reversal of his April 2014 decision. NSM, having exhausted all diplomatic means, decided that public action was the next important step to prevent the reversal.

Ending Philadelphia's sanctuary status would be dangerous for folks living in the city without legal documentation.² Undocumented immigrants could be handed over to US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) if they called the police to report a crime against themselves or were pulled over for a routine traffic stop. As a Christian, I believe this practice is in direct opposition to the basic call of scripture to "treat the alien among you as native born" (Lev 19:34) and to welcome the stranger (Matt 25:35).

I understood this request to participate in civil disobedience as one of accompaniment and solidarity. I took the request very seriously, especially because the organization's co-director, herself undocumented, asked me to risk arrest. I thought about it. I prayed for wisdom. I asked for my family's blessing, I asked for the blessing of my congregation, and I made plans for childcare and worship services later in the week, were I to be arrested and detained.

I don't like participating in acts of civil disobedience. I don't find them exciting or exhilarating. They are stressful. I worry about getting hurt or arrested. I worry about not having control over the circumstances around me. And I struggle with disobeying governing authorities, even when the cause is righteous. But, ultimately, participating was a public way to walk with undocumented folks and to use my power and privilege as a White citizen for the sake of the safety of others.

On the way to the protest, I began to worry about my safety, so I talked to Peter, the director of NSM. Peter listened compassionately. He heard my concerns and empathized. He didn't tell me what to do. The only wisdom he offered was, "Can you prayerfully channel your feelings into this work today?"

The question gave me permission to take my stress and anxiety and put it to use, channeling it to fuel my righteous indignation in this moment. This protest would be—for me—an embodied witness of my faith and an act of discipleship. Treating civil disobedience as an experience of reverence for God and God's beloveds gave me the inner fortitude to follow through, despite my fears.

After a few moments of deep breathing, prayer, and centering with the other participants in the action, I felt ready to be fully present. I was grateful for that time of centering because what we had expected would be simple arrests turned violent when security personnel dragged two protestors outside and threw them on top of the rest of us who were blocking the doors to City Hall. Our prayer and centering before the event carried us through as we continued to sing songs

² Human Rights Watch, "US: Immigrants 'Afraid to Call 911'; States Should Reject Corrosive 'Secure Communities' Program," May 14, 2014, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/05/14/us-immigrants-afraid-call-911>.

that drew on our collective spiritual histories, expressing reverence for God and God's people as we sang and sat in protest. We prayerfully adapted to the situation at hand when things did not go as planned.

Reframing Sanctuary

While my theological education had prepared me for worship within a sanctuary space, worship transgresses the boundaries of our buildings.

In 2016, NSM of Philadelphia developed a hotline for undocumented Philadelphians to call if there was a raid in their community.³ The hotline was set up to activate a large group of community allies to arrive on the scene, ready to shut down the streets in order to keep families safe from ICE detention and deportation. Every time NSM's supporters were activated, they were asked to enter the area of the raid in spiritual reverence, mindful of those whose lives and families were being threatened.

Church buildings are considered to be safe spaces from ICE.⁴ If NSM could gather around a home being raided by ICE and declare it a place of worship, it could pressure ICE to abandon the raid. Using prayer and spiritual songs to mark the street for worship, the space could be transformed from one of fear to one of sanctuary.

In other situations like this, if an ICE agent was threatening to arrest or detain an undocumented immigrant, protestors would be trained to draw attention to themselves and to the ICE agent. But this NSM action aimed instead to turn the street into worship, surrounding agents and families with love, prayer, and song, inviting all into our collective worship experience and inviting all present to turn toward God.

Ultimately, this model became difficult to implement. Hotline calls needed to be confirmed, and by the time folks were mobilized to a location, the arrests were over.

But just because something is not successful doesn't mean it's not instructive. New Sanctuary Movement redefined sanctuary by modeling public witness and protest as worship—where undocumented folks should be safe. And in our singing and praying in the streets, I understood my prayers and worship to be transformative for people's spirits as well as for structures that dehumanize.

3 Janell Ross, "Philadelphia Has a Hotline for Undocumented Immigrants Facing Raids," *Washington Post*, May 30, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/05/30/philadelphia-has-a-hotline-for-undocumented-immigrants-facing-raids/>.

4 John Morton, "U.S. Immigration and Customs Memo to Field Directors, Special Agents in Charge, Chief Counsel," October 24, 2011, <https://www.ice.gov/doclib/ero-outreach/pdf/10029.2-policy.pdf>.

Preparing Ourselves for Worship

These days, the only way I have the strength to enter into marches or other acts of protest is if I see them as an act of worship. The tension of these events fills me with anxiety and dread. But today's political circumstances compel me out of comfort. Worship should also be moving us out of comfort into something bigger, into God's liberating work in our world.

In the summer of 2020, I brought my daughter and several of her friends to a Black Lives Matter protest in Philadelphia. Shortly before that, on May 25, George Floyd had been murdered in Minneapolis by (former) police officer Derek Chauvin. Handcuffed, Mr. Floyd had lain face down, pinned to the ground by Chauvin's knee on his neck for more than nine minutes while the life drained out of him. Outraged by this police violence, people joined organized protests in cities and towns all over the world. Likewise, we wanted to express our support for the Black community, while calling for a system that treats Black and Brown folks with dignity.

On the way to the rally we talked about ground rules: Stay together. Remember that this is not about you. If you are scared, tell someone. Make sure you always have your buddy with you. Stay hydrated. We talked about how we White folks should behave, and we agreed to defer to the Black leaders of this march. They were in charge, and we would follow their lead. We also talked about what to do if tear gas was used on protestors. I brought alcohol wipes for us to smell—to clear our sinuses—and asked the girls to bring scarves to cover their faces. Just in case. This conversation was a preparation for worship, an experience of reverence in a crowd of thousands. We weren't just showing up; we were bringing our full selves to this event and preparing ourselves for personal and collective transformation.

As we found a parking spot near the march, I asked my daughter and her friends to think about a word they each wanted to focus on during the march. What was the intention they wanted to set for the day? How would they stay centered in what could be a contentious march?

I wanted to make this march an act of worship, a time of reverence for God and hope for the world that God had created. My solidarity with the Black community would be a way to honor the presence of God in my Black friends. My chants would be to honor God's Black children. My presence would be to elevate the silenced voices of God's Black- and Brown-skinned images. This was not about me.

Learning from those events with the New Sanctuary Movement, I brought my worship mindset into the street. I brought my anger at an unjust system that murders Black and Brown folks, and I channeled that into a spirit-led presence at this event. I brought the worship space out into the street, ready to use prayer as a tool of transformation, and song as a cry for God's justice. This march was

answering a call to justice, a call that transgressed the walls of worship spaces and flowed like a rushing river out the doors of our sanctuaries.

Worship is more than the gathered community engaged in liturgy in a house of worship. It is not bound by a worship order, perfect words, or carefully orchestrated singing. Worship is in the streets, walking in solidarity, crying out for liberation, praying with our feet. Liturgy flows through the chants and rallying songs. We show our reverence for God and God's people through our cries and our actions for the world that Jesus came to build with us. And in the chaos of protest, God is present.

Worship and the Kingdom of God

Robert Thiessen with Anne Thiessen

When I saw that “Worship and Witness” was the topic for this issue of *Anabaptist Witness*, I immediately thought, as perhaps some of you did also, of John Piper’s well-known and repeated declaration: “Missions exists because worship doesn’t. . . . Worship therefore is the fuel and goal of missions.”¹ In *Global Church Planting*, Craig Ott and Gene Wilson add, “Worship is the goal because when all else passes away, worship will be the occupation of the church for all eternity. It is our Great Calling, from eternity past to eternity future.” They quote (with added emphasis) Paul’s opening to Ephesians (1:13–14): “Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, . . . to the praise of his glory.”² Christopher Wright adds: “We could say that mission exists because praise does. The praise of the church is what energizes and characterizes it for mission.”³

In this essay, I will concentrate on the aspect of visible worship in the gathered church, focusing particularly on the issue of cultural imposition.⁴ Despite contextualization being widely written about in mission literature and acknowledged by many missionaries, cultural imposition remains a problem.

I realize that my experience in Latin America (since the late eighties) could be different from what others know about worship in the rest of the globe. I

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1 John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1993), 11.

2 Craig Ott and Gene Wilson, *Global Church Planting: Biblical Principles and Best Practices for Multiplication* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 397–98.

3 Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God* (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 134.

4 There are many other parts of church and individual life that could be considered worship, such as caring for widows and orphans, but I think that most readers’ initial response to the word “worship” involves those things that most groups practice during their communal “church service.” (In Spanish, the word for worship services is *culto*, which literally means “worship.”)

write with the awareness that there are many types of cross-cultural mission and church formation ministries, with a wide range of how issues within these ministries have been, and are being, engaged. However, in reading journals and books that cover this wide range, and when I discuss this topic with missionaries engaged elsewhere, I perceive that the concerns I carry—summarized as cultural imposition—are not limited to the places I am familiar with.

Another significant factor affecting my perspective is that I am mostly familiar with the efforts of missionaries and churches that fit broadly into the evangelical family (including Pentecostals) of the church. In Latin America there are very few other parts of the church starting new works in the dominant culture or that are involved among people who have not heard the Good News of Jesus. The Roman Catholic Church is obviously active, and commendable in some ways in this arena, but their long tradition of introducing male leadership structures (requiring many years of study) and rituals that do not arise from the local culture makes it even more difficult for them to allow for contextualized worship.

We can start an exploration of worship by simply stating that the church worships. This much we can agree on, even if we don't agree on what worship means or entails. The worship of God is the fitting air that we all need to breathe.

But this—like Piper's statement that "Missions exists because worship doesn't"—is perhaps too easy to say and too hard to pin down. What is the deep pool of assumptions behind these kinds of catchphrases? My concern is how such brief, unnuanced phrases that are easily repeated and superficially attractive can shape not just the Western church but also, by extension, our mission efforts globally. I am particularly concerned when the church exports its own expressions of worship to other people groups, with too little reflection about cultural differences that can easily decrease the relevancy of given expressions of worship in church gatherings. Without such reflection, these phrases can become a quip, a "jingoism" summarizing one's missiology in potentially counterproductive ways.

When Piper's statement is taken too simplistically, for instance, it can result in insistence that we (from whatever cultural background we reflect) know what worship should look like for people who live in cultures that are very different from our own. Additionally, the frequent Western assumption that leadership preparation takes at least a couple years on top of a couple-year period of proving maturity (especially when there is an emphasis on formal degrees) may result in an outsider leading public worship for a significant initial period. And an insistence that the Bible is inspired (meaning, the *missionary's* understanding of it is rarely questioned) may inhibit self-reflection on the insufficiency of our own theology. These factors, among others, can contribute to a pattern of cultural engagement where the missionary assumes the really important things are

already figured out, leaving little space for local people to develop their own theology and worship that reflects their own context.

So why does an insistence on worship in missions result in the kind of narrowness I have observed? Why do so many new churches all over the world look so much like the churches of the foreigners who initiated the work? The songs might include translated lyrics, but, for the most part, little else reflects the local culture. The prayers sound a lot like the home country's, even when spoken in a different language—the tone, the pauses, the filler words, the theology all vary little from the country of origin.

That said, I want to be careful to acknowledge that, over time, many churches in Latin America have since adopted aspects of their local culture in matters of tempo and exuberance. The process, however, has taken fifty years or longer and has been fraught with contention. And even today, many groups hold on to patterns established long ago by North American missionaries.

Regardless of the level of acculturation that the more established churches have attained, it is telling how they pursue their own cross-cultural mission among the First Nation peoples around them. Here in Mexico, they usually impose their own patterns and theology at the very least. Worse, they do this without the benefit of using the indigenous language.

Thankfully, today most missionaries understand the need for local expression and place a much deeper emphasis on contextualization. I rarely must argue for the goal of indigeneity. The problem of cultural imposition hasn't diminished sufficiently, however. The practice of worship—the how to—is still debated. The most significant pushback I receive comes from practitioners whose starting point is that God needs to be worshiped, rather than that there is One seeking a relationship in which our worship is “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23).

This quote from Jesus, in the middle of his interaction with the Samaritan woman, is his response to the woman's assumption that he, a good Jewish teacher, would demand that true worship happen in his own cultural center, Jerusalem. She wonders if her own people's practice of worshipping on the local mountain isn't at least as good. In response, Jesus gives all the permission we'll ever need to walk with different people into something we can't yet imagine, nor define from beforehand. He says, “But the time is coming—indeed it's here now—when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way. For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:22–23 NLT).

In light of this, many missionaries agree in theory that indigeneity is desirable and that Jesus gives us freedom to pursue it. Yet, in practice, some Western missionaries still find it difficult to foster this in practical ways. I believe that the following outline of traditional mission practice will help explain why. The more differences there are between the sender and receiver cultures, especially in areas of privilege, wealth, and education, the greater will be the effects of these points. This is roughly what happens:

- The missionary arrives in a place they have little understanding of.
- The missionary begins language learning and acculturation but often does so formally (not relationally).
- The missionary shares the gospel as they already understand it, often without knowing much about the local culture or its dynamics of honor vs. shame, or power vs. fear, as described by Jayson Georges in *The 3D Gospel*.⁵ People begin to accept the missionary's understanding of the universe and gather together because even this truncated and foreign gospel is still Good News.
- The missionary leads the group, since all the rest of the people are new to this way of understanding and, in the missionary's estimation, not ready for leadership. This means that the missionary leads in the form they already know, taking style, content, order, liturgy, and sacraments from their home culture. There are often some modifications in externals but no changes at the core of worship practices. An example would be serving communion on the first Sunday of the month with individual tiny cups of local juice accompanied by slivers of a local starch (reflecting both theological and hygienic concerns of the missionary).
- The missionary begins to raise up local leadership, usually six months to two years later, choosing those most responsive to their leadership—the ones who most adopt the missionary-established forms. Local leadership develops along the pattern laid out.
- The missionary gradually releases aspects of leadership: music is often first, next prayers, and finally, preaching.
- The local leaders who most respond to the missionary's direction rise faster. These are the ones who most do things the way the outsider is doing them. The situation becomes even more complicated when these leaders are paid by the missionary.
- The missionary leaves an established church with local leaders. These local leaders are the ones who deviated the least from the outsiders' pat-

⁵ Jayson Georges, *The 3D Gospel: Ministry in Guilt, Shame, and Fear Cultures* (San Bernardino: TimePress, 2014).

terns and theology. They can even be more adamant than the missionary about maintaining some of the established practices (Matt 23:15).

Laying out the traditional model of church planting this way makes it easy to see why conformity in worship, among other areas, arises in new church plants that are birthed through this model. Such conformity is inevitable. How could it be otherwise? But I think this kind of worship pains God, for whom creativity most describes the beginning and sustaining of our universe. Cultural imposition also carries with it a great disrespect for others as well as an ignorance of the price they pay, often without even knowing it. It can never be a holistic witness of who God really is.

Ott and Wilson in *Global Church Planting* lament the broad use of the traditional process outlined above. They identify it as the pastoral church planting model rather than the apostolic model practiced by Paul in the New Testament, where new churches did not depend on the missionary for their leaderships:

Though the apostolic approach to church planting is not necessarily the best approach in every setting, it is the approach that has been most often blessed by God in launching locally sustainable and reproducing church-planting movements. Unfortunately, most Western church planters have never observed it, were not trained in it, and thus hardly consider it as an alternative to the way they have seen churches planted in their home context. Even cross-cultural church planters tend to assume that apart from a few cultural adjustments they should plant churches as they have been planted in their home culture. But this will seldom lead to indigenous church multiplication.⁶

I've told the following story before in this journal, but it bears repeating here: Anne and I began our work among First Nations of Mexico with the Mixtecos of southern Mexico. We were living there, learning language and culture, trying to fit into their world. A small group of believers already worshipped together as the first evangelical church in this high mountain region. Two of their leaders had been martyred (separately) the previous year. The group lived in fear for their lives every day, facing many levels of persecution. They were mostly monolingual, with a few of the younger men knowing enough Spanish to sell goods in the city markets. We soon realized that during their worship services, four times a week, the only Mixtec used was for the transitions of "sit down," "stand up," "let's pray," and a very rough translation of the antiquated Spanish biblical text chosen for the day. A couple of the young men led the service in their broken Spanish. When we asked about this, why they didn't at least pray

⁶ Craig Ott and Gene Wilson, *Global Church Planting: Biblical Principles and Best Practices for Multiplication* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 90.

in Mixtec, the leaders quite ingenuously asked, “Wouldn’t God be angry with us if we used our poor speech to address him?” This, from people willing to lay down their lives to follow Jesus, unaware of how much he longed to free them from the shame of being marginalized.

Even though this story is from close to thirty years ago, I see many different iterations of it still today. I am involved in mentoring and connecting among a wide range of indigenous groups in southern Mexico, and not much has changed.

When a missionary perceives a lack of worship as the primary issue, they tend to emphasize the individual’s and culture’s inadequacy or wrongness. With this focus, things like injustice and marginalization, and poverty and deprivation become secondary concerns, often only addressed as a means to get at what is seen as of first importance.

I think that the above sequence also shows where a missionary’s approach could be different. It could all start before they even leave their own culture. They could reflect seriously on the model of Jesus, who, even while still in his own culture—ever present with God and the angelic hosts—knew he had to leave his world behind, taking nothing with him but his identity as he ventured out into our crazy world. While there are other lessons to be gleaned here, it is this “leaving” that has bearing on the present topic. In order for us to be incarnational (Phil 2:5–8), we, too, must leave behind much that we assume and value as we learn from those we serve. And in those first few years, if the missionary is learning like a babe and then a young child, and refraining from imposing their own understanding and culture, they will have time and space to reflect on those things. They can be discerning what is cultural and what might be supra-cultural. Of course, a few good missionary anthropology books will help that process.

Could we learn from local people not only their language but also how they think about the spiritual realm? About what really matters? The nature of humanity? What sin or brokenness means for them? Might we begin to understand the terrible hellishness of being marginalized and subjugated? If our preconceptions about these arenas and how God sees them don’t change through contact with another culture, how can we learn?

Would we be willing to leave behind the privilege of reading the Bible if those we were called to serve were an oral people? Would we forgo private devotions for five years to understand better how communal peoples find succor and knowledge? Would we fully live like locals if we end up among the poor? How far can we imagine we might need to go to follow the model of Jesus, commanded by Paul, in Philippians 2:5–8?

Once one begins true acculturation, there is then room for next steps, most of which will show themselves. Without this kind of beginning, there can be very little movement toward genuine indigenous worship that is meaningful.

But with it, we will see worship that arises from people who, for the first time, grasp the goodness of God, who provides for them beyond what they can imagine yet. Then they can know the love and honor that the father in the parable of the prodigal son shows (by running out to them while they are still far off, and by bestowing on them all the honor of being children, not servants, without reservation). When they see that the (international) community around them comes to the festival of welcome, eating the local food, then they will praise God for themselves. Not because of what has been done in some far-off place that bears little resemblance to their world, nor with words and externals formed by someone else's history, but through their own expression of the kingdom.

I believe that the Anabaptist family of the church is perhaps the tradition that leaves the most room for this kind of thinking and practice. We emphasize the centrality of Jesus Christ and his kingdom—and the way that Jesus reveals God more fully than anything else, including the rest of Scripture outside the Gospels. This should draw us away from a starting point of holiness that distances itself from wretched sinners⁷ and toward a welcoming kingdom of God. Jesus never distanced himself from sinners. In fact, the more wretched that society deemed people, the more he seemed to approach those people with mercy.

Reflecting on Jesus's life as normative should allow us to be learners in a new culture, realizing that his first thirty years were not wasted but, in fact, ministry. We might find it difficult to grasp that Jesus was God among us during those early years, given that the Bible only mentions one extraordinary incident from that time period—when Jesus was twelve, dialoguing with the teachers in the temple. To assume that Jesus's ministry began only after his first thirty years is understandable, but I believe that a richer perspective, and one that is likely truer to reality, is to view all of Jesus's years of learning and adapting as the *beginning* of his ministry rather than a prelude to it.

Remember that Jesus began his public ministry by announcing not a need for worship but the approaching kingdom as Good News. Citing Isaiah, he said:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the Lord's favor has come. (Luke 4:18–19 NLT)

Jesus's mission statement here should help us keep a wide view of what salvation entails and how we can be part of bringing that to earth.

Yes, as Piper insists, we are created to worship and to draw others into a 24/7 life of worship. But I would broaden Piper's statement from "Missions exists be-

⁷ This kind of holiness is the quality of God that Reformed thinkers like Piper take as their starting point, leading to their focus on a need for worship that preempts the Good News of a relational God of welcome.

cause worship doesn't" to **Missions exists because the kingdom doesn't**. Not fully. And not yet. Where there is no weeping, no hunger, no captivity. Where, yes, we worship our Lord and Maker, in the way that John foretold—coming together from every tribe, ethnicity, tongue, and family (Rev 7:9). Where the gates are never closed and people go in and out of the New Jerusalem that has finally come to earth.

What that worship looks like remains to be seen. At the very least, this vision of the New Jerusalem shows us that corporate worship should reflect local languages, cultural values, and needs. How worship is expressed beyond this deserves much further reflection. And we can only do such reflection well in conjunction with our global family—a privilege and a challenge that will continue until our Lord returns.

Let us all participate in mission, in the myriad of ways that need to unfold, till God's kingdom comes on earth as it is in heaven.

(Yard) Signs of Our Worship

Exploring Faith, Meaning, and Messaging in 2020

Debbi DiGennaro

Abstract

Through a sociological framework of *lived religion*, this research focused on the religious behavior and practices that lay people use in ordinary life to help create a sense of meaning and transcendence. Specifically, the research explored how Mennonite families were using yard signs to engage sociopolitical concerns during the fall of 2020 in the area around Harrisonburg, Virginia. Mennonite families were chosen as participants because of the conscious and overt link between religious practice and social behavior in the Anabaptist tradition. In the context of personal interviews, 12 participant households discussed their signs (25 signs total), their intentions for posting these signs at this specific time, and the messages they hoped to convey. This article features their voices and stories.

The year 2020 proved to be most unconventional. The COVID-19 pandemic turned our carefully scripted play of life into improvisation, and actors across the sectors found themselves trying out impromptu steps and new lines. These unanticipated pivots profoundly affected families and individuals in various communities of faith. For some families, the changes in congregational life felt like a little hiccup in the regular programming, a simple matter of minor changes against a backdrop of stability. Others experienced the changes as seismic waves crashing and redefining the religious landscape they had taken for granted prior to 2020. Either way, for many people of faith the previous ways of being in relationship and in dialogue became no longer accessible. In-person meetings with congregational singing, calls for volunteers, testimonies, offering, and communal prayer—abruptly paused. And yet, surely these people are still

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praying, still singing, still finding ways to financially support certain causes, and still finding ways to discuss the issues they find most compelling.

How are lay people adapting their religious practices, now that family and neighborhood life may seem more dominant than institutionalized forms of worship? It is still too early to name all the ways the pandemic is changing the religious landscape, but we know that it *is* indeed changing things—accelerating previous trends in one area while obfuscating trends in another. We also know that people live out their faith identities in their daily lives: sometimes we are conscious of the link between faith and behavior; sometimes we enact our faith identities in ways that other people can easily recognize as religious; and sometimes these expressions take place in locations that are collectively understood as sacred.

During this continuing time of COVID-19, as the average lay person is seeing less of pastors and worship professionals, the sanctuary, and institutional traditions, we might expect to see an increase in religious practices that are exploratory and more person-specific in nature. These practices may be located in unconventional spaces. This hiatus from in-person church life may be opening a space for certain forms of religious expression to come toward the fore as other forms fade to the background.

This research surveyed a small number of Mennonite lay families in a specific town during a specific period. It was a point-in-time dipstick to listen in on these families in the semi-public spaces of their front yards and to explore their motivation and intentions: What were they saying? Why were they saying it? And who were they talking to? Their messaging was cast, in that immediate moment, against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2020 national election. Against this historical backdrop, this research is one tiny sliver of observation in the multigenerational unfolding of Mennonite families in American society as they responded to being prodded, pleased, and offended by the sociopolitical realities of the nation.

1. Theoretical Location of Research

Lived religion is an ethnographic framework that focuses on the day-to-day religious practices of lay people. It emerged as an academic field in the United States in the late 1900s and was developed by scholars in the field of religious studies. David D. Hall and Robert A. Orsi are two of these scholars who were concerned that popular religion—in the sense of the institutionalized, grand traditions—was exerting too much control over defining what is legitimate, normal, and centered spiritual experience and meaning-making.¹

¹ David D. Hall, ed., *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); Robert A. Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*:

Lived religion places the microscope of academic research over the private, personal sphere—the micro locations where individuals or small groups embody their faith in ways, perhaps uniquely, that help them make sense of their experiences and anxieties. It emphasizes people and perspectives that may be considered peripheral, or at variance, with the grand traditions, noting the realities of what is happening at the margins as well as at the center, and the ways people actually embody their own faith (not only how they think they ought to). In doing so, it pays attention to the content and context of what the people are doing. As such, lived religion research investigates a plethora of other experiential locations such as home altars and shrines, special dietary choices, clothing choices, dance and arts, and homemade rituals, highlighting the things people do, discuss, and create. Lived religion allows for almost anything—so long as the “anything” is a vessel of meaning for the actors involved—to serve as a “text” for study.

As Nancy Ammerman summarizes the emerging field, it is about lay people (instead of clergy), what they practice (instead of dogma they believe), of their own agency (instead of prescribed behavior).² But some scholars go a step further, suggesting that the field does not actually differentiate between these categories. Orsi argues that attention must be given to institutions *and* persons, texts *and* rituals, practices *and* theology, things *and* ideas. The central issue, he says, is the way people reach for a sense of transcendence from the context of their quotidian realities.³

This theoretical framework pairs well with research on religious practices that are emerging or fluid, which makes it particularly useful in times of rapid change. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic left very little untouched, and religious behavior was no exception. But as church oversight boards in this research group took on laborious tasks of rewriting policies, redesigning spaces, restructuring personnel, and so on to adapt to COVID-19, the lay people were handed a tremendous amount of freedom to improvise and experiment.

Mennonite families, of course, are not the only ones that have been given this freedom. Ironically, America’s fastest growing religious classification, the Nones, have been working in this space for a while—developing meaningful ways of nurturing spirituality beyond the boundaries of the church/synagogue/mosque. But the Anabaptist community is particularly intriguing to watch at junctures like this because of the overt link between faith and behavior—and,

Faith and community in Italian Harlem, 1880–1950 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002).

2 Nancy T. Ammerman, “Lived Religion as an Emerging Field: An Assessment of Its Contours and Frontiers,” *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* 29, no. 2 (February 1, 2016): 83–99, <https://doi.org/10.18261/issn.1890-7008-2016-02-01>.

3 Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*.

specifically, *social* behavior (that is, behaviors in the context of community) in their lives. This research project emerged from a broader curiosity about how today's American Mennonite families would adapt to their churches being "closed."

Engagement is a prevalent theme in the Anabaptist construction of spirituality,⁴ and so the research question for this project developed along the lines of "How are Mennonite families showing up in their local community during this time?" As Palmer Becker puts it in *Anabaptist Essentials*,⁵ while Jesus is the center of our faith, community is the center of our life. As such, the way Mennonites show up in their neighborhoods carries a lot of weight—not just social weight but also theological weight. This interplay between behavior in the social sphere and belief in the theological sphere is present at official levels of the church as well as among the laity. And this is not a glitch in Anabaptist spirituality! Rather, Mennonites view it as a feature of their faith. In their way of understanding, avoiding (or at least minimizing) a dichotomy between belief and behavior forces faithful living to remain concrete, practical, and as genuinely messy as the human community always will be.

2. Methods

Participants for the study were initially sought through social media and direct requests for interviews among known households who qualified for the study. Participants were limited to households who self-identified as Mennonite; resided in the area around Harrisonburg, Virginia; and currently had at least one sign in their yard. Initial interviewees were encouraged to suggest additional participants, so the sampling method was mixed (purposive, convenience, and snowball sampling).

Individuals from 12 different households were interviewed between September 25 and October 6, 2020. Of the 12 interviews, 10 were conducted by phone, 1 by email, and 1 in person. These participants were connected to six different local Anabaptist bodies. Their real first names are used here with permission.

⁴ Engagement is a more prevalent theme for certain branches of the Anabaptist family than others. This comment is based on Ervin Stutzman's work in *From Nonresistance to Justice: The Transformation of Mennonite Church Peace Rhetoric, 1908–2008* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald, 2011), in which he argues that in the one hundred years between 1908 and 2008, changes in the USA-Mennonite community were characterized by movement from quietism to activism, from separatism to engagement, and apolitical church life to political involvement.

⁵ Palmer Becker, *Anabaptist Essentials: Ten Signs of a Unique Christian Faith* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald, 2017).

Participants were asked the following questions:

- What sign(s) are currently posted in your yard?
- What was the issue(s) you meant to engage with/respond to by posting your sign(s)?
- What do you hope others will think about, or what is the message you hope to convey with this sign?
- Assuming that there is some level of congruity between your signs and what you believe, can you describe the link between the signs and your faith/values?
- Are there any ways in which having this sign posted prompted changes in your social behavior, or changed the ways that others relate to you?

One might take issue with the claim that posting a sign constitutes *social* behavior, as, conspicuously, it does not involve any face-to-face interaction between people. While this may be ostensibly true, participants in the study were unambiguous about their intention for communication. No one reported posting the signs for purposes of aesthetics or public safety, for example. Without exception, the signs were intentionally situated in open spaces so they might be read by anyone who came near the house.

The posting of yard signs is not “corporate” worship in the same way that congregational singing is corporate, but perhaps it could be viewed as “corporate” in the sense of family-level, collective behavior. Eleven of the 12 participant households in this study indicated that their household discussed the sign they put up in their yard before posting it and/or generally were in agreement about posting it (even though purchasing and posting the sign only required one actor). The sense of collective, family-level ownership of the messaging suggests genuinely corporate behavior on the micro scale.

What about “worship”? Is it too far-fetched to talk about posting a sign as an act of worship? This article responds with a clear no. Here “worship” is conceptualized as voluntary action intended to honor God or enhance a sense of connection with that which is sacred. Even beyond this general correlation, in the context of Anabaptism, putting faith into action through a physical act like driving a yard sign into the ground may be considered an example of worship *par excellence*.

3. Limitations of the study

This study was not designed to reach a representative sample across congregations, political persuasion, or signage. As a case in point, the single most frequently discussed sign in this research was the Black Lives Matter sign (8 cases out of 25), and none of the Scripture-based signs—which are more common in the county—were represented here. This is not problematic, given the focus on faith, messaging, and meaning, but this research should not be extrapolated to make statements about the area that it was not designed to make.

A second limitation of this research is that it focused exclusively on the discourse of the families who posted the signs, while the voices from the intended audience—the drivers and pedestrians who read the signs—are largely absent. Those voices only entered into this research through participant-reported anecdotes of their audiences “responding” through actions of pulling up, damaging, or stealing signs, or yelling messages out the window of their vehicles as they drove past.

4. Results

In this sample of 25 signs, the most common sign was Black Lives Matter ($n=8$), followed by signs of support for a political candidate ($n=7$), “Welcome Your Neighbor” signs ($n=6$), and four other signs that only appeared once each. With only one exception, all the signs were manufactured, which suggests that families spent money to acquire them. On Amazon.com these signs typically cost between \$5 and \$30. All the signs were intentionally posted in the yard of the family’s home; that is to say that they were not posted by other parties (such as a landlord) or in a space where any anonymity was possible (such as a storefront or business). Five of the 12 participant households (42%) mentioned that at some point in the past year, at least one of their signs had been pulled up, damaged, or stolen.

Data from the interviews are organized below according to the sequence of the questions asked:

Question #1

Participants were asked, “What were the issues you meant to engage with by posting this/these signs?” Their responses, consolidated into 5 general categories, are listed below in order of thematic prevalence:

1. racism and minorities (9)
2. concerns about immigration⁶ (5)

⁶ While participants expressed common concerns about immigration, they approached those concerns differently—some from the angle of hospitality toward immi-

3. concerns about hospitality [toward minorities and/or immigrants] (5)
4. concerns about the accountability of the police force (4)
5. other concerns

Question #2

The second question prompted participants to reflect on the specific message they wanted to convey, to move deeper than their general concern (e.g., immigration, for example): What was the specific message they wanted to communicate about that concern? What did they want others to think about when they read the sign? This question moved the conversation from general themes to concrete and specific messages. Below are selected responses from interviews, organized thematically.

Regarding racism and minority-related concerns, participants said:

- “I want people who have felt alone to know that they are not alone.”
- “For me, it’s making visible and acknowledging the harm that comes from the invisibility and silencing.”
- “I want to show that I care about the part of the community that is getting the short end of the stick.”
- “It’s White people’s problem, and we have got to take responsibility for our problem. I really feel like now is the time to not be silent and [to] take responsibility for what we need to be responsible for and turn this around.”
- “We should rally in support of people who are vulnerable.”
- “[I want to show] just how hard we’re all working and talking about this [Black Lives Matter] situation.”
- “The Black Lives Matter sign is an indication of who we are and how we want our neighbors to be treated.”

Regarding immigration-related concerns, participants said:

- “I am publicly protesting the treatment against immigrants.”
- “The big [political issue] is immigrants and the awful situation with immigrants.”
- “Immigrant-friendly policies are good for our nation.”

Regarding hospitality-related concerns, participants said:

- “As a family we have had experiences of incredible welcome as guests [abroad] and very painful experiences of governmental barriers to being in a place we loved, so issues of welcome are very close to our hearts and the hearts of our children.”

- “We want to convey an openness to relationship, especially toward people for whom English is not their first language.”
- “I want people to feel like this neighborhood welcomes them.”
- “I have received hospitality and love from my neighbors, and I would like to share it to the best of my ability.”

Regarding accountability for police, participants said:

- “We believe in social change, we believe in change that could happen at the governmental level . . . like prison reform, police training, and defunding.”
- [The Black Lives Matter sign] “It’s about racism and the treatment of Black people by police departments with impunity. They don’t have any accountability if they kill somebody or treat someone bad.”
- “Our [Black] daughters have experienced blatant, overt racism in this country, both inside and outside the police department.”
- “The extrajudicial killings by police [of] citizens, disproportionately Black and Brown people . . . is morally reprehensible.”

Question #3

The third question asked participants to explore the ways in which their signage is congruent with their faith as Anabaptist Christians. Most of the participants spoke naturally and easily about this, frequently citing scenes of Jesus in the New Testament and implying that they wanted to emulate his behavior. Some referenced other authors, such as John Howard Yoder and his book *Politics of Jesus* and [Walter Wink’s?] *The Powers*. For some of the participants, however, this question seemed confusing and/or too abstract. It appeared to the interviewer that the question may have been problematic because it assumed a differentiation between values, politics, and religious convictions. This distinction was sharper for some than for others.

Here are a few participant comments about the link between their faith and their signs:

- “All of my signs are connected to my politics, and my politics are deeply connected to my faith.”
- “I see the Christian calling—and Anabaptist faith is part of that stream—is to be a blessing to the nations wherever we find ourselves. A more specific call to be people who welcome relationship—as ambassadors . . . I do see a posture of welcoming relationship at the heart of God’s intention for the world. That is central to who I am as a neighbor.”
- “I think of the phrase ‘They’ll know us by our actions rather than what comes out of my mouth.’ The act of putting my signs there [is my] pub-

lic protest of the treatment of immigrants and women and LGBTQ people. . . . Protest can be political, but can also be about being a follower of Jesus.”

- “I would hope that these signs remind me to live prophetically in a way that resists the dominant narratives of domination and empire.”
- “The crux of it for me is in where power lies. Based on the life of Jesus and where Jesus put energy, it was for people who found themselves outside the protection of the power that was communally held. Because my faith is based on living out things communally, I believe that it is important how others are treated in my community. I really believe that the KOG [kingdom of God] is realized when the imbalances of power are set right.”
- “I just feel like the whole early church was active, they were out there in the community and talking to the prisoners in jail. . . . They were definitely not passive people.”
- “The faith connection is Jesus’s teachings about supporting those who do not have voices, who do not have power, those who have been mistreated.”
- “Anabaptism . . . challenges followers of Jesus to put their faith into practice every day. [My signs] are a reminder to me of what I believe in my heart and want to live with my feet and hands.”

Question #4

The final interview question asked participants to reflect on ways that having sign(s) in their yards may have prompted changes in their social behavior or in the behavior of others toward them. Responses to this question went in several directions. When asked, “Has the sign prompted changes in your behavior?” one woman replied with spunk: “Not at all!” Another man said, “My life is an open book.” In these cases, participants appeared to feel a sense of satisfaction with the congruity between their signs and their character—a simple and direct statement about what *is*. For other respondents, the signs were more *aspirational*—a statement about who they want to be and what they want their community to be. Their answers indicated that, at the very least, they hope the signs prompt changes in themselves and in others.

As a case in point, Matthew Bucher, who led the Welcome your Neighbor sign initiative,⁷ spoke in depth about this aspiration for change. He reported that the original sign was hand-painted on both sides: the church where he is pastor positioned the front side to face the street and the back side to face the

⁷ See “Welcome Your Neighbors,” <https://www.welcomeyourneighbors.org/about>.

front door of the church. “It’s as much about *our* transformation as the *community’s* transformation,” he says. “There’s a temptation to post the right Facebook post and then move on to the next thing. But this is not a virtue signal that ‘we’re ok;’ it’s a reminder to us that this is how we are to be living.” That sign was intended, from its inception, to shape the person who posts it at least as much as the passersby who read it.

Other comments about changes in social behavior included the following:

- “The sign is a proclamation, and a reminder to me that I am committed to being a welcoming neighbor.”
- “It’s an opportunity to keep asking myself how I’m doing that in practical ways. Am I the kind of person who really welcomes everyone—because that’s what it says: I’m glad you’re my neighbor. It’s been formative for me.”
- “We’ve thought about making donuts and just delivering them to neighbors, making Christmas cookies, etc. We just have to put ourselves out there, especially if we’re putting ourselves out there in this way [with a sign].”
- “I think [non-English speakers] are more likely to stop and talk to us.”

These were the types of responses one might expect. Several respondents, however, took the question in a different direction. Christine, whose family’s signs were stolen and their mailbox destroyed, said simply, “We started locking our door.” Jennifer’s comment was similar: “You get paranoid.”

Several interviewees described how they feel—as citizens who often go walking, jogging, or biking in their community—when they see a certain sign. Most of the comments were connected to either the Welcome Your Neighbor or the Black Lives Matter signs. Matthew said, “I remember once when I was bloodied on the side of the road and I saw a Welcome Your Neighbor sign. I was greatly relieved to see it. It happened to be [on the property of] the Harrisonburg mosque.” Two participants reported that Black friends and/or family members have expressed appreciation for their Black Lives Matter signs; one remarked, “When I’m jogging, if I get into trouble I know which houses would be safe for me to ask for help.”

Discussion

Connections: Politics, Faith, Social Issues

The content of the interviews brought to the fore several items of particular interest. First, these interviews suggest a close connection between politics, faith, and social issues in participants’ thinking. Several participants spoke directly to this through comments like “God’s intention for the world . . . is central to

who I am as a neighbor” and (of immigration concerns) “It is a merging of faith and politics.” Since the 1990s, Americans have been trending toward increased alignment between religious identity and political identity,⁸ so this is not particularly a surprise, but it does prompt deeper questions of what this alignment might mean.

This congruity between faith, politics, and social issues may, on one hand, indicate a healthy level of integration between various facets of an individual or family. On the other hand, it may suggest muddy thinking, a fusion of ideas where individual parts might get lost. This may be especially true when the congruence between theology, politics, and social ideology is woven so tightly that it creates an almost impenetrable sense of certainty. Such an approach to politics and social issues that carries the full (perceived) weight of a theological system, combined with an approach to faith that carries very specific political and social ideals, can result in what appear to be self-reinforcing loops.

Sign Messaging

Another complexity that arose was multiplicity in messaging, when one sign was intended to deliver different messages to various audiences. The Black Lives Matter signs were perhaps the most indicative of this occurrence; several participants discussed that they wanted to send one message for Black people (a message of solidarity), and a different message for White people (a message of raising awareness and perhaps a rebuke). It appears that the intended message of a sign is much clearer to the person posting it than it may be to those who are reading it.

A related issue—scope of the messaging—was similarly complex. To what extent does a sign endorse an entire movement or political platform? For example, does a Black Lives Matter sign indicate support for the entire movement or only the specific claim that Black lives do, indeed, matter? One man said, “I will support anything that will mend race relations, but the Black Lives Matter movement is rotten to the core. I don’t have a problem saying Black Lives Matter, because they do! But if you look at that organization, it is nothing that Christians should be supporting.” A pro-Biden sign also elicited various responses: for one person it was about police “training and defunding”; for another person it was a message about creation care; for another a message in support of healthcare, and for yet another the sign was not about Biden at all but simply a statement of dissatisfaction with former president Donald Trump.

⁸ Nancy T. Ammerman, *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes: Finding Religion in Everyday Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Another observation regarding message drift points to ways the intended message of a sign can shift over time. Amy’s case made this point exceptionally well: she and her husband were entering their first election season as a recently married couple. Near the beginning of the season, Amy put a Biden/Harris sign in the grass on one side of the sidewalk leading to the front door. Several days later, her husband responded by posting a Trump/Pence sign on the other side of the sidewalk. When the interviewer asked what message they were trying to convey with their signage, she replied that her message had shifted. “At first, I wasn’t expecting the other sign. [My sign merely] conveyed that I support the Democratic party. Now that two signs are up . . . it suggests that in spite of the incredible polarization in our society, that two people could be married and live in the same house and raise children together.” For Amy, the messaging shifted from pro-Democratic to pro-depolarization and became a fist pump for nuanced discourse.

Elizabeth shared a similar story of message drift. When the Black Lives Matter signs came out, she initially chose not to post one. “I am African American, but through the years I have not felt the racism and [the level of] attack that average African Americans do. At first I thought it was saying ‘Black Lives Matter’ with so much force, it was almost like you were saying that no other lives were important so I didn’t put up the sign.” But as time passed and she listened to more stories from other people of color, she began to reconsider. Ultimately, she decided to post a Black Lives Matter sign—specifically as a show of her solidarity with a particular friend, “Jordan,” who had suffered significantly from racism. For Elizabeth, the meaning of the sign changed over time from a message of exclusivity (“no other lives are important”) to a very specific message of support for Jordan.

Community Responses

Many of the participants cited concerns about how others would respond to their signs. Some deliberately selected signs that were unlikely to antagonize their neighbors, while others reported wanting to support a message or give witness to an idea, even though they expected the message would be unpopular with some. Deanna, for example, who keeps a homemade PEACE sign permanently posted in her yard, said, “The idea of peace on earth is something my neighbors would be okay with. It doesn’t antagonize them in the same way that possibly a political sign would.” Jennifer, on the other hand, posted a Black Lives Matter sign even though she knew it would be unpopular with her neighbors. “I feel like it’s not ok for me to be silent,” she said. “We’re stirring up conflict in our community [with the signs]. How do we, as a peace church, stir up conflict in a way that is healthy? How do I value [my neighbors] at the same time that I am horrified by what they’re doing [in this situation where] we’re making things uncomfortable for our community and even uncomfortable for us?”

In spite of the apparent absence of antagonistic motives for posting signs, half of the participants reported being targeted for some form of mistreatment or harassment⁹ by people reacting to their signs. In John's case, he was cut off from his extended family. He reported that following some discussion about the Black Lives Matter movement and issues of police misconduct, "We [my relatives and I] are no longer on speaking terms."

Other participants experienced signs being toppled, destroyed, or stolen, messages shouted from passing cars or pedestrians, and social ostracism. The belongings (the signs themselves) of 5 interviewees were destroyed or stolen. In most cases, except when the signs were posted by the road, access to the signs included trespassing. One woman reported, "Within 36 hours [of posting the sign] someone climbed the fence, damaged it, and stole it." (She added, "We put a new one out right away. We have to bring it in every night [so it doesn't get stolen]; it's like our pet.") Christine, who had posted 6 signs, reported that they all were stolen in September and her mailbox was bashed. Jennifer reported that when she posted a Black Lives Matter sign, "Right away, people were driving by yelling, 'White lives matter' and 'All lives matter!'" A man walked by their home "screaming" toward the house and later toward her twenty-year-old son when he drove out the driveway.

Naturally, this type of pushback has been upsetting. Jennifer observed that she feels less safe in her community: "It makes you re-think everything. If he had seen me jogging by and he had been in a car, would he have swerved at me? You kind of get paranoid." Nevertheless, in every case where participants were the targets of hostility, they chose to repurchase and repost the same signs. Greta, whose Black Lives Matter sign was stolen, said, "Having had the sign stolen makes me realize that this takes effort. By reposting the signs, I'm saying, 'No, this [issue] isn't going away.'"

Intentions: The Question of "Why?"

This research took place during the eighth month of a pandemic, in the middle of a contentious election season, with the unemployment higher than it has been in the past seventy years. As economic and political concerns reached a crescendo, it was fascinating to listen in on what these families were talking about in the spaces of their front yards. But going a step beyond the *what* of their messages, there remained the question of *why*. Why bother? Why bother to go to the effort for something that might irk your neighbors and eventually get stolen?

Participants' intentions, shown below in five general categories, were full of substance:

⁹ Harassment here refers to various forms of pushback from community members.

1. **A vote for shalom and good neighborliness.** Several of the signs in this study, such as the PEACE sign, appeared to be a subtle but deliberate move to promote simple friendliness between neighbors—a reminder of shared humanity and an expression of goodwill. In times of tension and stress, this type of messaging may be particularly appropriate.
2. **Proclamation of faith.** Some people used their signs as a public declaration of faith—a clear and direct message about the beliefs of the families who were living at that address. John said, “We want people to see those signs and say, ‘The people who live in that house, social justice is important to them and they are willing to stand up for what they believe in.’” Proclamation signs, unlike the signs in the following categories, do not necessarily purport to change other people or systems. It is a family’s way of drawing a line in the sand: this is who we are, this is what we stand for. This kind of public declaration takes courage.
3. **Prophetic messages.** A number of the participants used their signs as a prophetic gesture: to raise awareness about problems, to lament, to encourage the confession of corporate sin, and to plead with their community to consider positive change. The messages behind these signs focused on “us”/“our community” and themes of redemption; they were grounded in a sense of hope that we, collectively, can do better. In this way, they may be reminiscent of certain forms of public prayer—expressions of lament and acknowledgment that as a human community we have fallen short.
4. **Social Action: intentional activism for improving certain aspects of the community.** Some families posted signs because they wanted to change the readers’ perspectives. Lee, for example, hopes his political sign “will help people think about alternatives . . . what is more edifying, what has more healing, what is more inclusive.” Jennifer said she hopes her neighbors will give consideration to the message on her sign, a sign that has not been popular in her area, because they know her personally: “Maybe because [our neighbors] know us as people, it can be a counterpoint to all the media stuff about [left-wing people] being baby killers.”
5. **Protest: an intentional show of disapproval for something another person or group has done.** Unlike the statements of faith, protest is often a response to someone *else’s* position. The audience is the “other.” The message is “Stop!” These messages of protest can be delivered with a high or low level of confrontation, and can likewise be interpreted (regardless of the intent) with high or low levels of hostility.

Yard Signs as Religious Dialogue

Using yard signs as a way to talk about deep values and complex concerns has a number of inherent limitations. Perhaps the most obvious one is the ambiguity created by the (necessary) brevity of the signs, which are often just one, two, or three words in length. These signs, packed with unspoken subtexts, may mean completely different things to the people who post them versus the people who read them. Take the Black Lives Matter sign in a neighbor's yard, for instance—is it a message about Black people, White people, policing, or voting reform?

Another important limitation is the relative absence of dialogue. When a sign is posted, it may or may not lead to conversation between those who post the signs and those who read them. For complicated issues, other platforms are better suited to an exchange of ideas—to questions and responses, and to the personal stories lying behind the emotions that yard signs often represent.

In spite of the limitations, however, these interviews underscored that families can indeed post signs as a platform to make public statements about things that matter to them a great deal—things that matter so much, in fact, that they may be willing to repeatedly purchase the same sign and keep posting it in their yards even when they fully anticipate that it will be stolen or destroyed.

Front yards may not be a typical place for religious dialogue, and plastic signs may not be traditional worship art, but these interviews suggest that participants are using yard signs for profoundly religious actions, including confession of sin, statements of faith, and action for social justice.

Continuing the Ancient Story: Faith Amid Change

At the time of this study, like so many families of faith across the nation, the Mennonite participants in this study had been experiencing an enormous (and nonvoluntary) disruption in how they were practicing faith during the COVID-19 pandemic. Only 1 of the 12 families represented was able to attend weekly meetings at their home churches in person. For the other 11 families, such conversations and activities were no longer happening in the same ways.

It seems likely that people will look for ways to replace what has been lost or changed during the pandemic and, in the process, develop new faith practices or explore new aspects of old faith practices. Perhaps in the eye of history the year 2020 will be a moment of paradigmatic change in American religious life. Perhaps it will be a time when our concept of “the sacred” bursts open. There will probably be changes in the way we relate to our spaces: as our relationship with the church building shifts, new spaces will take on sacred significance over time. Considering the current pandemic-induced limitations on social gatherings, these new spaces are likely to be smaller and more personal, perhaps centering around homes and neighborhoods. The rapidly evolving environment will continue to churn up new dilemmas, replacing the current “hot topic” issues in

our dialogue with new issues that 2020 has brought to the fore. And as families and faith communities adapt, social maps will invariably be redrawn as people cluster in new ways around novel issues and practices.

Gauging from history, some of our new habits are likely to be problematic—new habits often are—but perhaps some of these are changes we can welcome. The current status quo is certainly not free of problems, especially when viewed from the perspective of the margins. Perhaps it is not such a bad thing for our religious landscape to be upended. People of faith will continue to create meaningful practices; they will find ways to embody the values they cherish—which is as it should be.

Each generation must appropriate their faith to make it real. And as we move forward into new spaces, we also will be moving back into a very old story, a story repeated across many times and spaces, a story of faith, upheaval, and innovation.

Entrevista a Almendra Fantilli

Directora del documental *El Culto*

Marcos Acosta

MARCOS: En los últimos años, Almendra Fantilli y su esposo Lucas Magnin han estado en una búsqueda teológica donde han encontrado refugio en ideas anabautistas, especialmente en las obras de Antonio González. Un fruto de esta búsqueda es el libro *La traición suprema*,¹ ilustrado por Almendra Fantilli, donde se observa esta influencia.

Invité a Almendra Fantilli para que nos hable sobre su trabajo dirigiendo el documental «El Culto».² Luego, le envié algunas preguntas para invitarla a reflexionar sobre el rol del culto en la iglesia evangélica argentina con base en su experiencia y trabajo en el documental.

ALMENDRA: «El Culto» es un documental que registra de principio a fin la celebración de cuatro comunidades; es una invitación a contemplar un mosaico de similitudes y diferencias, de acuerdos y tensiones, de palabras y silencios en búsqueda de la trascendencia.

Para los cristianos evangélicos, el culto representa un tiempo y espacio de encuentro con lo divino, la comunidad y la propia espiritualidad. Ahí se cruzan historias personales y colectivas de tristezas, alegrías, esperanza y redención, y se manifiestan, explícitas o latentes, disputas por el sentido y la identidad cristiana.

Las cuatro iglesias son:

Almendra Fantilli: Licenciada en comunicación social y fotógrafa. Cristiana evangélica de toda la vida. Militante y trabajadora de la comunicación de distintas organizaciones sociales y políticas. Le conmueve profundamente lo popular, la búsqueda de la trascendencia y la manera en que las personas gestionan la vida cotidiana a través de la fe cristiana.

Marcos Acosta: Argentino. Ingeniero en Telecomunicaciones. Estudiante de Maestría en Divinidad en el Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary. Asistente de Anabaptist Witness. Cristiano evangélico con tendencias anabautistas.

¹ Lucas Magnin, *La traición suprema. Triunfo y vergüenza del cristianismo en el poder* (Córdoba [Argentina]: Ediciones del Altillio, 2019).

² «El Culto - Documental», acceso el 9 de diciembre de 2020, <https://www.elculto-documental.com>.

El Ministerio Templo La Hermosa: surgió en 1995 de la mano de su fundador, el pastor y apóstol Omar Páez, y su esposa, la pastora y profeta Alejandra de Lourdes Páez. Está ubicada en la zona sur de la ciudad de Córdoba, en el barrio Cárcano.

Esta iglesia se inscribe dentro del movimiento neopentecostal, una expresión del protestantismo en constante crecimiento en América Latina y otros lugares del mundo, caracterizada por la creencia y la vivencia de milagros, manifestaciones sobrenaturales y el poder del Espíritu Santo.

El ministerio realiza una fuerte tarea de contención espiritual, emocional y social, que incluye visitas a la cárcel de Bouwer, a hospitales, etc. Se destacan también diversos ministerios, como la escuela de danza, teatro y arte corporal, denominada «Mak, desh», de la que forman parte aproximadamente 200 jóvenes. También cuenta con tres bandas de cuarteto cristiano: La Antorcha, Oazis y Yeramel.

La Iglesia La Trinidad: es parte de la Iglesia Evangélica Metodista Argentina. Fue fundada en 1961. Se originó tras la solicitud de directivos de Renault (Ika), quienes pidieron a su iglesia en Estados Unidos que enviaran misioneros para crear una comunidad.

El origen de la iglesia metodista se remonta a la Inglaterra del siglo xviii, bajo la guía del Rev. John Wesley. Al principio, fue un movimiento de renovación espiritual, misionero y social dentro de la Iglesia anglicana; su trabajo en contra de la esclavitud, en favor de los sindicatos obreros y de las clases populares fue clave en el contexto de la revolución industrial. Posteriormente, se constituyó como una denominación en sí misma, que en la actualidad está presente en todos los continentes y cuenta con más de 90 millones de miembros.

En Argentina, la Iglesia metodista desembarcó en el año 1836. Su aporte fue muy importante en la educación durante el siglo xix y en su compromiso con los Derechos Humanos desde el último cuarto del siglo xx. Es parte de la Federación Argentina de Iglesias Evangélicas, y tiene una clara identidad evangélica y vocación ecuménica. En su horizonte misionero, hoy intenta responder a los desafíos de la igualdad, la violencia de género y la justicia ecológica desde comunidades vitales y encarnadas en su contexto.

En Córdoba capital, la Iglesia metodista está presente desde 1901 y cuenta con siete congregaciones (además de dos en Alta Gracia); cada una tiene su impronta, según el lugar en el que se encuentra. La Iglesia La Trinidad se encuentra en la zona norte, en el barrio Cerro de Las Rosas; cuenta con aproximadamente 40 miembros adultos, además de sus familias y otros tantos participantes esporádicos. La mayoría es de clase media trabajadora,

con fuerte presencia de adultos y adultas mayores. Hoy es una comunidad que ofrece culto dominical, encuentros bíblicos y de espiritualidad cristiana, talleres de formación cristiana y acciones de servicio social en barrios populares de comunidades hermanas.

Iglesia Cristiana Evangélica de Unquillo: fue fundada en 1945 por un grupo de personas pertenecientes a iglesias de los Hermanos Libres de la ciudad de Córdoba capital. Los Hermanos Libres llegaron a Argentina desde Inglaterra en 1882; su expansión estuvo vinculada a la línea del ferrocarril.

La ICEU cuenta con varios ministerios sociales y se caracteriza por una profunda reflexión sobre los modos institucionales de organizarse y la pedagogía popular. Se organiza con un sistema de equipo pastoral (ancianos/as y diáconos/as), pero las decisiones sobre la visión y la misión se deciden mediante una asamblea general de toda la iglesia. Cuenta con aproximadamente 60 miembros y se ubica en la zona centro de Unquillo, Córdoba.

Iglesia Comunidad Aviva: está ubicada en el centro de la ciudad de Córdoba capital. Cuenta con una membresía de aproximadamente 300 a 400 personas, en su mayoría jóvenes y familias jóvenes.

Fue fundada en 2012 por un grupo de jóvenes de diferentes comunidades, que compartían una experiencia con Jesús y una visión de llevar su mensaje a las personas que normalmente no irían a la iglesia. Los pastores principales son Guillermo Lo Forte, Marcos Lo Forte y David Torres.

La Comunidad Aviva busca ser una iglesia sencilla, centrada en las enseñanzas de la Biblia. Tiene una fuerte impronta hacia la evangelización y el aspecto comunitario de la fe. Se caracteriza por la naturalidad y frescura de sus encuentros, en los que todos/as son bienvenidos/as. La música (marcada por canciones de propia autoría, con arreglos contemporáneos) es uno de los elementos característicos de la comunidad. La iglesia se organiza mediante pequeños grupos (denominados «píxeles») que se reúnen semanalmente para compartir la fe de manera cotidiana.

MARCOS: ¿Cómo nació la idea del documental? Y de todas las opciones alrededor de la iglesia ¿por qué un documental sobre el culto y especialmente el evangélico?

ALMENDRA: Toda mi vida fui a la iglesia evangélica. Crecí asistiendo a los cultos semanalmente. Los rituales de preparación para ir al culto los domingos son parte de mis imágenes de la infancia, al igual que la regla familiar de no ver tele para «no distraernos», organizarnos en casa para

bañarnos mis tres hermanos, mis papás, mi abuela y yo antes de salir al culto, ver qué nos íbamos a poner, etc. Todas estas memorias se toparon con distintas circunstancias de vida; comencé a preguntarme por mi fe y la fe compartida con otros y de qué manera todo eso que vivíamos en el culto se vinculaba con la vida cristiana real, cotidiana y comunitaria.

A raíz de distintas lecturas y reflexiones elaboradas con amigos en un club de lectura del que participo, empezamos a cuestionarnos por nuestras maneras de ser y hacer iglesia y advertir la centralidad que en nuestras agendas eclesiales tenía el culto y cómo eso que vivíamos se vinculaba o no con la vida cotidiana. Entre esos ejes de reflexión estaba también la pregunta por los espacios, las relevancias de los templos y los edificios para las comunidades y la historia de las iglesias evangélicas en nuestro país. Este proceso se da en simultáneo, en el 2016, con la venta y demolición de uno de los templos evangélicos más antiguos de la ciudad de Córdoba, que unos amigos gestionaban como centro cultural. Por otro lado, acompañaba la realidad de mi propia comunidad de fe, con la que alquilábamos salones de fiestas, hoteles y hasta locales de partidos políticos para poder reunirnos para celebrar el culto.

En el 2017, el año de las celebraciones por los 500 años de la Reforma, comencé un taller de cine documental comunitario. En este marco, tenía que buscar algún espacio comunitario que identitariamente me ligara con otros y otras, para así poder elaborar audiovisualmente un relato. Fue ahí que mis profes alentaron la idea de hacer un documental sobre la temática de los evangélicos. Algo de fascinación había y hay sobre esta temática, por la presencia mediática de Trump, Bolsonaro, y sus vinculaciones con el mundo cristiano evangélico.

Fue en ese momento que pensé la idea y el guión; había visto un documental sobre el pabellón evangélico en la cárcel de Olmos de Buenos Aires y me encantó el tratamiento narrativo que tenía: la película te invitaba a la observación. Ahí me puse en contacto con muchas iglesias y durante el 2017 y parte del 2018 fue aprender y hacer. Aprender de cine y en simultáneo ir haciendo.

Elegí contar sobre el culto porque me pareció, en su momento, una buena síntesis teológica, visual y social que me permitiría establecer puntos de contacto y puntos de diferencia entre las iglesias, y porque a través de los distintos cultos se cristalizan distintos aspectos y énfasis de la identidad cristiana.

MARCOS: En las redes sociales del documental publicaron: «Para los cristianos evangélicos, el culto representa un tiempo y espacio de encuentro con lo divino, la comunidad y la propia espiritualidad». ¿Cuál dirías que es el rol y el objetivo del culto en la iglesia evangélica con base en lo que observaron? ¿Qué función tiene el culto en la iglesia como un todo?

ALMENDRA: El culto representa muchos aspectos y dimensiones de la vida de las comunidades. Desde un lugar teológico, el culto expresa el misterio que hay en el vínculo entre lo divino y lo humano. El culto a Dios representa a la humanidad deseando trascender y conectarse con algo superior. Desde una mirada de la recapitulación de la historia de la salvación, el culto se entiende como anamnesis, como recuerdo y reactualización de la obra salvífica de Cristo; el culto reactualiza el pasado, anticipa el futuro y glorifica el presente; es como un lugar sin tiempo. Desde un punto de vista de la organización eclesial, el culto representa los modos en que se organiza la estructura de la iglesia, la manera en que se dan las relaciones de poder entre los miembros, y la forma en que se distribuye la participación de la comunidad. Desde el punto de vista de la salud mental, el culto es el lugar donde los miembros «se gozan en Dios»; para la sanidad del alma y de la psiquis, tener espacios de liturgia para la reflexión y arrepentimiento sobre las propias prácticas es muy terapéutico.

Me gusta lo que dice Von Allmen en el libro *El culto cristiano*, respecto a que el culto permite a los miembros habitar en toda su plenitud antropológica. En la iglesia pueden ser ellos mismos, restituidos a la humanidad gracias a la salvación, donde no se transforman en monstruos, no son todos oídos, todos ojos, sino un cuerpo, con distintas partes.

En el culto se vislumbra la complejidad y la diversidad en las maneras del creer evangélico. Me parece bello y desafiante visibilizar el culto como ese «lugar teológico» donde las comunidades interpretan a Dios, su presencia en la historia y la relación con lo creado.

MARCOS: A veces las iglesias evangélicas tienden a ser culto-céntricas, esto es visible cuando la mayor parte de los esfuerzos de la iglesia (económicos y humanos) están orientados a hacer realidad el culto. ¿Cuál es tu reflexión sobre esto después de haber observado estos cuatro cultos?

ALMENDRA: Cuando era adolescente sentía mucha vergüenza de la experiencia del culto evangélico, sobre todo el pentecostal. No obstante, siempre me sentía muy conmovida por la presencia de Dios en la música, en la pal-

abra, en el encuentro con los hermanos. Se desplegaba una disociación que no lograba comprender del todo. Creo que hacer el documental me llevó a descubrir al menos dos valores que se relacionan con el rol que le otorgamos al culto en nuestras agendas eclesiales. Por un lado, la idea del culto como celebración. In Sik Honk dice que el culto es la fiesta preparada por Dios para la humanidad, y por lo tanto esta empieza en la experiencia del amor divino y continúa en la emoción de los seres humanos que responden con gratitud y amor. Hay mucho de la experiencia de lo popular, ligada al disfrute del estar, del compartir, de celebrar y festejar. Creo que la realidad de la iglesia evangélica no escapa de estas características de nuestros pueblos latinoamericanos, donde el rito, la festividad popular, son ingredientes de la participación semanal de la iglesia de a pie. Por otro lado, creo que el culto ocupa un rol fundamental en la salud emocional, espiritual y psíquica de las personas. Hay una vinculación entre culto y salud mental que no podemos ignorar.

El libro *Unidos en adoración* propone ver la celebración litúrgica como lugar teológico; uno de sus artículos desarrolla cómo el culto sirve como ese espacio temporal donde las personas renuevan sus recursos internos, generan espacios y facilitan climas para la reconciliación, se sienten parte de algo mayor; se promueve un clima para la introspección, la confianza en sí mismo a través de la confianza en Dios, y donde también se alienta a la vinculación responsable entre los hermanos y con otros. No obstante, una agenda eclesial que propone el cultocentrismo como manera de ser iglesia también vuelve dependientes a las personas de la institución. Así se promueve una centralización de la palabra de Dios bajo el rol de unas pocas figuras, al mismo tiempo que se reduce la vida de fe a un momento concreto, sin contemplar que la vida debe ser una liturgia que proclame constantemente la buena nueva a través del compromiso cotidiano con la realidad.

Creo que esto es muy peligroso no solo por las veces en que se usa el culto para construir poder y «la voz de Dios» solo en unos pocos, sino porque promueve una centralización y unificación ideológica y teológica que anula el diálogo, la conversación, promueve una liturgia estática e hipnotiza a los hermanos y hermanas, promoviendo una espiritualidad individualista y funcional a un sistema capitalista de consumo, donde vamos a tener «un momento especial con Dios», disociado de la vida del Reino de Dios de lo cotidiano, real y concreto. Si no se reflexiona sobre esto, termina imponiéndose una espiritualidad pasiva, individualista, que no da frutos

ni en la propia vida, ni en la vida con otros, que no se conmueve por las necesidades humanas.

MARCOS: Howard Snyder escribió que «la iglesia debe ser viable culturalmente. Las estructuras deben ser compatibles con las formas culturales de la sociedad en la que se encuentran. Por esta razón, las estructuras de la iglesia no pueden ser trasplantadas indiscriminadamente de una cultura a otra sin causar serios problemas y confusiones fundamentales acerca de la verdadera naturaleza de la iglesia». ³ El documental muestra claramente cómo en una sola provincia hay cuatro iglesias que son tan diferentes, pero que comparten tantas similitudes. No solo en el aspecto teológico del culto sino también en esta tensión entre cultura local y cultura evangélica global. Por ejemplo, hay canciones con ritmos latinoamericanos (cultura local) y canciones que vienen traducidas del inglés (cultura evangélica global). ¿Te parece que el culto evangélico es ‘viable’ culturalmente?

ALMENDRA: El culto tiene que ser pertinente y relevante para la realidad de la comunidad donde está inserto; tanto en el contenido como en la forma debe ser un encuentro comprensible y acorde a las vivencias de quienes participan. Las canciones que se cantan, las palabras que se usan, las melodías y la estética litúrgica deberían poder resonar en la identidad colectiva de quienes forman parte de las comunidades. En el caso de la iglesia Templo La Hermosa, me parece notable cómo dialogan con la música cuartetera y las bandas que llevan adelante la alabanza. Los pastores me contaban lo fundamental de esto para la congregación. En el documental es evidente cómo en todas las iglesias están estos cruces y esfuerzos para que la música, la palabra y los gestos sean comprensibles y adecuados para la audiencia. Y me parece importante esto desde los distintos elementos y lenguajes implícitos como las claves de interpretación que se utilizan para comprender los textos bíblicos, los temas que se priorizan para hablar, la manera de comprender los roles que ocupan los distintos hermanos y hermanas en la celebración, entre otros.

MARCOS: En un momento del documental se observa a alguien orando por los gobernantes. ¿Cómo el culto se relaciona con la realidad social, política y económica de Córdoba, Argentina? ¿Tiene el culto evangélico un elemento profético? Walter Brueggemann define lo profético como la

³ Howard Snyder, *La comunidad del rey* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Kairós, 2005), 226.

capacidad de reconstruir la realidad, incluyendo la historia y las relaciones de poder del mundo como lo conocemos, de acuerdo con la realidad palpable del reinado de YHWH.⁴

ALMENDRA: En el documental es evidente la diversidad de modos y niveles de cada iglesia al vincularse con la realidad social, política y económica. Lo que prima siempre es el mandato de la «oración por los gobernantes», pero también hay una conciencia de prójimo y actividades destacables en la tarea de contención social que abraza a distintos sectores de nuestro pueblo.

En los últimos años, las iglesias evangélicas se han destacado por la participación política mayoritaria contra algunas leyes, y esto es lo que mayor prensa ha tenido, al igual que un mayor llamado a la acción por parte de los referentes de las iglesias. Pero lo cierto es que hay una tarea constante en favor de sectores vulnerados. Comedores, roperos comunitarios, visitas a la cárcel, ollas populares y la vinculación de muchos miembros en organizaciones sociales, buscando —como dice Paul Lehman—, «mantener humana la vida humana en la tierra». El culto, en ese sentido, es el espacio donde se hace pedagogía, donde se delimitan sentidos y énfasis, y donde se llama a la acción.

No siempre estos llamados a la acción surgen de una imaginación profética contra todo lo que quiere ocupar el lugar de Dios; muchas veces este rol político de la liturgia queda suplantado por ingenuidad, una espiritualidad estática, una ignorancia voluntaria de la realidad.

La liturgia es contestataria y profética cuando proclama a Dios levantándose contra lo que excluye, oprime y denigra a las personas, creadas a imagen y semejanza de Dios. Aunque no se haga explícita, creo que toda liturgia hace esta proclamación del Reinado de Dios. Nancy Bedford dice que los cultos tienen que ser espacios abiertos y hospitalarios, donde las personas reconozcan la belleza y el amor de Dios. Creo que es lo que busqué visibilizar en el documental.

MARCOS: Anabaptist Witness es una publicación orientada a la conversación de la Iglesia anabautista menonita. Un principio de la eclesiología anabautista es el concepto de la comunidad como el centro de la vida cristiana. En los últimos años se ve como la iglesia evangélica, especialmente en Argentina, está tratando de recuperar esta idea. No es casualidad que las

⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament. The Canon and Christian Imagination* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 131.

iglesias fundadas en los últimos años siempre utilizan la palabra ‘comunidad’ en su nombre, y es el caso del nombre de dos de las iglesias representadas en el documental. Además, la palabra liturgia puede ser definida como ‘el trabajo de la gente.’ ¿Qué piensas de eso con base en tu experiencia y tu trabajo en el documental? ¿Es la liturgia evangélica el trabajo de la gente? ¿O la gente tiene un rol más pasivo?

ALMENDRA: El hecho de que la palabra comunidad esté en tantas iglesias en los últimos años creo que responde a la necesidad de pensar otros modelos eclesiológicos acordes a la época en la que vivimos, donde todos podemos sentirnos agentes de nuestra propia espiritualidad y en diálogo con la espiritualidad de nuestros hermanos y hermanas. Los modelos verticalistas y uniformes de la fe ya no tienen mucha cabida en algunos sectores de nuestra fe.

Podría hacer una doble lectura de esta pregunta. Si te refieres a los programas litúrgicos de los cultos mayoritarios, creo que hay poca reflexión en torno al «trabajo de la gente» en la liturgia; no obstante, siempre hay algo que «se sale del programa». Por más que las voces oficiales y caudillistas marquen su línea, la gente vive su experiencia (de modo individual) como le va saliendo, y sus aportes, desde los márgenes, son también señales de subversión. Es muy interesante cómo las encuestas sobre religión en Argentina desmitifican el hecho de que la gente hace todo lo que le dice el pastor. Esto no es así, y hay en el pueblo, en la iglesia de a pie, un germen que, movido por el Espíritu, rompe con la pasividad que se cree que tienen los miembros.

Book Reviews

Cláudio Carvalhaes, *What's Worship Got to Do with It? Interpreting Life Liturgically*, Cascade, Eugene, Oregon, 2018. 278 pp. \$33.00. ISBN: 9781620329719 (paper/e-book).

Moving into pandemic protocols—remote schooling and work, wearing a mask, keeping at least two meters away from the rest of the world—has felt isolating. In my suburb, the parks and library closed, churches were shuttered; even Tim Hortons was reduced to a drive-thru lineup.

Beneath this isolation, however, a thicker imbrication in global flows of goods, services, and human persons continues to course on. My grocery order for curbside pickup finds me bound in a surge of consumer demand for toilet paper. The ground beef may be missing because meatpacking plants are hotspots for infection. A podcast reminds me most of the workers in these plants are immigrants threatened with loss of employment if they opt for health over the company's bottom line.¹ My vegetables tell of similar enforced working conditions among migrant, essential workers who pick Quebec asparagus and Ontario tomatoes.² Even as I try to isolate my own vulnerability by keeping six feet apart, the vulnerabilities of the whole world still rush through my most mundane activities.

It's precisely here that Cláudio Carvalhaes situates liturgical life—where the liturgies of the world and of the neighbor course through the liturgy of the church. In *What's Worship Got to Do with It?*, Carvalhaes finds the “world, the church, and our existential life . . . all implicated and intertwined in our prayers, songs, and celebrations of the sacraments” (10). “Capitalism and free-trade agreements, militarism, drugs, agribusiness” (10) intersect the church's praising and praying, present in the bodies and concerns of our neighbors. The church has no sacred bubble, no quarantined space; it has its being, like Jesus, in the vulnerabilities of the world.

The essays collected in *What's Worship* tell stories from these intersections. The book opens with an account of the Presbyterian church that Carvalhaes pastored in the outskirts of São Paulo, where “everything in the congregation,

1 See “Covering Covid: Essential,” May 8, 2020, the fourth episode of the tenth season of the podcast *Embedded*, 22:00, produced by NPR, <https://www.npr.org/2020/05/08/852861231/covering-covid-essential>.

2 See Mark Kelley, Karen Wirsig, and Virginia Smart, “Bitter Harvest,” *The Fifth Estate*, CBC News, November 29, 2020, <https://newsinteractives.cbc.ca/longform/bitter-harvest-migrant-workers-pandemic>.

including the budget, was geared towards the needs of the people and the community around them” (6). Carvalhaes insists that churches’ liturgical lives, too, must be at the service of “sustain[ing] the lives of those who suffer” (7). After telling many more stories—of his mother’s prayers, of a baptism in Mexico, of an Easter service in Guatemala, of an undocumented woman pleading to Jesus and anyone who will listen for medicine for her sick daughter—Carvalhaes returns to this criterion: “If we start caring about those who hurt in our neighborhoods, it actually doesn’t matter what liturgical frame we use. Once our theology of praise is fully . . . serving those in need, we will begin where Jesus began” (219).

Which is not to say that liturgy doesn’t matter. No, Carvalhaes insists, liturgy functions powerfully, for better and for worse. In a chapter titled “Praying with Black People for Darker Times,” Carvalhaes narrates the infernal power manifest in years of a “Christianity [that] has also been a part of the creation of racial ideas,” where “worship has been a white project over the bodies of people” (107). In “Gimme de Kneebone Bent,” he observes how liturgy works as an *ordo* that transforms others into reflections of the colonizing subject. Later he warns preachers of this power: We are “cultural agents [who] must continuously check what ideological lenses we use” (182). Just as the world runs through the heart of worship, worship is also loose and powerful, for better and for worse, in the world.

Yes, also sometimes for better! Liturgies may function as “a transition space” to a more equitable society, one which sustains life in common care (31). Worship services call folks with “allegiance to the middle and upper classes [to] go work with people on the margins of our brutal society” (9). The promise and presence of God take on temporary flesh “through the materialities of our liturgies, gestures of mercy and compassion, dreams and hopes that spill over into communal forms of organized society” (187). In our prayers and in our feasting, greeting, holy kisses, confessing, preaching, dancing, the world that runs through worship and flows on around our worship is remade, reordered, set free.

How does liturgy do this? In “Praising God between the World and the Altar,” Carvalhaes profiles various ecclesial-liturgical traditions. He asks, within the press and flow of neoliberal capitalism and expressive individualistic consumerism, “What kind of society do we propose with our liturgies?” (204). He warns against an Emergent Church “eternal recurrence of the new,” where the gospel might “lose the critical edge of its old challenging demands” (207). He speaks just as strongly against a Mainline liturgics that thinks by enunciating the proper liturgical order, society, *ex opera operato*, is redeemed. Instead, he says, we might learn from Black churches that have “kept their prophetic tradition alive, where . . . to miss church is losing the ability that we can keep going for another week” (211).

This is where Carvalhaes closes *What's Worship*, with a chapter titled “Towards a Liberation Theology of God’s Glory.” Remembering Black protesters crossing the bridge out of Selma, Carvalhaes writes, “Their shout ‘Glory’ was a proposal for a different society! . . . In the midst of bullets, water hoses, and dogs, they walked! . . . Singing their glory to God was the way to keep themselves alive!” (237–38). Worship begins in meeting the love of God—this is what calls *glorias* from our throats—but it propels us out to meet God-in-person “amidst the poor,” for among the poor “the glory of God is in full swing!” (238). This is “God’s glory shaped by the work of solidarity” (246). More than the transcendent imposed *ex opere operato*, more than a punctiliar service that will “fill us up and send us out,” worship leads us to meet God with those forced to the margins, where glory is taking shape.

I read *What's Worship* during a pandemic, minding protocols of public health and personal vulnerability, meeting for worship only ever from behind a computer screen. But Carvalhaes tells me that even here I’m not cut off—in fact, I couldn’t be. In perichoretic movement, the world encompasses me and runs right through my heart. Carvalhaes presses further on my pandemic assumptions:

Our end is not alone behind a screen but together with one another. . . . Wiping each other’s tears can be done over the Internet but it must also continue to be done person to person, the virtual empowering the real, the real being a sign of our need for each other. (232)

This movement—from world, from God, to world, to God, again and again—keeps worship always at the intersections of the world.

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R. Daniel Shaw and William R. Burrows, eds., *Traditional Ritual as Christian Worship: Dangerous Syncretism or Necessary Hybridity?* Orbis, New York, 2018. 278 pp. US \$50.00. ISBN: 978-1626982628.

Jesus does not replace the message of Creator sent to our peoples, He completes the messages they brought. He does not take away the ceremonies, He restores and strengthens them. His path is not that of assimilation, nor of destruction, but of peace, healing, restoration, and walking humbly with the Creator as the people He made us to be. I am in no way bound or oppressed by following Jesus, but free to follow Him on the Red Road, and take my place dancing before the Sacred Fire.

—*One Hot Mama, Native American artist (v)*

The above quotation encapsulates well the recurring theme of “hybrid Christianity” featured in *Traditional Ritual as Christian Worship*, a collection of case studies exploring the inculturation or contextualization of the gospel. On the book’s brilliant cover, with a scene of the “Last Supper,” artist Peter Dambui casts Jesus and the disciples with Melanesian features (ii); this is analogous to Gabriel Kuman’s work contextualizing the Eucharist in the Simbu Pig-Kill Festival in his chapter (54ff). But more than Melanesian-izing the scene, Dambui’s portrait links the beginning of Jesus’s public ministry (of the Word)—reading from the scroll of Isaiah (Luke 4:16ff)—with the Last Supper (Luke 22:7–20), thus fusing the Old and New Testaments together “in his blood” (ii).

The first two chapters, by the book’s Western editors Shaw and Burrows, provide a helpful theological-anthropological foundation. All the remaining chapters are contributed by Indigenous scholars, who remind the readers “that God was in Melanesia [and elsewhere] before the arrival of the first missionaries” (59, *passim*). In order *not* to impose “foreign” worship patterns, the “Gospel communicators” (19) must study traditional rituals and ceremonies by which pre- or non-Christian peoples relate to the Creator. Indeed, “this book revolves around using traditional elements from a society’s pre-Christian past and present and find[s] ways to incorporate these elements into meaningful Christian worship in a biblically responsible way” (xxiv). Since the gospel is born into human culture through the Incarnation, it can never be “culture-free” (159), and so, argues Burrows, we must recognize “that Texans, Swedes, Italians, Peruvians, and Xhosa are all hybrid Christians” (30).

This volume is filled with astonishing examples of hybrid forms of worship. Analyzing the Costa Rican Indigenous myth and ceremony *El Baile de la Yegüita* (the dance of the little mare)—the basis for the Nicoyan Indigenous’ annual community-building and reconciliation festival—Osias Segura-Guzman and local pastor Gerardo conclude: “We can be 100 percent Costa Rican and 100 percent Christian” (53). Similarly, two popes, on past visits to Africa, clearly

agree, declaring that their hosts can be at once “authentically African and authentically Christian.”³

For several contributors, *honoring the ancestors* holds center stage in traditional worship (for example, Nigeria’s Igbos, Koreans, Melanesian peoples, and others). The chapters’ authors, referring frequently to Shaw and Burrows’s theoretical frame of reference, demonstrate that the traditional forms of honoring the ancestors are not a hindrance. Rather, these forms offer an excellent, non-alienating means for building a hybrid Christianity in dialogue with God’s biblically revealed “ultimate purpose” for each particular group and humanity as a whole. Exemplifying this, J. K. Daimoi’s treatise on “Ancestors as a Bridge to Understanding Jesus,” maintains that “the Epistle to the Hebrews can provide the basis for inserting the ancestors into God’s plan of salvation and for understanding the work of Jesus” (205–220, here 206). The Sentanian ancestors may be counted among the “cloud of witnesses” (Heb 11) that merits their respect and honor. But “Jesus . . . is at once the ancestor and the high priest of all ancestors” (211). Jesus, who “is uniquely the Son of God . . . offers human beings eternal life, which the ancestors cannot provide” (218–19); therefore, Jesus alone is worthy of all humanity’s worship.

In another example, Cheryl Bear of the Nadleh Whut’en First Nation community in British Columbia, looks at a common traditional ceremony—the smudge—to show how this can serve to further one’s devotion to God (190). Bear explains, “The smudge is a cleansing or purification ceremony” (191). Avoiding “syncretism”—“denial and condemnation of old beliefs and practices” or their “uncritical acceptance” (191–92)—Bear shows that these traditional ceremonies actually anticipate fulfilment in Christ, saying: “All North American Indigenous cleansing ceremonies point directly to Jesus . . . the cleansing sacrifice” (202).

Given the horrors of the European invasion—including land theft, cultural genocide, and destruction of families—we may well ask with former Prime

3 Robert J. Schreiter, ed., *Faces of Jesus in Africa* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), viii; Schreiter asserts: “A new style of Christianity needs to emerge that does not bifurcate the African Christian—making the African Christian reject a cultural heritage and identity in order to become a Christian. Popes Paul VI and John Paul II reiterated the theme of being *authentically African and authentically Christian* in their visits to Africa” (emphasis added).

In *Faces of Jesus*, a group of African theologians set to work helping their readers visualize the “face of Jesus” via familiar cultural categories like Ancestor, Elder Brother, Healer, Initiation Master, Liberator, etc. Invariably, their Jesus fills these roles to overflowing, thus making Jesus the unsurpassed measure of these traditional cultural roles, and so transforming and crowning them with ultimate fulfilment.

Minister Paul Martin: “After all this history, why are you even Christians?” (192). Bear’s answer “is that the story of Jesus is much older than our encounter with Europeans.”⁴ Bear affirms the full unity of Jesus and Creator and that “Jesus has perfectly revealed Creator.” Moreover, she argues: “Today Jesus walks onto the reservation through his body, the church. . . . The church must be an Indigenous church. . . . One’s worship must be Indigenous and authentic: worship, ceremony, values, instruments, methods, institutions, and life” (198). Bear credits Lakota theologian Richard Twiss with “help[ing] us understand how the Holy Spirit is introducing new ideas of being both Native and ‘Christian’ while walking with Jesus” (193).

It is hard to overestimate the potential impact on world Christianity by ethnic churches who are increasingly leaving behind them an imposed syncretistic Western-style worship and are instead adopting participatory, hybrid, home-grown forms of worship. These latter types of worship result from traditional core ceremonies finding both their fulfilment and transfiguration through the biblical dialogue in which its practitioners take leading roles. John Sanjeevakumar Gupta of India concludes his chapter by rightly comparing its significance to the birth of the Modern Missionary Movement (MMM): “Just as William Carey started the age of modern mission when he arrived in India in 1793, we are at the beginning of an age of new missiological understanding” (236).

Through the MMM, the Christian church became a truly worldwide reality. Sanjeevakumar Gupta predicts that the result of this growing “new missiological understanding” that encourages hybrid Christian worship will be mission that “allows the Holy Spirit to create . . . images of Christ acceptable . . . within [the hearers’] own cultural milieu (Rom 8:29)” (236). This, though in its early days, is not simply aspirational, futuristic; Sanjeevakumar Gupta already exults today: “The word ‘Emmanuel’ now brings a new realization to my life: God dwelling in the midst of God’s people, wherever they are found” (236). Judging by the reports of the other contributors, his is part of a chorus of hybrid Christians.

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⁴ Douglas Waruta similarly notes that despite the “grossly tainted” “Western models of Christian leadership,” Africans are undeterred: “*Jesus we know, and His disciple Paul; but you [Western message bearers], who are you?*” What is their clue? “When seen in the Gospels, he is easily known—by the scars on his hands and body from being crucified. Africans know how to look for these scars. Jesus supplied them in plenty” (*Faces of Jesus in Africa*), 63.

Jeffrey S. Denis, *Canada at a Crossroads: Boundaries, Bridges, and Laissez-Faire Racism in Indigenous-Settler Relations*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2020. 384 pp. \$39.95. ISBN: 978-1442614475.

JULIANNE DONER (JD): We are here to discuss *Canada at a Crossroads* by Jeff Denis, associate professor of sociology at McMaster University (Hamilton, Ontario). I am Julie Doner, a linguist, and I'm having a dialogue with Brian Fraser, a church historian. We were both part of a *Canada at a Crossroads* book club, facilitated by Steve Heinrichs, Director of Indigenous-Settler Relations for Mennonite Church Canada.

BRIAN FRASER (BF): What, in your formation as a Christian, makes you intrigued by this book?

JD: I was bullied as a youth, and that instilled in me a deep-seated concern for the outsider. My reading of the Bible only intensified that. Verses like Micah 6:8, Galatians 3:28, and James 1:27—powerful words of justice and inclusion—really transformed how I see and move through the world. As the Black Lives Matter movement intensified in the United States last summer, I read some news articles about how Canada's racism problem is actually worse than the [United] States' (contrary to popular opinion) when considered from the vantage of Indigenous peoples. Meanwhile, as a linguist, I was learning about the ways Canada's Indian Residential Schools caused severe language endangerment amongst Indigenous peoples. Many of my colleagues blame the church for that, since the majority of these schools were run by Christian denominations. So, as a Christian, I was in this deeply uncomfortable and contradictory state of mind, and I wanted to learn more to see how I could make sense out of it. When the author's brother, who is a colleague of mine, told me about this book club, it seemed like a good opportunity to explore these matters.

Why did you join the book club?

BF: My formation in the Christian faith has been in the Presbyterian tradition. At university and in my early ministry in Toronto, I was involved in a variety of social justice activities and coalitions. The biblical verse that inspires and informs me deeply is Hebrews 10:22–23, where, out of Christ's faith in us, we provoke love and good deeds. I am a Canadian church historian and now minister with a small Presbyterian church in Burnaby, BC. I taught at Vancouver School of Theology during the early

years of our Native Ministries Degree Program. It was a serious endeavor to build bridges. The program was designed and co-constructed with Indigenous colleagues. In that process, we went beyond educating each other to genuine dialogue in how to co-create a different future for forgiveness and reconciliation. That's still very much a work in progress. I continue to be involved in communities that pursue the same dream.

One thing I bring to the table, when appropriate, is a deep understanding of the worldview that infused the culture of the residential schools. That philosophy/theology was central to my research about the Social Gospel, including the shadow side(s) of that movement.

JD: What, in your opinion, are the main ideas of *Canada at a Crossroads*?

BF: This [book] is a deep dive into what scholars call a “thick description” of the attitudes, behaviors, and consequences of the ways Indigenous and Settler peoples in the Rainy River District of Treaty 3 engage in relationship. The main ideas are two: we must seriously confront the laissez-faire racism that has shaped many of our deepest assumptions and aspirations. Further, we have to find ways to co-create improvements by engaging in both sustained dialogue and serious action—even disruptive action—to transform the dynamics of our shared life. Change won't come simply through education, or even relationship. Action is necessary.

JD: Denis's detailed descriptions as to how laissez-faire racism operated amongst the Settler community is a core contribution of the book. He shows how prevalent assumptions and attitudes about Indigenous “lifestyles” are ignorant of historical and structural matters, and rooted in beliefs about the supposed shortcomings of entire groups of people. It was fascinating (and depressing) to read how robust these assumptions are. They survive high levels of education and even close, personal interracial friendships and marriages. Moreover, even those educated whites who know the history and are aware of the structural injustices, they are, according to Denis, “no more likely to support specific policies designed to overcome racial inequality” (215). The issue isn't ignorance. The issues are power and privilege.

BF: I appreciated how Denis came to these conclusions. Having genuinely immersed himself in the Rainy River District, he engaged diverse peoples in deep conversation, listening to the ways that they spoke of bridges and boundaries between Indigenous and Settler communities. And as he

explores these, readers are offered a powerful set of tools for confronting ourselves with the dysfunctions that cry out for transformation.

This book was rich in challenging insights, like the idea that many of us whites justify our privileged group position through a deeply internalized sense of superiority and entitlement. So, even though old-fashioned prejudice is rare, there's still an internal, racial hierarchy at work—a white supremacy that's used to defend and explain the status quo.

What was the most transformative insight that you found?

JD: I suppose the most challenging insight was that education and interracial relationships are not good enough to address structural racism. Action is required. I am much more comfortable as a learner than an activist, so this, again, puts me in an uncomfortable space. Yet I know that this work of bringing about justice, of loving one another—especially those different from us—is necessary and called for by God (again, Micah 6:8).

But this work is *messy*. Because true love does not mean making others be like you, or even meeting them halfway. True, sacrificial love is going beyond oneself to the “other.” Denis writes a lot about building “bridges” in his book, but I think bridges aren't sufficient—we need fords. We need to wade through the mucky water that separates communities, humbly listening to hear where our own actions and thoughts cause harm. It's kind of like the rich man who asked what one must do to receive eternal life. Jesus said to sell everything, but the rich man was not willing. People are often willing to give lip service to anti-racism, until it affects them materially or inconveniences them. I'm still not exactly sure how God is calling me to get messy in this work, but I am certain that God is calling.

But what do you think? Who should be reading this book, Brian? And what should they expect when they're reading it?

BF: I think this book should be read by people who are ready to be provoked, and to have their attitudes and behaviors transformed. They will encounter hard truths, entrenched patterns, and possibilities for change that require a patient urgency to realize.

JD: Yes, agreed! I just hope folks aren't thrown off by the very academic introduction. That was a bit hard to get through since I don't have a background in sociology. But once I hit chapter 1, on the history of relations between the predominantly settler town of Fort Frances and Couchiching First Nation, I couldn't put it down! Brian and I are academics, but I know

that many in our book club weren't, and we all came away graciously disturbed. I'm looking forward to the next book club.

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**Seth Klein, *A Good War: Mobilizing Canada for the Climate Emergency*, ECW Press, Toronto, 2020. 434 pp. \$19.95.
ISBN: 978-1-77041-545-4.**

I was standing with my young sons on the edge of a cornfield. It was late-December and snowing. We let the dog off her leash and watched as she ran across the field. Then she turned and leapt her way back toward us, jumping rows of downed cornstalks two-at-a-time. Bits of unfrozen soil flew through the air. I bent down so my face was even with that of my youngest son. We watched together. The falling snow thickened and the wind picked up. We could hardly see the opposite side of the field. "It's very pretty," he said. There was nothing really special about the place—a farm field that abutted a soccer pitch and a schoolyard. But my son was right; it was very pretty. As I dug the dog's leash out of my pocket, the snowflakes grew heavy, like airborne slush. By the time we got home and I returned to sermon-writing, it was raining. Weeks later we learned that 2020 tied 2016 as the warmest year on record.

There is much at stake in the ecological crisis unfurling around us: places we love, crops we grow and eat, ecosystems we depend on in more ways than we know, even the character of the world our children will inherit. Despite all this, our collective response is falling far short. Too much of our action, including that of the church, is merely individual or half-hearted. What is the way forward? What would meaningfully address the crisis of climate change? Seth Klein's new book, *A Good War: Mobilizing Canada for the Climate Emergency* aims to answer this question.

Klein is a policy wonk, with two decades of experience as the founding director of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives in British Columbia. The book's title makes the essential point: climate change must be framed not as an option-

al, hobby issue but as an existential threat. If our political leaders approached climate change the way a previous generation approached war, we could muster change on a timeline and scale that would make a difference. The COVID-19 pandemic has been fortuitous in this regard. In Klein's view, it has shown that "once emergencies are truly recognized, what seemed politically impossible and economically off-limits can be quickly embraced" (xvii).

A Good War is not a book about climate science. Klein simply accepts the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, including the necessity of cutting CO₂ emissions in half by 2030 and achieving net carbon-zero by 2050. The burden of the book is to outline the sorts of policies that will get us there. Klein says, "We need to decarbonize and electrify everything, while also ensuring that we are no longer generating electricity by burning fossil fuels. And we need to do this in a hurry" (179).

Doing something big in a hurry is one way to describe Canada's mobilization for the war effort in the 1940s. The pressure of total war required the federal government to rally the public, centralize decision-making, heavily regulate commerce, and raise the funds necessary to prevail. Changes weren't encouraged; they were mandated. For instance, Klein tells us, "For the balance of the war, the production and sale of the private automobile was illegal" (159).

This was true in both the United States and Canada. The federal government limited the profits that firms could make on war-related ventures and created twenty-eight crown corporations to provide competitive pressure and bridge gaps in the supply chain. The government decided to spend whatever it cost to meet their war-time goals. It introduced new taxes and borrowed money from its citizens. The results were astounding. To pick but one example: whereas before the war Canada manufactured roughly forty airplanes a year, during the war the country produced sixteen thousand military aircraft.

Drawing on this precedent, Klein suggests that the Canadian federal government should take similar actions today. His policy suggestions include a plan for shifting to 100 percent renewable energy by 2050, winding down fossil fuel extraction, developing green infrastructure, implementing a system of household carbon quotas, and enacting a series of new laws and regulations. Examples of the latter include prohibiting the use of fossil fuels in new buildings by 2022 and banning the sale of new fossil-fuel-combustion vehicles by 2025.

Klein believes that a massive mobilization like this could also be used to increase social equity. However, it is here that we see one of the chief risks of such a strategy, and Klein is not unaware of it. History shows that the centralization of power and the unity of purpose that wartime efforts engender creates an opportunity for increasing social inequity. The emergency mindset is volatile. With so much power gathered in the hands of so few, much depends on the character of the government.

Is there an alternative that doesn't come with these risks? As it happens, there is, and Klein is aware of this too, though his philosophical scruples make him wary of it. The relevant pre-commitments surface when Klein writes: "What is notable about Canada's wartime economic policies is that our leaders then were not bound by the straightjacket of neoliberal economic thinking" (171). Klein believes that current leaders willingly wear this sartorial encumbrance. He writes further, "Neoliberalism fetishizes the goal of balanced budgets and austerity." It also "disparages and undervalues the public sphere" (173). The upshot, Klein says, is that "we are fiddling at the margins while the planet burns, hoping that market-based signals can sufficiently alter household consumption and business investment. They won't" (171). It's true that quite a lot of fiddling is going on, but it's not quite true that the raft of policies Klein recommends necessarily leads in a different direction. It's also not true that Klein *knows* that policies more reliant on market-based signals won't work.

The alternative to Klein's wartime centralization of power is to tax carbon at a rate equal to the damage it does. This corrects the market failure that arises because nobody "owns" their own chunk of the atmosphere, and it doesn't require the government to decide (and police) exactly how we heat our buildings or power our travel. In addition to being more efficient, taxing carbon is also more just. It requires those of us who use fossil fuels to pay for the damage those fuels do. While Klein's sense of urgency is commendable, the core of his proposal asks future generations to pay to avoid the harm we are inflicting on them. There are a whole set of things one could untangle at this juncture related to Keynesian economic theory and the free market, but the crux of the matter is that the climate crisis is not something that can be dealt with as an acute emergency after which things will return to normal.

The climate crisis requires a solution that permanently corrects for the failure of markets to account for CO₂ pollution. It is probably not a coincidence that Seth Klein lives in a jurisdiction that has become the textbook example to demonstrate that carbon can be taxed without negatively impacting the economy. It's true that the carbon tax in British Columbia hasn't yet reached the price point at which economists think it would be most effective. However, this is more a signal that neighboring jurisdictions must also implement a similar mechanism than it is a signal that the policy itself should not be at the core of our response to the climate crisis.

There are multiple pathways to decarbonization, and Klein's proposal might well accomplish that objective. Creating green infrastructure projects expands a supportive constituency by immediately creating jobs that counteract those lost by making the use of fossil fuel illegal. That is smart. However, recent developments in Canada suggest that Klein may have underestimated the political feasibility of a more serious tax on carbon. This is a good thing, because putting that kind of a policy at the core of a national response to climate change is a

more just and durable way forward. The flashes and smoke of Klein's wartime metaphor make it hard to see this.

These kinds of discussions can be unsettling for Anabaptists, and not just because of the wartime analogy that undergirds this one. The fact is, many Anabaptists will find a kindred soul in Klein, who isn't entirely comfortable with his own framing of the issue. Some Canadians will relate to Klein when he writes, "I am a Canadian because of my parents' refusal to participate in war" (xvii). What is most troubling for Anabaptists is that our anti-Constantinian theology has not provided us with solid footing from which to address issues like climate change. Addressing the climate crisis with anything close to the speed and scale necessary requires collective action. Klein is right about that. What is more, it requires strong action from governments, action that will compel and not only invite. The toolkit must be stocked not just with carrots but also with sticks.

How do such measures—measures necessary to maintain the beauty and well-being of places and people we love—sit with Anabaptist theology and practice? With respect to values and virtues, the peaceful flourishing of communities and the development of God-honoring character, I think they fit quite well. Anabaptist readers of Scripture recognize that the earth and her myriad of non-human creatures matters to God. We know that following the example of Jesus calls us to grow our capacity for restraint, simplicity, and humility. We need little encouragement from civil authorities to put in victory gardens or advocate for climate migrants. Klein's call to respect the sovereignty of First Nations and honor treaties should make eminent sense to us as well. However, the climate crises exposes our underdeveloped theology of government. Much of Anabaptist political theology in recent decades has taken the form of critique: critique of war, critique of colonialism, critique of the use of violence generally. These critiques are not wrong, but at a time when risky, government-led action is needed, they are insufficient.

Many of us Anabaptists have used our high ecclesiology to avoid thinking about the necessary collective action that governments represent. In that sense, I'm not sure Anabaptist life predisposes us to prefer Klein's proposal or the alternative one based on the longstanding function of markets. Yet I doubt what churches think matters much to Seth Klein. He does wonder (rightly) why faith leaders have not been more vocal. He does offer an approving note about some faith institutions divesting of fossil fuel investments and another about the advocacy of an Irish Catholic mission organization. However, in this book churches are not considered a vital part of the political fabric. And that may be an important secondary lesson for us from *A Good War*. When it comes to this most crucial of issues, the future of the world our children will inherit, churches are mostly missing in action. This is important to recognize because climate change is not the only ecological crisis rushing toward us. The electrification of everything will actually contribute to some of the other crises.

In the long run, this conversation cannot be only about public policy, devolving into enviro-economic whack-a-mole. It must also be a conversation about consumption and what it means to live a meaningful human life. For those conversations, communities of faith are invaluable.

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Nicholas Shrubsole, *What Has No Place, Remains: The Challenges for Indigenous Religious Freedom in Canada Today*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2019. 254 pp. \$28.95. ISBN: 978-1-4875-2344-2.

Since the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, the phrase “religious freedoms” has frequently appeared on different news feeds here in British Columbia, Canada. While there are a number of reasons for that, especially notable for me is how the phrase is used by an array of Christians to assert their right to attend in-person Sunday services at their church in spite of an ongoing pandemic that has killed thousands in Canada and millions around the world:

- “It’s a protected right.”
- “The government is overstepping.”
- “Worship services are an essential service.”

Phrases like this give away, intentionally or not, a whole host of assumptions about what it means to exercise religious rights and freedoms in Canada, what role the Canadian government plays in determining boundaries around that, and how government officials should publicly assess what some may consider to be a private system of values and practices. While religious rights and freedoms may be an ongoing hot topic for Christians and health authorities in the midst of this pandemic, it has been far from just another “hot topic” for people groups who have had to publicly negotiate their religion with the Canadian government long before the pandemic. Reading Nicholas Shrubsole’s *What Has No Place, Remains* will draw anyone to this fact. Shrubsole outlines ongoing religious challenges Indigenous peoples face in relation to the colonial government of Canada—a power that made the destruction of Indigenous identity, culture, and religion a fixture of its ideological past and, some would argue, its present. Fundamentally, the book poses the question: Why is the realization of Indigenous religious freedoms so challenging in Canada today?

To answer this, Shrubsole offers key reasons that the Canadian government has largely failed to protect and understand Indigenous religions, especially in the case of sacred sites and spaces. In particular, he draws attention to reasons like the following:

- the government’s shallow and biased understanding of religion, thus requiring Indigenous communities to operate on terms that stem primari-

ly from a historically European Christian religious framework;

- the government’s inability or unwillingness to recognize its own location as an interested party in disputes (vs. a neutral arbiter);
- framing Indigenous religions primarily as historical and static (vs. evolving and fluid); and
- a consistent lack of meaningful inclusion of Indigenous leaders in decision-making processes.

Shrubsole draws these conclusions through case histories, highlighting events like the standoff at Gustafsen Lake in 1995 and court rulings made by federal and provincial authorities (e.g., *Ktunaxa Nation v. British Columbia* 2017, SCC 54).

While I could simply read *What Has No Place, Remains* as a scholarly exploration of legal and religious history in Canada, I recognize that it has deep connections to and implications for my own context:

- personally, as a settler on unceded land;
- religiously, as somebody whose faith heritage is largely responsible for colonialist ideologies; and
- professionally, as a pastor whose work is deeply tied to sacred space and faith formation.

When understood in this light, Shrubsole’s work offers a powerful call. It reminds me that I am not a neutral party who happens to live on this land. Rather, I am a citizen of a settler colonial state, a state that impacts the spaces—including religious and spiritual—that we all live in. If I benefit to the detriment of others, I bear some responsibility for that injustice. Shrubsole’s book highlights how I, as a Christian, have been given every opportunity to flourish because I live in a society that was constructed through Western Christian logics, institutions, powers and privilege . . . a society that still maintains and upholds those Christian logics and privileges (although not always in such overt fashion). This society has actively suppressed Indigenous peoples’ spiritualities in the past—criminalizing Indigenous rites and practices, and assimilating thousands of Indigenous peoples into Christianity through residential schools. And this same society continues to violate Indigenous peoples’ place-based spiritualities (e.g., harming or destroying sacred sites by privileging resource extraction).

Since I call myself a Christian—one whose faith has been weaponized to destroy Indigenous identities and cultures—and since I am recognized as pastor and leader within my faith community, I must call attention to and help undo the violent colonial ideologies—often wrought in the name of Jesus—that have harmed generations of Indigenous communities. In that vein, *What Has No Place, Remains*, while not written from a Christian perspective, not only raises questions of reparation and redress but also invites churches to ponder

how government institutions continue to violate Indigenous rights and how we might address such. As Shrubsole says, government violations take place “not in the construction of overt mechanisms that seek the destruction of Indigenous cultures, like residential schools, but in the spaces between the lines of Supreme Court rulings and government policy” (192) that continue to marginalize, forcibly reshape, and erase Indigenous cultures and religions.

With this in mind, I return to where I started: the COVID-19 pandemic. For faith communities that have only recently had to face the reality of navigating access to religious space with our government, *What Has No Place, Remains* is a sobering reminder that what Canadian Christians are facing right now is but the smallest drop of water compared to the ocean of struggles and injustice that Indigenous peoples have faced for over a century. As a pastor who started his first pastorate during the pandemic, I have felt the effects of the physical distancing and “lockdown” restrictions deeply. I understand the struggles of many churches in Canada right now. But the narratives offered in Shrubsole’s book are a strong reminder that what Christians are going through is far from “persecution” by the government. Indigenous peoples are the ones who have been, and are being, persecuted. They have literally had their sacred sites demolished to build golf courses and pipelines.

What Has No Place, Remains invites honest reflection on how the very definitions of religion within Canada’s framework have been set up to advantage Canadian Christian Settlers at the cost of this land’s original diverse inhabitants. And maybe that reflection can help us Settlers understand that Indigenous peoples have a lot to teach about religion and spirituality—about land, our relationship to space and place, and how the reconciliation of all things necessarily includes the land—land that is not primarily a resource to be extracted and dominated but a revelation of our Creator’s very own goodness and purposes for the world.

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