

Minutes

Winnipeg Mennonite-Catholic Dialogue, Meeting No. 21

Meeting held on 23 May 2007
at Canadian Mennonite University

Present: Elaine Baete, Adolf Ens, Irma Fast Dueck, Adolf Ens, Helmut Harder, Harold Jantz, Richard Lebrun, Henry Loewen, John Long, Luis Melo, and Lynda Trenholm.

Regrets: Michael Radcliffe

1. **Helmut** welcomed everyone to the Board Room, North Campus, of CMU, and offered an opening prayer.
2. *Sharing ecumenical and personal experiences:*
 - a) **Richard** reported participation in a workshop called “Talking about the Tough Stuff: Using Dialogue to Deal with Difficult Issues in the Church.” The facilitator was Susan Nienaber, a consultant with The Alban Institute. The workshop was sponsored by a local group called Congregational Peacebuilding Partners (an ecumenical group that includes the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Winnipeg) and held at CMU. Participants included members of various denominations.

Richard also reported attendance at an evening of storytelling and concert by Hutterites, held at Bethel Mennonite Church, and volunteer work with the House of Hesusd.
 - b) **Harold** recounted a trip through the States and spending Easter in Newton, Kansas, where he and his wife attended a Mennonite service, the next Sunday a Presbyterian Church service in Hot Springs, Arkansas, and the third Sunday the home congregation of Philip Yancey, Lookout Mountain Community Church of Denver, Colorado, affiliated with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. He continues his work with the House of Hesusd and New Direction Ministries.
 - c) **Elaine** reported hosting University of Manitoba chaplains at St. Paul’s College on March 8th to mark the World Day of Prayer. She will be going to India this summer for an interfaith experience with a group organized by Fr. Dave Creamer. She also reported going with some of her students to the Springs Church on 6 May. She was surprised that there was no mention of Jesus in the one and a half hour period they were there for worship – lots of talk about God, but Jesus was never named.

- d) **Adolf** spoke enthusiastically about his experience with the new dialogue group involving participants from the Fort Garry Mennonite congregation and Mary Mother of the Church parish. He also spoke of a granddaughter's participation in a choir, and how impressed he had been by the great sincerity of the sacred music portion of the choir's concert.
- d) **John** reported being very occupied with the same dialogue group, in particular with answering questions from Catholic participants outside the actual time of dialogue. He has also been having conversations with an Anglican friend who has wanted to discuss church financial issues.
- e) **Henry**, part of the same dialogue as Adolf and John, said he found this dialogue really a "miracle" because of the way all the participants seemed to be completely at home in the discussions and looked forward to the discussions. He also reported attending and singing at a funeral in a Lutheran church in Steinbach, singing in a choir in two Faith and Life events, and attendance at the Hutterite storytelling and concert event at Bethel Mennonite church.
- f) **Lynda** reported that she has been leading funeral services for deceased persons from various denominations at funeral homes. Her daughter will be getting married this summer, and she attended a wedding shower held at a United Church. She also reported a funeral at Christ the King for someone who was a "double-belonger." The service was without Eucharist. She also reported enthusiastically on the dialogue group involving people from Northeast Winnipeg.
- g) **Irma** spoke about her upcoming trip to Ontario where she will be participating in a conference involving six Muslim theologians from the famous school at Qom in Iran and six Mennonites. There will be about thirty observers. Unfortunately, the story was picked up by *Maclean's* and has generated a considerable amount of controversy, with objections being voiced by Iranians living in Canada and by the National Jewish Congress. This has raised security issues. It also raises questions about dialogue. In response to a question, Irma reported that this dialogue was begun at the initiative of MCC, and has also involved an exchange of scholars between people from Qom and the University of Toronto. In fact, this will be the third conference to come from this initiative.
- h) **Luis** provided a handout and spoke about the following activities:
1. "Baptism in the Catholic Church" at Mennonite Brethren Collegiate (April 16, 2.00–4.00 p.m.) Luis was to be joined at the talk by Helmut, but ended up doing it alone. He was surprised to discover that only about 1/3 of the class were Mennonite, with 1/3 from various Protestant denominations, and 1/3 Catholic. He found it an amazing experience.

2. Europe

a. April 27–May 19: England.

- Chemin Neuf Community (Langport, Somerset, May 3–4). Ted Wood from Winnipeg is part of this community, which seems to combine the charismatic renewal and Ignatian spirituality. Apparently there are plans to start a similar community in St. Boniface.
- Visit to Bruderhof in Forest Gate, London. This group, with two houses, is an experiment in urban monasticism.
- Visit to Franciscan Friars of the Renewal
- Mass for Migrant Works (Westminster Cathedral, May 7) The Catholic bishops have taken the initiative with this group, largely illegal immigrants, as a social justice issue.

b. May 9–May 19: Rome: Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity

- Meeting with Msgr. Donald Bolen (Anglican-Catholic Relations, ARC-Canada, Anglican Church of Canada General Synod in Winnipeg)
- Meeting with Msgr. John Radano (Mennonite-Catholic Relations) Radano is very interested in our Catholic-Mennonite dialogues in Winnipeg, which appears to be unique in the world. Luis hopes for written reports at our June 20th wrap-up, to have material to forward to Radano, who would like to promote similar dialogues elsewhere..
- Meeting with Msgr. Matthias Turk (“Joint Pilgrimage/Study Tour between Catholics and Lutherans in western Canada to Mark 10th Anniversary of the Joint Declaration on Doctrine of Justification in 2009). Luis will be very much in this activity.

3. Jewish-Catholic Relations: Phase II of Dialogue in Winnipeg

4. Issue of “Global World Day of Prayer” (May 27th, Pentecost Sunday)

5. Upcoming Events

a. Saskatoon:

September 27–28: Western Diocesan/Eparchial Coordinators of Ecumenism, WDECE Annual Meeting (“Spiritual Ecumenism”)

September 28–30: Annual Conference & 40th Anniversary of the North American Academy of Ecumenists (“Interpreting the Scriptures Together: Seeking the Visible Unity of the Church”) Luis hopes to see some members of our dialogue at this meeting.

b. Winnipeg:

October 1: Canadian Conference of Churches: Forum (University of Winnipeg)

i) **Helmut** reported a number of activities:

1. Attendance at a meeting at Bose monastery in Italy for continuing work on the common “cloud of witnesses” project. He recounted a meeting with a Fr. Helmut Moll from Cologne who is gathering stories of 20th-century German martyrs, both under the Nazi regime and under the Communist regime in East Germany. Helmut was overwhelmed by the large number of Catholic martyrs of this era.
2. Although he was not able to attend this meeting in person, Helmut was able to report on the visit of six Canadian Hutterites (not formal representatives) to Innsbruck, Austria, for a ceremony commemorating the execution of Jacob Hutter. This involved an apology from Catholic churchmen for what had happened in the sixteenth century. The trip was apparently quite an experience for Canadian Hutterites.
3. Over Easter, Helmut, as member of a choir, sang the Bach B Minor Mass with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra.
4. Helmut reported working on a paper for a session of the Canadian Theological Society at its upcoming meeting in Saskatoon on the development of understanding of church through ecumenical dialogue. He will refer to a number of international dialogues, but put special emphasis on Mennonite-Catholic dialogue.
5. Reported an upcoming trip to Philadelphia for a meeting with the Quakers, an historic peace church.
6. There is also an upcoming trip to Rome in October, where he will be among ten Mennonites invited to participate in a Catholic-Mennonite dialogue as a follow-up to the five-year dialogue. He will also attend a planning meeting for a symposium planned for May 4–11, 2011, to conclude the Decade to Overcome Violence.
7. Reported that a symbolic Mennonite-Catholic peace action is being planned in Columbia.

3. Report from local dialogue groups and the college group.

- a) **Richard** reported that the **St. Ignatius/Charleswood Mennonite group** had completed its discussion of prescribed portions of *Called Together To Be Peacemakers*, and that a small group has agreed to prepare a report for the June 20th wrap-up.

He also reported that the **St. Paul's/CMU group** had done the same. As well, he reported a “consultation” held at CMU on 19 April involving himself, Irma, Harry Huebner, Helmut and Luis, which considered possible formats for a continuing Mennonite-Catholic dialogue between faculty at CMU and St. Paul's College. It was agreed that 1) there is no reason why this dialogue should continue to be under the “mother group” or follow the pattern of inter-parish dialogues, 2) there seemed general agreement about the utility of the “6 plus 6” format (perhaps expanded to include a few more); 3) there seemed support for a program for the 2007–2008 academic year that might include a) A session (or two) on Part I, “Considering History Together,” of *Called Together to be Peacemakers*, b) Sessions on books and/or essays by Catholics and Mennonites on particular topics of mutual interest, and c) A session (or two) on Part III, “Toward a Healing of Memories” of *Called Together to be Peacemakers*. Irma and Richard are exploring these ideas with their colleagues at their respective institutions.

- b) **Adolf** and **John** reported on the Fort Garry Mennonite/Mary Mother of the Church group, which has one more meeting scheduled at which a report for the June 20th wrap-up meeting will be prepared. Their remarks led to a discussion about ways to publicize the activities of all our groups. **Helmut** reported that he is writing an article on the dialogue for his congregation's newsletter. **Luis** suggested that there was nothing to prevent sharing the good news about our activities. **Helmut** noted that Susan Sudermann of the *Winnipeg Free Press* was interested in the topic. **Irma** thought that John Longhurst would also be interested.

John referred to the second page of a two-page handout prepared for the Fort Garry Mennonite/Mary Mother of the Church group, which raises questions about might be addressed in a report to the June 20th wrap-up, and possible initiatives for dialogue and healing of memories beyond our Catholic-Mennonite dialogue.

Luis outlined a number of possible future scenarios for the inter-parish dialogue groups, and Helmut suggested that decisions with respect to these possible futures might best be made after the June 20th wrap-up.

- c) **Harold and Lynda** reported that the Northeast dialogue group will have one more meeting before the June 20th dialogue.

4. **Report and discussion – planning for the June 20th meeting.**

There was discussion of a number of logistical questions – determining how many people might attend, the form that reports from the various groups might take (relatively short oral reports – no more than 8 to 10 minutes, and a written reports for the record), minutes (**Richard** volunteered for this task), shopping (**Henry** to assist **Irma**), etc. **Irma** is working with Fr Robert Polz to plan the worship service. **Irma** and **Helmut** will follow up on the planning for the wrap-up, and get in touch with members of our group as appropriate.

5. **Dinner break**

6A. **A Catholic Martyr Story – Elaine** made the following presentation of about **St. Justin Martyr**.

According to the *Divine Office* book of the Catholic Church, which clergy, religious and lay persons pray and meditate on daily, **St. Justin**, philosopher and martyr, was born of pagan parents at Flavia Neapolis in Samaria believed to be around Nablus in Palestine at the beginning of the second century. At the age of 30 he became a Christian and traveled to debate pagan philosophers, eventually going to Rome. Following his conversion to the faith he wrote many works in defense of religion, of which we have only two: the *Apology* for the Christian religion and the *Dialogue with Trypho*, a Jew. He also opened a school at Rome in which public debates were held. Justin was martyred along with several companions during the reign of Marcus Aurelius around the year 165. On the liturgical calendar, the Church celebrates his Memorial on June 1.

“Martyr, philosopher, and defender of Christianity. In Rome he was denounced and tried with Charita, Chariton, Euelpistus, Hierox, Liberianus, and Paeon. They were scourged and beheaded. Justin, also called “the Philosopher,” was the first layman to serve as an apologist. He dedicated his life to spreading the Gospel message to the uneducated. The records of Justin’s trial are extant.”

A little more detailed perspective of his life in synthesis follows:

All the voices around Justin clamored that they had the truth he sought so desperately. He had listened to them all since he first came to Rome to get his education. They each shouted that they held the one and only answer but he felt no closer to the truth than when he had started his studies. He had left the Stoic master behind but the Stoics valued discipline as truth and thought discussion of God unnecessary. He had rejected the Peripatetic who seemed more interested in money than discussion. The Pythagorean had rejected him because he didn’t know enough music and geometry—the things that would lead him to truth. He had found some joy with the Platonists because the contemplation of ideas gave wings to his mind, but they had promised wisdom would let him see God and so, where was God?

There was one place that Justin always escaped to in order to get away from these shouting, confusing voices, and to search out the quiet inner voice that led him to truth. This place was

a lonely spot, a path that seemed made for him alone in a field by the sea. So sure was he of the isolation of his retreat that he was shocked one day to find an old man following him.

The old man was not searching for truth but for some of his family. Nonetheless they began a discussion in which Justin identified himself as a philologist, a lover of reason. The old man challenged him—why was he not a lover of truth, a lover of deeds. Justin told him that reason led to truth, and philosophy led to happiness. This was certainly an interesting thing for Justin to say since he had not found the truth in the study of reason or happiness in his quest among the philosophers! Perhaps the old man sensed this for he asked for Justin's definition of philosophy and of happiness.

In the long discussion that followed, Justin spoke eloquently to the old man's searching questions, but even Justin had to admit that philosophers may talk about God but had never seen him, may discuss the soul but didn't really know it. But if the philosophers whom Justin admired and followed couldn't, then nobody could, right?

The old man told him about the ancient prophets, the Hebrew prophets, who had talked not of ideas but of what they had seen and heard, what they knew and experienced. And this was God. The old man ended the conversation by telling Justin to pray that the gates of light be opened to him.

Inflamed by this conversation, Justin sought out the Scriptures and came to love them. Christ words "possess a terrible power in themselves, and are sufficient to inspire those who turn aside from the path of rectitude with awe; while the sweetest rest is afforded those who make a diligent practice of them."

Why hadn't Justin known about Christianity before with as much as he had studied? He had heard about it, the way other pagans of second century Rome had, by the rumors and accusations that surrounded the persecution of Christians. The fearlessness of their actions made him doubt the gossip, but he had nothing else to go by. Christians at that time kept their beliefs secret. They were so afraid that outsiders would trample on their sacred faith and desecrate their mysteries that they wouldn't tell anyone about their beliefs—even to counteract outright lies. To be honest, there was good reason for their fears—many actors for example performed obscene parodies of Christian ritual for pagan audiences, for example.

But Justin believed differently. He had been one of those outsiders—not someone looking for trouble, but someone earnestly searching for the truth. The truth had been hidden from him by this fear of theirs. And he believed there were many others like him. He exhorted them that Christians had an obligation to speak of their faith, to witness to others about their faith and their mysteries.

So Justin took his newfound faith to the people. This layman became the first great apologist for Christianity and opened the gates of light for so many others. He explained baptism and Eucharist. He explained to the pagans why they didn't worship idols and why that didn't

make them atheists. He explained to the Jews how Christians could worship the same God but not follow Jewish laws. He explained to the Greeks and the philosophers how philosophy did not take into account the dignity of humankind. He wrote long arguments known as apologies and traveled to other lands in order to debate publicly. His long education in philosophy and rhetoric gave him the skills he needed to match his opponents and the Holy Spirit gave him the rest.

It is not surprising that Justin was arrested during the persecution under Marcus Aurelius. Along with four others (Chariton, Charites, Paeon, and Liberianus) he was brought before the Roman prefect, Rusticus, to be accused under the law that required sacrificing to idols. When Rusticus demanded that they “Obey the gods at once, and submit to the kings,” Justin responded, “To obey the commandments of our Saviour Jesus Christ is worthy neither of blame nor of condemnation.”

When Rusticus asked what doctrines he believed, Justin told him that he had learned all the doctrines available during his quest but finally submitted to the true doctrines of the Christians, even though they didn’t please others. (An understatement when he was under danger of death!)

When Rusticus asked where the Christians gathered, Justin gave a response that gives us insight into Christian community and worship of the time: “Where each one chooses and can: for do you fancy that we all meet in the very same place? Not so; because the God of the Christians is not circumscribed by place; but being invisible, fills heaven and earth, and everywhere is worshiped and glorified by the faithful.”

When Rusticus asked each of them if they were a Christian, they all responded the same way: “Yes, I am a Christian.” When Rusticus tried to put responsibility for this on Justin, they responded that God had made them Christians.

Just before Rusticus sentenced them he asked Justin, “If you are killed do you suppose you will go to heaven?” Justin said, “I do not suppose it, but I know and am fully persuaded of it.”

Justin and his fellow martyrs were beheaded in the year 165 and went to be with the Truth Justin had longed for all his life. He is often known as **Justin Martyr** and his works are still available.

Elaine also spoke very briefly about **St. Lucy**, virgin and martyr, who was executed in the early fourth century. She suggested that with the trafficking of women and children as we know it in our time, St. Lucy’s life and the lives of many other women martyrs around her day has significance for us today.

- 6B. **A Mennonite Martyr Story.** **Harold** spoke about the life and death of Jacob Aron Rempel (1883–1941), who lived in Russia and died a victim of the Stalinist regime. Harold based his report on a recent biography published by Rempel’s son and granddaughter.

Born into a poor family of 13 children, Rempel could not at first afford an education, and began his career as a stable hand. Nevertheless he read widely, and was self-educated in his early years. Eventually he was able to obtain an unlicensed teaching position in a Mennonite school in a Jewish village. This eventually led to a position in a better school, and an offer to finance his education in Switzerland, where he spent six years.

By the time he returned to Russia in 1912 he had mastered six languages. On his return he began teaching in a teacher training school and in a Mennonite School of Commerce. He married and began to preach as well as teach at the university. Widely-accepted as a preacher, he eventually realized he had to choose between university teaching and ministerial work to which the church was calling him. He took the call of the church as a call from God. He was ordained in the early 1920s and took on pastoral responsibilities for a number of villages, where he was instrumental in baptizing some 4,000 young people during nearly a decade of ministry. By the time he was silenced by the authorities he had written some 8,000 letters and given some 3000 sermons and addresses. A substantial number of his letters have survived this period.

As conditions became increasingly difficult under the Soviets, many Mennonites left or tried to leave Russia from his communities. One of the last projects Rempel was involved in was an attempt to start a Bible school, eventually without success. He was forced to give up his church leadership through a taxation tactic employed by the Soviets. He was forced to leave his village and his wife and children were driven out of their home and their belongings auctioned off for a pittance. In 1929 they left for Moscow in an effort to gain permission to leave the country. However, he was arrested and his family sent back to the Ukraine. In the months that followed, Rempel was held for a time in the Lubjanka prison in Moscow, questioned at length, tortured, and finally sent to the Solovky prison in northern Russia, where he almost died. While being sent to the south, he escaped by jumping from a train. In the years that followed he was free for a time, arrested and escaped again. For very short times he actually saw his wife and family. For a time his eldest son Alexander could be with him. For a year and a half he lived among a group of Mennonites in Turkestan. It is letters that he wrote to his wife and family during the years of his absence that make up the greatest number of surviving letters. They provide a picture of a great Christian leader tested to the extreme and still remaining faithful to his God and his calling. He was a witness to the brutal exiling of the Mennonite community in which he had found shelter. Not long after, he too was re-arrested, eventually taken to the city of Orel, where he was imprisoned with other condemned leaders. In September, 1941, the Minister of the Interior, Lavrenti Beria, sent a communiqué to Joseph Stalin recommending the execution of these leaders. Stalin signed the order to execute and a few days later, on September 11, 1941, it was carried out; 157 men and women, of whom Jacob Rempel was number 123. All executed secretly in a forest, where they were buried, and the place of execution hidden. In one of his last letters, written in March, 1941, he wrote these lines: "This is how I understand life. They can put me in chains, beat me, sever my head, but they cannot rob me of my faith, my knowledge, the story of my life."

Harold concluded his presentation by reading a statement that Rempel had written to his brother in 1935, in which he reflected on his situation, speaking of how he had suffered in silence (as Jesus remained silent before Pilate), but also expressed a wish that his story be told.

Luis reflected briefly on three Marianist brothers who were killed by the Communists during the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s.

7. **Summary and reflections based on “Problem or Promise? Confessional Martyrs and Mennonite-Catholic Relations” by Jeremy M. Bergen.**

a) **Helmut** by way of a general **introduction** spoke of research on the thousands of twentieth-century martyrs. He notes the way that Bergen finds tension between two trends in contemporary Mennonite theology and church life, with their being, on the one hand, retrieval of the relevance of martyrdom, and on the other, an increased ecumenical openness to Catholicism. Helmut thought Bergen may be putting too much stress on attention to martyrdom as a marker of Mennonite identity, and pointed out that martyrdom is not the only way being Christian. He put martyrdom with the *via negativa*, with its emphasis on the cross and suffering, as a part of the mystery of Christ. At same time, he acknowledged that issue of the “confessional martyrs” who died at the hand of Catholics in the sixteenth-century raises a number of interesting and important questions.

b) **Luis** offered the following as a general schema as a framework for considering Bergen’s article:

Preliminary Remarks from the Catechism of the Catholic Church

Part III (“Life in Christ”), Section II (“The Ten Commandments”), Article 8 (“The Eight Commandment”), Part II (“To bear the Truth”):

Act of Discipleship: Lex Vivendi

#2473 *Martyrdom* is the supreme witness given to the truth of the faith: it means bearing witness even unto death. The martyr bears witness to Christ who died and rose, to whom he is united by charity. He bears witness to the truth of faith and of Christian doctrine. He endures death through an act of fortitude. ‘Let me become the food of the beasts, through whom it will be given me to reach God.’ (cf. St. Ignatius of Antioch, AD Rom. 4,1: SCh 10, 130).

#2474 The Church as painstakingly collected the records of those who preserved to the end in witnessing to their faith. These are the acts of the martyrs. They form the archives of truth written in letters of blood...

[Behaviour (#2113): “Many martyrs died for not adoring ‘the Beast,’ refusing even to simulate such worship”]

Part I (“Profession of the Christian Faith”), Chapter III (“I Believe in the Holy Spirit”), Article 5 (“The Communion of Saints”), Paragraph 2 (“The Communion of the Church of Heaven and Earth”):

Creed: Lex Orandi

#957 Communion with the saints. ‘It is not merely by title of the example that we cherish the memory of those in heaven; we seek, rather, that by this devotion to the exercise of fraternal charity the union of the whole Church in the Spirit may be strengthened...’

We worship Christ as God’s Son; we love the martyrs as the Lord’s disciples and imitators, and rightly so because their matchless devotion toward their king and master. May we also be their companions and fellow disciples...’

From Part II (“The Celebration of the Christian Mystery”, Section I (“The Sacramental Economy”), Chapter 1 (“The Paschal Mystery in the Age of the Church”), Article 1 (“The Liturgy—Work of the Holy Trinity”).

Liturgy: Lex Credendi:

#1173 When the Church keeps the memorials of martyrs and other saints during the annual cycle, she proclaims the paschal mystery in those ‘who have suffered and have been glorified with Christ. She proposes them to the faithful as examples who draw all men to the Father through Christ, and through their merits she begs for God’s favours.’

THE INTRODUCTION

1. A New Situation/Context

Recognition of “significant tension” in contemporary Mennonite theology and church life:”

- Retrieval and reflection on constructive relevance of martyrdom
- Ecumenical openness to Roman Catholics

2. Dimensions

This is a study of origins (16th century Anabaptism and the fact that these represent half of the religious martyrdoms in Western Europe) as well as whether and how martyrdom “might delineate a particular way of being Christian in the world.”

3. Starting point and Assumptions: Martyrdom as a Way of Life?

“Martyrdom names an approach to knowledge and a way of life more generally which assumes that the truth of Christ cannot somehow be secured but is rather a gift received and lived out in vulnerable yet hopeful giving in return.” (Chris Huebner)

* The *via negativa* of entering into the mystery of Christ?

Questions:

- Should/can martyrdom be the “starting point” in discipleship or is it the “result” of faithful discipleship (and a call to a “few” rather than the “many”)?
- Is a more positive approach to discipleship more embracing (i.e. inclusive rather than narrow) of the Gospel message of Christ?
- Does this reflect a particular view of being/not being in relationship with the “world” or “culture” (i.e. an eschatological rather an incarnational approach to mission where that which is “good” and “of God” is affirmed and that which is “not good” or “of God” is put in contact with the Gospel for transformation)?

4. The Issue: The Double-Edged and Ambiguous Nature of Confessional Martyrdom

- Anabaptists were put to death by other “Christians” (Protestant and Catholic).
- Both sides claim “faith” and “truth”

Questions:

- What does this say of the “status” instigator of the martyrdom: True Christians? Haters of the Faith?
- How can confessional martyrs be a model when they “reinscribe the polemic of church division”?

5. Thesis

“Any gifts that Anabaptist martyrs have to give the contemporary church—either Mennonite or the wider church—cannot be received apart from facing the difficult reality that they were ‘confessional martyrs’ who were killed by other Christians. There is no way forward other than a *joint* remembering and repentance that begins to refuse the logic of church division.”

6. Development of Thesis

The Pneumatological Dimension: both dying for the faith and its recognition of this witness is the work of the Holy Spirit (empowering the martyr and building up the Church through memory)

Outline:

Part I: Review of Catholic literature on the “ecumenical potential” of martyrs and a new martyrology. Issue: “the framework in which martyrs are remembered decisively shapes their ecumenical significance”

Part II: Review of Anabaptist literature that “makes this issue appear intractable” and the suggestion of “a way forward.”

Part III: Critique of 5 Mennonite Approaches to the Martyrdom Tradition.

7. Conclusion

- Violence in the Body of Christ.
- Toleration of Religious Differences.
- Goal:

“My intention is not to minimize the faithfulness and witness of the Anabaptist martyrs, but rather to reframe their stories in ways that can teach and build up the whole church. Yet I do suggest that the disunity of the church that is written in the broken bodies of confessional martyrs is, in some way, sinful. Our task must be to recover ways of seeing how these witnesses point to the healer of all sins.”

8. Areas for Future Research

- Criterion of Recognition of Martyrs (patristic?)
- Ethical Dimensions of Martyrs for Discipleship: liturgy and mission. From “memory” to “imitation” and “invocation” in the communion of saints.
- Ecclesiological Dimensions to Explore: Sin and Need for Conversion, Discernment of Will of God

b) Richard spoke to Bergen’s section on “The Roman Catholic Ecumenism of Martyrdom” as follows:

Bergen begins by evoking the huge ceremony held at the Coliseum in Rome on May 7, 2000, as described in the document “Ecumenical Commemoration of Witnesses of the Faith in the Twentieth-Century,” which I downloaded from the Vatican website. As described in this document, this was a very elaborate ceremony, led by Pope John Paul II, and involving a large number of representatives from various Christian “Churches and Ecclesial Communities” (to use the Vatican’s terminology). There were appropriate Scripture readings, testimonies from martyrs of various denominations, commemorations, ritual gestures (such as lamps lit at the foot of the Crucifix dominating the Commemoration), and hymns sung by a number of choirs from various Churches and Ecclesial Communities. It was a “big show.”

As Bergen suggests, this ceremony demonstrated to the world a very real revolution in Roman Catholic thinking about “non-Catholic” martyrs, the reversal of a position that had been enunciated by St. Augustine and that had endured until the mid-twentieth century. This principle was that only those who hold Catholic doctrine may be Christian martyrs. Augustine’s dictum was that it was not the punishment but the cause that makes a martyr. This meant martyrdom was denied to those who died for what was deemed false, and that those who died for “infidelity, or heresy, or schism” could not be granted public recognition as martyrs in the liturgy of the church.

The shift was signaled in a significant way by the Second Vatican Council in its document *Lumen Gentium*, which recognized that at least some separated Christians shared baptism in Christ and adherence to Christ unto death, and that the Holy Spirit “has strengthened [them] to the extent of the shedding of their blood.” John Paul II pushed well beyond this position to make martyrdom “a sign of the movement towards visible unity.” Shifting the focus of the ecumenical movement from the structures of ecclesial governance, he makes “martyrs the *de facto* prophets of unity.” As the “commemoration” document of 2000 puts it, the pope was concerned that all the Church and Ecclesial Communities “acknowledge an ecumenism lived in giving one’s life in sacrifice for Christ.” The pope described this “*ecumenism of the saints* and the martyrs” as “the most convincing form of ecumenism.” As he said in the Apostolic letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*: “The *communio sanctorum* speaks louder than the things that divide us.”

The 2000 ceremony of commemoration in Rome, in speaking of victims of persecution, focused on the victims of Russian Communism, the Nazi regime, and racial and tribal conflicts. But as Bergen notes, John Paul II, in his earlier 1995 encyclical letter *Ut unum sint* had alluded as well to the divisions of the sixteenth century, “caused by faults on both sides.” It is this question, the situation of “*confessional* martyrs,” and in particular the sixteenth-century Anabaptist martyrs as signs of division, that Bergen explores in his paper. He ends this section of his paper with a very apt quote from Pope John Paul II to the effect that “the commitment to ecumenism must be based upon the conversion of hearts and upon prayer, which will also lead to the *necessary purification of past memories*.” As an historian, it strikes me that this is precisely the right approach.

c) **Adolf** spoke to the section: “Sixteenth Century Confessional Martyrdom,” and offered the following remarks:

With Brad Gregory, Bergen seems to reject a social scientific or cultural basis for “framing” or defining martyrs and gives as alternative a “pneumatological” framework. Taking that approach, he argues (they argue) forces “the theologian” to consider “the activity of the Holy Spirit and the question of truth.”

By those criteria the Protestant martyrs of the 16th century “helped to clarify the developing divisions in Christianity.” The first two claimed as martyrs by the Lutherans in 1523 confessed their belief “in one Christian Church” but not in “your [RC] church.” Thereby they implicated the RCC as being part of Satan’s conspiracy “against the truth.” That is, we now have members of one “confession” declaring their martyrs as “true” whom the other “confession” saw as heretical and hence as “false martyrs.”

Since 16th century Anabaptists (unlike the Reformed and Lutheran Protestants) did not kill anyone for her/his faith, they did not have to enter the debate about true or false martyrs in the same way. Nevertheless, argues Bergen (Gregory?), they could claim to be the true church because they were only a persecuted (not persecuting) church – and “true Christians had always been persecuted.” (373)

By the 17th century there were factions within the Anabaptist-Mennonite movement, some arising from geographically separate and loosely parallel development, some from division over disagreements of one kind or another. Bergen claims that these divisions, “these microconfessional affiliations were reproduced in rival martyrologies.” [I am not sure what he means by this: did they **produce** rival martyrologies?] These rival compilations were integrated by Hans de Ries and later compilers so that all groups could claim the martyrs in common. Bergen sees these efforts in “intra-Mennonite ecumenism” as broadening the “doctrinal criteria” for who could be called a martyr, and infers from this process that it was deemed “appropriate” to reframe the definition after the fact, as long as it was “to accomplish a goal ... consistent with that for which the martyrs died.” (374)

The significance of a martyr’s death may thus be reinterpreted later on in order to give “the message the church later judges the Spirit to speak ... through that death.” This sets the stage for Bergen’s 5-fold way of possible reinterpretations to overcome the “problem” that faces us (as 20th century Mennonite and Roman Catholics) in our ecumenical discussions.

* * *

Some observations (by **Adolf**):

a) It may be appropriate to reinterpret a theology of martyrdom to suit the understanding or agenda of the church at a later time, but that presupposes that we know how the church at the time of the martyr deaths understood its position. Among 16th century Anabaptist writers, Dirk Philips is one of the more “theologically” oriented, and even he claims that Anabaptists were “persecuted for the sake of truth **and righteousness.**” (*Writings* CRR 6: 373.) I think a much more prominent motif was that identified by Williams and Mergal, *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers* (LCC XXV): 284, in a note on Ulrich Stadler’s “Cherished Instructions.” Stadler talks about *Gelassenheit* (yieldedness, abandon) “free, unencumbered, yielded hearts” who “long to leave the world” and for whom the saying “Death is my reward” has meaning. This Anabaptist motif is characterized by Williams as combining “the mystic’s impulse to die to self with the radical evangelical’s urge to imitate Christ unto the cross.” I am surprised that Bergen does not refer to Ethelbert Stauffer’s article on “The Anabaptist Theology of Martyrdom” (*MQR* 1945) rather than rely so much on Gregory’s interpretation.

b) To assert that 16th century Anabaptist martyrs died to “accomplish a goal” would, I think, be quite foreign to their thinking. Following Christ was for them at the core of faithful living. If the consequences of that should be death then that would not be unexpected. But martyr death was not sought to prove their point or validate their movement. Even the educated leaders (who wrote theology) escaped from prison if they could.

d) Irma spoke to the section “Martyrs and the Contemporary Mennonite Church: Context and Possible approaches.” and in particular on the subsection on “Martyrs as Markers of Cultural Identity.”

Irma identified certain weaknesses in the notion of martyrdom as a marker of Mennonite cultural identity, suggesting that it often tended to be more cultural than theological, and that uplifting “self-sacrifice” could be unhealthy for the community. She observed that there seems to be evidence that the level of abuse in Mennonite homes is higher than the national average, perhaps a reflection of acceptance of the notion of “suffering in silence.” She also suggest that the idealizing martyrdom could be in conflict with the championing of human rights On the other hand, she recognized the validity of the concept of martyrdom as gift, a sign of willingness to turn your life over to God.

On the issue of “suffering in silence,” **Harold**, going back to his presentation on Jacob Rempel, pointed out that while Rempel could not speak out himself, he asked that his son tell his story.

e) **John** spoke to the subsection on “Discipleship as Baptism of Blood.”

He pointed out that Bergen thinks that this may be the prevalent theological perspective on martyrdom among Mennonites, who have taken persecution and suffering as a mark of the true church. This claim for a unique position is clearly problematic, as Bergen recognizes, because it perpetuates a view that sees other forms of Christian discipleship as outside the true church. This recognition leads to Bergen’s argument that the question must be reframed.

Helmut found it odd that Bergen could write about baptism by blood without citing 1 John 5: 6–8, which is where the phrase is used in the New Testament.

Luis noted that reframing puts the emphasis on conversion to Christ, and moves away from the lack of communion and charity that signifies dialogue broken off.

f) **Luis**, in **Michael’s** absence, spoke briefly to the subsection on “Martyrs as Political Victims.”

Luis noted that Bergen rejects this typology, and went on to point out that it is similar concerns that have made Liberation Theology problematic for the Vatican. Under the Christendom situation of the 16th century it was difficult to distinguish political and religious martyrdom. It is not that clear in Catholic theology whether one can be a martyr to the truth but not for Christ.

Adolf pointed to reasons why in Latin American Liberation Theology appeared suspect to Catholic authorities. There were intra-confessional martyrs there, but the situation was not like that under the atheistic Soviet regime.

g) **Lynda** spoke to the subsection on “Pneumatic Abandonment of the Church” as follows:

First of all, I must say that I found Bergen’s paper extremely interesting and enlightening if not somewhat disturbing. In addition, this particular section provided me with much food for thought as the Christian churches prepares for the feast of Pentecost this Sunday.

I read something this week about Pentecost by Tom Saretsky as he reflected upon this Sunday’s readings in *The Prairie Messenger*. And I quote;

Since Pentecost is considered the birthday of the Holy Spirit, the apostles must have been the candles. Though the candles may be blown out, (indeed the apostles were martyrs) the fire of the Spirit won’t be extinguished. Its fire gives light and life to the world. However, in this day

and age, there is another fire that burns. It is a militaristic fire that threatens to consume nations, races, cultures and religions. This fire is destructive but, as Christians, inflamed with the Spirit, it is up to us to fight fire with fire. We are called to combat the flames of injustice, hatred, and division with the fire of love, peace, understanding and acceptance. We have the power to do this because “(we) are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in (us).

I couldn't help thinking that these words were timely as I reflected upon this particular section of Bergen's paper. His statement and the questions posed at the end of the previous section touched a nerve. He states that “both sides(Mennonite and Catholic) claimed that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, was manifest in the suffering of their martyrs and the doctrines that they held.” His questions arising from this statement are at the same time worthwhile, yet disturbing. “How can this dispute about the presence and message of the Holy Spirit be resolved? On which side was the Spirit *really*, or was the Spirit even present at all?” I could almost imagine the Spirit sighing deeply - “too deep for words” as St. Paul says in his letter to the Romans.

I do not agree with Radner's suggestion that “the Holy Spirit has absented itself from the divided Body of Christ.” I believe that “the fire of the Holy Spirit continues to burn with wild abandon despite humanity's attempts to douse its flames.” “The flames of the Spirit provide light and comfort in a divided world.”(Saretsky) Certainly, Radner's argument that “division as divine judgment is thus an appropriate lens through which to read church history, yet our view of this history will be necessarily be obscure” seems futile and askew. “Since one does not know where to look for visible holiness in a divided church, rival claims about the location of invisible holiness are advanced.” Bergen concludes that in this scenario, “martyrs are reduced to ciphers in the battle of ideas, in which human suffering and cruelty are relevant only as a confirmation of a truth that exists to some extent outside the human drama.” This statement I have a problem with and agree that if “the sanctifying element of martyrdom is actually a dehistoricized catechism ... of the doctrine to which they point”, then it would be difficult to discover “the contours of the Spirit's concrete work in history and the character of the individual witness.” I take exception to Radner's suggestion that the attempt of the 2000 Vatican ceremony was lame in honouring the visible holiness of the ecumenical martyrs. Indeed, this ceremony took steps to reconcile and to heal ecclesial divisions.

And I'm sure the Holy Spirit, in her infinite wisdom, was interceding for the all involved according to the will of God. To have such efforts reduced to “babble” among separated brothers and sisters” is ludicrous in my opinion.

I found Radner's lauding of the eighteenth-century Jansenists to be very interesting. They remained committed to the unity of the Roman Catholic Church and its hierarchical

authority but dissented and suffered imprisonment, banishment, and excommunication because they believed the human will is not free to do good and that salvation is limited to God's chosen few. Thus, the Jansenists were not lauded as martyrs because they were not killed for their convictions. "Rather than being triumphant bearers of the truth, the Jansenists instead followed the church's calling to bear conformity with the *crucified* Christ." Their actions pointed to Christ - witnessed Christ.

The last paragraph of this section is very powerfully written, I think. Bergen pulls apart "Radner's supposed near synonymity between the unity of the church and the truth." Radner desires a "penitential church that refuses the logic of division." He concludes that the "practise of division is embedded in the very face of confessional martyrdom, the very existence of which serves as a reminder of the inability of the church to perceive, let alone achieve, the truth of the Body." This is a very human church that needs these constant reminders.

Certainly, I heaved a sigh of relief when I read that "the pneumatic abandonment of the church is not the last word." The Spirit is alive and well. She did not condone Christians killing Christians, not for a second. The Anabaptist martyrs – all Christian martyrs – are witnesses to faith in the crucified Christ and should be emulated. But we are called to prevent cruelty and murder from ever happening again. I agree wholeheartedly that "God is indeed working for ecumenical reconciliation but perhaps by veiling God's Spirit and demanding penitential practise as the basis of the Christian life."

I am reminded of the refrain of the song "One Spirit, One Church" by Kevin Keil. "We are a pilgrim people, we are the Church of God. A family of believers, disciples of the Lord. United in one spirit, ignited by the fire. Still burning through the ages, still present in our lives."

Thus, we "seek the warmth of the Spirit" We seek to "kindle the flames of love, mercy and compassion in the hope that they will become a blazing inferno engulfing the world in peace and harmony." (Saretsky)

h) Henry spoke to the subsection of "Engrafting Confessional Martyrs into a Shared History."

Henry began with an anecdote about a pastor who was called on the carpet for some perceived fault, and who acknowledged that this had been a situation where "the Holy Spirit was out to lunch."

Henry suggested it was tough for a lay person to appreciate that both sides must be alive and part of the same family. How can it happen? Our identity must be based on

conversion and belonging to Christ. Our judgment must really be founded on the Gospel, and an appreciation that none are innocent. We must abandon self-righteousness.

In this context, **Henry** found he was taken with two phrases used by Bergen: the “spirit of penitence” and consideration of the “Church as a whole.”

Luis found the key sentence is Bergen’s argument to be the one at the end of the first paragraph of this section: “We must exchange our view of history for one in which we identify with both persecutor and victim.” We become martyrs if we embrace and suffer, if we give up the “we-they” categories. We are all in Christ and moving together in our suffering. He recounted the story of the killing of Amish schoolgirls by a deranged killer. The first action of the Amish community was to reach out to family of the killer, recognizing that the killer could have been anyone.

Harold recalled that Pope John Paul II had on many occasions acknowledged instances of wrong-doing by the Church in the past.

Adolf was much taken by Bergen’s call to penitence, and the suggestion that Mennonites have not done enough penitence for their part in maintaining divisions in the Body of Christ. He pointed out that the sixteenth-century Mennonite martyrs did not see themselves as dying for the cause of reform but as yielding to Christ. They accepted death as necessary, but did not seek it. **Luis** agreed that the call is to faithful living, and that those who fled persecution (as the Jews fled Nazi persecution) did not nothing wrong.

Helmut pointed out that Conrad Grebel had not sought martyrdom, and reflected on how people went from being “heretics” to becoming a “sect.”

Henry recalled the time when Mennonites wondered if Catholics were Christians!

Adolf brought us back to our discussion of the “problematic” that Jeremy Bergen has created. He went on to point out that the situation is always dynamic, with both sides today having changed very much from what they were in the sixteenth century.

Luis agreed, and went on to note how complex ecumenism has become today. How much emphasis do Christian denominations today give to the issues that moved people in the sixteenth century? For example, the issue of “justification by faith” no longer seems too important to Lutherans today. We are all in different places.

Adolf suggested that the Roman Catholic Church had done sixteenth-century Anabaptists a favour by forcing them to abandon the idea of a state church.

Helmut concluded by suggesting that we are all in this together, all called to penitence and forgiveness.

Lynda reminded us that the Holy Spirit has not abandoned us.

8. **Wrap-up**

With respect to the June 20th wrap-up, it was suggested that we would need to debrief ourselves with respect to what is learned from the group reports and the subsequent discussion about future possibilities. So it was agreed that our group should meet again on either 9 October or 16 October (both Tuesday evenings).

9. The **closing prayers** were led by **John**.