

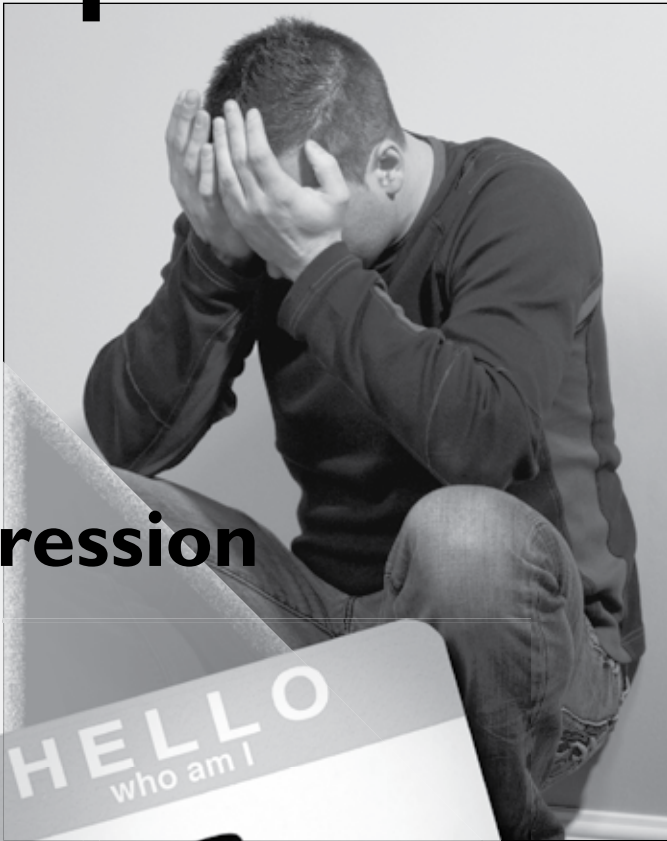
Theōdidaktos *Taught by God*

Journal for EMC theology and education

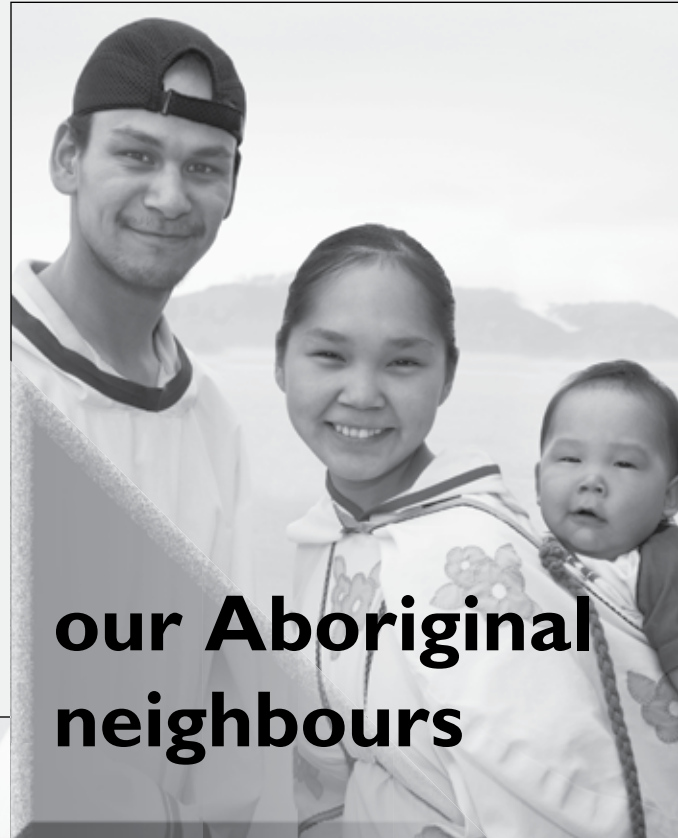
Volume 3 Number 1 February 2008

An Anabaptist response to

depression



**our Aboriginal
neighbours**



questions of identity



sexual brokenness



Also included: Feature sermon by Layton Friesen and book review by Andrew Reimer

A theology of God and depression

Tremors rippled through the world when it was revealed that Mother Teresa had suffered for decades with what she called her “dark night of the soul.” Unfortunately her last wish that her journal recording these thoughts not be made public was ignored. Those who suffer depression are often encouraged to do personal therapy by writing down their thoughts. Mother Teresa, on the short list for sainthood, was no exception to the darkness of depression and wrote prolifically about her feelings. Perhaps someone thought that others would be encouraged to know that Teresa went through hard times too.

What puzzled me more than the fact that a world-renowned Christian leader had gone through depression was the revelation that she felt the absence of God and found no comfort in the Word of God. She spoke of God not wanting her and a constant feeling of not pleasing him enough to gain his favour. In terms of pouring oneself out for the poorest of the poor in our world, few could match the actions of this little woman. Yet she struggled for decades with the doubts and personal insufficiencies all the while holding the truth in her hands.

Depression is not reasonable. I fully understand that when any of us goes through “the dark night of the soul” logic takes a holiday. It is a battle of the mind versus the heart, and the heart often wins, much to our defeat. Our hearts represent our feelings and feelings are not logical. Our minds represent our power to reason and to think things through.

If you suffer chemical depression or have a bipolar disorder you know that there is very little in this world that can pull you out of the gutter of inexplicable hurt. The mind loses out to the heart if we fail to understand the way both minds and hearts operate.

Depression is not foreign to the servants of God. One need only think of the prophet Elijah following the Lord’s victory through him over the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:16-46).

Some have described the aftermath of this great event in Elijah’s life as a severe

case of mental breakdown. He prayed for death; he was given to excessive sleep; he needed to be encouraged to eat. And his perception of his circumstances was clouded by anxiety: “I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too” (1 Kings 19:10).

What Elijah could not see through his pain was the presence of the LORD and the seven thousand servants God had reserved for himself. But that is how depression affects many people and especially those who experience great victories. Often the mountaintops are followed by deep valleys.

It is well known that Charles Spurgeon suffered from bouts of depression throughout his remarkable career as a preacher. He would cry for a good hour, not knowing why. Fortunately Spurgeon trusted the Lord and developed a theology of depression to carry him through his “dark nights.” Spurgeon wrote, “This depression comes over me whenever the Lord is preparing

As Anabaptists what is our response to mental illness and its crushing effects? Depression has been stigmatized in our churches and sidelined as a real illness because its victims do not wear a cast or need a cane. If the “man after God’s own heart” found hope in God when his soul was downcast (Psalm 42), can the Mennonite find the same hope?

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a larger blessing for my ministry; the cloud is black before it breaks, and overshadows before it yields its deluge of mercy. Depression has now become to me as a prophet in rough clothing, a John the Baptist, heralding the nearer coming of my Lord’s richer benison [blessing]” (*Lectures to My Students*, p. 160). In the meantime Spurgeon had to deliver his sermons with a broken heart and likened such activity as working with a broken instrument.

The reality of depression among Christians today requires that we develop a proper theology of God and his involvement in our lives to combat the onset of the “dark night of the soul.” Spurgeon was a strong Calvinist and as such relied on the Sovereignty of God.

As Anabaptists what is our response to mental illness and its crushing effects? Depression has been stigmatized in our churches and sidelined as a real illness because its victims do not wear a cast or need a cane. If the “man after God’s own heart” found hope in God when his soul was downcast (Psalm 42), can the Mennonite find the same hope?

“Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God” (Psalm 42:11). ☉

Darryl G. Klassen

Mennonite Peacemakers and Aboriginal Neighbours

Andrew Reimer

Andrew Reimer gives leadership to North End Community Church in Winnipeg, Man.

Context and introduction

For the last six years my wife and I have lived in Winnipeg's North End leading a church plant in this inner city community, commissioned by three Mennonite denominations (EMC, EMMC and CMC). Our neighbourhood is home to a large Aboriginal population and we have made an intentional effort to build relationships with Aboriginal people. Approximately half of our small congregation are Aboriginal Christians. I grew up in the EMC and my wife grew up in the EMMC. Both of us are from families of Russian Mennonite origin.

Our ancestors began immigrating to Canada beginning in the 1870s in hopes of living a close-knit peaceful existence with as little participation as possible in surrounding society. They settled on land offered by the Canadian government—land formerly belonging to First Nations that had become the “possession” of the Crown through the unjust processes of colonization.

Though Mennonites were not directly involved in developing or carrying out the oppressive policies propagated against Aboriginal people at the end of the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries (for example, none of the Residential Schools were operated by any Mennonite groups), they nonetheless participated in the colonization of this continent and benefited from these oppressive policies.

Today, most Mennonites I know enjoy the economic and social privilege of white middle-class life in the Western “First World.”

Meanwhile, Canadian Aboriginal communities are reeling from centuries of exploitation: Dislocation from their homelands; death by disease and hunger; attacks on their economic, social and spiritual way of life; and generations of forced cultural assimilation and abuse in residential schools.

During this period of colonization, Christian mission work among Aboriginal people became just one more form of European conquest in which “the missionaries consistently confused the

gospel of Jesus Christ with the gospel of [E]uropean cultural values and social structures” (Tinker 2004, 103).

Today, the effects of this history among Canadian Aboriginal people are acute. Poverty, alcoholism, abuse and high suicide rates are only the visible symptoms of lost or suppressed cultural and communal identity, dispossession of land, and internalized oppression. Internalized oppression describes what happens when “Aboriginal people themselves...come to believe the pervasive notion that they are inferior” (Silver 19).

Furthermore, Aboriginal people continue to be marginalized by the dominant white society today; their concerns, struggles, and experiences are misunderstood, their voices are not listened to, and their identity

and intrinsic value as a people is unrecognized.

My Mennonite denominational circles promote Anabaptist values of non-violence and peacemaking as taught by Jesus. We claim to take Jesus seriously when he says “just as you did/did not do it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did/did not do it to me” (Matthew 25:40/45 NRSV).

As people called to work for peace and uphold all human life, how have we as Mennonites responded to the dehumanizing violence propagated against our Aboriginal neighbours? (By “violence” I am referring not only to physical violence but also practices and policies, which cause great harm economically, socially, and spiritually.)

Have we recognized this violence, acknowledged our part in it, and

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responded with humility, compassion, and loving solidarity (loving these neighbours as we love ourselves—Matthew 19:19, Mark 12:31, Luke 10:27), or have we blindly insisted, “Peace, peace,” when there is no peace (Jeremiah 6:14, 8:11)?

Research approach

In pursuing an answer to this question, I interviewed a sampling of seven pastors in the three Mennonite denominations that I represent, including several Winnipeg churches and several churches in smaller communities. These churches predominantly consist of white Christians, many of whom descend from Russian Mennonite ancestors. I asked each pastor to respond as best they could to the following questions:

1. *To what degree do people in your congregation believe there is a need for white Christians to work towards reconciliation with Aboriginal people?*
2. *If we were to ask people in your congregation to explain the social problems experienced by Aboriginal people today, what reasons or solutions would they give?*
3. *What kind of awareness do people in your congregation have of the history of violence committed against First Nations people? How would you characterize their attitude or response to this history (e.g. ignorance/don't think about it, denial, “it wasn't me”, “let bygones be bygones”, grief, anger, responsibility, action)?*
4. *Would most people in your congregation admit to having racist attitudes towards Aboriginal people?*
5. *Have people in your church been involved in any efforts to develop relationships with Aboriginal people? If so, describe these encounters and the approach or approaches used. What kinds of relationships have resulted?*

The responses I received represented a broad range in awareness and attitudes towards Aboriginal people and the issues they face. However, I have identified some patterns that I expect may be true for most churches in my denominational circles. When I refer to *Mennonites* in the remainder of this study or use the first person plural *we*, I am using the term as shorthand for the people who are part of the three Mennonite denominations I am connected with (EMMC, CMC, EMC), especially those living in Manitoba, with whom I have the most contact.

Mennonite attitudes towards and involvement with Aboriginal people

When Mennonites become aware of human need, many of us have an impulse to *do something*. At our best, we sincerely believe in the way of Jesus and we try to live this way. In churches where more people were aware of the suffering and struggles presently faced by Aboriginal people, pastors usually described a desire to help, either by addressing their physical and social needs, or by addressing their spiritual need for salvation in Jesus Christ.

Most churches have at least a few people involved in some kind of effort to reach out to Aboriginal people—often by working or volunteering at a soup kitchen, prison ministry, camp, or youth drop-in where many of those being served are Aboriginal.

Four of the seven pastors I spoke to said a significant part of their congregation has participated in long-term involvement with communities that are home to many Aboriginal people; some deep and mutually respectful friendships have developed out of this. Many Mennonites sincerely want to be involved with Aboriginal people in practical and helpful ways, and this is especially true in churches where there is a greater awareness of difficulties Aboriginal people face.

When asked about social problems experienced by Aboriginal people, several pastors said the people in their churches would cite reasons such as alcoholism, dependence on government funding and a weak work ethic, without mentioning root factors such as loss of land, culture, and identity.

However, when asked about social problems experienced by Aboriginal people, several pastors said the people in their churches would cite reasons such as alcoholism, dependence on government funding and a weak work ethic, without mentioning root factors such as loss of land, culture, and identity; none of the pastors explicitly referred to racism as a factor their congregation would identify. Awareness and understanding continues to be quite limited with many of us holding to simplistic and unsympathetic explanations for Aboriginal suffering.

Although we as Mennonites may feel some sympathy for Aboriginal people regarding the violence that their people suffered in the past, we are reluctant

to think too much about it or consider what it might have to do with our lives today. The most common response to this history in the churches I sampled was: “I don't want to think about it. It wasn't us. Let's all stop dwelling on the past and move on.”

One pastor suggested when Mennonites consider their own history of persecution in Russia, they conclude that, since we have “pulled ourselves out” and moved on, Aboriginal people should do the same.

Several pastors also identified a perception that since our generation of white Canadians did not commit the violence of the past and today's Aboriginal people were not the victims, this history has nothing to do with us.

Such responses betray blindness to the ongoing consequences of this violence in which we, the descendants of European colonizers, continue to benefit both economically and politically from exploitation of Aboriginal peoples and lands, while today's Aboriginal people continue to suffer the effects of being dislodged from their land, having their numbers decimated by European diseases, and having their cultural identity and way of life attacked by cultural assimilation policies including church-run residential schools.

As most Mennonites enjoy the

privilege and status of the white “First World,” we want desperately to believe that our present circumstances are mainly the result of our hard work and God's blessing, making it difficult to recognize the ways in which we benefit from violence and injustice against vulnerable peoples. Before we can grieve suffering and loss with our Aboriginal neighbours or understand and address root causes of their suffering we must acknowledge our own complicity.

Many of us are also blind to our own racism. Only two of the pastors I interviewed said people in their congregations would admit to holding racist attitudes towards Aboriginal people; the other five pastors said

their congregations would not think of themselves as being racist. This response reflects both an insufficient definition of racism (such as “outspoken hatred towards people of another race”), and a fear of having to rethink our own attitudes, assumptions, and practices.

Ched Myers confronts “those of us who fancy ourselves ‘conscientized’ [to racism],” saying that when we insist to people of colour, “Well, the system may be racist, but *I* am not...[we are] miss[ing] the point, which is that we cannot *not* be racist in a system of white privilege” (Myers 1994, 290).

This blindness to our own racism combined with our well-intentioned impulse to help and evangelize Aboriginal people in need can be a dangerous mixture, taking the form of *paternalistic ministry*. In our efforts to reach out to Aboriginal people with practical assistance and the gospel message, we who claim to be colour-blind unintentionally (I hope) reinforce our white cultural superiority both to ourselves and to the ones we are trying to help.

We remain in the position of “problem solver,” with the Aboriginal people as the “recipients,” “the ones with the problem” or, worse, just “the problem” (Aboriginal Christian leader Ray Aldred’s observation).

Almost all of our efforts to develop relationships with Aboriginal people have taken the form of running or volunteering in programs for Aboriginal and other people in need. In my interviews, I heard only a few examples where Aboriginal people were involved with Mennonites on the “helping” side of the effort, and there was only one example of a Mennonite being involved in an Aboriginal-led effort.

When we come to Aboriginal people with an unacknowledged belief in our cultural superiority and attempt to communicate the gospel of Jesus, we will invariably confuse our own cultural values, beliefs and practices with the message of the Reign of God. When we do this we implicitly reinforce in colonized Aboriginal people their sense of cultural inferiority and fail to convey Jesus’ love for, and affirmation of, *all* humanity (Aldred 2007).

Mennonites are handicapped in our peacemaking efforts among Aboriginal people as a result of blindness to our own complicity in Western colonization and to our own racism. Although we sincerely want to obey Jesus’ call to work for peace where there is violence and suffering, we

It is quite likely that white missionaries have used Jesus’ attack on “human tradition” in Mark 7:1–13 to compel Aboriginal people to give up many of their cultural practices. Perhaps it would have been more appropriate if European colonizers had heeded this teaching themselves.

often fail to see our part in the problem and consequently “dress the wounds of my people as though it were not serious, [saying] ‘Peace, peace,’...when there is no peace” (Jeremiah 8:11 NIV).

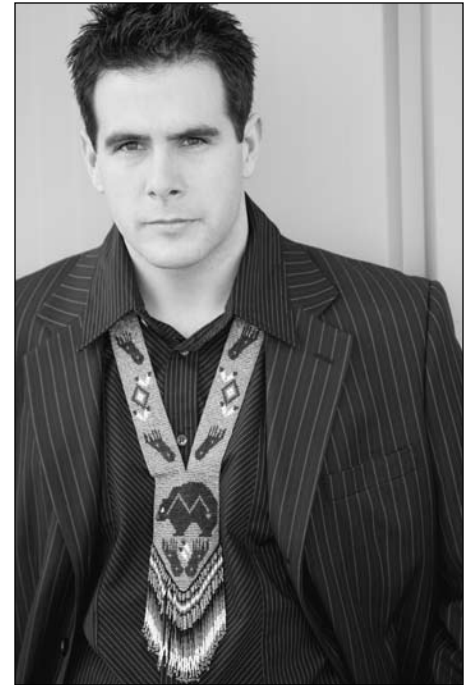
Jesus and the tradition of the elders: Mark 7:1–13

It is quite likely that white missionaries have used Jesus’ attack on “human tradition” in Mark 7:1–13 to compel Aboriginal people to give up many of their cultural practices. Perhaps it would have been more appropriate if European colonizers had heeded this teaching themselves. Jesus’ teaching in this passage confronts many of us “First World” Mennonites today who are blinded by our own cultural assumptions.

In this confrontation between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus tears away the pious façade of the “tradition of the elders” to expose the economic and political motives behind these practices and their harmful social effects. They question Jesus over his disciples’ failure to perform ritual hand washing before eating (vv. 1–5).

The Pharisaic regulations of ritual purity at meals were intended to reinforce boundaries of ethnic identity and class status (Myers 1988, 80). Apparently, Jesus’ disciples had been fellowshiping with the wrong people, which probably included Gentiles and “sinners” (the same issue raised by the scribes of the Pharisees in Mark 2:16).

Jesus eventually addresses the religious leaders’ question about ritual purity in



verses 14–23, but first he shows how their whole system of traditions is disobedient to God’s commands because it destroys life and community. He accuses them of being hypocrites, or play actors (Barker ed., 2002, 1477), and quotes Isaiah, saying the scribes and Pharisees are “teaching human precepts as doctrines” (Mark 7:7 NRSV). He then explains, “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition!” (Mark 7:9 NRSV). Not only are these traditions merely “human precepts,” they actually cause disobedience to God’s commands.

Jesus illustrates his point with an example—the practice of “Corban” (verses 10–13). The Corban vow “concerned a practice of consecrating or “willing” one’s property and resources to the temple. Once this vow was made, personal assets belonged to the temple treasury and, though still in the hands of the owner [until his/her death], could not be used” (Myers 1988, 221).

Jesus points out that such vows forbade people to use these economic resources to care for their elderly parents, “thus making void the word of God through your tradition that you have handed on.” (Mark 7:12–13 NRSV). Corban was one among “many” exploitative traditions promoted by the scribes and Pharisees who, as religious and political elites, benefited from the revenue Corban provided for the Temple treasury (Myers 1996, 80) and (Diewert class lecture 2007).

In Jesus’ evaluation, the traditions

promoted by the scribes and Pharisees, were a religiously legitimated form of social control, which served to support the status quo at the expense of God's vision for justice and community (see also Mark 2:15–17, 3:1–6, 10:1–12 and 12:38–44).

What cherished traditions or conventions of social order would Jesus and his disciples violate or disregard today in their mission to make known the Kingdom of God among Aboriginal people? And if we confronted him about this, what cultural assumptions or practices of ours would Jesus denounce as human precepts meant to keep us comfortable while our neighbours suffer violence and injustice?

Response: Solidarity, resistance, liberation

I believe one of the first things Jesus would show Mennonites is that we have become citizens (captives) of an empire in which our privileged social status and economic security (as white, middle class residents of the "First World") blinds us to the violence that this empire depends upon to survive, and to our own captivity to human precepts such as "civilization" and "progress."

The empire I'm referring to is global capitalism, an empire with its roots in the colonialism of the past five centuries. Brian Walsh and Sylvia Keesmat argue that globalism has all the characteristics of a religion: "Doesn't it require faith to believe that economic growth is the driving force of history? And on what basis, other than perversely blind, self-interested faith, can we justify the assumption of global capitalism that it is permissible to ruin one place or culture for the sake of another?" (Walsh and Keesmat 2004, 30).

This blindness led to the exploitation of Canadian Aboriginals and continues to result in the exploitation of vulnerable people groups all over the world, as we in the "First World" raise our standard of living (for more on this, see Zygmunt Bauman's critique of modernity in his 2004 book entitled *Wasted Lives*).

If Mennonites are to truly be peacemakers among Aboriginal people, and in the rest of world, we must first be healed of the cultural cataracts that blind us from seeing that we have bought into a worldview which says that those of us who are "developed" or "civilized" are superior to those who are not.

Our first step in working towards solidarity, resistance, and liberation with Aboriginal people is to seek our own

We must find new ways of living that depend less and less upon the exploitative practices of the empire. As we allow God to free us from this captivity, then we can begin to truly participate in the peacemaking reign of God through God's Son Jesus Christ.

liberation from captivity in the empire of global capitalism. One way of resisting as a faith community the claims of this empire on our lives is to recognize and name human precepts posing as divine truth: materialism, white/western privilege, "civilization," capitalism, and individualism.

We must resist by no longer believing that we in the "First World" deserve to live at the standard we do, and together we must find new ways of living that depend less and less upon the exploitative practices of the empire (the further exploration of this topic deserves its own essay). As we allow God to free us from this captivity, then we can begin to truly participate in the peacemaking reign of God through God's Son Jesus Christ.

Our liberation from the empire of global capitalism and allegiance to its human precepts will mean that we no longer need to defend the status quo, or pretend that we have not reaped the benefits of the exploitation of others. We will no longer need to deny our racism, because we will not be afraid to change. And our relationships with marginalized people will no longer need to be defined by paternalism, because we will see, as Jesus sees, the intrinsic value and dignity of *all* God's image-bearers. And then we will be ready to follow God into solidarity, resistance, and liberation with Aboriginal people.

I will explore a few ways that we can begin to move in this direction:

1. Proximity: Jesus entered into solidarity with humanity by becoming human and coming near to us. He understood the dehumanizing effects of the Tradition of the Elders because he spent time with people who had been victims of these

laws—and he was deeply moved to stand *with* these people and stand *against* the powers that exploited them. Although Mennonites cannot truly experience Aboriginal life, we can come closer to understanding Aboriginal people's experience when we spend time in humble relationships with them.

Many Mennonites live in communities that are insulated from Aboriginal people by geographical distance. Others may actually live quite near to communities of Aboriginal people, but remain insulated by social distance (i.e. in urban/suburban neighbourhoods, reserves near farming communities) which keep us from actually relating to them.

Mennonites need to find authentic ways of crossing these distances, not as tourists or saviours but as learners, in an effort to listen to their stories, perspectives, hurts and hopes. We can then begin to know them as people and not as a political agenda or a "problem to be solved" (Aldred 2007).

2. Grieving: When we are engaged in humble relationships with Aboriginal people, resulting in greater understanding and compassion, and make efforts to re-evaluate history free from Western assumptions such as "progress" and "civilization," we will begin, as Native American theologian George Tinker says, "an ongoing process of owning our history, honestly knowing our past, so that our future may be *freed from living in a cover-up mode* and our *decisions for the future may be most creative and life-giving.*"

Tinker continues, "It is equally crucial for white Americans to recognize occasions of oppressing others in their past and for Native American peoples to identify the sources of the oppression they have experienced and continue to experience. Both Indian and white must *confront...the lie that finally results in both the oppressor and the oppressed blaming the oppressed for their oppression*" (Tinker 1993, 9 emphasis mine).

Both Aboriginal people and white people (including Mennonites) need to be healed from the violent history of colonialism and our continuing racism and oppression. The appropriate response to this violence and its effects is to *grieve*. Several pastors I interviewed alluded to the public apologies to Aboriginal people for historical violence that have been made by some church denominations, and even Mennonite Central Committee, and suggested that many people in their churches would question the value or validity of such apologies.

This scepticism on the part of Mennonites may have something to do with our blindness to our own complicity in colonialism, which I have already discussed. But, whether it takes the form of public apologies or not, I believe owning and grieving our history is an important step towards being healed and restored to true peacemaking, lest we repeat that history.

Giving voice to the grief of a community has biblical precedent in both the Israelite prophets and the life of Jesus (when Jesus weeps it is to grieve in solidarity with the blindness and suffering of others). Walter Brueggemann in his exploration of prophetic grieving says “tears break barriers like no harshness or anger. Tears are a way of *solidarity in pain* when no other form of solidarity remains” (Brueggemann 2001, 56).

As God heals our blindness and liberates us from our assumptions of cultural superiority we will be moved to grieve as Mennonites for our part in this history and to grieve in solidarity with the pain of our Aboriginal neighbours.

Among Mennonites, this could take the form of small group reflection, congregational worship times designated for grieving, or more public expressions of grief. In our relationships with Aboriginal people, we must be prepared to join in the grief of our friends.

Authentic solidarity in grieving with Aboriginal people will not attempt to draw attention or glory to ourselves, but neither will we be too reluctant to make our solidarity with Aboriginal people publicly known. Jesus, our model for solidarity, did not perform acts of justice or mercy in order to gain notoriety or

popularity, but neither did he let a critical audience deter him from performing these acts of justice and mercy (as we saw in Mark 7:1-13, these became occasions for confronting and resisting the oppressive structures and those who perpetuated them).

Further moves that I do not have space to discuss here include speaking out against racism, moving from paternalistic ministry done to and for Aboriginal people toward partnerships with them, and affirming Aboriginal people’s liberty to discover how the gospel of Jesus Christ takes shape within their own culture (see Aldred 2007 and Myers 1994).

Conclusion

As Mennonites we have a deep familiarity with our Christian call to non-violence and peacemaking and a sincere desire to do something about the needs we recognize among Aboriginal people. However, our current status as part of the privileged white “First World” has blinded us to the roots of this injustice and our complicity in it. We fail to acknowledge that many of the assumptions we have based our lives on are merely human precepts which we have pursued at the expense of God’s vision for true peace.

As a result we dress the wounds of our Aboriginal neighbours as though they were not serious. Mennonites need God to heal our cultural blindness and free us from captivity to comfort so that we may forge new and life-giving relationships with our Aboriginal neighbours. With Jesus showing the way, we must listen to them, grieve with them, and empower them to be the people God created them to be. Then we will say to our Aboriginal neighbours, “Peace,” and they will believe us. ☉



Mennonites need God to heal our cultural blindness and free us from captivity to comfort so that we may forge new and life-giving relationships with our Aboriginal neighbours. Then we will say to our Aboriginal neighbours, “Peace,” and they will believe us.

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Reflections on identity: *Evangelical, Anabaptist, and Mennonite*

Terry M. Smith

Terry M. Smith has been a member of the EMC since 1979 and a minister since 1985. He is a graduate of Steinbach Bible College and Mennonite Brethren Bible College.

The Evangelical Mennonite Conference has a rich spiritual and theological history and identity. At the same time, we are unofficially dialoguing internally and externally about our identity, both about how to define our theology and about what to call ourselves. Our members are, as well, engaged in cultural change, both among those who are Dutch/German/Russian (DGR) and those from many other cultures.

Given our recently affirmed church-planting emphasis,¹ the EMC would benefit by consciously becoming even more welcoming than it has during the past 60 years. How should we do this? In Anabaptist fashion, we decide that together.

As part of this, it would be helpful to creatively explore and reduce where possible the tension that sometimes creeps in between being *Evangelical* and *Anabaptist*. Joining the two at their best in a rich mix is a challenge explicitly contained within our Conference name. In 1952 our leaders decided that *Evangelical* and *Mennonite*² each alone did not say enough about our identity; this was reiterated in 1959 when *Church* was changed to *Conference*, but both

descriptions remained. While most of us will remain students, rather than specialists, in dealing with the diverse, overlapping histories and theologies of Evangelicalism and Anabaptism, this does not excuse us from making evaluations and decisions in the present and about our future.

Second, we need to take conscious steps to remove or reduce a significant double-message with its push-pull effect: That *Mennonite* means *both* faith and culture. There need to be more effective ways of appreciating DGR and other cultures within Evangelical Mennonite churches.

Finally, future use of *Mennonite* as a local church identity is viable, in my view, only if two positive factors are present. There is, regrettably, some room for pessimism in this area. It must, however, be stressed that to question the viability of the term *Mennonite* as a local church or denominational identity does not mean that *Evangelical Anabaptism* is being questioned.

Evangelical

It is an equal privilege to serve Christ within any part of His Church; it's a great honour only possible by grace. We

can be humbly grateful for Evangelical churches, whether connected with the EMC in Canada or not. For example, after being raised in the United Church of Canada, I was spiritually nurtured within Evangelical churches. Most of our EMC pastors benefit from evangelical scholars such as John R. W. Stott, Michael Green, I. Howard Marshall, and dozens more; their books typically sit on our bookshelves. *Evangelical* is part of our identity as a Conference.³

There are 420 million Evangelicals in 128 countries connected with the World Evangelical Alliance.⁴ We need not be "ashamed to call them brethren" (Hebrews 2:11). Does this mean we need to agree with all their diverse views, positions, and actions? No. Stott and Green, for instance, are evangelical Anglicans who baptize infants, while EMC resides within the Believers' Church tradition.

The World Evangelical Alliance, of which the EMC is part by being a member within the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, does not include believer baptism as a criterion for membership. *Evangelical* is a broad description, sometimes too broad for some of us.⁵ We are sometimes embarrassed by what some people do in the name of Evangelicalism, but, to be honest, embarrassment can be equally be caused by what is sometimes done in the name of being *Mennonite* or *Anabaptist*.

For at least 50 years the EMC has valued cooperation with other Evangelicals. To reach out locally, nationally, and internationally fits the Servant's Song: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6). This vision and mission was taken up by Our Lord, Who passed it on to His Church (Matthew 28:18–20).

Because of the wider Church's

1 The church planting emphasis, while applauded, is needed, given the EMC's modest history of growth: After 134 years in Canada we have 60 churches. The Canadian Convention of Southern Baptists, whose history goes back to the 1950s, currently has over 250 churches (www.ccsb.ca). Our Board of Missions was formed in 1953. In other words, the vision for Canada was developing among Southern Baptists and the EMC at about the same time, but the EMC's growth since has been much less.

2 Jack Heppner has raised the issue of "both in my conference the EMMC and in the EMC, which of the words in our names are the modifiers and which are the central descriptors" (*The Messenger*, April 19, 2006, p. 3). In my view, the central descriptor is *Christian*, with *Evangelical* and *Mennonite* serving as adjectives clarifying how *Christian* is understood.

3 For the record, I identify as a Christian, Protestant, Evangelical, Believers Church, and Anabaptist—in that order of priority. Other EMCers will select and arrange the terms variously. My order, coincidentally, reflects the order that such parts of the Church have influenced my life, not the order that these streams of theology and practice appeared within history.

4 www.worldevangelicals.org (WEA website).

5 Dr. Al Hiebert quotes an EFC survey that uses four positive and two negative criteria in "Who is an Evangelical?" (*The Messenger*, March 22, 2006, pp. 4–6). The criteria, though, do not include salvation by grace through faith alone, and even the positive affirmation of Jesus as the "divine Son of God" is, given my background in the United Church, too imprecise for my taste. Further, the survey results suggested seven percent of Canadians are "evangelical Catholics"; this might be true, but more questions need to be asked and answers given before I am comfortable in recognizing that designation for others.

task, many of our Board of Missions-supported personnel function within non- or inter-denominational missions. Within most of these missions a broad-based Evangelicalism is presented, rather than Evangelical Anabaptism. In such settings our Evangelical Anabaptist distinctives, seemingly, become only one package of beliefs among many held by team members from various theological backgrounds.

The result appears to be that, despite the intentions behind providing Evangelical Anabaptist training and doctrinal examination, EMC workers around the world (and thereby the EMC, whom they represent) present Evangelicalism more often than Evangelical Anabaptism. This remains so, even if some leaders only reluctantly admit it. It's fitting to be "partners in the gospel" (Philippians 1:5). We might wonder, though, if our Anabaptist mission efforts are somewhat devalued by settling for common denominators among Evangelicals in the type of congregations we establish or the view of mission that we accept.

Undoubtedly, wider Evangelicalism has its impact on the EMC. In December 1999, Dr. Archie Penner presented his thoughts at an EMC ministerial on *The Effects of Fundamentalism and American Evangelicalism in Our Conference*.⁶ Dr. Penner saw the effects as a mixed blessing.⁷ Given the diversity of Evangelicalism, we might doubt that it could be otherwise. Dr. Penner, for instance, did not address wider Evangelicalism beyond Canada and the U.S.

To be fair, we need to hear the caution of C. Norman Kraus, "In order to compare and contrast Anabaptism and Evangelicalism one must first define the two movements, and that in itself is by no means an easy task. Both movements are diverse."⁸

For instance, not all U.S. evangelicals

We are responsible, through our boards, committees, and leaders, for the decisions we make. If we regret some negative influences from wider Evangelicalism, we need to become more effective at influencing EMC churches ourselves.

agree with the foreign policy of a particular American president, past or present. We can be, in any generation, quite concerned when the wider Evangelical church absorbs mainstream, secular values or a militaristic foreign policy.

Similarly, though, not all interpretations or expressions of Anabaptism within history would be viewed as equally beneficial today. Members of the sixteenth-century Radical Reformation often faced false portrayals and misunderstandings; we should be, then, cautious about and charitable in how we analyze our Evangelical relatives.

Moreover, while acknowledging mixed influences, we need to be wary of portraying the EMC simply as the *victim* of negative influences. A victim complex serves us poorly because it excuses us to be passive rather than active in our decision making. It is healthier to acknowledge that, through the *bulk* of our history, we have been more actor than victim in the choices made about leadership, theology, and direction.

We are responsible, through our boards, committees, and leaders, for the decisions we make. If we regret some negative influences from wider Evangelicalism, we need to become more effective at influencing EMC churches ourselves. Our boards and leaders are working and can, no doubt, provide more direction in this area.

Further, we need to go beyond this victim posture to a clear, positive reaffirmation: It is through Evangelical

influence that the EMC regained early Anabaptism's historic emphases of salvation by grace through faith only (with assurance of salvation, though not with the Calvinist emphasis of perseverance of the saints), the need for local church evangelism, and foreign missions. The EMC also is indebted for adopting later positive Evangelical developments such as Sunday School and Vacation Bible School.

A major reason for recognizing the positive value of Evangelicalism is that to do otherwise we risk alienating those EM congregations, leaders, and members who would lean to being *Evangelical* rather than *Mennonite*. When we devalue what they (and we as the *Evangelical* Mennonite Conference) stand for, it becomes less likely that they will be motivated to critically reflect on what it means to be an *Evangelical* or choose to be influenced by Evangelical *Anabaptism*. The more concerned that *some* Anabaptist leaders are to disassociate themselves from being Protestant or Evangelical, the more discomfort some of us will feel about their analyses.⁹

Bruce Guenther, MBBS associate professor of church history and Mennonite studies, isn't bothered by the term *Evangelical*: "I know it has many different connotations and needs a whole range of nuances. I teach a course on the history of evangelicalism and spend three hours just on definitional issues. *But we're being disingenuous if we focus on our Anabaptist identity and object to our evangelical Protestant identity. Our history connects us to both!*" (italics added).¹⁰

It is important to remember that within the EMC it's a false choice to select between *Evangelical* and *Mennonite* (meaning *Anabaptist*)—our challenge and task is to relate them positively.

Anabaptist

The EMC is part of Mennonite World Conference, with 1.5 million baptized members in 53 countries.¹¹ Our MWC history, through the involvement of Dr. Archie Penner, goes back decades, though our current EMC involvement seems minimal.

6 "Archie Penner: Study the Word!" *The Messenger*, January 12, 2000, pp. 6–7.

7 Dr. Penner expressed concerns about an earlier emphasis on dispensationalism and away from some of the implications of the peace position. He said, however, "We are not propagating Anabaptists and saying they have everything completely correct.... Divine truth is so great, so comprehensive, so beautiful, so immense, that God needs every Bible-believing denomination, plus many more, in order to present the whole of divine truth, and even then it will not be enough" (p. 7).

8 C. Norman Kraus, ed., *Evangelicalism and Anabaptism* (Herald Press, 1979), p. 169.

9 I would be counted among those whose discomfort becomes more pronounced when this happens.

10 "Telling the Story of Who We Are: An Interview with Bruce Guenther" (*MB Herald*, July 2007), p. 17.

11 www.mwc-cmm.org (MWC website). This compares to 105 million Baptists, 36 million baptized, (*Baptist World Alliance*, bwanet.org) and 66 million Lutherans in 78 countries (*Lutheran World Federation*, www.lutheranworld.org). We clearly have many more brothers and sisters outside of the Anabaptist church than within it. We can rejoice in having a much larger spiritual family than is represented by the Anabaptist portion of Christ's Church.

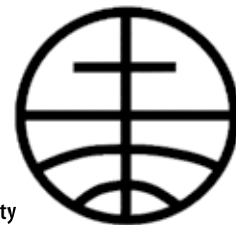
While not all Anabaptist groups identify with MWC, our moderator Ron Penner has repeatedly said it's important to build stronger ties with our Anabaptist brothers and sisters around the world. I agree. It would seem inconsistent to expend much effort to create an Evangelical Anabaptist Church around the world while not functioning effectively as part of Mennonite World Conference, much of which represents the results of post-19th century mission efforts by Mennonite conferences.

The value of *Anabaptist* as a term itself is debatable. Menno Simons considered it to be an "inane slur," an insult.¹² Reformation historian Walter Klaassen reserves it for those who have been persecuted or those who have been baptized a second time; this would effectively rule out most EMCers,

who have been baptized once.¹³ In Canada, though, *Anabaptist* is no gain over *Mennonite* for a local or regional identification.¹⁴ We have inherited the term *Anabaptist* by default; as such, however, it remains useful as a shorthand term for a confession or a system of theology.

Some of our congregations perhaps aren't concerned about becoming more Anabaptist. The reasons vary: It could reflect confusion of *Anabaptism* with a cultural image of *Mennonite*, the mixed influence of wider Evangelicalism, our taking for granted a large overlap with the wider Believers' Church theology, a sense of mission to be a community Evangelical church, and the teaching of local leaders.¹⁵ These congregations, however, operate within the Evangelical and Believers' Church tradition.

Mennonite World Conference is called to be a communion (Koinonia) of Anabaptist-related churches linked to one another in a worldwide community of faith for fellowship, worship, service, and witness.



(from its website)

Evangelical *Anabaptism*, however, needs to remain important as a confession or system of theology.¹⁶ Perhaps some EMC churches don't recognize how many Believers Church insights that seem common today were reclaimed when Radical Reformers stood for them in the sixteenth-century: Believer baptism, local church autonomy, discipleship,¹⁷ church discipline, religious toleration, separation of church and state, a peace witness, and more.

Some people might think that, if these are common property now, why emphasize *Anabaptism*? One partial answer is that an ignorance of Church history does not serve us well; many

The Christian Church today faces many challenges that Anabaptists have encountered previously, and some leaders from outside Anabaptist circles are seeing potential answers in some areas of Evangelical Anabaptism.

churches are at risk of *assuming* an identity while not consciously *teaching* it and thereby *weakening* it.

The Christian Church today faces many challenges that Anabaptists have encountered previously, and some leaders from outside Anabaptist circles are seeing potential answers in some areas of Evangelical Anabaptism: Its rejection of Constantinianism, a rich sense of community, and a peace witness.¹⁸

Studying Anabaptism can be enriching—as, in all openness, can be the study of any major stream of Reformation theology. Admittedly, because of its diversity in the sixteenth-century and since, Anabaptism isn't easy to study at certain levels; and it is fairly described as a mixed blessing. Menno Simons faced

12 *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons* (Herald Press, 1956, 1984) pp. 334, 570.

13 Walter Klaassen, *The Future of the Anabaptist Vision, The Messenger* (Sept. 21, 2005, pp. 6–7).

14 If, for instance, our churches in parts of Regions 1 and 2 became the Alberta Anabaptist Assemblies (AAA), that would not communicate well to the public. John H. Redekop endorsed "Evangelical Anabaptist" (*A People Apart: Ethnicity and the Mennonite Brethren*, Kindred Press, 1987), p. 159. He quoted both Dr. Frank Epp, "It would be better for the Mennonite people to lose their name and keep the original meaning than to keep the name and lose the meaning" (p. 158) and Dr. Frank C. Peters, "I'm at a point where I am asking whether the use of a name which has an ethnic connotation (as Mennonite Brethren) should not be reconsidered...It is the biggest issue we have faced in fifty years" (p. 159). Redekop notes that when Myron Augsburg planted a church in Washington, D.C., the name chosen was *Washington Community Fellowship*, not *Mennonite*. Redekop's comment? "Very interesting" (p. 159).

15 Some leaders and members would place this lack of interest upon ministers who enter our conference with backgrounds outside of the Mennonite church. I suggest that this is too easy and largely misplaced. First, churches choose the ministers they want. A congregation's identity is largely formed at the time of a pastoral search, and they are looking for a leader to suit them. The die is cast, in effect, and the minister is chosen because he or she reflects the church. Pastoral search committees, like good fishers, know what they are likely to find by dabbling in particular waters. Second, it's recognized by some EMCers that some ministers raised outside of the EMC enter it with a stronger appreciation for Evangelical Anabaptism than have some ministers raised within the EMC. One's background does not ultimately decide the choices we make. Third, within our conference some of our churches negotiate with ministers and have them in place before the Board of Leadership and Outreach's Ministerial Examination Committee becomes involved. This suggests that among such churches that working with the national board to determine if a leader is an Evangelical Anabaptist isn't a high priority.

16 Some people, like Robert Friedmann, *The Theology of Anabaptism* (Herald Press, 1973), would say Anabaptism is inherently unsystematic. Anabaptist theologian Thomas N. Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology: Biblical, Historical, Constructive* (IVP, 2004); and Mennonite systematic theologian A. James Reimer, *Mennonites and Classical Theology: Dogmatic Foundations for Christian Ethics* (Pandora Press, 2001) would likely disagree. Dr. Helmut Harder has written "there is also a time for a systematic presentation of what we believe," *Guide to Faith* (Faith and Life Press, 1979), p. 3. While systematic theology has its dangers, an unsystematic theology can have a greater danger, as Dr. Archie Penner implied on December 3, 1999, during questions after his presentation at the EMC ministerial (*The Messenger*, January 12, 2000, p. 7).

17 This isn't to say that Magisterial Reformers were unconcerned about discipleship, but that Anabaptists remain challenging in some aspects of what they saw involved within discipleship.

18 Recently Dr. John Roth has stated his concerns that Mennonite Church USA members are moving away from historic Anabaptist beliefs ("Professor sees loss of historic beliefs," *Mennonite Weekly Review*, November 26, 2007, pp. 1–2). His concerns are valid, and the theological drift might be mirrored within some parts of the EMC. Some Anabaptist concerns are, indeed, valued by a wider range of churches and leaders today because they are instructive in a post-Constantinian setting (Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, Abingdon, 1989). My concern, however, is that promoters and presenters of Anabaptism need to go beyond giving the impression that modern Anabaptists have had right it all along. Rather, in post-sixteenth century Europe, Russia, and elsewhere, Anabaptists also lost some of it along the way by the choices they made. Modern Anabaptists reflect both the gain and the loss.

diversity in his day.¹⁹ Partly because of the catastrophic use of claimed visions in his day, he rested with the written Word of God as witness to Christ:

I am no Enoch, I am no Elias, I am not one who sees visions, I am no prophet who can teach and prophesy otherwise than what is written in the Word of God and understood in the Spirit. I do not doubt that the merciful Father will keep me in His Word so that I shall write or speak nothing but that which I can prove by Moses, the prophets, the evangelists and other apostolic Scriptures and doctrines, explained in the true sense, Spirit, and intent of Christ.²⁰

Christ alone was his faith focus, with Menno imploring readers to test his teachings by the written Word of God.²¹ I, for instance, confess to more comfort with Menno Simons' emphasis on the written Word than some other Anabaptists' "rejecting the Word in favour of the Spirit."²² The role of the Spirit in our interpretation and application of Scripture remains essential. Menno,

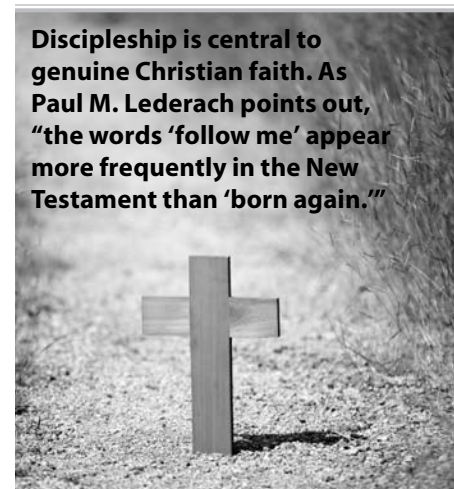
however, saw the written Word as providing a safeguard against subjectivity. This is important.

Another example: While strongly opposing some modern Anabaptists' willingness to set aside or minimize penal substitutionary atonement as one biblical meaning of the Cross,²³ I have learned from their emphasis upon various meanings of the Cross. At the same time, however, I recognize that such multiple meanings of the Cross are evident within wider Evangelicalism at its best and within the wider Christian Church.²⁴

Further, the statement of Hans Denck rings through the past five centuries: "No man may know Christ except he follow Him in life." Discipleship (*nachfolge*, following after Christ) is central to genuine Christian faith. As Paul M. Lederach points out, "the words 'follow me' appear more frequently in the New Testament than 'born again'."²⁵ When some Canadians claim to be Christians "in their heart" without a concern for lifestyle, the New Testament call to discipleship is a corrective needed in our society.²⁶

There can be a rich interplay between *Evangelicalism* and *Anabaptism*. As Dr. Ron Sider says, "Mennonites [meaning *Anabaptists*] need Evangelicals and Evangelicals need Mennonites." He says that Anabaptists can bring out the reality of the church as a community, the need for "a more holistic biblical gospel" and to return "costly discipleship" to the "evangelistic proclamation." Anabaptists remind Evangelicals that "from a biblical perspective orthopraxy (right living) is just as important as orthodoxy (right doctrine)" and Anabaptists "need Evangelicals lest they forget that the converse is equally true."²⁷

Robert Webber has written, "What is



needed now is a theological corrective of such a nature that the Evangelical church will be shed of her social, political, and cultural identification. We need a corrective that will allow Christ to emerge through the church's worship, theology, mission, and spirituality as the hope of the world."²⁸

Bruce Guenther has said, "I'm convinced that our dual identity [Evangelical and Anabaptist] actually gives us an advantage for doing ministry within a Canadian context. It offers us a way to see—and critique—both streams that have shaped us. And it definitely gives us more resources to respond to a postmodern, post-Christian society."²⁹

Mennonite

On the level of the local EMC church, the answer to the question of whether the EMC will likely retain *Mennonite* as an identity is suggested by our current practice: Of the 60 churches listed in the *EMC Yearbook 2007*, only 22 retain *Mennonite*.³⁰

It might, at first, appear that the more

19 Early Anabaptists had their own sharp disagreements over such matters as marital avoidance (whether a spouse should shun a marriage partner under church discipline). In 1558 Menno Simons felt so misunderstood by some other Anabaptist leaders that he wrote a letter saying, "If the omnipotent God had not preserved me last year as well as now, I would already have gone mad" (*The Complete Writings of Menno Simons* (Herald Press, 1956, 1984, p. 1053).

20 *Complete Writings*, p. 310.

21 *Complete Writings*, pp. 311–312.

22 Walter Klaassen says, "It is true that there were cases of illuminism, of rejecting the Word in favour of the Spirit. Certainly this tendency is noticeable again in the early South German Anabaptism of Denck, Kautz, Hut, and Bunderline. Even these men always depended on the Bible, but they accepted Scripture because the Spirit in them testified to its truth. But most Anabaptists managed to maintain the tension between Word and Spirit, holding clearly and firmly to both" (*Anabaptism in Outline*, Herald Press, 1981), p. 72.

23 J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Eerdmans, 2001); Joel B. Green and Mark Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament & Contemporary Contexts* (IVP, 2000); and John Driver, *Understanding the Atonement for the Mission of the Church* (Herald Press, 1986) on this score. My concern stems, in part, from my United Church background. The United Church has questioned penal substitutionary atonement and, in large measure, given up on seeing the Cross as involving an objective atonement. Galatians 3:13 and 2 Corinthians 5:21, among other Scriptures, point toward the penal substitutionary nature of the Cross.

24 See, for instance, the short study by Leon Morris, *Glory in the Cross: A Study in Atonement* (Baker, 1966): "Since the atonement is God's perfect provision for man's need it is necessarily many-sided" (p. 59). He briefly mentions moral influence, example, Christus Victor, and others. "The reality is vast and deep and all our understandings of it are partial. Harm is done when it is insisted...that any one theory covers all the facts" (p. 80). The word *meaning* is preferred over *theory*.

25 Paul M. Lederach, *A Third Way* (Herald Press, 1980) p. 21.

26 Another error is when people interpret being a Christian as simply involving living a decent life; rather, that decency needs to be grounded in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. See Ron Sider, "Evangelicalism and the Mennonite Tradition," in C. Norman Krause, ed., *Evangelicalism and Anabaptism* (Herald Press, 1979), pp. 149–168, reprinted in *The Messenger* (April 21 and May 5, 1999), available on-line at www.emconf.ca/Messenger.

27 See Ron Sider, "Evangelicalism and the Mennonite Tradition," in C. Norman Krause, ed., *Evangelicalism and Anabaptism* (Herald Press, 1979), pp. 149–168, reprinted in *The Messenger* (April 21 and May 5, 1999), available on-line at www.emconf.ca/Messenger.

28 Quoted in Krause, p. 181.

29 "Telling the Story of Who We Are: An Interview with Bruce Guenther" (*MB Herald*, July 2007), p. 17.

30 Two EMC churches more recently changed their names: Cornerstone Fellowship Church (formerly Swift Current EMC) and New Life Christian Fellowship (formerly Tilbury EMC).

In my view, the EMC is largely abandoning *Mennonite* to culture. Because of this, the continued presence of *Mennonite* in local names is more likely among pockets of DGR Mennonites where outreach to people of similar culture is unofficially the major focus and success.



a single church of mostly non-DGR people that retains *Mennonite* in its name. Our lack of success says more about whether *Mennonite* is a transferable identity within mainstream Canada than does pointing to positive Anabaptist developments in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. We can be well aware of Mennonite World Conference and its wonderful work, but, for me, the litmus test for the EMC is what we do in Canada where our long-standing congregations are known.

Within our church planting in Canada, the EMC has not demonstrated that people of other cultures are prepared to take on the *Mennonite* tag, whatever affection they have for Anabaptist history, theology, and practice. When many of our local churches and members don't identify with the middle portion of our denominational name, and when potential believers see *Mennonite* as a cultural identity, we have a basic public relations problem.³² In my view, the result is that the EMC is largely abandoning *Mennonite* to culture. Because of this, the continued presence of *Mennonite* in local names is more likely among pockets of DGR Mennonites where outreach to people of similar culture is unofficially the major focus and success.³³

After much thought and effort over 28 years in the EMC, it is my reluctant opinion that any future use of *Mennonite* as a conference identity is viable only if two positive factors are present. First, it needs to be openly stated through official structures and by direct pastoral teaching that *Mennonite* represents faith, rather than a DGR cultural identity. Secondly, this understanding needs to be accepted by both new members and the general public. Both seem unlikely to happen.³⁴

Rather, it's likely the term will continue to be used culturally. It will remain within local use among pockets of the EMC, in the small print on some church signs, and on conference letterhead.³⁵ But on churches that seek to reach out more widely, *Mennonite* will not be an effective invitation, not even with a name such as *All Nations Mennonite Church*.

A necessary distinction is vital for another major reason: Because many non-DGR people resist becoming Mennonites (if it means culture), they don't realize what else they are setting aside (Anabaptist theology). The DGR Mennonite Church's lack of adequate distinction has made it easier for some people to dismiss the difficult message of discipleship in Christ.³⁶

For me, the most important votes on whether to keep *Mennonite* as part of our

dominant the presence of DGR members, the more likely that a particular local church will retain *Mennonite*. However, that assumption is misleading. With perhaps 80 percent of our members being DGR in culture, they dominate most of

our churches, and yet only one-third of our churches retain *Mennonite* as a local name.³¹ It appears that many DGR Mennonites have misgivings about using *Mennonite* as a local identity.

After 60 years we've failed to establish

31 In comparison: (evangelical) Lutheran Church-Canada (99 percent use *Lutheran*), Canadian Baptists of Western Canada (78 percent use *Baptist*), Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (38 percent use *Pentecostal*), EMC (37 percent use *Mennonite*). My thanks go to Helga Downwy (LCC), Shelby Gregg (CBWC), Gloria Aide (PAOC), Becky Buhler (EMC).

32 Dr. Bruce Guenther, the Mennonite Brethren seminary professor, has come out sharply to say: "It's become increasingly clear to me that using the term Mennonite as an ethnic adjective is irresponsible and creates considerable confusion within our congregations." Guenther says, "We need to stop using Mennonite to refer to certain foods, ways of dressing, surnames. The misuse of the word creates insider/outsider kinds of boundaries that are completely inappropriate within the life of a Christian community. Especially within a Christian community that's now so multicultural and diverse" ("Telling the Story of Who We Are: An Interview with Bruce Guenther," *MB Herald*, July 2007, p. 17). Put another way, Guenther would say that "regardless of our origins, 'we're all ethnic Mennonites'" ("Study conference begins conversation," *MB Herald*, December 2007, p. 16). If that's so, no one or two cultures can be seen as uniquely Mennonite. The relationship of faith and culture is better described by using at least two words (the equivalent of Ukrainian Catholic) than by the single word of *Mennonite*.

33 Some people might, perhaps, trace back some of this tendency to abandon *Mennonite* to culture to the period of the Western Gospel Mission (1945–1961), a church planting emphasis in western Canada among various non-DGR groups. The WGM operated outside of official EMC circles, and the churches planted, some of which were later absorbed into the EMC and EMMC, were known as *Fellowship Chapels*. Why that local name? We can speculate. Western Gospel Mission would not have wanted to appear to be setting up a rival Mennonite denomination. It's likely, too, that director Rev. Ben D. Reimer and other early WGM leaders sensed instinctively that *Mennonite* had a German cultural ring to it, which would be a barrier in evangelism and the establishing of churches in the years just following World War Two. I recall asking Rev. John K. Reimer, the first WGM worker and a minister I respect, about part of this, and he told me that community people knew the workers were Mennonites. The important matter, though, was quite different: Did the community people know that *they could become* Mennonites? There is a difference between help accepted and an identity accepted. Consider, in this line, the classic MDS story of a woman who refused to come down from a tree "until I see a Mennonite!" While DGR Mennonites might take some comfort from this story, it mustn't be stretched so far as to ignore the barriers that exist. It's one matter to accept disaster relief or other practical help from a plain-dressed DGR Mennonite; it's quite another to join a church if it means adopting other cultural ways.

34 It is unlikely that the EMC ministerial, for example, would pass a motion saying that *Mennonite* is only properly a faith description, and not to be used as a cultural description. Many DGR ministers have much invested, as did past generations, in being both Servants of the Word and Keepers of the Culture, despite its partial compromise of The Anabaptist Vision. Further, people on the street are rarely interested in church motions. However, if such a motion led to leaders and congregations being more intentional about what is taught, and isn't, that might affect some Canadians. Decades of mixed public relations aren't, however, easily overturned.

35 While it's unlikely that *Mennonite* will be officially dropped within my lifetime, the unofficial dropping is occurring.

36 Calvin W. Redekop, who wrote *Leaving Anabaptism: From Evangelical Mennonite Brethren to Fellowship of Evangelical Bible Churches* (Pandora, 2001) is concerned that ethics, not ethnicity, is the real reason people turn away from the Mennonite church. He is likely accurate that some people avoid the Mennonite church because of its inconvenient ethic. On the other hand, he does not give adequate attention to the negative impact of the faith-culture fusion.

denominational name are cast by people outside of the Church: Do they view it predominantly as a faith description or a cultural term? Do they see the identity as inviting (decided by choice) or excluding (decided by birth)?

On a formal level, within my reading of early Radical Reformation history, *Mennonite* and *Anabaptist* were originally similar theological identities, like *Presbyterian* and *Reformed*. But on a more practical level within Canadian society, my response is different. When I am honest about my experiences as a person of mostly British culture and as a pastor, the efforts I've expended to reclaim *Mennonite* as a spiritual identity for non-DGR people seem like trying to shut the barn door after the horse is gone. That

effort, for me, has ended.³⁷

It befits *The Anabaptist Vision* that we disengage Anabaptist theology from being inseparably linked to one or two particular cultures (DGR and Swiss). To leave it linked leaves our conference theologically vulnerable. If we can't

If the EMC is ill-prepared to critique its own faith-culture mix, our ability to critique wider faith-culture mixes in society is somewhat compromised.

37 People of non-DGR background have varying experiences in the EMC and other parts of the Anabaptist Church. My eleven years as pastor at Creighton were good years, but almost immediately the cultural barrier of *Mennonite* appeared. My wife Mary Ann and I sang a duet at a Thanksgiving gathering where a local Baptist pastor introduced us, commenting that Smith was a strange name for being in the Mennonite church. That was precisely the idea I didn't want projected! We had come to Creighton to invite people of all backgrounds into NFC, and now an early public introduction repeated an excluding stereotype. But should we blame the pastor? He had simply caught what was taught. There are various ways of teaching: Officially and unofficially. The faith-culture fusion, or confusion, is taught in many ways in Canada. The result is that neighbours, strangers, inquirers, and the curious pick up on a single word—Mennonite—that both invites and excludes. This might be called *The Anabaptist Diversion*.

38 We will not review the histories of the Fellowship of Evangelical Bible Churches (formerly Evangelical Mennonite Brethren) and the Fellowship of Evangelical Churches (formerly Evangelical Mennonite Church, the U.S. denomination that caused us to change our name in 1959). They have dropped *Mennonite* in their denominational names and, largely, Evangelical Anabaptist distinctives in practice. My concern is that such a dual act not be followed in the EMC.

39 As a person of largely British culture and United Church of Canada roots, I agree, with Dr. John Roth and others, that any response to the "Word become flesh" will be reflected culturally. That, however, is quite different from defending *Mennonite* as an ethnic description. Since early Anabaptists were critical of the Magisterial Reformation and sought to reform or restore or recreate the Early Church, they set the bar higher than other Reforming groups—and, thereby, later generations of their descendants aren't beyond critique in this area. Given that Anabaptists often bemoan Constantinianism, it's a curious turn of history for members of a Believers' Church tradition to often use the name of a prominent early leader (Menno) to identify themselves culturally. *Mennonite Constantinianism* might be used as a term to describe the shift between the Church being entered voluntarily to people being identified as part of it by birth (surname). The DGR Mennonite church has suffered its own compromise and fall within history.

40 One useful result of my analyzing the faith-culture relationship in the DGR Mennonite church is that it has caused me to reflect on the relationship of the British culture and Christian faith in the United Church of my childhood. It has been necessary for me to examine how a pro-British Canadian government treated DGR Mennonites in Canada during World Wars One and Two and the education crisis of the 1920s. There is cause to reflect on the bitter joke: "Do you know why the sun never sets on the British Empire? It's because you can't trust an Englishman after dark." I acknowledge my growing awareness of the errors of a British colonialist legacy, while continuing to value the richness of my mostly British ancestry with humble gratitude.

41 It isn't the purpose of this paper to pass any sort of judgment on the richness of DGR culture, nor how people will use *Mennonite* as a description if it is abandoned to culture; that is for others to decide. My assumption is that DGR culture is rich and worthy of preservation. Dr. Royden Loewen, the Chair of Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg (and of EMC church roots), identifies six responses to faith and culture: "Historian analyzes creative tension of faith, ethnicity," *Mennonite Weekly Review* (November 26, 2007), p. 12.

42 "Letter of Consolation to a Sick Saint," *Complete Writings*, pp. 1050–1052. The message is available in *Counsel from an Older Pastor* (*The Messenger*, Feb. 22, 2006, pp. 8–9).

43 "Therefore I deem it necessary, sincerely to warn and admonish all beloved readers in the Lord not to accept my doctrine as the doctrine of Jesus Christ until they have weighed it in the balance of the Spirit and Word of the Lord, that they may not place their faith in me nor in any teacher or writer, but solely in Christ Jesus" (*Complete Writings*, p. 311).

distinguish adequately between faith and culture, should the EMC ever decide to drop *Mennonite* from our denominational name we risk dropping Evangelical Anabaptist distinctives in theology and practice.³⁸ While some EMCers might find this acceptable, it would represent a serious move away from *The Anabaptist Vision*.³⁹

Finally, if the EMC is ill-prepared to critique its own faith-culture mix, our ability to critique wider faith-culture mixes in society is somewhat compromised.⁴⁰

Conclusion

Two stories perhaps illustrate some of our on-going challenge. First, I once attended part of an annual meeting of the local historical society in Steinbach, Man., where a writer read a children's story about making snow angels. It didn't strike me as particularly *Anabaptist*, though it might fit *Mennonite* as culture.⁴¹

On the other hand, on June 3, 2007, I was asked in an emergency to give a sermon at the Mennonite Heritage Village (Steinbach, Man.) during a service held in a former Old Colony Church building. The meetingplace had been moved from Chortitz, Manitoba. My wife's maternal grandmother, Helena Peters, had been the caretaker of the building for a time when it was in regular use in Chortitz. The speaking occasion turned into the privilege of honouring a woman whom I never got to know except through stories told by her descendants.

The message was on the assurance of salvation, ultimately drawn from Scripture, but based on Menno Simons' 1557 counsel to an insecure believer.⁴² An Old Colony minister might have thought it inappropriate of me to teach on assurance of salvation in that setting. However, both within Scripture and the writings of early Evangelical Anabaptist Menno Simons, assurance is provided that God will receive a penitent believer.

We might step back to ask: Was this a correct analysis of Menno Simons? More importantly (and here Menno Simons would agree⁴³), was it a correct analysis of Scripture? How should this study of Scripture and of early Anabaptism affect how we assess later developments in Anabaptism, Evangelicalism, and Evangelical Anabaptism? These questions touch on Evangelical Anabaptist concerns. They reflect part of the essential discussion that we can't get away from within the EMC—whatever our Conference is called in the future. ☉

Sex: Pastoring on Dangerous Ground

Ed Peters

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This article is based on one of three presentations given at the EMC Ministerial Meeting in July 2007.

In 1873, British philosopher and Member of Parliament John Stuart Mill boldly predicted a lessening of the sex drive as civilization advanced. "I think it most probable that this particular passion will become with men, as it is already with a larger number of women, completely under the control of the reason."¹ A quick survey of contemporary culture, however, would suggest that Mill has missed the mark!

Today, sex is used to sell everything from deodorant to cars; it is a central theme in many television shows and movies; and the pornography industry is "now globally worth \$57 billion, with the United States—porn's spiritual home—accounting for \$12 billion (by comparison, Hollywood is worth a mere \$10 billion)."²

Given the continuing pervasiveness of sexuality in society, we as church leaders must be proficient not only in dealing with the symptoms of a sexually broken world, we must also be able to present a persuasive point of view that recognizes sex as a God-given gift. Martin Luther once said, "If you preach the gospel in all aspects with the exception of the issues which deal specifically with your time—you are not preaching the gospel at all."³ Certainly, the issue of sexuality is a matter that confronts us in our time.

The Good News

At the pinnacle of the creation account Genesis records these words, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27). Our unique sexuality, male and female, is not only a part of God's perfect creative design; it is a reflection of his very image. Through sexual intimacy, God has not only provided a means of procreation; he has also given a gift for enjoying intimacy and relationship—a gift intended to be explored in the security of a loving marriage relationship.

Human beings experience sex as a

personal encounter, not just a biological act. As Philip Yancey observed in an essay entitled *Designer Sex*, zoologists puzzle over the oddities of human sexuality, unable to find any evolutionary advantage.

We are the only species that commonly has sexual intercourse face-to-face, so that partners look at each other and have full-body contact. Virtually all other mammals have a specified time in which the female is receptive, or in heat, whereas the human female can be receptive anytime, not just once or twice a year. In addition, we humans continue to have sex long after the childbearing years have passed. Relationship is the key!⁴

Furthermore, a biblical worldview of sexuality not only celebrates sex as a gift given for pleasure and intimacy, safeguarded by the love and trust of a marriage covenant. Scripture also suggests a mystical and sacred element to sex. In the act of sexual union the man and the woman become what the Bible describes as "one flesh" and it is within this intimate union that sex transcends the physical—it becomes in a very real sense a signpost pointing to the Kingdom of God.

For instance, while describing the love and sacrifice that should characterize a marriage relationship, the apostle Paul suddenly shifts from the physical union between husband and wife to the spiritual union between Christ and the Church. He writes, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the Church" (Ephesians 5:31–32). Somehow, in the commitment of a

healthy marriage and the intimacy of sexual union, we are given a picture and a foretaste of our relationship with God.

Philip Yancey writes, "In one sense, we are never more Godlike than in the act of sex. We make ourselves vulnerable. We risk. We give and receive in a simultaneous act. We feel a primordial delight, entering into the other in communion. Quite literally we make one flesh out of two different persons, experiencing for a brief time a unity like no other. Two independent beings open their inmost selves and experience not a loss but a gain. In some way... this most human act reveals something of the nature of reality, God's reality, in his relations with creation and perhaps within the Trinity itself."⁵

It is in the context of understanding and celebrating sex as a sacred gift from God that provides the reason why it must be honored. Reducing sex to a mere biological act or a personal pleasure to be selfishly consumed, is to perform a great injustice not only to ourselves and those we use—it is a rejection of God's gift. No wonder then that Paul scolds the Corinthians for their low view of sexuality (1 Corinthians 6:16–20).

The Bad News

Despite the goodness of God's gift, the intention of our sexuality has been confused. G. K. Chesterton likened this world to a shipwreck off a desert island. A sailor awakens from a deep sleep and discovers various treasures strewn about, relics from a civilization he hardly remembers. One by one he picks up these treasures—gold coins, a compass, fine clothing—and he tries to discern their meaning and purpose.


1 As quoted in "Rumors of Another World: Designer Sex," Philip Yancey, page 74.

2 "End of Sex?" <http://english.ohmynews.com>, April 29, 2006.

3 As quoted in "Pure Desire," Ted Roberts, page 49.

4 "Rumors of Another World: Designer Sex," Philip Yancey, pages 75–76.

5 "Rumors of Another World: Designer Sex," Philip Yancey, page 82.



Today, sex is used to sell everything from deodorant to cars; it is a central theme in many television shows and movies; and the pornography industry is “now globally worth \$57 billion.”

According to Chesterton, the world finds itself in a similar predicament. Good things are found throughout creation, but because of our amnesia—our fallen nature—each of these gifts is also subject to misunderstanding or abuse. Power, wealth, and sex are among the gifts that God has given us and can be used for great good; but too often we fail to see their intent and thus twist it to our own purposes. The problem is not that the gifts are spoiled. They are relics of Eden. The problem is us—our amnesia affects our ability to determine their proper use.⁶

This problem is not only reflected in the world we live, but also among Christians and their leaders. In a survey commissioned by *Leadership Magazine*, the question was asked, “How common is pastoral indiscretion?”

Among the findings was that:

- **23% of pastors** said they had done something sexually inappropriate with someone other than their spouse while in a local church ministry (the definition of inappropriate was left to the respondent).

- **12% of pastors** admitted to having sexual intercourse with someone other than their spouse since they’ve been in local church ministry.

- **18% acknowledged** inappropriate sexual contact. As disturbing as those numbers may appear, it should be noted that a similar survey of *Christianity Today* magazine readers who are not pastors found incidents of immorality were nearly double.⁷

Furthermore, the addition of Internet pornography has made anonymous sexual misconduct more pervasive. According to *Pastor’s Family Bulletin*, March 2000, 63% of men attending *Men, Romance & Integrity Seminars* admit to struggling with pornography in the past year. Two-thirds are in church leadership and 10% are pastors.

Focus on the Family’s pastoral care line reports that one out of seven calls received is about Internet pornography.⁸

There are many reasons why we, even as Christian leadership, may have lost our bearings on this God-given gift. Psychologist and author, Larry

Crabb observed, “When a pastor, or anybody for that matter, gets in sexual trouble, rarely is the primary motivation sexual. Certainly, the sexual pleasures and excitement are real, but the core issue is that he or she is incredibly undernourished.”⁹

This undernourished soul may have many contributors. Fatigue caused by unending demands and pressure may weaken resolve. Frustration in ministry or at home may also contribute whereby sexual attention, whether given anonymously or through an inappropriate relationship, can create temporary feelings of power and control. But perhaps the primary contributing factor that leads to an undernourished soul and vulnerability to sexual sin is isolation.

Those in Christian leadership may experience isolation for a variety of reasons. In trying to reach out to as many people as possible, we may feel we have little time or energy left to nurture deep friendships. Isolation from God is experienced as we fail to monitor our own spiritual pulse.

Lapses in personal spiritual disciplines such as worship, prayer, and self-examination may lead one to feel like a professional dispenser of spiritual truth while your own soul grows weary

6 “The War Within Continues,” *Leadership Magazine*, Winter 1988, page 32.

7 *Ibid*, page 12.

8 “Pastor’s Family Bulletin,” *Focus on the Family*, March 2000.

9 “Traits of a Sexually Healthy Pastor,” *Leadership Magazine*, Summer 1995, page 21.

and isolated from God. In the end we are vulnerable to filling this need from illegitimate sources.

Speaking on behalf of the Lord, Jeremiah warned, "My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water" (Jeremiah 2:13). As Christian leaders, this indictment surely applies to us when we abandon God's gift and intention for sex for a counterfeit. The pleasure, power, and affirmation we may experience from sexually inappropriate behaviour are mere broken cisterns—the pleasure and joy will soon escape.

How then do we safeguard our minds, hearts, family, and ministry from the paths of sexual sin? Let me suggest:

Humility. Scripture warns, "If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" (1 Corinthians 10:12). The one who believes "it could never happen to me" is most at risk because he/she will not be on guard. Considering examples such as King David, a man after God's own heart who committed adultery, it is naive to believe that one is immune to sexual temptation.

Nurture your marriage. Seek opportunities to explore and develop your relationship through marriage enrichment weekends or seminars, times away. It should be remembered that many adulterous relationships begin with deception, and deceptions begin with seemingly innocent secrets. Careful and honest communication with one's spouse is a safeguard.

Nurture the soul. As Christian leaders, we must acknowledge that not only are the forces of human nature pulling us toward sin, we are also at the forefront of a spiritual battle. If Satan can succeed in entangling a pastor or church leader in sexual sin the consequences are usually far reaching. Therefore it is critical to tend to one's relationship with God through prayer, worship, and other spiritual disciplines.

Take precautions. If you are going to counsel people of the opposite sex, avoid doing it while alone and avoid private physical contact. Ask yourself, "Do I look forward to my appointments with this

It is important that the Church rediscover, celebrate and communicate the goodness of God's gift of sexuality.

person? Do I seek to meet with this person away from the office, alone or in a more casual setting? Do I prefer that others not know I'm meeting with this person?" If the answer is yes to any of these questions, it is time to remove yourself from the situation.

Be cautious of growing emotional/spiritual intimacy. Many Christian leaders who enter an inappropriate sexual relationship do not begin with that intent. While counselling a woman wanting to end an affair, David Seamands asked his client to "give up not just the relationship but also the symbols of that relationship." The next session Seamands expected her to bring a photo, necklace, or some memento. Instead the woman brought a copy of Oswald Chamber's devotional book, *My Utmost for His Highest*.¹⁰ The affair began as a spiritual matter.

Be accountable. The public humiliation of Ted Haggard, former pastor and president of the National Evangelical Association, should sound a clear warning to all in leadership. As a part of a statement read to his congregation in Colorado in which Haggard confessed to sexual immorality, he said, "When I stopped communicating about my problems, the darkness increased and finally dominated me. As a result, I did things that were contrary to everything I believe."¹¹ Talking about sexual temptations helps to break the obsession.

Remember the consequences. Sin, whether discovered or hidden, carries consequences. This is particularly true of sexual sin. It profoundly affects those involved, your family, your testimony, the church you minister in, and ultimately your intimacy with God. Sexual sin exacts a heavy toll.



Ministering to a sexually broken world

Historically, the Church has responded to the sexual brokenness of the world with repression. In the past, Church authorities simply issued edicts forbidding sex on certain days of the week and holidays. The list escalated until at one point it is estimated that only forty-four days a year remained available for marital sex.¹² Today repression usually takes the form of silence and inaction. In contrast, our culture has responded to sexual brokenness with obsession—giving itself fully to its sexual appetites. Surely, both paths only lead to further pain.

Instead, it is important that the Church rediscover, celebrate and communicate the goodness of God's gift of sexuality. As congregations we should seek to equip parents to communicate a Biblical perspective of sexuality and marriage to their children and teens. Teaching and preaching the good news of God's intention for sex as well as warning against its abuses must be held in balance from the pulpit and classroom. Furthermore, in preparing and commissioning people for ministry, I believe it is important for our ministry training institutions and even our ministerial examination committees to take seriously the sexual history of those entering ministry and how it may impact the way they minister.

We must also acknowledge the reality that sexual brokenness already exists in our congregations *and* our leadership. Where such is the case, we must seek to be redemptive in our approach. We can begin by creating a climate of grace that invites sexual struggles to be acknowledged and confessed in its early stages before ministries and marriages are shipwrecked.

Small group ministry and accountability is critical in this regard. James reminds us that it is in confessing

10 "Private Sins of Public Ministry," *Leadership Magazine*, Winter 1988, page 18

11 As quoted from "SojoNet: Faith, Politics and Culture," November 6, 2006.

12 "Rumors of Another World: Designer Sex," Philip Yancey, page 80.

and praying for one another that healing is found (James 5:16).

Finally, let me address the issue of restoring the fallen—especially those who are part of church leadership. In such situations there are many variables to consider: Was the sin voluntarily confessed or was it exposed? Is the individual repentant or unrepentant? How prominent was the position of leadership of the one committing sin?

Was the sin public (directly involving others) or private? (It should be noted here that private sin is not less serious in nature, but can be dealt with in a more private manner. Whereas public sexual sin, such as adultery, directly affects more people and consequently will need to be dealt with publicly to a greater extent.) We must also consider whether the sexual sin was an isolated event or reflective of an ongoing pattern.

One of the unique traits of sexual sin is its addictive nature. Stephen Arterburn, an author who has written extensively on sexual addiction, suggests that when sexual sin has moved to the level of addiction, it must be treated in a different way.¹³

Some of the indicators suggesting sexual addiction include *detachment*. Sex, the most personal of human behaviours, becomes utterly impersonal. Even when sex involves a partner, that partner is not really a person to whom the addict is relating but simply an interchangeable part in an impersonal process.¹⁴

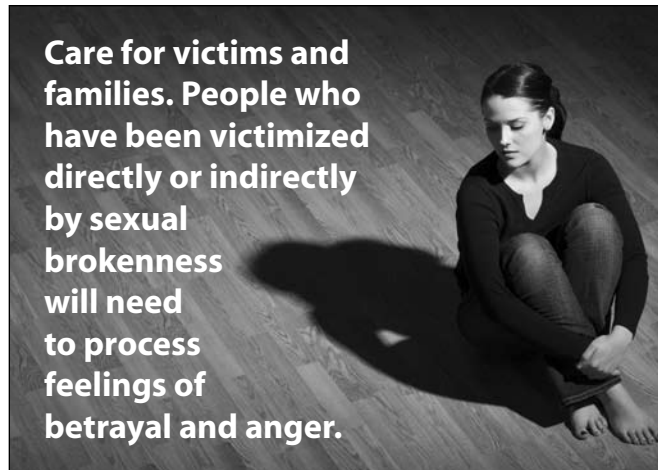
Another characteristic of addiction is that it is *cyclical*. Sexual activity or stimuli is used as a mood-altering drug. After the act, the sex addict feels guilt, shame, and self-reproach, often promising himself it will never happen again. Days or weeks later, however, the scene is repeated. Over time the addict becomes desensitized, needing more stimulation to produce the same results.

Given these and other variables, it is naïve to suggest a simple recipe outlining one common response to sexual sin. I

will, however, suggest a few important ingredients:

Reaffirm God's grace. God is able to bring healing and forgiveness. It is important to hold out the prospect of hope and dare to trust God for wholeness. Given the extensive damage that sexual sin often brings, you may need to ask God to give you compassion for the one who has sinned as you seek to minister to them. It is wise to remain humble in dealing with those who have failed sexually as we remember that "but for the grace of God, there go I."

Be there for the long haul. Particularly when sexual sin involves an addictive element, we must be prepared for a long recovery process with some setbacks. (It is worth noting that participants in Alcoholics Anonymous continue to view themselves as recovering alcoholics even after they have not consumed alcohol for years.) One should also be aware that



most addicts become consummate liars in order to maintain their double life. Test what they say.

Care for the victims and families. People who have been victimized directly or indirectly by sexual brokenness will need to process feelings of betrayal and anger with the goal of reaching forgiveness, even where reconciliation is not possible.

Accountability. At times those who have fallen into sexual sin will ask for forgiveness and expect forgiveness to mean the removal of consequences. Instead, we must view consequences and accountability as an integral part of the

healing process. This is particularly true for church leaders.

As leaders, we must be aware that there are certain boundaries that if crossed may make it impossible to re-enter the same ministry. To be reinstated in ministry will depend greatly on the sincerity of one's repentance evidenced by a willingness to submit to accountability and discipline.

Conclusion

Let me then conclude this presentation with the words of the apostle Paul, "I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received" (Ephesians 4:1). This certainly involves sexual integrity as we seek to pastor in this particular corner of dangerous ground. ☹

Online Resources

Christians For Sexual Integrity
www.sexualintegrity.org

Christians in Recovery
www.christians-in-recovery.com

Counseling Affiliates
www.sexaddictionhelp.com

Covenant Eyes (Internet Accountability Resource)
www.covenanteyes.com

Enough Is Enough
www.enough.org

Net Accountability
A Dallas-based non-profit that provides resources and raises awareness of the problems of Internet pornography.
www.netaccountablilty.com

Online Sexual Addiction (OSA)
Email: OSAinfo@onlinesexaddict.org
www.onlinesexaddict.com

Protectkids.com
www.protectkids.com

Pure Restoration Workshops
The *Pure Restoration Recovery Workshop* is an intensive, four day addiction recovery program for men who are ready to restore their lives to purity.
c/o The Net Accountability Foundation
660 Preston Forest Center
Dallas, TX 75230
1-888-580 PURE
www.purerestoration.com

Sexaholics Anonymous (SA)
www.sa.org

¹³ "Leadership Magazine: Freeing the Sex Addict", Summer 1995, page 73.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Baptized Eyes Revelation 1:9–20

Layton Friesen

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Revelation 1:9–20 (NIV)

⁹I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. ¹⁰On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, ¹¹which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."

¹²I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³and among the lampstands was someone "like a son of man," dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. ¹⁴His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. ¹⁵His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. ¹⁶In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

¹⁷When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. ¹⁸I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

¹⁹"Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later. ²⁰The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

Later on in this meeting we're going to invite a guy up here and dump a jug of water on his head. I'm sure he's had water dumped on his head countless times before and today it will happen to him again. That's all really baptism is: dumping water on dry people.

Is that what you think baptism is—just dousing a guy with a can of tap water? I hope not. But do we think of Jesus in those kinds of reductionist terms?

Like I said in my first sermon on Revelation a few weeks ago: The most important question in the Book of Revelation is the spiritually demanding question, and that is what you can imagine.

John is telling his churches: "If you could just see Jesus with baptized eyes, you would have a new worship. If you could just see your fumbling little congregation with baptized eyes, you wouldn't be so discouraged. If you could just see Rome with baptized eyes, you wouldn't be so quick to jump into bed with the Empire."

Folks, you and I need to be converted from believing with our physical eyes and ears to believing with a baptized imagination. This process takes years; it is symbolized in one simple ritual: Baptism.

The passage begins in verse 9: "I, John." On the bank of the river before your baptism John is just another guy, some preacher dude with another long speech; but when you're coming up out of the water, John has become your brother. John shares with you in Jesus the persecution and the kingdom and the patient endurance. He is on the island of Patmos.

Why is he on the island of Patmos?

When you're on the banks of the river before your baptism he's there because he probably got on the ugly side of a local politician who couldn't stand his tiresome ranting, and so the politician made some arrangements to get him exiled here. Good riddance to bad rubbish.

But when you're coming up out of the

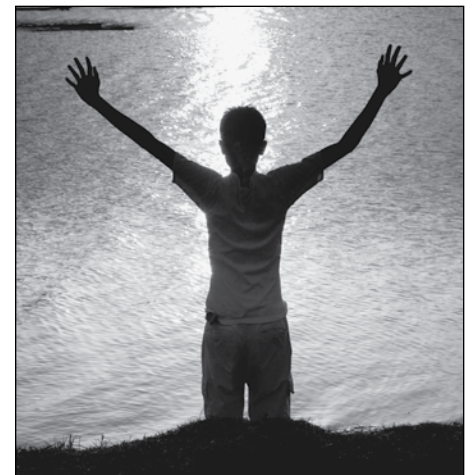
water John is here because of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus. He is here because he was the bullhorn of God, announcing to Asia Minor that Jesus is pressing in; and wherever Jesus presses in on the world, there is suffering and opposition.

What day is it? When you're going into the water it's just Sunday, the day named after the Roman god Sun. Or it's the last day of the weekend. Or it's your day off.

But when you're coming up out of the water, it's the Lord's Day—the day the stone table cracked, Jesus came out of the tomb. The day that great freight train called history came to a dead standstill, and then slowly started going in reverse.

What was John doing?

We need to be converted from believing with our physical eyes and ears to believing with a baptized imagination. This process takes years; it is symbolized in one simple ritual: Baptism.



When you're going down into the water to get baptized, John is just another freak, zoned out in some trance. Who knows what hallucination he's going to see in that state? But when you're coming out of the water (verse 10), John is in the Spirit.

He is not out of his mind. His sail is up and unfurled and the Spirit is blowing him along; the Spirit is doing the only thing the Spirit has any interest in doing with anybody, and that is showing him Jesus.

For whom is this message that John is about to write?

When your eyes are dry you only see a peasant who lived long ago. But when your eyes are weeping with the tears of baptismal water suddenly the Spirit in you says, "Look!" And you look and this person that before had seemed so insignificant is gone—and you realize things are not what they seem.

When your head is dry you see a motley assortment of churches—a pathetic bunch, really—some too weak to stand, some too tired to go on, some too cold to lift a finger, some too poor to pay heed, and some on life support. But when the water starts coming down over your head into your eyes, you see these churches are *seven*—the number of fullness. In all their human limitations they are seven, the universal catholic church of Christ in all times and in all the world and in all truth.

John is told to write in a book what he sees and send it to these seven.

He turns to see the voice speaking to him. And what does he see?

When your heart is dry and crusty—parched from lack of water—you see a shabby little group of churches that are of no use whatsoever to anything their world thinks is important. These churches are useless.

The world around them thinks religion has an extremely important role to play in the function of society. But these churches are useless.

But when the water of life starts soaking down into the dry crust of your heart, you look up again and see seven golden lampstands. Hammered out of gold, brilliant and expensive.

Together the seven are a flood of light—fire rising out of each—streaming off the brilliance of the gold. A shining light illuminating the dark. These churches have a mission.

Who really cares about these churches?

With a mind wrapped in darkness you see these churches long abandoned by their founder, a fellow I think they called Jesus. He left them sixty years ago. Most of the people cannot remember him. Back then he walked with them. Back then apparently he protected them. Back then apparently he guided and taught them. But now these churches are alone. Nobody cares about them.

But then the light of the seven lampstands blaze up in your mind you look again and see an awesome figure right in the middle of the seven—not somewhere way above them in a distant heaven, not somewhere outside looking in—but right in the middle of them all one like the Son of Man.

This alive, powerful, awe-inspiring Son of Man could not come any closer to them than he is.

He is there. He is present. He knows exactly what is going on.

In the seven letters to the churches in chapters 2 and 3 we will hear this Son of Man say over and over: I know. I know your works. I know your toil. I know your affliction. I know your poverty.

I know you happen to live where Satan's throne is. I know your works of love. I know your reputation for being alive when in fact you are dead. I know you are neither hot nor cold. I know. I can see it. I'm standing right here beside you. I can see it.

Who is this Son of Man?

When your eyes are dry you see a couple of old stories tucked away in that book some people read—the Christian Bible. Interesting stories perhaps, worth reading if you're into the literature of the period, but this person amounts to



a few words on a couple of crusty old manuscripts.

When your eyes are dry you only see a peasant who lived long ago.

When your eyes are dry you only see one more of an endless parade of religious leaders that have come and gone across history.

When your eyes are dry you see someone who was not able to accomplish much—left the world long before he finished the job of ending guilt. He left the world with as much slavery to self as he found it. He left long before the loneliness of isolation had been ended.

When you see with dry eyes you see someone with little wisdom. Someone so stuck in his little time that he could have nothing important to say to any other culture.

When you see with dry eyes you look into his eyes and you see plain old eyes—ordinary human eyes you can hide from, eyes that can't see you where you are, eyes that probably would not recognize you, eyes that leave you cold.

When you see his feet with dry eyes you may see the dusty, cracked feet of a walking preacher. You see the feet of a criminal with a rusty nail pounded through, broken, useless.

When your eyes are dry you hear a voice that is weak and frail and human—a voice that commands no attention, a voice everybody can safely ignore, a voice muffled and reduced to print, a voice that will never rise above the sound of the crowd in the amphitheatre, a voice that will never rise above the commotion of your children just before supper.

It's a human voice. A normal voice you can listen to if you want; if not, just tune it out and listen to another voice.

When you see with dry eyes his face is simply another face in the crowd. You couldn't pick him out at a party. By tomorrow his face will be erased from your memory—when you see with dry eyes.

But when your eyes are weeping with the tears of baptismal water you see what John sees. Suddenly the Spirit in you says, "Look!" And you look and this person that before had seemed so insignificant, so average, so gone, so 20 centuries ago is gone, the veil is torn away—and you realize things are not what they seem. You had been tricked.

It's the Son of Man, the Ancient of Days from Daniel. He is wearing the robe of a priest—the great priest who has connected God and his people. This is the one who did it!

His voice is like the sound of many waters. Take the Maid of the Mist to the foot of the Niagara Falls sometime and feel the thunder in your chest as the water roars over the edge and rams the rocks below. This Son of Man has a voice like that.

He has a sash, a belt. It's gold! But it's not around his waist like someone ready to work. No, this sash is slung across his chest, like someone who has finished his work. The priest has brought God and creation together. Guilt is over. Slavery is obsolete. Loneliness is history. He is done. He will not need to do anything more about that—ever.

His head and hair are white as white wool, white as snow. If you take every scrap of wisdom, everything that is true about creation, everything that is right about God, all the wisdom in the mind of God and creation, if you take all that wisdom and put it into one person, this is him! Pure, spotless, uncorrupted.

His eyes are like a flame of fire. They burn through everything like laser. He sees through every lie we've ever succeeded at. All the nice things we did for questionable motives, he stares through. The little images of competence and power and personality we've managed to patch together for ourselves, he stares through. The little sins we hide, the things we would be embarrassed to have anyone else know about, he sees. His eyes are like a flame of fire.

His feet are burnished bronze. These are not the feet of mixed iron and clay that Nebuchadnezzar saw in his vision of the kingdoms of the world, shaky and unstable.

These feet are stable. They are strong. They are planted. They will never crumble. No nail can ever pierce these feet.

His voice is like the sound of many waters. Take the Maid of the Mist to the foot of the Niagara Falls sometime and feel the thunder in your chest as the water roars over the edge and rams the rocks below. This Son of Man has a voice like that.



In his hand he holds seven stars. These seven stars are the seven angels of the seven churches. These angels represent the churches in the heavenly places. And all seven stars are in the hand of this Son of Man. He holds them in one hand.

Out of his mouth comes a sharp, two-edged sword. His words are not lost, his words are not muffled, his words are not insignificant. You can't just tune them out. His words have the power and the authority to separate, to cut through the confusing and cluttered tangle of human life—cutting off, cutting out everything that has ignored God till now.

When you look at his face you feel like you are staring at the sun on a clear day. Dazzling, burning when you face it head on, you instinctively know to turn away. His face is like the sun shining with full force.

When your eyes are flowing with the tears of baptism, you see this. And John did see it, he had a conversion and he fell at his feet as though dead. Like Isaiah: "Woe is me! I am lost for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of the Armies!"

When this Son of Man sees John lying there like a dead man, he says no, no. He reaches out his right hand—the one with the seven stars—and says do not

be afraid. Do not shrink from being a human being. I am the First and the Last, and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have got the keys on me.

You go ahead and die. You go ahead and suffer. Let the beast spit all his venom in your face—he tried that one on me, he will try it on you—I have the keys to death and the grave.

Friends, I said a few weeks ago that Revelation is probably the most spiritually demanding book in the Bible.

John is showing us that if we cannot see the Son of Man like this, if for us he is any less, then we need to be baptized.

O Lord, baptize our eyes to see the Son of Man!

O Spirit, anoint our minds to understand the Son of Man like this.

O God, wash away the illusions. May we come to see what John saw! May we come to see our church this way!

Our world constantly throws another

god up in our faces, trying to convince us that now, here, finally, we have the saviour; now at last the Lord has arrived.

But today John is calling us higher. I want to close with the words of a man who saw more of the 20th century's claims to power than just about anyone else.

He travelled the world for years as a journalist, documenting the rise and fall of every leader and movement the 20th century believed in at some point.

The words of the Englishman Malcolm Muggeridge near the end of his life, after he had seen it all:

We look back on history and what do we see? Empires rising and falling, revolutions and counter-revolutions, wealth accumulating and wealth dispersed, one nation dominant and then another. In one lifetime I have seen my own fellow countrymen ruling over a quarter of the world, the great majority of them convinced, in the words of what is still a favourite song, that, 'God who's made the mighty

would make them mightier yet.' I've heard a crazed, cracked Austrian proclaim to the world the establishment of a German Reich that would last a thousand years; an Italian clown announce that he would restart the calendar to begin his own assumption of power. I've heard a murderous Georgian brigand in the Kremlin acclaimed by the intellectual elite of the world as wiser than Solomon, more enlightened than Ashoka, more humane than Marcus Aurelius. I've seen America wealthier and in terms of weaponry, more powerful than the rest of the world put together, so that Americans, had they so wished, could have outdone an Alexander or a Julius Caesar in the range and scale of their conquests. All in one little lifetime. All gone with the wind. England, part of a tiny island off the coast of Europe, threatened with dismemberment and even bankruptcy. Hitler and Mussolini dead, remembered only in infamy. Stalin a forbidden name in the regime he helped found and dominate for some three decades. America haunted by fears of running out of those precious fluids that keep her motorways roaring, and the smog settling... All in one lifetime, all gone. Gone with the wind. Behind the debris of these self-styled, sullen supermen and imperial diplomatists, there stands the gigantic figure of one person, because of whom, by whom, in whom, and through whom alone mankind might still have hope. The person of Jesus Christ.

And it is this Jesus Christ that I present to you. ☉

“We look back on history and what do we see? Empires rising and falling, revolutions and counter-revolutions, wealth accumulating and wealth dispersed, one nation dominant and then another...all gone. Gone with the wind. Behind the debris of these self-styled, sullen supermen and imperial diplomatists, there stands the gigantic figure of one person, because of whom, by whom, in whom, and through whom alone mankind might still have hope. The person of Jesus Christ.”



Book Review

***The Prophetic Imagination: Revised Edition*, Walter Brueggemann (Augsburg Fortress, 2001), 178 pp., \$18, ISBN 0-8006-3287-7.** Reviewed by Andrew Reimer, pastor, North End Community Church, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

In *The Prophetic Imagination*, Walter Brueggemann explores his hypothesis that “the task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us” (3). He argues that this alternative consciousness serves to criticize the dominant consciousness and energize people and communities to move in the direction of the hopeful alternative promised by God. Brueggemann shows how this hypothesis emerges from the Biblical tradition of prophesy embodied in Moses, the prophets, and the life and message of Jesus.

The book begins with a chapter devoted to showing how the biblical prophetic tradition has its roots in the alternative community-forming ministry of Moses. In Egyptian society under Pharaoh, a religion of static gods is used to prop up an oppressive status quo, whereas in the alternative community founded by Moses, a politics of justice and compassion emerge in the actions of a sovereign and free God (6-8). Brueggemann shows the roots of prophetic criticism in the cries of the enslaved Israelite people “bringing hurt to public expression” (12). Moses’ prophetic action of taking sides with the powerless, marginal Israelites and proclaiming God’s favour has an energizing effect (16-18).

From here, Brueggemann introduces the idea of “royal consciousness” embodied in Solomon’s reign. Rather than embrace Moses’ vision of God’s hopeful future, Solomon created a satiated (and uncriticized) present, in which everything had already been attained (25). Brueggemann focuses on the way in which affluent economics and oppressive politics depend upon and are legitimized by “the religion of the captive God” (30). Brueggemann highlights the similarities between the royal consciousness in Solomon’s reign and our contemporary North American state of affairs.

Chapters three and four explore how the prophets of Israel nurtured an alternative consciousness. Brueggemann

says “the vocation of the prophet [is] to keep alive the ministry of imagination, to keep on conjuring and proposing futures alternative to the single one the king wants to urge as the only thinkable one” (40). Jeremiah is offered as the clearest example of prophetic *criticism* through “articulated grief” (46-48). Jeremiah mourns the reality that the royal consciousness refuses to acknowledge—



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namely, the end of the kingdom and the death of the people (47). By giving voice to grief he cuts through the numbness of the dominant consciousness. Several examples are given of how the prophet gives voice to the grief of the people and also to the grief of God himself (49-55). Through prophetic mourning, false kings are dethroned and leave room for the coming of God’s kingdom.

In situations of hopelessness, Brueggemann says, prophets *energize* as they offer symbols of hope, bring public expression to hope, and speak about newness that redefines our situation (63-67). He gives several examples of Isaiah’s “language of amazement,” also referred to as “doxology,” creating hope where there was only despair (69-79). He explains that “the language of amazement is against the despair just as the language of grief is against the numbness” (68). The prophet’s words energize weary and hopeless people by engaging their imagination with images of the newness God can and will bring about in the midst of their exilic circumstances.

For most of the remainder of the book Brueggemann explores Jesus of Nazareth’s place in the prophetic tradition of criticism and energizing. By reflecting on Jesus’ birth, his announcement of the Kingdom, his compassion, and his crucifixion, the first chapter on Jesus shows how his life and actions criticized the royal consciousness. Brueggemann observes that Jesus’ “ultimate criticism is his decisive solidarity with marginal people and the accompanying vulnerability required by that solidarity” (82). The chapter concludes by stating that the crucifixion of Jesus is the “full expression of dismantling that has been practiced and insisted upon in the prophetic tradition since Moses” by “articulat[ing] God’s odd freedom, his strange justice, and his peculiar power...[which] break the power of the old age and bring it to death” (99).

The second chapter on Jesus shows how he is the “fulfillment and quintessence of the prophetic tradition” as his life, words and works energized people. Brueggemann explores how Jesus

brings new energy through his birth, ministry, teachings, and resurrection. To the marginal and suffering ones in the present order, Jesus offers hope of a new future possible in the action of God. This new future is initiated in "the ultimate act of prophetic energizing," the resurrection of Jesus (113). Brueggemann concludes the book with a brief chapter on the practice of prophetic ministry in contemporary life.

The Prophetic Imagination paints a picture of prophetic ministry that is of value to the Church both for interpreting the Scriptures and for the ministry of the Church.

First, Brueggemann's exposition provides a way of reading biblical prophesy that provides a corrective to both conventional liberal and conservative misconceptions. My faith background has been mostly influenced by conservative ways of understanding prophesy, which Brueggemann summarizes thus: "the prophet is a fortune-teller, a predictor of things to come (mostly ominous), usually with specific reference to Jesus" (2). While the author affirms that prophets do speak about the future, he clarifies that "they are concerned with the future as it impinges upon the present"(2); in other words, prophetic references to the future are meant to energize people to begin living out God's new future in the present as an alternative community.

Throughout his study, Brueggemann roots the message of Moses, the prophets, and Jesus in their historical, social, and political contexts. Too often, conservative Christians in their reading of prophetic texts get preoccupied by attempting to identify the future events being referred to by the prophet, and in the process miss the social and political significance the prophet's words would have had for the hearers of his/her own time.

Unfortunately, Brueggemann fails

Brueggemann explores how Jesus brings new energy through his birth, ministry, teachings, and resurrection. To the marginal and suffering ones in the present order, Jesus offers hope of a new future possible in the action of God.

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to discuss some texts that conservatives often interpret in the "fortune-teller predictions" vein, such as Daniel, Revelation, some of the New Testament epistles, and the words of Jesus himself on the end of the age. It would have been helpful if he had clarified how his understanding of prophecy is consistent with these texts. In any case, this book provides a helpful corrective to conventional conservative and liberal ways of interpreting biblical prophecy. In this evaluation I have focused on its benefit to conservative Christians in particular.

When we can recognize the criticizing and energizing impact of the biblical prophet in his/her own time, then we can begin to imagine what words and actions can have a similar criticizing and energizing impact in our own socio-political context. This brings me to my second evaluation in relation to the book's value for the ministry of the church. In Brueggemann's study of the biblical prophetic tradition he provides solid support for an understanding of

prophetic ministry, which he hopes believers will seek to live out in their contemporary situation. Nurturing a consciousness that is alternative to the dominant "royal consciousness" is a role we need to see as being fundamental to our existence as a Christian community today.

We can benefit from Brueggemann's description of both criticism and energizing. The challenge before us in the North American church is to begin by grieving our identification with, and legitimating of, the "royal consciousness" of ethnocentrism, conquest, and global consumerism and the resulting violence and exploitation enacted on those who are not "in." Then, we are challenged to imaginatively seek to live out a hopeful alternative in our current context that is rooted in the new future that is possible because of God's freedom to enact justice and compassion in history. In this book Brueggemann deepens our understanding of what it means to be sent by Jesus as he was sent. ☹

TheoDidaktos

Journal for EMC theology and education

TheoDidaktos: Journal for EMC theology and education invites essays, book reviews, and articles for consideration.

Editor Darryl Klassen, senior pastor at Kleefeld EMC, can be contacted at 204-377-4773, kemc@mts.net, or Box 344, Kleefeld, MB R0A 0V0. Essay length is a maximum of 3,500 words.

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The Final Word

I see the perils which have daily surrounded us from the beginning. So many souls are deceived by false prophecies, smooth words, sham holiness, faked power, the boasting and the false promises of the Antichrists and the false prophets who are intent upon their own honor, fame, and gain under a semblance of God's Word. Such was the case with the popes of Rome, with John of Leiden, with those of Münster, and others. Therefore I deem it necessary, sincerely to warn and admonish all beloved readers in the Lord not to accept my doctrine as the Gospel of Jesus Christ until they have weighed it in the balance of the Spirit and the Word of the Lord, that they may not place their faith in me nor in any teacher or writer, but solely in Christ Jesus.

– Menno Simons, 1539

“Why I Do Not Cease Writing and Teaching,”
The Complete Writings of Menno Simons
(Herald Press, 1956, 1984), p. 311

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