

Minutes

Winnipeg Mennonite-Catholic Dialogue, Meeting No. 13

Held on 19 October 2004 at St. John Brebeuf

Present: Elaine Baete, Richard Lebrun, Luis Melo, Michael Radcliffe, Linda Trenholm, Adolf Ens, Helmut Harder, Harold Jantz, Henry Loewen, Elaine Pinto, and Joe McClelland (guest)

Introductory

Luis Melo reported regrets from **John Long**, and introduced **Joe McClelland**, a deacon at St. John Brebeuf Parish and host of the meeting, and **Linda Trenholm**, a pastoral assistant at Christ the King Parish, who has been invited to join our dialogue group. **Helmut Harder** reported that he had invited Ron Penner to take up the vacancy created by Ardith Frey's departure to Ontario (where she has now become the interim pastor of the Hamilton Mennonite Church), but that on second thoughts Ron Penner had declined, the invitation, with the suggestion of another person. Helmut had not yet had time to find out if the suggested person would like to join our dialogue. This was followed by a round of introductions, with all participants introducing themselves for the benefit of Linda and Joe.

1. Opening prayer was led by **Joe McClelland**.
2. **Reporting ecumenical activities**

Helmut Harder reported the following ecumenical activities:

- a) Attendance at the Mennonite Church Canada Assembly in Winkler, where decisions were made for the Conference to seek membership in the Canadian Council of Churches and Evangelical Fellowship of Canada.
- b) Attendance at the Martyrs Conference and the Bridgefolk Conference at Collegeville, MN
- c) Continuing work with the international Mennonite-Catholic dialogue group, particularly with respect to encouraging local groups to take up consideration of the report "Called Together to be Peacemakers."
- d) A holiday in Quebec with his wife, in which they were hosted by the Marianist Brothers (arranged by Luis) and visited a number of Catholic churches in the province.
- e) Attendance at a meeting of the Canadian Council of Churches in Ottawa, where he reported on both the International Mennonite-Catholic dialogue and our own dialogue here in Winnipeg.

Elaine Pinto reported:

- a) Working with a Ukrainian Catholic group at regular meetings
- b) Becoming a Benedictine Oblate at a ceremony at St. Benedict's Monastery scheduled for November 25th. Our group is invited to attend.

Harold Jantz reported:

- a) Working with the New Directions for Life Ministry, which works with individuals struggling with sexual issues.
- b) Continuing work with the House of Hesse, where two openings to mark a move into a new facility were held.

Mike Radcliffe reported:

- a) Continuing work as a spiritual director in the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises program (where he is currently directing two Mennonites), as well as continuing work in the RCIA program at St. Ignatius Parish.

Luis Melo reported;

- a) Attendance at the Mennonite Church of Canada conference in Winkler, where he brought greetings from the Archdiocese of St. Boniface.
- b) A visit to two Hutterite colonies with Joe McClelland.
- c) Involvement in organizing the upcoming Joint Lutheran-Catholic Worship on Sunday, November 14th, to celebrate the 5th anniversary of the signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. Our group is invited. He is also working in endeavors to help the declaration take root in local congregations of both churches. Another initiative is to involve people from the Reformed tradition as well.
- d) Involvement in planning and organizing an education conference in February that will focus on Catholic-Evangelical relations in western Canada. He noted that this will reflect an international dialogue between the World Evangelical Alliance and the Roman Catholic Church.
- e) In his office at Archdiocese of St. Boniface, Luis reported on an initiative to involve people beyond the perimeter highway in ecumenical relations, beginning with the Seine River Zone, which will include places like Steinbach, Morden, and Winkler. The first step will be an inventory of ecumenical activities and a search for ecumenical possibilities.
- f) Attendance at the meeting of the Canadian Council of Churches in Ottawa.
- g) Luis reported that the "Windsor Report" dealing with how Anglican churches in Canada and the U.S. are dealing with the issues of the blessing of same-sex unions and homosexual clergy is stimulating much discussion in conferences of bishops, and has led to the postponement of the release of the ARCIC II document.

3. **Personal reflections on assigned paragraphs from Chapter II, “Considering Theology Together” of Called Together to be Peacemakers.”**

Helmut Harder – on paragraphs 69 and 70:

Paragraph 69 gives a brief overview of the themes that are covered in chapter II, “Considering Theology Together.” We begin with ecclesiology, i.e. “The Nature of the Church.” First a Catholic understanding, then a Mennonite understanding, then a list of convergences and divergences. Next we do the same with what we believe about baptism. For me, this was one of the more interesting sections of our Dialogue, since it treats the ritual of formation that became the unique flash point in the 16th century for the Anabaptists, as is clear in the very name—Anabaptist—given to these dissidents. Of course, there were several flash points, with the understanding and practice of the Eucharist/Lord's Supper running a close second. And so the Dialogue turned from Baptism to the Eucharist/Lords Supper. Baptism and Eucharist/Lord's Supper are expressions of an umbrella issue, the sacraments. Then, of course, we needed to put our peace theologies on the table. We find a report of this discussion in chapter II of the Report as well. Actually, in the order of things, the Dialogue moved from Church (in 1999) to Peace (in 2000) to the Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist/Lord's Supper (in 2001).

Paragraph 69 points out that with each topic, the Dialogue group spent considerable effort identifying convergences and divergences. (This approach has been used in other dialogues as well.) A substantial list of these is reported in the chapter. In fact, if we had the patience and the time, we could spend years unpacking these in the course of our local dialogue. As it is, for starters, we will only touch on them in this round. Actually, I have some questions as to whether a probing of convergences and divergences was the best way to go about our comparative exercise. It's probably one place to start laying out some of the ground we stand on together and separately. I know that John Howard Yoder has criticized this approach. Laying out current convergences and divergences assumes a “development-of-tradition” approach to Christian truth. The group seeks to ascertain what is the truth we can agree on here and now—and similarly, where do we part company—with a view to seeking our unity on the basis of what we believe along the way. If we want to do it the Mennonite way, would we not rather take a “restitutionist” approach? That would mean that we ask each group to come to the table with an exposition of what each has claimed to be theologically and confessionally valid throughout history and today on the basis of Scripture. This would take us into a discussion of the Scriptures. We would soon see: 1) which texts we tend to latch on to; 2) what kinds of exegesis we employ to ferret out the truth; 3) how we put our biblical data together when we enter into theological interpretation; 4) what value we give to the Biblical record as a whole; and also 5) how we work with the process of tradition. All this to say that I think we still have much to learn from each other as to *how* to dialogue. For this five-year round, we followed the classic ecumenical way and the Catholic way. And also the way that is typical in everyday conversation where, in our quest for unity, we quickly move to making comparisons on the basis of what we believe about and how we practice the faith in our time.

Paragraph 70 tells us that it seemed right to begin our theological discussion with the nature of the church. Here we are in line with the recent German Mennonite theologian, Fernando Enns, whom I have mentioned before. He says, concerning Mennonite teachings on

peace, that we will not understand Mennonite peace theology except in conjunction with a Mennonite understanding of ecclesiology (the nature of the church). Whether we have successfully shown how church and peace are inseparably linked together, I don't know. Perhaps we can keep that question in mind when we come to that section in Chapter II.

Discussion

Richard Lebrun found Helmut's suggestion of a "restitution" approach interesting and important. **Henry Loewen** reflected on the nature of "dialogue," suggesting that when you open yourself up to other you should be prepared to change. **Adolf Ens** noted the absence of biblical scholars among the Mennonite participants in the International dialogue.

Richard Lebrun's reflections on paragraphs 71-83

These paragraphs set out what the authors identify as "A Catholic Understanding of the Church," taking full account of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council on the issues involved. I found myself nodding agreement with almost everything that is said in these paragraphs, which paint a very attractive portrait of contemporary Catholic understanding of the Church. The three primary images that are highlighted, the Church as the people of God, the Church as the body of Christ, and the Church as the temple of the Holy Spirit, are certainly those that I have come to appreciate since the time of Vatican II. The same can be said about characterizing the "mystery of the Church" as *koinonia* or communion. These dimensions are then nicely linked with the role and importance of the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist as the way individuals are incorporated into Christ and the Church.

These paragraphs (especially 78) also offer a clear enunciation of Vatican II's teachings on the relations between Scripture and Tradition, and the role of the Magisterium in maintaining authentic teaching and unity. The explicit teaching on infallibility (as set out by Vatican I) and its limits (speaking *ex cathedra* in declaring that a certain doctrine belongs to the deposit of faith) is clearly stated. However there is no hint about the continuing controversy among Catholic theologians concerning the implications of the statement (from *Lumen gentium*) about "religious submission of mind and will" to the "authentic magisterium of the Roman pontiff."

With respect to paragraph 80, I particularly liked the statement that "The followers of Jesus must conquer the spirit of this world with the Spirit of the beatitudes." As an historian I can only say that it to be regretted that the Church (or at least some of its representatives) too often in its history failed to live up to this injunction.

I also very much liked the comment in paragraph 83, the last paragraph in this section," devoted to the "catholicity" of the Church (understood to mean extension over the whole world), in which it is said that this "catholicity of the Church is a call to embrace all legitimate human particularities." Again, the historical record since the 16th century of missionary methods that tended to assume that Christianization also required Europeanization inspires regret that the understanding embodied in this statement was too often absent. On the other hand, our recent Hanley speaker, Fr. Joe Komonchak, pointed out that in Rwanda, Catholic Hutus and Catholic Tutsis put their ethnic identities ahead of their Catholic identities and massacred one another—too much inculturation?

Overall, these paragraphs paint what is, to my mind, a very attractive and defensible

portrait of Catholic self-understanding of “Church.” I only regret that the actual practice of churchmanship by members of the hierarchy (and I could name particular Roman Catholic bishops) too often fails to live up to these fine ideals. At the moment, I am thinking both of the failures of bishops (particularly in the U.S., but elsewhere as well), to deal honestly and effectively with cases of sexual abuse by priests, and of the way American bishops are closing down parishes all over the country—too often in a “ham-handed” way that flouts any understanding the Church as “the people of God.” The ordinary lay people, whose sacrifices built the churches being sold off, often seem to be completely ignored.

Harold Jantz: reflections on paragraphs 71-83:

I’d like to begin with a story. Years ago while I was editing *Christian Week*, I met a young couple who were members of a Catholic parish in this city. Their name was Reimer. Naturally, I was interested. I asked the young man, whose name suggested a Mennonite background, how he came to be part of the Roman Catholic Church. He said that, actually, he had grown up in a well-known independent, non-denominational church in this city. He had attended Providence College. He came to a point where he became profoundly dissatisfied with the ecclesiology of the church he had grown up in. They had little or no sense of a larger church. Of course, it helped that he had met a young woman who had grown up in the Catholic Church. They married and he chose to join her church. He told me how good it felt to gain a sense of a universal church and to know one’s self to be connected in Christ to God’s people throughout the world. It was a statement I could understand.

But there was an interesting sidebar to this story. This young man’s wife’s family – her parents were both doctors – had a child who had Down’s Syndrome. It was something the parents couldn’t deal with and they gave that child away. Their handicapped son ended up in a Mennonite family, deeply rooted in the church. To this day that child, now in middle age, lives with a Mennonite family as a son. As I read the section that described *A Catholic Understanding of the Church*, the strongest sense I came away with was one of the convictions we share. About much of it I would say, this is what I too, rooted in my Mennonite Brethren church, believe.

While I might not use the word “sacrament,” I (we) would affirm that the church “is a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race.”

I (we) would affirm strongly our conviction that “the Church is understood to be the people of God, namely a people God planned to assemble in the holy Church who would believe in Christ” and that the Church is “given the vocation of participating in God’s plan for all peoples to bring the light of salvation which is Christ to the ends of the earth.”

I (we) would affirm with conviction that the Church is “the body of Christ in and for the world,” that it is Christ’s *ekklesia*, that is, that the Church carries the mission of Christ, namely that in Christ God is reconciling the world to himself

I (we) would furthermore identify unreservedly with affirmation that the Church is the “temple of the Holy Spirit.” We too see this expressed in the praise which rises up as the Church worships its Redeemer and Lord, as members are knit together into a living edifice, as gifts are exercised for the good of all and for the world, and where the bond of unity in Christ is experienced.

I (we) believe too that the communion within the Trinity in some mysterious way models

what followers of Christ experience as they unite with one another in the church and sense their hearts united with other believers in a bond of peace.

I (we) too see baptism as an act which incorporates people fully into the community of faith, the Church. We too believe in the important, indeed, central role, that worthy men (and women) play in “the task of transmitting the faithful witness of Christ” across the years.

We too believe that the sacred Scripture and a spiritual tradition enable us to give “an authentic interpretation of the Word of God” and that this is best accomplished by those who are teachers to the church exercising their role in communion with one another.

We would also affirm strongly that the Church has “the obligation to be a faithful witness of that which she has received in word and deed,” which is made possible “through the anointing that has been received by the Holy Spirit. The Church lives then under the Word of God...”

And most certainly, we would affirm that the Church is not merely extended to all parts of the world, but that just as Christ came into a particular social and cultural situation, we too recognize “the same apostolic faith [in Christ] has been incarnated in diverse cultures and places throughout the world.” The church, we too believe “is to speak all languages and embrace all cultures.”

I want to say again, when I look at this document, we share the most important core convictions.

Where we would likely find ourselves in tension, would be at the following points:

While we believe that we do indeed meet Christ in the church, we believe that a personal relationship to Christ both precedes and anticipates incorporation into a visible community of faith. Baptism then is a sign of what has already taken place, and incorporation into the visible body.

We would be hesitant to say that “just as the Trinity is one, in the diversity of persons, so too is the church one though many members.” We would likely rather say that the Trinity is a realized unity while the church lives in expectation of that unity, experiencing a taste of what it might mean, but living in the hope that Christ will one day present her to the Father “without spot or wrinkle” (Eph. 5:27), in perfect unity.

While we too believe in the importance of passing the deposit of truth on to the next generation, “transmitting (as it were) the faithful witness of Christ down through the ages,” we cannot embrace the understanding that one church or one magisterium might carry either the burden or the privilege for that witness. We would not be able to say, “the whole body of the faithful who have an anointing that comes from the holy one cannot err in matters of belief.” On the other hand, we would find encouragement from the point noted as identified by Pope John Paul II as needing further discussion, namely, “the relationship between Sacred Scripture, as the highest authority in matters of faith, and Sacred Tradition, as indispensable to the interpretation of the Word of God.” In fact, I am certain that many of my tradition would be gratified to note the times that the primacy of the “revealed Word of God” is repeated as the source of the Church’s faith and life. While we appreciate the importance of tradition in interpreting the revealed Word of God, we believe that as a living Word it also speaks to us in our contemporary settings in ways that may not have been understood as well at other times. The emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit that has characterized the last century might be a case in point.

When the one Church is spoken about, many of my tradition would affirm that there is indeed one Church, but that church cannot be identified with any particular institutional expression, rather that it ought to be seen as consisting of all who confess Jesus Christ as Lord

and know themselves to be in fellowship with the body of Christ, the people of God, in this world. Institutional forms of the church, insofar as they submit their life and teaching to the Word of God and the correction and wisdom of the larger Church, should be seen as “authentic” expressions of the Church. We could not accept that the “one Church of God... is concretely real in the Catholic Church,” however much we might appreciate many aspects of that church.

Having said that, I would nonetheless, be untrue to my convictions, if I did not express my great appreciation for the strong note the statement strikes on proclaiming the “Good News of the kingdom of God and the gift of salvation in Jesus Christ that God offers freely to all of humanity” as at the core of the Church’s identity and mission. And to amplify that: “the catholicity of the Church therefore consists in the recognition of the same apostolic faith that has been incarnated in diverse cultures and places throughout the world In spite of the diversity of its expressions ... the Catholic faith is understood to be the same faith contained in the Scriptures, handed on by the Apostles and confessed in the creeds today.” To that we would simply say, Amen. That’s what we believe too.

Discussion: Helmut Harder commented on the image of the Church as the temple of the Holy Spirit (as described in paragraph 74) and as the “community of the Holy Spirit” (in paragraph 86), noting that the difference in vocabulary reflect a different understanding of the local on “holiness”—with Mennonites putting an emphasis on the local congregation and having less sense of its presence in St. Peter’s.

At this point, the group broke for supper.

Elaine Baete’s reflections on paragraphs 84-92 (read by **Mike Radcliffe**):

These paragraphs of *Called Together To Be Peacemakers* present images or models of the Mennonite church based on three biblical images from a Mennonite perspective and all from within a Trinitarian formula.

1. The Church is the “new people of God”...as a family established through the grace of God and therefore a household of faith.
2. The Church as the “Body of Christ” where the members of the Church are incorporated as a body into Christ.
3. The “Community of the Holy Spirit” established when Jesus breathed on his disciples and they received the Holy Spirit; thereon the disciples live *koinonia* (fellowship).

Other descriptions of the Mennonite Church are presented following these three main ones:

1. (Par. #87) Fellowship of believers: those who, by free will believe Christ and obey the Gospel.
2. The “community of disciples” who proclaim the reign of God and provide a foretaste of the Church's glorious hope.

3. “People in mission” as witnesses to the ends of the earth, living in a peaceful manner, and evangelizing through various ministries such as social service and advocacy for peace and justice among all peoples.

4. The “Peace Church” as peace is essential to the meaning and message of the Gospel, as well as to the Church’s own self-understanding; non-resistance is important to promoting peace.

5. (Par. #91) The Church is understood as a “servant community” as Jesus came to serve.

6. Church as “communion of Saints”: all who believe in Jesus Christ and seek to follow in holy living.

II. I was moved, yes, with joy, to discover that these biblical images and descriptions were images that are also held dear to our own Catholic understanding of Church. On the other *hand*, and in comparison to the images just described, I recognize and regret that in my understanding and knowledge of Catholic history, the Catholic model and/or image of Church has not always been able to be identified with peace and non-resistance (a notable difference). Here I refer to the “military” image of the Church as conqueror that has been characteristic of the Catholic Church in the past.

III. I think what is significant of these images and descriptions of Church for both Catholics and Mennonites is that both take images that are rooted in Scripture, and especially from the New Testament. Paul Minear in his book *Images of the Church in the New Testament* lists some ninety-six images of the Church though some might not be really figures of the Church, indicating how rich the New Testament is regarding ecclesiological imagery.

Avery Dulles, in his book *Models of the Church* (expanded edition, 1987) presents six images or models of the Church: Church as Institution, Church as Communion (which includes the “People of God” and “Church as Mystical Body” images), Church as Sacramental (mediator), Church as Herald (Proclaimer), Church as Servant (Model of action for justice and participation in making the world a better place), and the latest addition of Church as Discipleship.

It would seem that there are some real convergences in the images and understandings of what it is to be “Church” that we can work on for further understanding. Dulles in his text says that images as symbols are highly evocative in their power as they convey a latent meaning that is apprehended in a subliminal or subconscious way. How we therefore image and symbolize our understanding of Church influences greatly how we live “being Church” out in daily life. Dulles goes on to say that “if an authentic image is recognized but denied in practice, there will follow the same disintegration of the ligaments of corporate life” (*Models of the Church*, p. 21).

Adolf Ens' reflections on paragraphs 84-92:

Some observations:

1. "Mennonite" in "Mennonite Understanding" is not equivalent to the term "Catholic" in "Catholic Understanding." This becomes clear in comparing the source authorities cited in the Catholic section (71-83) with those in the Mennonite section. In the former virtually every point is based on an official declaration of the Church, many from Vatican II. In the Mennonite section all but two references are to individual authors. And even those two exceptions (notes 70 and 73) are references to confessions (officially adopted statements) of different branches of the Mennonite church. That difference arises from and points to the divergent understandings of the church: it is difficult for a unified "Mennonite" understanding to arise since for them "the primary manifestation of the Church is the local congregation" and/or "various groupings of congregations" called "denominations." (Paragraph 105)
2. This is not to deny that Bender (notes 62, 63) had very significant authority conferred on him by the Church (he was Dean of the seminary of the largest North American Mennonite denomination and secretary of the executive of MCC, the most inter-Mennonite organization of North American Mennonites, among other positions held). Nor does it suggest that "outsiders" Littell (note 68 – Methodist) and Friedmann (note 71, Jewish Mennonite) did not interpret 16th century Anabaptist theologians fairly. It is also true that as these scholars and churchmen constructed their summary of an Anabaptist understanding of the church they used many other Mennonite confessions than the two cited in our document. However, the present summary, like the ones cited in the source documents, is a composite of individual or regional statements, selectively used by the compilers. [For example, the two 16th century Anabaptists quoted in this summary, Hans Denck in Paragraph 88, and Balthasar Hubmaier in Paragraph 92, were both designated as "marginal Anabaptists" by Bender, though he too, agreed with the quotations used.] Mennonites have difficulty in knowing how to use the "authority" of their Anabaptist and more recent "tradition."
3. You will have noted the similarity of the three main images of the Church used in both the Catholic and Mennonite summaries. At the same time, it is striking that the Mennonite statement interprets the same NT image in a more egalitarian or reciprocal direction than the Catholic summary. e.g. body of Christ #85 implies a commitment to one another; #87 mutual accountability to one another. In the Catholic view, the emphasis falls more on the **one** of "one body."
4. There is a strong role for every member in the Church at many levels of ministry based on a strong conviction of the Holy Spirit giftedness of every member in the Mennonite understanding. In the Catholic understanding the role of the laity has been considerably broadened and strengthened after Vatican II.

Henry Loewen's reflections on paragraphs 93-102

In paragraph #95, "Incorporation into the body of Christ," the opening sentence; "We agree that the invitation to be God's faithful people is offered to all in the name of Jesus Christ," has been and is key.

This belief is fundamental to our understanding of faith, of salvation, of Church. I Corinthians 3:11, “For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid: that foundation is Jesus Christ,” is the one verse frequently used to summarize the teachings and/or testimony of Menno Simons. This verse is probably the one most often found on plaques or hangings in our sanctuaries; it is the verse found at the bottom of our official church stationery. Mennonite Church Manitoba states: that “Our Vision is to be a community of congregations unified in Christ Jesus...”

Adolf Ens, in a paper titled “Ecclesiology,” writes:

This sense of intimate belonging together is created by Christ. The Pauline imagery of the church as the body of Christ implies this most strongly. There is an ever-present danger of losing this central conviction, perhaps the more so precisely at those times when the sense of comfortable belonging together is strongest in the community. (“Ecclesiology,” C.M.B.C., February 1991)

He continues by quoting Harold Bender:

Christian fellowship is to be sharply distinguished from superficial and transient associations. The warm feeling between familiar friends who meet regularly at church meetings, the bonds of an ethnic group with a common language or cultural and historical background, the awareness of a network of related families – all these may have sociological and psychological value in adding to the bonds of loyalty to a common faith which otherwise bind a church membership together, but they cannot carry the life of a Christian community. Group affairs, such as the church supper, the Sunday-school class picnic, the homemaker’s club, or the men’s brotherhood, may even substitute for Christian fellowship and speed the descent of the church from its high calling in Christ to being merely one of the better social clubs that help to build the community, with religion serving somewhat as background music.” (Harold S. Bender, *These Are My People. The New Testament Church* [Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1962], 44.)

Paragraph #98, *Oneness of the Church*, says that “we take seriously the Scripture texts that call Christians to be one in Christ. We confess that our witness to the revelation to God in Christ is weakened when we live in disunity.”

If, as we say, we are taking it seriously, then we need to take it more seriously yet. I believe that Christianity’s witness to the world has been weakened by our disunity. – We separate from each other to more closely follow Christ. – is what seems to have been and still seems to be the logic for many of our separations.

In light of this, our meeting together is cause for joy, for celebration. These, and other similar dialogues are small steps that will hopefully lead to further steps in each of our individual as well as corporate journeys. Everett J. Thomas, editor of *The Mennonite*, writes in his editorial, entitled “Blind Spots” that:

It is also a form of discipleship to be vulnerable to other Christians and to weigh their counsel when they say we are wrong. If we are, God’s grace is also sufficient for such blind spots. (*The Mennonite*, September 21, 2004.)

This search for unity needs to continue and therefore the paragraphs under *Areas of Future Study* are critical in our search for unity.

In paragraph #100, *Ministry of the Church* the statement; “We also agree that chosen leaders, ordained and lay are essentially servants of God’s people,” reflects another important understanding of what it is that should characterize Christians. The concept of “servant

leadership” was much discussed in our Mennonite Church at one time. Today we talk more about leadership. The attitude of servanthood is counter to today’s culture. In each of our traditions there are countless stories of how God’s presence has been felt when we were able to serve our neighbors.

Winkler resident Helen Dyck related some of her postwar Russia experiences, noting the appreciation her family felt when they received three MCC blankets.

“These blanket comforted even our broken spirits,” said Dyck after seeing a display of blankets. MCC made a big impact on us. We saw them as a symbol of God’s love,” she added. (*The Mennonite*, September 21, 2004, p. 2.)

Elaine Pinto’s reflections on paragraphs 103-105

Section 103 Church and the Authority of Tradition

While it is true that Mennonites do not hold Tradition (capital T) equal to Scripture, there is a very strong tradition (small t) that carried much power in my childhood days, though less so now, and that was the lived church tradition of the Mennonites. If we did not revere the memories of the saints, we most certainly revered Mennonite history and the elders of the community. If a heavy hand rested on a young shoulder in church with the words “Nah, wie gehts es mit Gott?” (How goes it with God?) you certainly would feel that hand as the hand of God, and the appropriate trembling was in order. And while it was true that all in the Mennonite Church was to be subject to Scripture, as a child I did not hear a critique that Mennonite traditions were not Scriptural. To be a Mennonite meant that your church and your life, if you were baptized, was lived in accordance with Scripture. There was a holy reverence for Scripture joined with the expectation that it was to be a lived reverence. For me this changed when one of the first of my generation’s critics, writer Rudy Wiebe, wrote *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, and exposed a fictional Mennonite community for living otherwise. He showed that Mennonite traditions did not necessarily equate to Scriptural living. There has been confusion around pairing Mennonite tradition and biblical living in the past, with an acceptance of ethnic traditions that have nothing to do with biblical values. For e.g., Mennonites could be identified by certain names (implying a select geographic origin) or Mennonites make *zwiebach*, and serve *faspa* on Sundays. These identities and traditions have nothing to do with living according to Scripture, and define a peoplehood around customs rather than biblical living. Though it is decreasing, small t tradition has remained strong in the Mennonite church.

Section 104 The Incorporation into the Church

The practice of infant baptism points to the truth that baptism is a gift, a grace given without merit, something not even sought out by the baptized. It is a sacrament mediated, not earned, completely initiated by God, albeit with the participation of willing parents. This is very grace-filled, and draws one's heart in gratitude. Yet, there can be a limitation, when those that practice infant baptism can undervalue the baptism experience, or worse still, treat it as something “magic.”

Mennonites, on the other hand practice adult baptism, which carries the weightiness of self-preparation, and implied readiness, which can point to works instead of grace. This sober self decision implies the step is taken more seriously. The one baptized is tested in terms of

authenticity, and the sponsors and the local church could be viewed the “gatekeepers” that carry the keys to the kingdom. But this can have ungodly ramifications. When my mother was 14 and wanted to join the Mennonite church, she had one score against her. Her mother had separated from an abusive husband (unheard of in those days). Because of this Grandma sat in the last row of the church, and was not allowed communion, and my mother was often shunned. So when my mother came to the elder and asked permission to begin the process of becoming baptized, the elder looked at her and said, “Have you done anything to try to bring your parents back together?” and turned her away from baptism. She kept trying, and at 17 was finally accepted.

Section 105 The Structure of the Church

Here I would offer an observation. I wonder if the fact that the Catholic Church relates to far away Rome as its highest authority allows for a looser commitment at the local parish level. Yet, is it that very “looseness” in the Catholic Church that makes me feel so accepted before God just as I am? Mennonites, being more governed by the local congregation ... in-house observers, are perhaps more likely to keep our behaviors in check. The downside of that could be an orientation to be on the lookout for the other person’s purity, or presenting a kind of false front, project a sense of not accepting people for who they really are.

Luis Melo’s reflections on paragraphs 107-110

Areas for future study on “Catholicity”:

Luis began by reflecting on the possibility of moving from a focus on classical and rather “static” aspects of the Church to more of a focus on consideration of the Church as “experience” and the Church as “event” and “action.”

These aspects would include consideration of both the past, with the emphasis on memory of time and in time, and of the present, with the emphasis on geography and space. The Church is gathered and sent in the name of Christ to proclaim Christ.

Luis put emphasis on the concept of “fidelity”—being faithful to the gift by passing it on to the next generation. This also has implications for the eschatological dimension. These are things that happen in prayer and worship.

These considerations have implications for:

1. The content of Catholicity—how the magisterium is conducted and how tradition is understood and appropriated.
2. The instruments for Catholicity. (Services and offices to maintain and foster unity/community/fidelity) Here there are tensions between views that stress the importance of hierarchy and those that stress equality.
3. Universal / local. (Binomial) There are strengths and challenges to both dimensions, the Mennonites giving witness to strong local church and the Catholics giving witness to strong universal church.
4. Where and type of dialogue.

Reflections on linkages between the local and universal.

Meaning of the universal?

Where should the emphasis be with respect to dialogue? National, local (congregational level), international? This is a delicate issue ... The question of churches identifying what structures they and the resulting appropriate type of realistic dialogue possible. E.g., is it possible to have

an international dialogue between the Catholic Church (Vatican) and the Mennonite World Conference? Does the latter organization represent and have the authority to speak for all Mennonite congregations?

Discussion

Adolf Ens noted the irony of the involvement of the Mennonite World Conference in the international dialogue with the Catholic Church. The way this was carried on seems to imply that Mennonites are more like the Catholic Church than is the case. For Mennonites, organization beyond the local congregational level is really more a question of “networking” than forming bodies with binding decision-making authority. Adolf also observed the ways in which Mennonite churches in Canada seem, almost unconsciously, to be moving towards creating something like a “national church.”

Helmut Harder commented on how the “convergence” statements in the “Called Together to be Peacemakers” document was to a certain extent “cobbled together.”

Luis Melo thought that a lot of nuances were missing in the statement, and that more evangelical categories needed to be considered.

Harold Jantz observed that we cannot dialogue unless each party can declare honestly who they are.

4. **Scheduling of the next meeting.** January 19, 2005, was set tentatively as the date of the next meeting.

5. **Response from our “listener” – Joe McClelland**

Joe reflected back to the group what he understood to be the most important and/or interesting points that he heard.

He was particularly taken by the discussion about alternative routes to dialogue—the “convergence-divergence” approach in contrast to a possible “restitution” approach.

It seemed to him that some of the shades of difference, e.g., references to the “community of the Holy Spirit” (Mennonite vocabulary) as opposed to the “temple of the Holy Spirit” (Catholic vocabulary) were semantic in origin, reflecting the language at the origin of each metaphor.

In other cases, for example, in the Mennonite emphasis on a “community of believers,” the same term may be used—“Body of Christ”—but with a somewhat different meaning. He sensed a stronger sense of the laity among Mennonites.

Joe picked up on Mennonite reflections about infant baptism, especially the question of whether among Catholics infant baptism is appreciated and valued enough as grace.

He was also impressed by discussions of “Church as act” rooted in discipleship, and rooted in fidelity to this gift that we receive.

6. **Joe McClelland** hosted a visit to worship space at St. John Brebeuf Church and led the group in a recitation of the “Bridgfolk Prayer” as a closing prayer.