

Minutes

Winnipeg Mennonite-Catholic Dialogue, Meeting No. 26

Meeting held on 2 October 2008
at the home of Helmut Harder

Present: Adolf Ens, Dora Dueck, Doug Enns, Helmut Harder, Janet Kozak, Richard Lebrun, Henry Loewen, Luis Melo, Viola Mirochnick, and Lynda Trenholm

Regrets: Joseph Langan and John Long

Helmut welcomed the group, and asked everyone about their summer. Most had tales to tell – **Richard** about great fishing, **Luis** about the invasion of carpenter ants at the summer cottage, **Doug** about a flooded basement, **Helmut** about a “mixed” wedding (his son to a Ukrainian Catholic), **Viola** about the tribulations of trying to have a house painted during a rainy summer, **Janet** about her trip to Australia to attend the World Youth Day, and **Henry** about construction projects, past and present.

Helmut then led us in an **opening prayer**, taken from the Mennonite Hymnal. He also told us about a recent visit of a friend from Munich (who attends an English-speaking Anglican church in Munich). He acknowledged that he and Irma had had a difficult time “surviving” after the unexpected death of their daughter last spring – but that he had been heartened by the Munich friend’s comment about their home: “The Holy Spirit lives here.”

1. Sharing of ecumenical activities:

Viola reported her continuing involvement in a Christian Life Community associated with St. Ignatius Parish, and about attending a Buddhist wedding (with a nice description of the details of the service).

Richard mentioned that he continued to volunteer at the House of Hesed, a hospice for people with AIDs that has ecumenical support.

Dora reported involvement in a Northern Lights sponsored ecumenical marathon, and showed us the recent volume featuring forty Canadian Christian writers, which she co-edited.

Adolf told us about his granddaughter, a graduate from a French immersion program, who is now attending the Collège de Saint-Boniface, and who has recently signed up for a retreat at the Trappist Monastery in Holland, MB. He also spoke about learning about a “revisiting” of the Christian-Jewish schism – work by Tom Yoder Neufeld on of the book of Deuteronomy and the “Jesus connection” – spoken of by Jack Sudermann in five sessions at a recent Mennonite conference.

Janet described a week-long experience in Melbourne, Australia, preceding the World Youth Days in Sidney – the excitement of so many young people from all over the world, the hospitality of the Australians, and the sharing that went on.

Lynda described a Jewish-Catholic wedding at St. Bernadette’s parish in which she was involved.

Luis distributed a list of his ecumenical and religious activities, as here listed, and commented on some of the items (comments in **bold**):

1. *“Believer’s Church” International Conference (June 12, Canadian Mennonite University)*

2. *Europe (June 13–July 5)*

(a) *Rome: Pontifical Council for Christian Unity (June 16–19)*

(b) *London: Retreat at Orthodox Monastery of St. John the Baptist at Tolleshunt Knights in Essex (June 23–28)*

Attending this retreat at a double-monastery (men and women) with people from all over was the highlight of the summer. The retreat focused on the “Jesus Prayer” – “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God have mercy on us.” This was a very deep experience that led to a lot of questioning about one’s activities.

3. *Bridgefolk Conference (July 25–27, Colledgeville, Mn.): Saints and Martyrs. One of the “saints” spoken about at the meeting was John Howard Yoder, which Luis found very interesting. After some hesitation, Luis accepted a three-year term on the Bridgefolk board of directors. He reported that thought is being given to having the Bridgefolk conference in Winnipeg some future year.*

4. *San Francisco: Meeting with Director of Office of Public Policy and Social Concerns of Archdiocese of San Francisco*

5. *Work with Coptic Orthodox Community*

6. *Jewish-Catholic Dialogue: “The Misunderstood Jew” (Levine)*

7. *Meeting of Catholic Ecumenical Officers in Winnipeg: Planning for 2008–2009*

8. *Lutheran-Catholic Planning: 10th Anniversary of the Joint Declaration on Doctrine of Justification:*

(a) *Tri-Archdiocesan Clergy and Rostered Ministers of the ELCIC: Study Day in May, 2009 with Dr. Margaret O’Gara (morning and afternoon)*

(b) *Laitly & City-Wide: Evening Hymn Sing with Dr. Margaret O’Gara*

(c) *Joint Worship Service: Sunday in October close to Reformation Sunday when the JDDJ was signed (Oct. 31, 1999)*

9. *Manitoba Inter-Faith Council: Concerns Related to Interreligious “Experience” (Prayer)*

10. *North American Academy of Ecumenists (September 25–29, St. Louis, Mo.): Ecumenical Ecclesiology. The next meeting of this group will be Washington, D.C., again in the last week of September, 2009. Luis also serves on the Board of this group.*

11. *Zone Meetings: Clergy and Parish Workers: “Kilcona” and “ZUF”*

12. *Letter to Muslims—Ramadan 2008 (Grand Mosque)*

On the Horizon:

1. *Anglican-Catholic Dialogue (CCCB): Toronto, October 23–26: “The Word of God” (Synod of Bishops and Pauline Year) Luis is preparing a report on the Synod in Rome on the Word of God for the Anglican-Catholic Dialogue. In passing, he mentioned how difficult it is for him to find time to write.*

2. *Western Diocesan-Eparchial Co-ordinators of Ecumenism (WDECE): Annual Meeting (Lumsden (Regina), November 6–8)—Interchurch and Interfaith Marriage*

3. *Joint Working Group of Pontifical Council for Christian Unity and the World Council of Churches (Geneva, November 13–23)—Reception as an Ecumenical Challenge*

4. *Anglican-Roman Catholic Bishops’ Dialogue (St. Boniface, November 25–28)*

Helmut reported that he (and Irma) will be going to Bose ecumenical monastery in northern Italy in late October to participate in a symposium on the theme “cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12) that he has helped organize. After the event, he and Irma will do a tour of Sicily in a rented car.

He also reported that the document “A Mennonite and Catholic Contribution to the World Council of Churches’ *Decade to Overcome Violence*” (distributed to the group), which he had help prepare last October in Rome, will be presented a WWC meeting in Kingston, Jamaica, in 2011.

Doug said that a Jewish exchange student from Berlin is staying with them, and that his wife had gone with the student to a Rosh Hashanah service at a North End synagogue (after discovering that this is a very expensive occasion at some Winnipeg synagogues). It turned out to be something of a “charismatic” experience, with a joke-cracking rabbi. They will also take the student to a Yom Kipper service a Shaarey Zedek synagogue.

2. ***Discussion of What We Believe Together.***

Helmet began by asking if anyone (especially those who had missed the June meeting) had comments about the first three chapters of the book.

Viola wondered about the notion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as “community” – which Yoder gives (p. 20) as the first of five dimensions of “Christian Faith in a Triune God” – “God himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is God in community.” She said that, in practice, in her experience, from Sunday School and from preachers, the emphasis usually seems to be on the Father and the Son, with sometimes an overemphasis on the Father, and at other times an overemphasis on the Son. She wondered if there had been comments on this issue at our meeting of 8 June.

Helmut replied by observing in that some Mennonite churches the Holy Spirit appears to be have been given considerable publicity since the 1980s. It was noted as well that some people have difficulty with the title of Father, and have suggested other names, such as “Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer.”

Henry thought that Holy Spirit has been spoken about more in recent years, and told a little anecdote from his work in the Mennonite conference, when one side of a debate tried to legitimize its position by saying its stand was the work of the Holy Spirit – whereupon someone opined that perhaps “the Holy Spirit was out to lunch.”

In responding to Viola’s concern, **Henry** spoke from notes that he had prepared for the June meeting, parts of which will be reproduced here:

“In our *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, we say: ‘We humbly recognize that God far surpasses human comprehension and understanding.’ (p. 20). Nevertheless, here we are using our ‘our minds,’ our words to talk about God and how ‘God has defined himself.’ “Central to our understanding of God, our faith is the belief ‘in a Triune God.’ (p. 20) ‘We know God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.’ We baptise people ‘in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.’” We teach ‘the Trinity’ in our Catechism.

“While the belief in the Triune God is ‘central to our faith,’ I, on a personal note, do not recall a lot of sermons preached on this topic. The Beatitudes for example received much more attention. I recall discussion around the topic that the word ‘Trinity’ does not exist in the Bible. Do we have to use that word?

“For the first twenty years of my life the German language was used in our Catechism teaching and preaching. Here the term ‘die Dreieinigkeit Gottes’ was used. The ‘three-in-ness of God.’ Is this different than ‘the Trinity?’” ...

“A second point that Neufeld stresses in our understanding of God, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is the importance of the community, the church. Note the following statements:

“God himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is God in Community.” (p. 20)

“The Church has the joy of seeing that within its community, and even beyond, this prayer begins to become reality.” (p. 23)

“God, who makes himself known in fellowship as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, seeks to restore divine community through ‘a people’.” (p. 24)

“And the covenant community was expected to be a living testimony...” (p. 25)

“The miracle of the birth of the church was the formation of a human community.” (p. 26)

“The spirit of fellowship is necessary to do adequate interpretation of the Bible.” (p. 27)

“The goal of every worship service is to renew our covenant with God and with the church.” (p. 29)

“The service of the church is directed toward the community.” (p. 29)

“Not only individual missionaries, but also entire faith communities should migrate...” (pp. 30)

Luis acknowledged that the word “community” is obviously important for Neufeld, since it is a word that he uses so often.

Helmut reported the emphasis that Fernando Enns, a speaker at a recent conference, put on the Trinity, and noted as well that the World Council of Churches has emphasized Trinitarian

theology the past couple of decades.

Luis also observed that all the liturgical prayers in the liturgies in both Eastern and Latin rites are Trinitarian in form.

Chapter 4 – “We Read the Bible Together.”

Adolf spoke to the following points:

- **Canon** – Explicitly naming 66 (39 + 27) “books” recognized as canonical is a recent development in Mennonite confessions of faith. Anabaptist writers in the 16th century and ministers and laity of “conservative” Mennonite groups at least well into the 20th century quoted some “apocryphal” books quite a bit and did not distinguish such appeals to Scriptural authority from similar appeals to the 66.
- **Translation** – Some 16th century Anabaptists were scholars with good knowledge of Hebrew and Biblical Greek, as well as Latin. A few were active translators. Outside of Switzerland, most German-speaking Mennonites soon came to accept Martin Luther’s translation as the “authorized version.” When they made the transition to English in North America, many replaced Luther’s with the Anglican authorized (King James) version. Those developments helped the process of “congregational” interpretation in that the interpreters accepted a common text. The later proliferation of “private” translations and still later of “paraphrase” translations weakened a sense of an authoritative text and allowed the inherent subjectivity of the translator to erode clarity of what was *the* canonical text.
- **Word of God** – The confession that “Jesus is the Word of God *par excellence* 1 John 1:1–2)” [p. 73] is often (logically) followed by the claim that the Bible is our trustworthy *witness* to the Word. This brings with it a Christocentric emphasis to the whole enterprise of “canonical interpretation.” [p. 71] That is, it gives the direct witness to Jesus (the New Testament) a dominant role in interpreting the inherited Jewish Scriptures (Old Testament). Mennonites have as a result been accused of placing too much emphasis in the second Person of the Trinity.
- **Authority for faith and life** (p. 72) – Anabaptists asserted this especially against those 16th century reformers who seemed to separate faith (theology) from life (ethics), leading to a two-kingdom theology (Luther) in which “natural theology” informed public life and Jesus’ teaching about Christian living was relegated to a “private” or personal sphere. Anabaptists further emphasized “following after” Jesus in life, as over against an emphasis on a “wholly other” Christ whose primary role was his substitutionary death in achieving atonement with God.
- **Congregational interpretation** (page 75) – A better term would be interpretation by the gathered Christian community (1 Corinthians 14:26ff). They took Jesus’ teaching that “where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them” (Mt. 18:20) to apply to the ethical discernment context in which it is said, where the community seeks to discern “what is bound in heaven” and should therefore also be “bound on earth.” To keep this from producing a checkerboard of local congregational decisions [p. 77], they attempted to have periodic representative gatherings (conferences) to continue “gathered community” interpretation for the whole church. Unlike regional Catholic “Bishops’ Councils” or Vatican initiated global Councils, Mennonite Conferences did not speak for the whole Mennonite world communion. [This document is attempting a new thing in collecting and integrating input for the global Mennonite community in search of confessional unity.] On the other hand, the strong emphasis in many parts of the Mennonite church on “congregational autonomy” made it difficult even within a conference for congregations to agree to a “Conference” interpretation or position.

- **Obedience and understanding** – “Biblical truths must become a faith experience and a faith understanding, lived and expressed in a personal way.” [p. 77] The somewhat mystical but highly practical 16th century Anabaptist Hans Denck wrote: “No one can truly understand Christ unless he follows Him in life. And no one can truly follow him without understanding him.” This dialectic between obedience to what is already understood and the gaining of more or greater understanding through such obedience has been re-applied in parts of Latin American Liberation Theology of the 1970s. The emphasis on obedience (praxis) and the recognition that this is at least as important of understanding (theology) has given rise to the term “orthopraxis” [p. 84] even among Mennonites to balance the earlier emphasis on “orthodoxy.”

Discussion of Chapter 4:

Richard began by reporting that Rodney Stark, in his new book *The Discovery of God*, writes that some scholars are now suggesting that the gospels were written first in Hebrew, and then translated into Greek (in part, at least, on linguistic analysis that suggests that the Greek used in the Gospels seems to reflect this). **Adolf** replied that it has long been believed that the Gospels, though written in Greek, were based on oral tradition in Aramaic, and that Luke himself speaks of having consulted documents, which could well have been written in Hebrew.

With respect to the Apocrypha, **Helmut** reported that citations and paraphrases from the Apocrypha appear in early Mennonite confessions of faith, and that preachers in the 1940s still cited the Apocrypha, but that today not much attention is paid to the Apocryphal books.

Luis pointed that the early Greek-speaking Christians had used the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament that included the “Apocrypha” that were omitted from the Hebrew Old Testament, and that some Catholic traditions, such as praying for the dead, find scriptural justification in the Book of Maccabees, one of the Apocrypha. Although dropped from the King James translation, the 39 Articles said of the Apocrypha that these books were useful but not essential. **Henry** reported that he has long used a Bible that contains the Apocrypha.

With respect to natural theology and Lutherans, **Helmut** noted the difference between Lutheran and Mennonite attitudes towards the Sermon the Mount, which Luther characterized as a passage for sectarians, and Mennonites took dead seriously.

Luis recalled that in his training, when they were asked to preach on different them, he had chosen to speak about the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes were seen as a part of a new spirituality; they raise the issue of what degree we are capable of living the life of Jesus.

Adolf noted how for Luther marriage was a matter of natural theology, and in a famous bigamy case, he could justify it as part of Saxon tradition. **Luis** agreed, noting how the Orthodox, Lutherans, and Catholics could allow more than one marriage. **Adolf** observed what a problem this can create for missionaries, and reported that in Tanzania only the Lutheran missionary would allow whole families to stay together after conversion to

Christianity.

Doug suggested that with the proliferation of translations and paraphrases there is no longer an “authoritative word.” With NRSV there was at least a tone of authority. Without that “hearing and obeying the Word” becomes problematic.

Henry recalled an incident at a conference where some were critical because the Scripture was not read, but something spoken as memorized.

Luis observed that while the NRSV is the Catholic standard, it is not the best translation for “proclamation,” lacking the poetic qualities of the Jerusalem Bible, for example.

Adolf recounted reading that the translators of the King James version were told to aim for translations that would sound elegant when read, and that the Church of England thus used it as the authorized version for public use, but allowed other translations for private study.

Chapter 5. We Pursue Shalom

Richard offered the following comments on the chapter:

I found this chapter very powerful. Uncompromising in its dedication to the message of Jesus, the prose is articulate and persuasive.

It is to be noted that the chapter begins with mention of the book *A Culture of Peace; God's Vision for the Church*, by Eleanor and Alan Kreider and Paulus Wijada, a book I picked up at a Bridgefolk conference where I met Eleanor.

I was particularly struck by a few passages.

1. (P. 96) “We believe that no nation, no ethnic group, no religious or political movement has the right to call upon the name of God, and to pretend to be at peace with Jesus, while taking up arms against human beings. We believe that such attitudes are ‘pre-Christian.’ Jesus is clear: “You have heard that it was said: ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” (Matthew 5:43–44.)

This is the briefest and most pertinent statement of the Mennonite position on pacifism that I have ever read.

2. I was also much taken by the advice given on p. 98. “It is good to start loving enemies by practicing with small things. ... We need mental and emotional hygiene. Be alert to the condition of your mind! Pay attention to the state of your heart. If the concept of an enemy gets installed in your mind it is necessary to rip it out. This enemy might be a member of the faith community. ... It is necessary to

delete all images of enemies from our mental archives. If a root of bitterness begins to establish itself in your heart, it is necessary to pull it out.” It strikes me that these are wonderful admonitions for anyone who finds themselves caught up in disputes within their own faith communities. It is probably advice I should take to heart, because I can become pretty upset and impatient by some of the things put out by “Catholic authorities.”

3. I noted with interest that the only “authority” that is ever cited in the chapter is the Bible. Telling stories of Christians living out what is being recommended is all that is offered in addition to the Scripture passages.
4. I observed as well that it is the Mennonite understanding of Baptism that is displayed on p. 100. In contrast to the usual Catholic view that sees the sacramental “sign” in water and the words of the rite, it is the change of life and a lifestyle of obedience to Jesus that are seen as the “signs that lead to water baptism, the external visible act of being incorporated into the family of faith.” But we’ve explored these different perspectives many times in our dialogue.
5. I was much taken by the description of the “Micah Challenge.” I have the citation from Micah 6:8 “to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” posted on my desk, but I had always thought of it as an injunction to the individual. But here (p. 101), it is taken up as a challenge to the “church” – a call to the church “to live as an example of justice ... in such a way that its behaviour and attitude become contagious throughout the whole social environment.” [The same ideal of church behavior is reiterated in the book’s last chapter “History Matters.”]
6. I was also struck by what the author picked up from Pakisa Tshimida and Tim Lind in their book *Sharing Gifts in the Global Family of Faith* with respect to “sharing gifts.” Among the obstacles to sharing gifts identified by these authors are “centralization of decision making ... fear of cultural, racial, theological, and other differences ... and the view that some gifts are more valuable than others.” Somehow I found myself applying this check list to structures, practices, and attitudes within the Catholic Church.

These are just a few of the things that struck me in reflecting on this chapter. The whole chapter, as well as the “study questions” offered at the end of the chapter, is worth a lot of meditation.

Helmut began by characterizing Paulus Widaja (an Indonesian) as keen and outspoken on the issue of pacifism, which he insists is linked to evangelism, a point often lost. It should not be peace vs. evangelization, but a marriage of the two. The very word “salvation” suggests this, for the word “healing” is hidden within it, and it means to reconcile, to make peace, shalom.

Peacemaking, **Helmut** suggested, requires trusting God fully, be willing to be martyred, rather than engaging in violence towards others. He cited the German word “Gelassenheit,” which implies be willing to let go, to have absolute trust in God’s way. With respect to “peacemaking as a blessed duty,” (Neufeld, p. 92), Helmut reported that in the International Dialogue this led to extended discussion and in the end disagreement on the question of the possibility of a “just war.” The bottom line for Neufeld is that there is **no** justification for any war. If war employs violence, it evolves violence, a spiral of violence.

With respect to the renunciation of violence (Neufeld, p. 94), **Helmut** stressed the idea that for Christians there can be no double ethic; Christian ethics can never be anything but the ethic of Jesus, and that this is also a good political ethics.

Helmut noted how Neufeld took the notion that “there is not peace without unconditionally loving our enemies” (p. 96) to logical but difficult extreme, and highlighted the story about the Bolivian tribe that lived this ethic at the cost of many lives.

Helmut was uncomfortable however, with Neufeld’s statement that “The Church fights for justice,” suggesting that a word other than “fights” should have been chosen. Language is important!

Discussion

Luis concurred in the point about taking care with the language we use, and told a little anecdote about being reprimanded for using “bullets” to list points in a presentation. He also liked Neufeld’s point to the effect that “So often national identity is stronger than Christian identity.” (p. 97)

Adolf cited a remark to the effect that the pope could have prevented or stopped WWI and WWII if he had only commanded Catholics not to kill each other.

Chapter 6. We Worship and Celebrate Together

Viola began by saying how much she liked Neufeld’s subtitle statement to the effect that the “community loves to get together,” and contrasted this to church going as a “habit.” She also highlighted the notion that “God serves us” in our gathering and that this is to prepare us for service, for discipleship. In the section on worship as the “main reason” for Christian meetings, she liked the descriptions of the attitudes that should be associated with worship: prayer, consecration, and exaltation.

She highlighted Neufeld’s characterization of the Lord’s Supper as a “celebration of mutual acceptance and reconciliation,” as well as his characterization of the bread and wine as beautifully symbolic of Christ’s body being broken and his blood shed for a new creation, a new peoplehood, and a new life. She thought this last point was one she would

like to discuss with people in her congregation.

Viola noted the seriousness with which Neufeld speaks about Bible Study, and reflected on the years of debate that could arise in Bible study groups over passages that might bear on issues such as the role of women (ordination, in particular) in the church.

Luis distributed and spoke to following notes:

INTRODUCTION: CONTEXTUALIZATION OF CHAPTER 6

Introduction
Statement of “Shared Convictions”
Good News
1. We Give Glory to the Father
2. We Give Glory to the Son
3. We Give Glory to the Holy Spirit
4. We Read the Bible Together
5. We Pursue Shalom
6. We Worship and Celebrate Together
7. We Are a Worldwide Family
History Matters
Readings and Sources
About the Author

Overview in General Structure

Worship is the human response to divine initiative (1–3) as recorded and rooted in sacred text (4) and is fundamentally an experience of God’s peace, reconciling the world to himself (5) at all times and creating a family that does likewise (7).

Opening Quote: “We gather regularly to worship, to celebrate the Lord’s Supper, and to hear to Word of God in a spirit of mutual accountability”

- “regularly” is defined as “mostly on Sunday”
- an impression is given of that the celebration of the Lord’s Supper is frequent
- there is little elaboration and development of the relationship between the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist (order and what is normative in worship)
- it is good to see mutual accountability which appears to be underemphasized in Catholicism

REFLECTIONS AND COMMENTARY

Our Christian community loves to get together:

“We come together to so that God may serve us”...“God wants to serve us in the ‘service’”:

- A humble spirituality. Jesus as the Beatitude of God. God takes the initiative. We are called to hear God’s Word and call to allow Christ in the Holy Spirit to minister to us—that is—give His life anew for our eternal life and hold us to him (forgiving us, healing us, giving us dignity and consolation, washing our feet) and making us truly His, a new creation—His people (church). All is gift and the human being as pure receptivity is a call to accept the gift of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

- An active spirituality. Being a People of the Beatitudes. The human response to God in discipleship of Christ. We participate in the mission of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit—that is—serving God in with our “time...gifts...money...and capacity to love...” that is, offering the “sacrifice of our bodies”, a “spiritual worship” (Rm. 12.1). This service extends beyond the community (world). All is given as gift so that the world may know the gift of God in Christ.

6.2 Worship is the main reason for Christian meetings:

Worship is defined in “active” and “personalistic” terms. Worship is:

- (a) “an attitude of prayer” (although rooted in Hebrew Testament—Ex 20: 4–5 there is an explicit limit to politics or nationhood or ethnicity—Rev. 13:4).
- (b) “an attitude of consecration” (although worship is a sacred, true sanctification should have no “separation between sacred and secular areas”).
- (c) “an attitude of exaltation” (call to creativity and an embodied prayer—“music, song, dance, poetry, narratives, theater, decoration, celebration, architecture ,clothing, culinary arts, tithes in service...” Is this normative in Anabaptist worship or is this the expression of a hope?

6.3 The celebration of the Lord’s Supper and baptism are powerful experiences:

The Lord’s Supper are identified as a dominical (given by the Lord) sacrament and is understood to be “symbolic” and an “ordinance” in the Anabaptist churches.

Other moments are listed as practiced by Anabaptists (“confession of sins, anointing of the sick, ministerial ordination, marriage vows, blessing children”) but not considered to be “formal” sacraments. To what extent are these observed among Anabaptists today and what form do they take?

Water baptism is given preeminence: it “conveys at least five messages” (“receiving the Holy Spirit, dying and being resurrected with Christ, having sins washed away, being incorporated into the church which is the body of Christ, and making a public covenant of faithfulness before God and the church”). Although the matter is mentioned (water), the form (words) is not.

The Lord’s Supper is:

- (a) “a celebration of mutual acceptance and reconciliation”. Emphasis is given to this as an expression of God making peace (forgiveness and reconciliation) with humanity in Christ. The ethical imperative of being agents of peace in the community and the world is mentioned.
- (b) “a celebration of gratitude and spiritual nurture”. Emphasis is given to the dimension of this as an expression of “sacrifice” (“grains of wheat, gone through a mill an oven or death to the old self, to afflictions, and to persecutions, have been kneaded together in one body, building a unity. The trampled and trodden grapes have become one wine.”). This spiritual meditation of “thanksgiving” does not mention the form and matter of the Eucharist (as well as its structure).
- (c) “a celebration of proclamation oriented towards the future”. The threefold referent of

sacramental liturgy (past-present-future) is completed with this section. This “confession” or also has an outward thrust: to do the “evangelistic work to do in light of his expected return.”

6.4 We get together so that God may speak to us and we might listen:

God’s word is heard through:

- “the sermon” (or “preaching”)
- “public bible reading”
- “prayer” (with the admonition that there be no sermon without prayer, that is, it leads to intercession for the needs of the community and the world”—this offers an ethical imperative that identifies the church as “liv[ing] in the world and [being] sent to the world)
- “Bible study”
- “singing”
- “testimonials” (“telling our experiences of [God’s] faithfulness in our daily lives)

This is done in the settings of “congregational meetings...homes, as well as...church buildings”.

The minister is given the title of “preacher or worship leader”. This is elaborated upon in the next section which treat “how” and “who” does the worship.

6.5 We make decisions together in a spirit of shared responsibility:

“Lifestyle” is the word used for different callings within the Body of Christ and the statement is made that “not all choices in life are personal”. The tension between “social control” and “respectful liberty” is mentioned gingerly. As well, an attempt is made to describe the relationship between the “local church” and the “global family”.

Although different “organizational models” are explored, the statement that “no biblical model exists” is made with the concession that “there are at least sketches of different models”, with “at least three constants in the church of the New Testament”: “servant leaders”, “leadership teams, and the “whole congregation” as sharing in service and leadership.

This is a rather packed and generalized statement, requiring much nuance; the first being that there are different churches not just one church in the New Testament period. Here authority and church organization come to a head, as does the relationship between scripture and tradition. In fact, each of the three “constants” falling under the rubric of “tradition”:

- Episcopal tradition (with bishops): hierarchical with strong leadership of individuals
- Presbyterian tradition (with councils or elders): shared leadership
- Congregational tradition (with more authority to the membership assembly of the church)

The statement is made that Anabaptists have tried to “integrate these three dimensions”. No explicit description of this integration is given, or if one model is emphasized or preferred among Anabaptists. Perhaps the answer is found in statements like: “authority is both from above and from below” and that “spiritual authority must be based more on spiritual qualities than on having been elected to an office or by a majority vote”. It could be said that the *raison d’être* of authority (ministry of *koinonia* for *koinonia* over space and time) is underdeveloped. The accent is clearly on the “practical”: mutual accountability/responsibility and a team approach in ministry. “Our

theology of discernment, blessing, and ordination of servant leaders seeks to integrate the approval of God and the approval of the congregation” needs to be unpacked.

Discussion of Chapter 6.

Viola picked up on Neufeld’s use of the phrase “preacher or worship leader,” and explained that in her experience that this often meant a pastor who preaches plus a worship leader, who could be a lay person.

Adolf observed that Neufeld’s treatment of different models of church was dense and needed unpacking, but that in practice one sees mainly a congregational model.

Helmut pointed out that Neufeld was writing for the “global” Mennonite church, which includes many different models, including churches that have bishops.

Richard mentioned and recommended a new book by an American Jesuit, George B. Wilson, entitled *Clericalism; the Death of Priesthood* (Liturgical Press 2008), in which the author provides a very astute analysis of “clericalism,” not only in churches, but in professions like law, medicine, and academe, and shows how it is always detrimental to “priesthood,” understand as in the biblical phrase that characterizes Christians (true disciples of Jesus) as “a royal priesthood.”

Luis recalled a conversation with Sandra Beardsall, who teaches at St. Andrew’s College, the United Church college of the University of Saskatchewan, where the college has abolished all titles of academic rank, in attempt to deal with this issue.

Chapter 7. We are a World-Wide Family

Doug commented on this chapter from notes that are reproduced here [in forwarding the notes to me, Doug indicated that he may not have covered all this in his oral presentation, but it seems to me that all his comments are well worth our reflection. RAL]

At the outset of this chapter I wondered why Neufeld decided to use the term “family” in the title rather than the word “community” which appears in the article itself, “As a worldwide community of faith and life we transcend boundaries... “The word “family” seems a bit too parochial to express the notion of crossing borders. Moreover, in the gospels Jesus repeatedly critiques “family” allegiances which compete with loyalty to Christian discipleship. Although “family” may feel a little “warmer” it may also convey an overly close-knit kind of connection which detracts from the more global/international intent of the chapter.

Neufeld’s missional examples of Christ as the first missionary and the early church reaching out beyond its ethnic and national boundaries are helpful. However there is no mention of God’s global mission within the Hebrew Bible itself. Abraham’s commission to be a blessing to all the nations, Jonah’s critique of ethnocentrism, and 3rd Isaiah’s vision of multinational worship would have strengthened Neufeld’s argument. A

biblical theology embracing both Testaments adds credence to the inclusive nature of the gospel and the missional call of the church.

Just a comment about Neufeld's use of the word "missions." My former professor at the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary preferred the term "mission" because it speaks of God's one single mission to the world rather than our various human "missions" we may engage in. One is theocentric the other is anthropocentric. The more recent popularity of the term "missional" seems to be a helpful way to refer to the church. I affirm Neufeld's assertion that our Christian identity has a higher priority than our national identity. We give ultimate allegiance to Christ and his kingdom rather than any nation, state, or tribe. One can readily see how this stance corresponds to the church's peace commitment. An MCC poster puts it this way, "A Modest Proposal for Peace: Let the Christians of this world agree not to kill each other."

Neufeld challenges us to cultivate fellowship with other Christians. Crossing boundaries of race, color and nationality does not seem as difficult for me as crossing the boundaries of fundamentalism or militarism, etc. Fellowshiping with other Christians who seem to be on opposite ends of the pole theologically or politically remains the challenge for me. Neufeld's comment that the "gospel helps us to assume "a self-critical stance" (p. 124) reminds me to be gracious and humble in relating to other Christians who think differently.

Neufeld addresses issues of race, gender and segregation. He gently and carefully speaks about gender roles, biblical guidelines and cultural contexts attempting to cover various practices within the global Mennonite church. Later in this section the following statement gave me pause: "the act of baptism illustrates clearly that there is just one social class in church: that of forgiven and restored sinners" (p. 128). Given that in Mennonite churches we practice believer's baptism at an age of maturity I wondered about the unbaptized who attend church services. Do they sometimes feel like second class citizens in the church? The issue of sexual orientation also raises questions about segregation and class. Neufeld does not address this issue here.

Neufeld denotes a lot of space to the church's relationship to the world. Issues of church, culture and witness are significant from a Mennonite perspective. Mennonites have sometimes been known as "the quiet in the land." Neufeld attempts to carve out a balanced perspective of being in but not of the world. I wondered whether his theological rendering of "world" (opposed to Christ and his kingdom) didn't account for the more generic use of "world" which also appears in scripture. Hauerwas and Willimon (Resident Aliens) talk about the church being against the world for the world. We take a counter-cultural stance in opposition to the destructive powers in the world in order to engage in mission with God who loves the world. I wondered about Neufeld's perspective on universal salvation. Two times in this section he includes the word "yet":

"world, which does not *yet* live salvation in Christ" (p. 129);

"many who do not *yet* belong to the community of faith" (p. 130).

It displays the hope of the gospel that all may be saved. Neufeld phrases this as a future reality.

Neufeld sees the role of the church as paramount in the positive transformation of culture. His metaphor comparing the church to a kidney is somewhat novel. The church

does act as a purifier of culture. I thought Neufeld might have also entertained the notion of the *church as a culture* which displays the distinctive character of the kingdom. I appreciated Neufeld's reminder that it is ultimately God's grace which transforms and not all our noble efforts. We are dependent on God and there is nothing God's grace cannot overcome.

Neufeld concludes the chapter by looking at three ways in which the church witnesses to God's grace. The first is by serving others. Here Neufeld highlights the Mennonite hallmark of service to others, a fitting response to the God who loves all people. Secondly, Neufeld includes care for creation, critically important in our day and age. He points out the biblical mandate of ecological stewardship and being faithful to future generations. Finally, Neufeld includes the missional mandate of the church to make disciples of all nations. Neufeld sees the church as central to the process of conversion. Here he might have included Augustine's statement, "there is no salvation without the church." One cannot be Christian without being in relationship with other Christians in the church. I would describe this as "impossible" instead of Neufeld's rendering "of no use". He reserves the word "impossible" for being part of the church without having a personal experience of faith. Neufeld also makes reference to various ways people come to faith. For some it is a decisive moment. For others it is more of a process. Historically Mennonite Brethren have emphasized the decisive moment or crisis conversion. This was their experience when they were established from the larger Mennonite Church. Today as one listens to individual faith stories in Mennonite Brethren churches, conversion as a process is much more common.

Janet offered the following summary of this chapter:

– "We" **transcend boundaries** of nationality, race, class, gender and language – this is the essence of Christian mission. Christ was the first missionary.

– The worldwide body of Christ is formed by many **cells**, which is the church. There is a purpose and need for local churches, denominations, National Churches and regional conferences. Fellowship and sharing is necessary for growth. Each tradition has beauty and richness.

– Local churches are where the life of the body of Christ is visibly experienced. There are Pros & Cons of **Nationalism** within the Christian community. But!! Our Christian identity must be stronger than our national identity. (*In the Ukrainian Catholic Church, this is my experience – a struggle being ethnic, culturally based.*)

The way to overcome this is fellowship with followers of Jesus from other countries and other nationalities. (p.122) (e.g. Hutu & Tutsi). "Never put National interests higher than the interest of the kingdom of God."

– **Ethnicity** – Ethnicity, race, language all have their shadow and light sides but is worthy of being protected and cultivated. We all have a common bond – we all come from the hand of the same Creator. All are seen as equal in the eyes of the Heavenly Father and in the community of faith.

– **Languages** – are rich & knowing more than one language is an asset and is encouraged because it strengthens the body of Christ. (e.g. Babel/Pentecost) Language is used in ministry (translators, etc.).

– **Class/Gender** – God has created us differently we have been given gifts to use to maximize our potential. There is a difference between men and women but are designed to cooperate and complement each other mutually.

– **Class/Status** – Jesus reverses the social classes (e.g. becoming a servant). The act of Baptism illustrates one social class in Christ. In the Church all are forgiven and restores sinners.

– **Evil Forces** – The church is called to be an alternative force. We need a healthy balance. “We cannot pull away from the world because we have been sent into the world.” (p.128) Jesus calls us to overcome evil with good. The church has distanced itself from the world – “we” must transcend the walls of the church building. (e.g. *In the Byzantine liturgy, we remember the Last Supper and the transformation of the bread and wine into the mystical body and blood of Christ. The emphasis is not so much that the bread and wine have been transformed, but that by partaking of the Eucharist, we are transformed and then we go out (beyond the liturgy) to transform the world.*)

– “When the church adapts to the world it loses its transforming power. What is the world?” It is all the human reality that doesn’t accept the Lordship of Christ and is not interested in the new times of the kingdom of God and its justice. Therefore the world needs transformation, change and conversion.

– **Peace** – Examples of peace work is given. More radical changes are possible. It is Christ through his church who brings transformation.

– **Grace** – Through grace change is possible. Christian witness is authentic only when it points toward God and his work of grace. From Grace comes **hope**. “Grace is not something we can do, but that which we are unable to do.” (p.133) There are no social situations, no human misery that God cannot transform: no human sins that God cannot forgive, and no failures that God cannot restore.”

– **Service** – A call to a life of service. Images: God as a labourer dignifies human labour leads to a comparison between divine labour and human labour. A life of service gives satisfaction. We need this sense of meaning and purpose. “We serve Christ, serving others”. A life of service has transforming power. “He who does not serve is of no service” (p.134) Their act of service transforms them. Service brings blessings to the needy and service transforms for the better those who server.

– **Ecology** – a caring for Creation. Avoid worshipping creation instead of the creator. (Iconoclasm) But we can honour creation because it reveals something of the wisdom,

the power and the majesty of God(p.135)

Our responsibility today is to look into social ethics, global politics and ecology.

– **Conversion** – The call to conversion is an invitation to know him, which comes from Christ himself. Christ invites us to know him through the church. How do we experience him? (Moment vs. process; bible instruction or crisis) The form and manner of conversion is not as important as the result. Be alive. Faith experiences can be individual and/or communal.

Discussion of Chapter 7.

Helmut observed that this is the longest chapter in the book; the topic was obviously of great importance to the author.

Commenting on the uses of the terms “family” and “community,” **Dora** reported that at a recent meeting of the Mennonite World Conference it was observed that people from the global South preferred the language of “family,” while those from the global North preferred that of “community,” perhaps because the second term was more esoteric and intellectual.

Viola thought that this made sense. In a “family” you have to be accepted.

Luis picked up on Neufeld’s statements on p. 131 – “It is in the church where Christ is being found. And it is Christ through his church who brings transformation” – and said that this is the major reason he is ready to invest so much energy into ecumenical dialogue and in Catholic-Mennonite dialogue in particular. He also liked Neufeld’s analogy of dialysis for questions relating to gospel and culture, with the gospel revealed in the Bible as something like a kidney that extracts toxic elements and provides blood with oxygen and nutrition for life.

History Matters

Richard offered the following commentary on the chapter:

Pp. 142–243: Here, Neufeld draws on what Arnold Snyder has to say about the Anabaptist heritage, and talks about maintaining a balance between “obedience to church rules and orders” and “nurturing and cultivating a vital life of the spirit.” He cites Snyder’s view that the important Anabaptist heritage is the search of a holistic gospel which “refuses to allow salvation and the spiritual life to be separated from a life of obedience and discipleship.”

It seems to me that this balance between “obedience to church rules and orders” and the “nurturing and cultivating a vital life of the spirit” is just as much a part of the Catholic heritage as what Snyder and Neufeld claim for the Anabaptist heritage.

Pp. 145–146. Here Neufeld writes about the relationship between the “kingdom of God” and the church. He stresses the idea that the “church in the power of the Holy Spirit will continue to be the showcase and vanguard of this kingdom,” and argues that “the church has to live the justice of this kingdom in a public and understandable way.”

Again, it seems to me that for the Catholics, the ideal relationship between the “kingdom of God” and the church is no different.

When I reflect about my involvement in ecumenical activities, it strikes me that our first prayer (and highest priority) is the one that we pray in the Lord’s Prayer, that “thy kingdom come,” and only secondarily do we pray for the unity of all Christians in one church.

P. 146. A very minor point. Neufeld writes “But followers of Christ must also endure a ‘battle of the pacifists’ (Ephesians 6:10–20).” On first reading one might be tempted to think that the phrase in quotation marks – “a battle of the pacifists” – are the words of Paul. But this is not the case; the phrase is simply Neufeld’s way of summarizing this Pauline passage.

Lastly, it is to be noted that in this chapter, in general contrast to the other chapters where only the Bible is cited as an authority, Neufeld seems to cite Arnold Snyder as “an authority.”

Adolf recalled the title of a book by a CMBC president, “The Story that Shapes Us,” and added that, next to hymns from hymn books, we remember stories.

Conclusion

Helmut wrapped up the discussion with the observation that everyone had seemed to enjoy Neufeld’s book.

Richard requested those who had prepared notes for their presentations to forward them to him, to assist him in the preparation of the minutes.

3. **Topic** for our next discussion. After brief consideration, it was agreed that at the next meeting we should take up “A Mennonite and Catholic Contribution to the World Council of Churches’ *Decade to Overcome Violence*.”
4. **Next meeting.** The next meeting was tentatively set for 4–9 pm, Thursday, 8 January, at Holy Family Church (Grant and Harrow). **Janet** will make arrangements, and invite the pastor.
5. **Closing prayer.** **Helmut** led us with another prayer from the Mennonite Hymnal.