



# Going Deeper

Guidance on Six Key Themes  
in Anabaptism



**emc**

*Published by the Evangelical Mennonite Conference*





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*Published by the Board of Church Ministries*

*Evangelical Mennonite Conference*

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# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	5
<b>A Working Definition of Evangelical Anabaptism</b> .....	7
<b>Lesson One</b>	
Discipleship: To 'Walk with God' .....	11
<b>Lesson Two</b>	
Believer's Baptism: the Call to Responsible Commitment .....	21
<b>Lesson Three</b>	
Community: God's Design for Humanity .....	39
<b>Lesson Four</b>	
Hermeneutics: Interpreting Scripture with a Focus on Christ .....	51
<b>Lesson Five</b>	
The Church and the State: Principles and Imagination .....	67
<b>Lesson Six</b>	
Preaching Peace: Imitating the Presence of Jesus .....	81



# To assist your congregation in *Going Deeper!*

Before you is *Going Deeper: Guidance on Six Key Themes in Anabaptism*.

These Lectionary/Preaching Aids are given to strengthen our churches in discipleship and understanding and offered to assist those who guide congregations within our EM Conference.

From 2004 to 2008 our national Evangelical Anabaptist Committee sought to strengthen our commitment to the EMC *Statement of Faith*. It researched where our conference was at and produced materials. In 2008 it forwarded its final report to the Board of Church Ministries and the Board of Leadership and Outreach. One recommendation within it was to produce materials such as these.

The six themes chosen are discipleship, believer's baptism, community, hermeneutics, church and state, and peace.

What do we seek to put before you? A bit of:

- a **Lectionary**, selected Scripture readings for public worship service use
- a **Preaching Aid**, a guide toward interpreting the Lessons of the Church Year
- a **Service Order**, elements used to guide Christians in a service of worship

These lessons contain some or all of these elements. The authors were to provide Scripture readings (Old Testament, Gospel, and wider New Testament) with a brief exposition and guidance on the theme. Some provided hymns, choruses, prayers, and blessings. Later, we asked Jennifer Kornelsen to provide such items for three lessons besides her own.

While the EMC does not have an official church year, our congregations are influenced by Christian and secular times on the calendar. By providing this material, we hope pastor-teachers (Ephesians 4:11) will plan to provide yearly teaching on these themes.

Our EM Conference is a voluntary association; our interpretation of Scripture is safeguarded by being connected with each other. Aware of both of these realities, we hope and desire that our churches will highlight what are, in some circles, neglected emphases of Scripture within our common church life.

No attempt has been made to force these materials into an artificial uniformity. The lesson results vary. In matters of format and style, insights have been gained through

this process that will assist the BCM in the future production of similar materials.

We are grateful to William McCaskell, Dr. Harvey Plett, Jennifer Kornelsen, Stephanie Unger, Henry Friesen, Eric Jordan Doerksen, Layton Friesen, and Dr. Arden Thiessen for providing lesson materials. Special thanks go to Jennifer Kornelson for providing additional worship materials upon our request.

As well, we have included *A Working Definition of Evangelical Anabaptism* prepared by then EAC member Pastor Ed Peters and consultant Dr. Terry Hiebert as an internal working document of the EAC.

Henry Friesen, former EAC and current BCM member, had the idea for this project. He provided coordination and oversight, enlisting writers. Executive secretary Terry Smith assisted in oversight, through editing, and by writing this introduction. Administrative assistant Rebecca Roman offered counsel, designed the layout, copied the pages, and collated the books. Gerald Reimer, conference youth minister, offered counsel.

We trust that these labours will be useful to you. May Christ bless and guide you in your preaching/teaching ministry!

*Board of Church Ministries*  
*Evangelical Mennonite Conference*

**Fall 2010**



# A Working Definition of Evangelical Anabaptism

*by Pastor Ed Peters and Dr. Terry Hiebert*

## Introduction

The challenge in defining “Evangelical Anabaptism” lies in the scope and precision of such a definition, as there is a great variety of belief and practices within both Anabaptism and Evangelicalism. This particular definition is not intended to be exhaustive but merely provide a framework that captures the core values of Evangelical Anabaptism as reflected in the EMC. These values are also contrasted with mainstream Evangelicalism/Fundamentalism in the hopes that a contrast will help bring the unique nature of Evangelical Anabaptism into sharper focus. (It should be noted, however, that this contrast deals only in generalities and runs the risk of oversimplification.) With this in mind, the following values are highlighted.

## Evangelical Anabaptism is...

1. **Biblical:** Commitment to the scriptures (both Old and New Testaments) is foundational and serves as the authority for faith and life.

Fundamentalism has strongly emphasized the inerrancy of scripture as a test of orthodoxy. While Anabaptism also holds a high view of scripture (the EMC statement of faith calls the Bible “inspired and infallible”) the emphasis has been to discover Christ through the witness of the Scriptures. Thus orthodoxy was seen not as a creed, but in a life of obedience to the teaching and life of Jesus.

2. **Christ-Centred:** Jesus Christ is the head of the Church, providing salvation through grace. The person, life and teachings of Jesus serve as a model of conduct for the believer. (This perspective has given rise to the emphasis of beliefs such as simplicity, non-swearing of oaths and embracing suffering/cross as a mark of discipleship.) Christ serves as the starting point of theology and hermeneutics. Both the Old Testament and the rest of the New Testament are interpreted from the Gospels. The Old Testament points to Jesus Christ. The epistles find their meaning in the person of Jesus. (See Paul M. Lederach, *A Third Way* [Herald Press, 1980], 19.)

A couple of contrasts to Evangelicalism are worth noting. First, it seems that while many traditions focus on the *work* of the cross;

Anabaptists have focused on the *way* of the cross. Furthermore, other theological positions within Evangelicalism seem to begin with the Old Testament. Here Jesus and the church are merely a continuation of the story of Israel or an interval before God works with Israel again. This can affect beliefs in areas such as infant baptism (where baptism is based on the Old Testament practice of circumcision) or one's view on participation in war.

- 3. Missional:** The mission of the church is holistic. It includes an evangelistic mandate to declare salvation through Jesus Christ, making disciples of all nations, and the service mandate to love your neighbour as yourself.

There has been a growing awareness of the need to be holistic (addressing physical, social, structural as well as spiritual needs) in mission work within Evangelicalism. This emphasis has been a part of the Anabaptist tradition.

- 4. Discipleship:** The gospel of God's saving grace is to be combined with God's empowering grace. The experience of the New Birth is expressed in a life of Christian discipleship that gives tangible evidence of the gift of grace. Believers should not be satisfied with a mere confession of faith that is unaccompanied by visible fruit. Works do not earn or deserve salvation. Rather, they demonstrate and nurture a living faith.

The emphasis in Evangelicalism has traditionally been the invitation for sinners to "believe in Jesus." Thus the important question in Evangelical faith has been, "Have you accepted Jesus Christ as Saviour?" In contrast, Anabaptism has typically place more emphasis upon conversion as a process involving a call to take up your cross and follow. Here the verification of genuine conversion is a life of discipleship. This difference in emphasis has, generally speaking, resulted in Anabaptists rejecting the doctrine of eternal security, instead emphasizing the believer's responsibility and choice to daily walk with Christ.

- 5. Community:** The followers of Jesus are called out of the world and into commitment to one another called the church. Importance is placed upon mutual dependence, equality, accountability, church discipline and group discernment. Water baptism is the confession of a personal faith and marks the point of identification with the visible body of Christ.

Evangelicalism has been fostered and developed in a cultural environment that values individualism. This has resulted in an

emphasis in a “personal” relationship with Jesus with less emphasis on accountability and church membership.

- 6. Servanthood:** Just as Christ came to be a servant to all, so Christians should serve one another and others in the name of Christ. This attitude of servanthood should be evident in all areas of life including interpersonal relationships as well as church leadership structure.

Although Evangelicalism would agree with the principle of servanthood, it often is not reflected in church structure or leadership styles. While Anabaptists have traditionally emphasized group leadership and congregational government, other traditions often reflect a corporate/business model of top-down leadership.

- 7. Peace:** At the heart of the Christian life is finding peace with God through Jesus Christ and living at peace with one another. Believers are called to love one another—even our enemies—seeking to be instruments of reconciliation and tolerance. Instead of taking up arms, believers should seek to do whatever they can to reduce human distress and suffering.

While agreeing to the principles of forgiveness and love for enemies on a inter-personal level; Evangelicalism has nevertheless frequently supported and aided governments in international armed conflicts. Anabaptists were leaders in the concepts of religious tolerance and the separation of church and state. They did not believe in the practice of swearing oaths.

*This document was produced for the EMC’s Evangelical Anabaptist Committee, which operated from 2004 to 2008. Ed Peters is pastor of the Evangelical Fellowship Church in Steinbach, Man., and was a member of the EAC. Dr. Terry Hiebert is a professor at Steinbach Bible College and served as a consultant to the EAC.*

Terry Hiebert has said about the *Working Definition*: “The contrast with evangelicalism may need to be refined some time. The evangelicalism described is a version of evangelicalism that reached its peak in 1984. You might want to use an adjective like conventional, mainstream, traditional, or another better term. Check Robert Webber’s short history of evangelicalism in the introductory chapter of *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches*.” It is important to note that the *Working Definition* has no official standing, but is offered as information.



## Lectionary Readings:

*Genesis 5:21–24*

*John 12:20–36*

*1 Peter 2:20–24*



## Discipleship: To ‘Walk With God’

*by William McCaskell*

In many ways the word *discipleship* is frequently thought of to be synonymous with Anabaptism. Yet, often our current understanding of discipleship may dramatically differ from the early Anabaptists and their understanding of what it was to be a disciple of Jesus Christ in the sixteenth century.

### Discipleship is *Gelassenheit*

C. Arnold Snyder in his book on Anabaptist spirituality, *Following in the Footsteps of Christ*,<sup>1</sup> argues that the underlying foundation for discipleship among these radical reformers was their unwavering commitment to an attitude and lifestyle of surrendering or yielding (*Gelassenheit*) to God, which sprung from a deep belief in fearing God, trusting in God’s sovereignty and responding to God out of humility.

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1 C. Arnold Snyder, *Following in the Footsteps of Christ* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004), 32.

Essentially the more one is inwardly yielded to God, the more one is able to express this same attitude in a lifestyle of discipleship.

The three texts we are exploring are deeply rooted in Anabaptist thought and life as they are quoted in one of the earliest collections of important biblical texts for the sixteenth century Anabaptists—a topical concordance of the Bible consisting of a collection of biblical texts compiled sometime between 1529 and 1540. At least fourteen German editions and one Dutch edition were published from 1540 to 1710, making it, next to the *Ausbund* hymn collection, the most frequently published work of the Anabaptists.

The concordance does not contain a word of commentary or guide in interpreting the Scripture references or biblical texts that are listed. Rather, it consists of approximately 150 pages of Scripture references covering just over 65 topics, prioritized in importance by the sixteenth century compilers of the concordance. The first five topics are Fear of God, Repentance, Discipleship (where our three texts are found), Rebirth, and Service of God.

Our relationship with God begins as we yield to God's will, and our relationship continues as we surrender our will daily in our walk with our Lord.

In our three texts you will notice a metaphorical motif: that of walking with God. For the evangelical Anabaptist, the awareness that the Christian life is a journey that one undertakes with the Spirit's empowerment

is at the heart of our understanding of discipleship. For as we are born of the Spirit, we are enabled to walk this road of following our Saviour; our relationship with God begins as we yield to God's will, and our relationship continues as we surrender our will daily in our walk with our Lord.

## **Old Testament Reading: Genesis 5:21–24** (Enoch walked faithfully with God)

<sup>21</sup>When Enoch had lived sixty-five years, he became the father of Methuselah. <sup>22</sup>Enoch walked with God after the birth of Methuselah three hundred years, and had other sons and daughters. <sup>23</sup>Thus all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty-five years.

<sup>24</sup>Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him (NSRV).

In a chapter of the Bible that is comprised of capturing the rhythm of life—life, passing on life, and death—there is one character among the many that stand against that rhythm; and if we are not careful, we can miss the significance of this particular man, Enoch.

Enoch lived for a total of 365 years; he passed on life by fathering a son named Methuselah; Enoch, however, the author points out, did not die, for he “walked with God... and God took him.” In a time when life was longer than it is now, death was still present. The account of Enoch brings hope that death will not always have the final say, that one day the effects of death will be negated because one can “walk with God.”

In fact, it is that phrase to which we want to turn our attention: “Enoch walked with God.” The author says it twice. The phrase “walked with” comes from the Hebrew stem word *hithpa’el*, denoting intimate fellowship almost to the point of “to live with.” Interestingly, the only other person this phrase is used for is Noah in Genesis 6:9 in a slightly intensified form.<sup>2</sup> If one were to read this verse in a variety of translations we would notice that many of the thought-for-thought translations (TNIV, NLT, etc.) attempt to capture the significance behind this phrase.<sup>3</sup>

When the author chose to describe Enoch in this way it was to communicate the closeness that existed between Enoch and God, a familiarity, a relationship. The author of Hebrews picks up on this truth by describing Enoch’s walk of faith in the famous “Faith Chapter” (Hebrews 11) as a faith pleasing to God.

## **Gospel Reading: John 12:20–36**

(Jesus invites his followers to walk faithfully with him)

<sup>20</sup>Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. <sup>21</sup>They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” <sup>22</sup>Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. <sup>23</sup>Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. <sup>24</sup>Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. <sup>25</sup>Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. <sup>26</sup>Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

<sup>27</sup>“Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. <sup>28</sup>Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” <sup>29</sup>The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.”

<sup>30</sup>Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. <sup>31</sup>Now is the

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2 R. J. D. Utley (2001). *Vol. 1A: How it All Began: Genesis 1–11*. Study Guide Commentary Series (68). Marshall, Texas: Bible Lessons International.

3 This is seen in the adverb “faithfully” being associated with “walked” in these versions (i.e., Enoch walked faithfully with God).

judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. <sup>32</sup>And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” <sup>33</sup>He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

<sup>34</sup>The crowd answered him, “We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?” <sup>35</sup>Jesus said to them, “The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. <sup>36</sup>While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light” (NSRV).

There were many people in Jesus’ day who were interested in seeing him. After all, Jesus was fascinating to listen to, he was popular, and he appeared to be the leader of a movement that could have far-reaching political and religious implications (this passage immediately follows what is known as the triumphal entry of Christ into Jerusalem). It is of no surprise that men and women from the far reaches of the Roman Empire had a desire to see Jesus.<sup>4</sup>

Yet Jesus, despite all his popularity, was not that interested in people simply “seeing him.” Rather, he had a great desire that they would learn to follow him, to walk the path he was about to walk. The path that Jesus was on would, of course, lead to his death. It would, in turn, lead to a new way that Jews and Greeks could follow Christ together—which Christ interestingly foreshadows in the way he responds to the news of visitors arriving from Greece.<sup>5</sup>

In light of our topic, our attention turns to verses 35 and 36, where Jesus encourages his followers to walk in the light while the light remained with them. To walk in the light is to believe in and learn from Jesus, the Son of God, and then, as children of the light, to continue to walk as Jesus walked, though Jesus would be no longer physically present. See 1 John 2:6: “Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did” (NIV).

To walk in the light involved both believing Jesus and imitating Jesus. As David Augsburg writes in *Dissident Discipleship*, there are four questions to ask oneself regarding the practice of radical attachment to Jesus: “Do you believe the story of Jesus? Do you believe in Jesus? Do you believe Jesus? Do you believe what Jesus believed?” It is these last two questions, Augsburg argues, that begin to point us in the direction of true discipleship—a discipleship that focuses on the yielding of our will to God’s in order that a life can truly experience what it is to follow the Son of God.

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4 These men from the *west* represent, at the end of Christ’s life, what the wise men from the *east* represented at its beginning; one group came to the manger of a baby, the other to the cross of a King.

5 “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (John 12:32 NRSV).



It is interesting to contrast Enoch, who walked with God and God took him, with the first disciples, who also walked with God by responding to that command of our Lord, “Follow me!” Rather than being taken by God, they were, through the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, given the supernatural responsibility to bear the light of God to a world of darkness; others who have yet to walk with God were to be given an opportunity to do so, because of the children of God who remain.

This responsibility and privilege of being light or God-bearers to the world is possible because we are willing to yield ourselves to God, willing to surrender our will to God’s will. We are, in the words of Christ, willing to “hate our life” and even “lose our life.” For the early Anabaptist, these words of Christ expressed the fundamental truth of discipleship—an uncompromising yielding to the will of God, regardless the cost.

As Anabaptists, we believe that “walking with God” is to be more than a platitude that is bantered about. It is to be demonstrated in real life situations.

To describe this attitude and action in such sharp terms as *hating* and *losing* are similar to Luke’s account (Luke 14:26) and echoes the Old Testament wisdom literature’s use of the words, where the word “hate” means “to leave aside, renounce, abandon” (as in Proverbs 8:13, where “the fear of the Lord is hatred of evil, renouncing evil”).<sup>6</sup>

### **Epistle Reading: 1 Peter 2:20–24**

(We are invited to walk faithfully with Christ, regardless of the cost)

<sup>20</sup>If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God’s approval. <sup>21</sup>For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps.

<sup>22</sup>“He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.”

<sup>23</sup>When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. <sup>24</sup>He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed (NRSV).

As Anabaptists, we believe that “walking with God” is to be more than a platitude that is bantered about. It is to be demonstrated in real life situations. It is to be displayed even when, or especially when, it is not natural or easy. In fact, to follow in the steps of our Saviour means that we look to Christ as our example—an example that includes

6 Athol Gill, *Life on the Road* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1992), 79.

suffering for doing what is right and entrusting one's will and one's well-being to the wise and holy judgement of God. It is, again, a picture of an uncompromising yielding to the will of God, regardless the cost.

In verse 20, the NRSV speaks of the believer enduring what is right and suffering for what is right as having the “approval” of God; the word for approval interestingly is *charis* in Greek, the same word that is often translated “grace.” Other versions translate *charis* in this verse as “commendable with God” (TNIV) or “a gracious thing with God” (ESV). In the Greek text it is literally “grace before God.”

It is interesting to note that Peter ties suffering to the Christian calling and a specific type of suffering—suffering that is modeled after Christ's suffering. The word for *example* (*hupogrammon*) is used only here in the New Testament, though it was used by the early church father Clement of Alexandria to describe the “letters of the alphabet for children to copy.”<sup>7</sup> The example of Christ that Peter specifically refers is shown in the events of the Messiah's death, as he makes clear in verses 22–24.

For Peter, the idea of walking with God and following Christ was certainly more than an abstract belief.

For Peter, the idea of walking with God and following Christ was certainly more than an abstract belief. He was first called to follow God by Christ himself (Matthew 5:11); he also tried to follow God by keeping his distance from Christ after the Messiah's arrest (Matthew 26:58), which ended in Peter denying he knew his Lord. It is particularly noteworthy that we see in this letter that

Peter uses the word *epakolouthein* for “follow,” which indicates closeness to the one you follow. To which Peter further explains exactly how one is to follow, “in his steps.”<sup>8</sup> By imitating the example of Jesus, we will closely “follow in his steps” (literally, “footsteps”).

This passage, and particularly 1 Peter 2:21, was one of the passages most frequently quoted and referred to by the early Anabaptists to describe what it was to be a disciple of Christ. Dirk Philips, Menno Simons, and Pilgrim Marpeck all frequently quote and expand on this passage of 1 Peter. Michael Sattler, in his well-known Schleithem Confession, says that believers are to “follow Jesus” in declining to serve as an earthly

7 Erland Water and J. Daryl Charles, *Believer's Church Commentary 1–2 Peter and Jude* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 2000), 93.

8 Norman Hillyer, *New International Biblical Commentary – 1 and 2 Peter, Jude* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers), 84.

ruler: “Peter also says, Christ suffered for us (not ruled), that you should follow after his steps.”<sup>9</sup>

As disciples of Christ, we can have the assurance that if we follow in our Lord’s footsteps and it leads to suffering, God’s grace rests upon us. It is the same grace that took Enoch to be with God; the same grace that enables us to be children of light and bear the presence of God to a dark world; and the same grace that gives us the strength and ability to remain faithful, yielded to the will of God, even if it means suffering. This grace can only be experienced as we learn to surrender our will to God’s will and in doing so we become living disciples of a risen Saviour.

## Worship Aids

### Welcome

We are together to worship the one who called us by his grace. We desire to walk with God and to be imitators of Him. Let us look to him who is our way, our truth and our life.

### Prayer of Confession

Lord God, help us to love those  
whom we find it difficult to love.  
Give us a heart that reaches out  
to those we would otherwise ignore.  
Give us the strength not to cross  
on the other side of the road  
but to play the part of the Samaritan.  
This will not be easy, Lord.  
It is not in our nature.  
We spread our love thinly  
among those we can relate to  
those who share our values  
and those who do not threaten  
our comfortable lifestyle.  
It’s not easy, Lord  
and on our own we shall fail.  
But with your help all things are possible.

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9 Ibid., 107.

You led the way  
and it is your example that we look to.  
You turned the values of this world upside down.  
Do the same with us, Lord.  
Help us live the reality of your Love. Amen.

## **Congregational Commitment**

We commit ourselves to follow Jesus Christ,  
through whom God has made friends with the world  
and in whose name we share the work of reconciliation.  
We commit ourselves to the way of the cross,  
living a life of simplicity, self-denial, and prayer.  
We commit ourselves to love each other,  
serving the church,  
and sharing our time, talents, and possessions.  
We commit ourselves to care for the world,  
bringing good news to the poor,  
setting free the oppressed,  
and proclaiming Jesus as Liberator and Lord.

~ from *Worship Together*, #434

## **Prayer of Response**

Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace.  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
and where there is sadness, joy.  
O Divine Master,  
grant that I may not so much seek  
to be consoled as to console;  
to be understood as to understand;  
to be loved as to love;  
for it is in giving that we receive;  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

~ St. Francis of Assisi

“Our Father, you called us and saved us in order to make us like your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Change us, day by day, by the work of your Holy Spirit so that we may grow more like him in all that we think and say and do, to his glory. Amen.”

~ Soren Kierkegaard, 1813–1855

## **Benediction**

2 Thessalonians 2:16–17 (NIV): May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

## **Music Suggestions for Worship**

### *Contemporary*

All That We Are  
As I Abide in You  
Find Me in the River  
Holiness, Holiness (is what I long for)  
I Will Never Be  
Jesus, All for Jesus  
Lord Reign in Me  
One Heart, One Mind

### *Hymns*

May the Mind of Christ My Saviour  
God Our Father You Have Led Us  
I Surrender All  
I Have Decided to Follow Jesus  
Take My Life and Let It Be  
The Servant Song  
Lord Jesus of You I Will Sing  
Will You Come and Follow Me?

*William (Bill) McCaskell, diploma NBI, MA (studies), is an ordained EMC minister, a former pastor of MacGregor EMC, and currently the executive director of Canadian Sunday School Mission (Manitoba). Worship Aids provided by Jennifer Kornelsen.*

# Annotated Bibliography

**Callen, Barry L. *Radical Christianity*. Nappanee, Indiana: Evangel Publishing House, 1999.**

Callen seeks in *Radical Christianity* to introduce the Believers Church tradition to the greater Christian community by bringing into conversation the doctrine and practice of the Anabaptists with the contemporary church's understanding of the same. His approach is thorough and fresh and carries with it a solid theme of discipleship through its pages. He weaves historical and current Anabaptist voices together into a single prophetic call: "The sixteenth-century Anabaptists were committed to citizenship in the realm where God rules, whatever that would cost or come to mean. So must it be for contemporary Christians who intend to make a difference in the world in the wonderful wake of the difference Christ has made in them" (xiv).

**Dyck, Cornelius J. *Spiritual Life in Anabaptism*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1995.**

Dyck has edited a wonderful collection of early Anabaptists' writings into a single collection, organizing them into themes—one of which is Discipleship. The other themes (peace and justice, the body of Christ, word and Spirit, etc.) also, however, carry with them overtones of the importance the life of discipleship was to Anabaptists.

Most of these writings span from the early sixteenth- to the mid-seventeenth century. It is interesting how many of the writings apply to our contemporary journey of following Christ, including the dangers of materialism (many Mennonites of the Netherlands became quite prosperous in the 1600s), the importance of unity within the community of faith, and the challenges that come with living a life of commitment and discipleship.

**Gill, Athol. *Life on the Road*. Scottsdale, PA.: Herald Press, 1989.**

Gill, who lived and taught in Australia until his sudden death at age 54 in 1992, brings a wonderfully fresh and at times disturbingly challenging message to the Christian Church in his work entitled *Life on the Road*. With the help of an extended "road" or "journey" metaphor, Gill examines the life Jesus calls his followers to live, and what the different aspects of that life—our call, the cost, our possessions, community, mission, power, prayer and grace—may look like with Jesus as our master. Each chapter begins with examining three Gospel texts as Gill skilfully interprets and then applies the words of Jesus. Gill's work is accessible in reading and demanding in application.

**Snyder, C. Arnold. *Following in the Footsteps of Christ*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004.**

Snyder sets out to answer the question, "Is there anything unique about the spirituality of early Anabaptists?" What he discovers in his work is that there is, indeed, a unique Anabaptist spirituality, and it centres on the belief and practice of one yielding their will to the will of God. This "yielding," according to Snyder, is at the core of early Anabaptism and forms the very basis of what it is to be a disciple of Christ.

Snyder's book gives an excellent historical overview of sixteenth-century Anabaptism as he sets out several themes of belief and practice for the radical reformers. Although he does not spend much time making contemporary connections, his work is still helpful in gaining a proper understanding of the origins of early Anabaptist spirituality.

Snyder includes numerous anecdotes from early Anabaptists. They make useful sermon illustrations.

## Lectionary Readings

*Jeremiah 31:31–34*

*Matthew 28:19–20*

*Mark 10:13–16*

*1 Peter 3:21*

*1 John 5:7–8*



## Believer's Baptism: the Call to Responsible Commitment

*by Harvey Plett, PhD*

**O**n January 18, 1525, the Zurich City Council decreed that parents who had not had their infants baptised were to bring their infants for baptism within the next eight days or suffer serious consequences. On January 21, 1525, the Zurich City Council issued a decree forbidding a small group to continue to meet for prayer and Bible study. That evening the group met to pray and to decide what they would do with this order to disband.

At that meeting, after prayer, George Blaurock asked Conrad Grebel to baptise him. One account says Grebel baptised Blaurock by cupping water in his hands and poured the water on Blaurock's head. Then the others in the group asked Blaurock to baptise

them. This was the beginning of what is known as the Anabaptist Movement. A large segment of the movement was and is also identified by the name *Mennonite*.

As a result of studying the Bible, these brothers and sisters decided that the Scriptures taught a Christian should be baptised with water. The prerequisite for baptism was repentance from their sin, accepting the forgiveness of Jesus and begin following Him, and then the request to be baptised. This is called Believer's Baptism.

## Various Meanings of Baptism

This step to Believer's Baptism was a radical step and contrary to the Roman Catholic Church's teaching and practice of infant baptism. For the Roman Catholic Church it was important that infants be baptised shortly after they were born because to baptise was giving the New Birth to the child and thus making sure it would go to heaven should it die.

This sacramental view had emerged since Constantine, 325 A.D. A sacrament was and is a ceremony that mediates the grace of God to the recipient *ex opere operato*; that is, it works its act of grace independent of the response of the recipient. Roman Catholics, the Greek Orthodox, High Church Anglicans, and Lutherans are some major churches that taught and still teach sacramental baptism by water.

John Calvin and the Reformed Church developed an interpretation of the meaning of baptism known as Covenantal Baptism. The covenantal view teaches water baptism has replaced circumcision. Circumcision was performed on boys eight days after birth, that is as infants, and they were thereby made members of the covenant community of Israel.

Believer's Baptism was a radical step and contrary to the Roman Catholic Church's teaching and practice of infant baptism.

The Covenant teaching is that, with the coming of Christ and the New Covenant, circumcision was replaced by water baptism as the sign of the New Covenant, and was to be administered to both boys and girls as infants. By water baptism they became and become members of the New Covenant people, the Church.

Since it makes them members of the New Covenant people, at least one of the parents is to be a Christian member of the New Covenant people. Infants where neither the father nor the mother is a Christian, as a rule, are not baptised. Some Churches teaching this interpretation are the Reformed, Congregational, and the Covenant churches.



All church bodies that practice infant baptism also practice a ceremony called Confirmation. Confirmation comes to children anywhere between eight to 12 years of age. Prior to the Confirmation sacrament/ceremony, the one to be confirmed has to take a period of instruction in the teaching of the church. It is the ceremony whereby the person makes a personal commitment to owning the faith of the group that baptised them.

This ceremony recognizes that what happens to an infant is not sufficient. Confirmation recognizes that as the baptised person grows in his or her maturity and understanding there has to be a voluntary personal decision of owning the faith. The Confirmation ceremony is where the person makes a responsible and accountable decision to own and be responsible for his or her faith.

The Anabaptists gave a radically different interpretation to the role and meaning of water baptism. There may be some similarities, such as baptism being the sign of the New Covenant. This ties it somewhat into Covenant Baptism, but it is quite different. It is called Believer's Baptism. We now turn our attention to examining Believer's Baptism.

## **Believer's Baptism**

The Evangelical Mennonite Conference is part of the wider Anabaptist/Mennonite family of churches that teach and practice Believer's Baptism.

*Our Statement of Faith* says, "We believe a Christian should be baptised in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. To qualify for baptism, one must repent of sin and by faith accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. Water baptism represents the baptism of the Holy Spirit at the time of conversion and the washing of regeneration, which the believer has experienced. It is an act of obedience, which identifies the believer with the church of Christ (Matt. 28:18–20; Acts 2:36–47, 10:47–48, 18:8, 22:16; Romans 6:1–4; Titus 3:5)" (Article 11, *Ordinances*).

## **Antecedents in the Old Covenant**

Jeremiah 31:31–34 says,

<sup>31</sup>"Behold the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, <sup>32</sup>not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. <sup>33</sup>But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God,

and they shall be my people. <sup>34</sup>And no longer shall each man teach his neighbour and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (RSV).

As we think of the biblical teaching on water baptism, we need to start with the Old Testament where God began calling a people to Him. God established a sign and a ritual for the Covenant He made with Abraham and the people of faith after him. The New Testament calls this the Old Covenant (Hebrews 8:13). The sign of the Old Covenant was the outward sign of male circumcision (Genesis 17). As we move through the Old Testament we hear the prophets speak of a New Covenant. That New Covenant will be written upon the hearts of the New Covenant people and will replace the Old Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31–34).

Hebrews 8 speaks of how Jesus brought the New Covenant. Hebrews 8:13, referring to Jeremiah's statement, says, "In speaking of a new covenant he treats the first as obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away." Hebrews 9:15 says, "Therefore he (Christ) is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred which redeems them from the transgression under the first covenant." The New Covenant in Christ is the fulfillment of the Old Covenant (Hebrews 1:1f., Matthew 5:17) and now replaces it.

The New Covenant brings out the intent and goal of the Old Covenant. This New Covenant is spelled out in the authoritative New Testament. We now can understand what the Old Covenant was all about since we now have its fulfillment. This also becomes a guide for our hermeneutics of the Bible. We read and interpret the Old Testament through the eyes of the New Testament, the fulfillment of the Old (Hebrews 1:1–2; 8:13).

The quote from Jeremiah ties the New Covenant with the Old Covenant, which is the precedent and root of the New. The common element that links the Covenants is each is based on a faith response (Genesis 15:1–6, Galatians 3:6–9, Ephesians 2:11–21). The newness of the New Covenant is Christ's sacrifice is the once for all sacrifice for sin and replaces animal sacrifices (Hebrews 9:1–14).

The temple is now not a building, but the believer and the church (1 Corinthians 3:16–17, 2 Corinthians 6:16–7:1). It is now inclusive and not only Jewish (Galatians 3:28–29). Just as there was a sign, circumcision, to become a member of the Old Covenant

The New Covenant brings out the intent and goal of the Old Covenant.

people, so there is a sign of becoming a member of the New Covenant people. Water baptism is the sign and symbol given to the people who enter by faith into the New Covenant. It is a symbol applied to both genders on the basis of faith, in contrast to circumcision being applied only to males.

Water baptism had its antecedents in Jewish proselyte baptism and John's baptism. In contrast to the sign of the Old Covenant, which was applied to infants without their consent, the sign of the New Covenant was applied as a result of the faith response of the individual and that individual's request (Acts 2:38–41). Circumcision was applied when the boy was seven days old, thus as an infant. This changed with John's baptism of repentance.

John's baptism was applied when the person repented of sin. New Covenant baptism is applied on the basis of repentance of sin, acceptance of Jesus as Saviour, and living a renewed life. Baptism is requested by the individual. The New Covenant sign is thus a totally different sign from the one of the Old Covenant, though it is a continuation of living by faith.

Water baptism is the sign and symbol given to the people who enter by faith into the New Covenant.

Paul refers to the crossing of the Red Sea as baptism into Moses (1 Corinthians 10:1–5). In 1 Peter 3:21 the saving of Noah and his family from the flood is symbolic of baptism. Thus, there are various symbolic connections between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant baptism, the sign of becoming a member of the New Covenant people.

With this brief look at the Old Testament forerunner, we now look at the fulfillment of God calling people as it is explained in the New Testament. In particular we examine the sign of the New Covenant, water baptism.

## **Believer's Baptism in the New Testament**

In Matthew 28:19–20 we read,

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (RSV). (See also Mark 16:16.)

Matthew 28:19–20 gives us the Great Commission. The Commission says that on

the basis that Christ has all authority in heaven and earth we are to go and make disciples of all nations. A disciple is a learner, a follower. According to the Greek, the Commission could read, “As you go make disciples.”

Two things are noteworthy. First, the commission is given to every follower of Jesus and is the goal of the believer wherever he lives or works. Second, “make disciples” is in the imperative and, therefore, not a suggestion, but an issue of obedience for every member of the New Covenant.

Baptism is the outward sign of stepping into the family of God.

Another matter to note is that the making of disciples is described in two ways: baptizing and teaching them.

The following is an outline on making a disciple:

1. The Word of God is shared in word and deed with a person.
2. The Holy Spirit convicts the listener of sin.
3. In true contrition and repentance the listener confesses and repents from sin.
4. The convicted person by faith accepts the forgiveness offered in Christ.
5. The repentance manifests itself in beginning a new lifestyle.
6. The disciple asks for baptism

Baptism as part of making disciples includes what has just been outlined. Baptism is the outward sign of stepping into the family of God. Since baptism is the sign of the new covenant and those in the new covenant are the church, baptism identifies the one being baptised with the church, both the universal as well as the local body. It is the act of becoming a church member.

## No Lone Rangers

Christians are not Lone Rangers, but members of the body. In Acts 2 those who were being baptised were thereby added to the body of believers; they became members of the church. Some debate whether Acts should be interpreted as becoming church members. The statement that they were “added to” clearly says they became members of an existing body.

It is also of interest to note that churches that practice infant baptism all teach that those who are baptised have become members of the church. Baptism as initiation into

the church is also affirmed by the writings of the Church Fathers of the second and third centuries.<sup>1</sup> This is how Christ is building His church (Matthew 16:18).

## Church Order

Church structure emerged almost immediately with division of responsibility for the work in the body (Acts 6:1-7, 16:23). Many of the New Testament books are addressed to local churches with guidance given to the process of appointing leaders (1 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:2; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:1–5:1; 1 Timothy 5:17–22; 2 Timothy 2:25f., 4:1–2; Titus 1:5–6).

Thus, as churches were organized leaders were appointed and to them fell the responsibility to baptise and teach. Tertullian, at the end of the second century, says that a bishop or a presbyter or deacon should administer baptism and, if none of these are available, by a layperson. Ignatius, around 117 A.D., said the bishops were to do the baptizing. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:40, “All things are to be done decently and in order.”

The one being baptised has been instructed in the elementary doctrines of the Bible. That is really the only person who could request baptism, by knowing what this is all about and then deciding to proceed with baptism. It is an informed request.

Baptism involves water either being poured on the head of the candidate or by the candidate’s being immersed. Water baptism for the Anabaptists is not sacramental; that is, it does not work its work of grace and salvation without any response from the one being baptised.<sup>2</sup> Menno Simons says,

Oh no, outward baptism avails nothing so long as we are not inwardly renewed, regenerated, and baptised with the heavenly fire and the Holy Ghost of God...In the spiritual strength which we have received, we henceforth bind ourselves by the outward sign of the covenant in water which is enjoined on all believers in Christ, even as the Lord has bound himself with us in his grace, through his Word, namely, that we will no longer live according to the unclean lusts of the flesh, but walk according to the witness of a good conscience toward him.

Simons also says, referring to 1 Peter 3:21, “Here Peter teaches us how the inward baptism saves us, by which the inner man is washed and not the outward baptism by which the flesh is washed. For only this inward baptism, as already stated, is of value in

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1 Acts 2:37ff.; Ignatius; 1 Clement; Karl Heussi, *Kompendium der Kirchengeschichte* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1981), 27, 31; A. C. McGiffert, *A History of Christianity in the Apostolic Age* (1897), 541.  
2 Pilgram Marpeck, “The Writings,” 197–198.

the sight of God, while outward baptism follows as evidence of the obedience of faith.<sup>3</sup>

For the Anabaptists, the one being baptised is very much involved in the process. First of all, by making the decision of accepting Christ, the person has been born again and has received the Holy Spirit. Now, in obedience to the prompting of the indwelling Spirit, the person asks for baptism and experiences growth in his or her life through this step of obedience.

The act of obedience is blessed by God and gives the baptised one a sense of God's nearness and peace. It is a public testimony saying, "I belong to and identify with Christ," as well as the step of identifying with Christ's body, the Church. The Spirit is present and ministers to the one being baptised, as well as to those attending as they reflect on the reality being symbolized by the baptism (Matthew 18:19–20).

Robert Friedmann, in his article "Recent Interpretations of Anabaptism," summarizes the significance of baptism in the Anabaptist frame of reference in this way:

It [baptism] is understood as a most solemn event. It does not bestow graces upon the receiver but means rather a sealing of the new life and commitment. . . . Whosoever demanded baptism upon faith and, after due inquiry, received it, will no longer deviate from his new path. Basically it means the determination to resist sin in all its subtle temptations. As a presupposition, however, the brethren taught a genuinely felt self-surrender unto God. . . . the very qualification for entrance into the new covenant of grace.<sup>4</sup>

Baptism is preceded by instruction about the faith. To become a disciple requires hearing and knowing what it takes to become and be a disciple. Once, on the basis of the instruction received, the commitment to follow Jesus is made, the request for baptism logically follows. The need for baptism is included in the teaching or in the process of making disciples. A disciple would understand this and, as a result, ask for it.

Baptism is

- Symbolic of cleansing (Acts 22:16, 1 Peter 3:21); in Scripture, water often used to symbolize moral and spiritual cleansing.
- Symbolic of the person's death to sin and the sinful life (Romans 6:1–6).
- Symbolic of the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 3:27).

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3 Menno Simons, *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, ed. J. C. Wenger, trans. Leonard Verduin (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956, 1984), 124–125.

4 Robert Friedman, "Recent Interpretations of Anabaptism," *Church History* (June, 1955), 147.

- Is an act of initiation into and acceptance of responsible church membership in a local church (Acts 2:14–42).

Thus, when Jesus says disciples are made by baptizing them, it is more than merely administering the water. It includes, at least, what has been noted above.

Matthew 28:20 teaches those who have been baptised are to be taught to observe all that God has commanded. And so the baptismal candidate has received some teaching before he or she is baptised, then receives more after having been baptised and become a member of the faith community. They are to be taught to observe all things Jesus has commanded. Here is nurture and growth in the faith. 2 Peter 1:3–11 gives us an idea of what is to be taught and what is to happen once a person has been baptised.

When we ask who is to do all of this, we have already noted that the commission is given to all believers. We also noted that as soon as you have a group of people together leadership is needed. This is also true of the Church and as seen from Scriptures noted above, this happened as soon as the Church began.

When Jesus says disciples are made by baptizing them, it is more than merely administering the water.

The above is what we also find in the writings of the Anabaptists. Dirk Philips, in his *Enchiridion (Handbook)*, says baptism is a sign of faith in Christ and is done on the basis of a voluntary request by the person being baptised.<sup>5</sup> Philips goes on to say that from what we see in Acts 2, 8, and 16, it is clear that the people who got baptised had been instructed in the Gospel, and, thus, had received instruction before they were baptised; this indicates that a person needs to be instructed in the Gospel before being baptised.

Dirk Philips then says that the outward water baptism is symbolic of the baptism of the Spirit, evidence of genuine repentance, and a witness of faith in Christ. He further says that an appointed leader in the church administers baptism.<sup>6</sup>

Balthasar Hubmaier in his debate with Zwingli said,

You ask, “what or how much must I know if I want to be baptised?” The answer is that

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5 Dietrich Philip, *Enchiridion*, trans. A. B. Kolb (Aylmer, ON: Pathway Publishing Corp., 1910; reprinted, 1978), 18-19. Note: a later retranslation is also available: C. J. Dyck et al, eds., *The Complete Writings of Dirk Philips* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1992).

6 Philip, 18.

you must know this much of the Word of God before you receive baptism: you must confess yourself a miserable sinner and consider yourself guilty; you must believe in the forgiveness of your sins through Jesus Christ and begin a new life with the good resolution to improve your life and to order it according to the will of Christ in the power of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and if you err therein, you must be willing to accept discipline according to the rule of Christ in Matthew 18:15–20 so that you may grow in faith day to day....<sup>7</sup>

J. I. Packer says, “So a church that did not require baptism and an unbaptised Christian who did not ask for it would be something of a contradiction in terms.”<sup>8</sup>

## Believer’s Baptism and Children

Mark 10:13–16: “And they were bringing children to him, that he might touch them; and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it he was indignant, and said to them, ‘Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.’ And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands upon them” (RSV). (See also Matthew 19:13–15 and Luke 18:15–17.)

An important matter that remains to be examined is: “Believer’s Baptism and Children.” If baptism is only for those who make an intelligent repentance of sin and profession of faith, the question that logically comes up is, “Where do children fit into this scheme?” The text from Mark speaks not only of infants, but also children who were being brought and coming to Jesus.

The Greek word used for children is *pais* and is used to refer to a child, either male or female, and all ages from infancy up to adulthood (Bagster, *The Analytical Greek Lexicon*). Thus, it refers not only to babies, as some say, but also to children of various ages. It seems mothers were bringing their children to Christ for Him to touch them, thus taking up the room close to Jesus. The disciples wanted to keep them away from Jesus. Jesus said, “Forbid them not for to such belongs the kingdom of God” (KJV, NIV).<sup>9</sup>

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7 Quoted in Rollin S. Armour, *Anabaptist Baptism* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1966), 29.

8 J. I. Packer, *Growing in Christ*, (1996; reprinted, Crossway, 2007).

9 Menno Simons, “Christian Baptism,” *Complete Writings*, 280–281; Dirk Philips, “Christian Baptism,” quoted in Walter Klaassen, ed., *Anabaptism in Outline* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1981), 185–187.



## The Status of Children

The place of the child in the Church was clear to the founding leaders of Anabaptism. Children were not responsible or mature enough to make such a major faith decision. Not only that, the Anabaptists taught that on the basis of Mark 10:13–16, where Jesus teaches the Kingdom of God belongs to the children; they were saved, that is members of the Kingdom of God. The same teaching is found in Matthew 19:13–15 and Luke 18:15–17.

Parents should encourage their children to follow Jesus at their level of understanding and accept professions of faith at the level they are made.

It is the concern of many that children will not be saved unless they experience the New Birth. According to the Gospels, they are in the Kingdom. They need to be encouraged to continue on that path as they grow in understanding and ultimately make a responsible decision to continue or reject the faith.<sup>10</sup>

It should be noted that children who grow up in homes that are Christian will respond to the Gospel in their childish understanding. As they grow, they affirm this commitment; and when they arrive at an accountable age, they will continue to reaffirm their faith commitment and move to the next step of obedience, water baptism.

Parents should encourage their children to follow Jesus at their level of understanding and accept professions at the level they are made. Others will have a more crisis experience in adult conversion and then ask for baptism.

Dirk Philips in his article on “Christian Baptism” speaks to the question of infant/child baptism. He says that according to the Gospels, Christ accepted the children, and promised them the kingdom of heaven through grace and mercy, and not because of baptism. He goes on to say Christ makes it sufficiently plain to us why children are acceptable to God, inasmuch as he sets forth the children as an example to us. He says children are innocent as long as they are in their simplicity.

He further argues that the guilt of Adam’s sin has been atoned for, so children will not be condemned because of Adam’s sin (John 1:29; Titus 2:11; Romans 5:12, 17–18; Galatians 3:13). It is only as a child moves from what he calls its simplicity into sin that it becomes responsible and moves into a lost situation. He also suggests that children should be encouraged to stay in their simplicity and as they grow be taught the truths

<sup>10</sup> Maurice Martin, *Identity and Faith: Youth in a Believers’ Church* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1981); Gideon G. Yoder, *The Nurture and Evangelism of Children* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1959); Menno Simons, *Complete Writings*.

of God so they will incorporate these truths into their lives, become responsible believers and ultimately move to baptism and identification with the church and responsible church membership.<sup>11</sup>

Dirk Philips also says, “Since therefore children are saved, are in God’s hand, and are included in his grace, the kingdom of heaven is theirs (Matthew 19:14). It is therefore a great folly to baptise infants that they may thereby be preserved and saved, and to damn those infants who die unbaptised.”<sup>12</sup>

Lydia Mueller quotes Hans Schlaffer, in his *A Short and Simple Admonition*, ca 1527, who says, “Christ says about the children that the kingdom of heaven is theirs or of such, and that whoever receives one of them receives him. They belong to him. Whatever you do to the least of these my own, says the Lord; you have done it to me. Now if they are his, the dear little children are not lost. Never!”<sup>13</sup>

Believer’s Baptism teaches that the person must be old enough and responsible enough to make the conversion decision.

Believer’s Baptism teaches that the person must be old enough and responsible enough to make the conversion decision as well as to decide to be baptised. Believer’s baptism also entails becoming a member of the church, the body of Christ, the fellowship of the saints, giving and receiving of counsel, as well as cleansing from sin and walking in newness of life. Thus infant and children’s baptism are

eschewed. The baptism of people who have been baptised as children is not recognized as a valid baptism, and they will be asked to be baptised as believers if they want to join a believer’s baptism church (Matthew 18:15ff).<sup>14</sup>

Infant baptism is, therefore, not considered a true baptism because it is not based on the faith and the request of the one being baptised. It is also for the same reason that people who have been baptised as infants will be asked to be baptised on the confession of responsible faith if they want to become members of a church that believes and practices believer’s baptism. The Anabaptist movement began by baptising believers who had been baptised as infants.<sup>15</sup>

11 Stuart Murray, *The Naked Anabaptist: The Bare Essentials of a Radical Faith* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2010), 110–112; C. Arnold Snyder, *Following in the Footsteps of Christ* (Nyack, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 66–110.

12 *Enchiridion*, 43–44.

13 Lydia Mueller, *Glaubenszeugnisse oberdeutsche Taufgesinnter I.*, 1938.

14 Paul Lederach, *A Third Way* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1980), 80–88; Snyder, *Following in the Footsteps of Christ*, 66–110; Marlin Jeschke, *Believers Baptism for Children of the Church* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1983), 137–138.

15 Jeschke, 137–138.

It should be noted, again, that to the Anabaptists, infants and children were covered by the sacrifice of Christ and so parents could and can be at peace that if a child died, it went to be with Jesus. The Anabaptists rejected the teaching that a person is born lost and damned because of Adam's sin. They taught that Christ's death has removed the guilt of Adam's sin though humans inherit the tendency towards sin.

Thus they teach that each person will die, be lost, because of their own sin (Ezekiel 18:19–20; Romans 5:12). A question we do well to ponder is whether we have felt uneasy about our children's salvation and have accepted child dedication in the hopes of assuring their salvation. If this is the case, we are making the child's dedication sacramental and need to re-examine the teaching of Scripture on children.

In Anabaptist preaching, 1 John 5:8 has also been used quite extensively.<sup>16</sup> 1 John 5:8 reads, "For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood, and these three agree..." (RSV).

The witness of the *Spirit* is the gift of salvation. In the life of the one baptised, the witness of the Spirit means cleansing from sin, power to overcome sin, the initial transformation of character or the new birth. The witness of the *water* is that through water baptism the baptised one announced publicly a desire to fellowship with the church. By baptism the person acknowledged publicly that he was a brother/ sister in Christ and the congregation also publicly acknowledged the new believer as one with them.

The witness of *blood* pledged continued yieldedness to Christ and the church. There were two meanings of the blood witness. First, it spoke of the Christian life as a constant struggle against sin; it was a bloody struggle. Second, it spoke of faithfulness unto death. Persecution and martyrdom has been and continues to be the experience of the Church.

## Conclusion

The Anabaptists, then and now, understood and understand the Bible to teach water baptism is not optional for the believer, but a necessary step of obedience in becoming a disciple. It is done by and within the context of the local church and symbolizes cleansing from sin, an act of identifying with the church, a personal commitment to live accountably within the fellowship of believers, and being faithful to Jesus unto death. It is part of obeying the Great Commission.

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16 See, for example, Hans Hut; Pilgram Marpeck; Balthasar Hubmaier; John D. Roth, *Beliefs: Mennonite Faith and Practice* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2005), 67ff; Lederach, *A Third Way*, 84ff.

# Worship Aids

## Scripture Passages

Baptism of Jesus – John 3:13–17

Great Commission – Matthew 28:19–20

Day of Pentecost – Acts 2:37–47

Philip baptizes the Eunuch – Acts 8:26-39

Baptism of Lydia – Acts 16:14, 15

Baptism of Philippian Jailer – Acts 16:25-34

Mark 10:38

Luke 12:50

John 4:1

Romans 6:1–4

Galatians 3:2–7

1 John 5:7–8

## Some Visuals

Consider creating a banner that could be displayed at all baptisms. Colours appropriate for baptism include blue and silver (water), red (fire, blood of Christ), white (purity).

If baptism is by pouring place the water to be used in a clear glass pitcher or bowl on a table at the front of the sanctuary where it will be visible to all.

Have a processional of the baptismal candidate(s) and have each one carry a lit white candle. They could be placed in a candle holder up front and leaving them burn until the service is over.

When pouring, have all the candidates come on stage and kneel on a rug for being baptized.

When baptism is by immersion, whether in the church's building or outside, ensure that all can hear the questions asked and answers given. A towel needs to be provided.

When finished baptizing, extend the hand of fellowship to them as new members of the church; then give them a verse from Scripture and pray for them before they rejoin the rest of the congregation.

## Hymns

All the Way My Saviour Leads Me

O Happy Day

O Jesus, I Have Promised  
Oh, for a Thousand Tongues  
Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven  
What a Wonderful Saviour  
I Have Decided to Follow Jesus  
Hallelujah! What a Saviour  
Take My Life and Let it Be  
May the Mind of Christ My Saviour

These hymns are all found in *Mennonite Brethren Conference Hymnal*, 1995.

## **Choruses**

Sweet Mercies  
Sanctuary  
I Believe in Jesus  
Little by Little  
I Lift my Eyes Up  
Wisdom of My God  
Heavenly Father I Appreciate You  
Thou Wilt Keep Him in Perfect Peace  
Lord I Lift Your Name on High  
A New Commandment  
Turn Your Eyes on Jesus  
In His Time  
Bind Us Together  
My God and I  
This is the Day  
Heaven Came Down  
His Sheep am I

## **Prayer**

Father of Grace and Mercy. We thank you that you are present to bless these baptismal candidates.

These believers have become your disciples and now follow in obedience by being baptized with water to testify that they have experienced your salvation in Christ. They are also being baptized to indicate that they are identifying with your body, the church, as manifested in this local congregation. For this we thank and praise you.

Bless them with your guidance and blessings. Help them sense the gifts you have given

them and then help them to use them for your honour and glory. Guide them as they take up the responsibilities of being members in this local body.

Give them wisdom to keep going when things get tough. May they experience the immeasurable greatness of your power at work within them.

We pray for us as a congregation that we may accept these new members and help them find a warm home in our midst.

Thank you in the Name of Jesus. Amen.

*Harvey Plett, diploma SBI, BA, MDiv, MA, PhD, is an ordained minister, an educator, and a former EMC moderator.*

# Annotated Bibliography

## ***The Mennonite Encyclopaedia***

The Encyclopaedia has helpful articles on the Anabaptist view on water baptism. The Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia On-line ([www.gameo.org](http://www.gameo.org)) can provide this material.

## **Armour, Rollin Stely. *Anabaptist Baptism: A Representative Study*. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1966.**

This is study of what the key leaders in the early Anabaptist movement taught on baptism. Rollin has done thorough research, which makes it an important resource.

## **Klassen, Walter, ed. *Anabaptism in Outline*. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1981.**

This volume is a collection of quotes of sixteenth century Anabaptists on the various Christian doctrines. Each chapter deals with one doctrine. For example, chapter 8 is on Water Baptism. It is the longest chapter in the book. Readers will find this an invaluable source for researching Anabaptist theology.

## **Lederach, Paul M. *A Third Way*. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1980.**

This is a very readable discussion of various Anabaptist doctrines. Lederach says, "I have tried to contrast Anabaptist/Mennonite views with other theological streams, both historical and current."

## **Martin, Maurice. *Identity and Faith: Youth in a Believer's Church*. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1981.**

Martin writes a very readable discussion about youth, conversion and the church. Martin uses his own experiences as a young person in highlighting the religious issues. Martin uses resources from the social sciences in a descriptive way to help us understand the development of humans and faith. It speaks to the issue of children and faith.

## **Murray, Stuart. *The Naked Anabaptist: The Bare Essentials of a Radical Faith*. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2010.**

As the title implies, Murray tries to get at the core beliefs of the Anabaptists with as little cultural baggage as possible. He emphasizes core ethical principles that he has found were and are taught by the Anabaptists. These core values include such as peace, taking care of the poor. Being a Christian is more than believing, but also involves living by these ethics. The church is called to be a community. Discipleship, friendship, and mutual accountability are explored. Baptism is for believers. Failure to live the faith is a denial of the faith.

## **Snyder, C. Arnold. *Following in the Footsteps of Christ*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004.**

Snyder focuses on the spirituality of the Anabaptists. He includes in his insightful discussion themes such as coming to knowledge of the truth, the new birth, baptism of water, the church as the body of Christ, spiritual disciplines, discipleship, and martyrdom. He concludes with a chapter on Anabaptism today. The chapter on water baptism is particularly relevant.

**Yoder, Gideon G. *The Nurture and Evangelism of Children*. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1959.**

Yoder wrote this book in response to the discussion in what was the Mennonite Church, which is now a part of Mennonite Church U.S., on the question of the child in the church.

He outlines what he considers the teaching of the Bible on the issue. He also examines what other denominations and organizations such as Child Evangelism Fellowship teach about children and faith. He raises the question whether the practice of child dedication rather than parent dedication is really an uneasy replacement for infant baptism.

He accepts the emphasis that humans inherit the bent to sin, but he does not accept the Reformed teaching of total depravity in the sense that infants and children are damned unless they are of the elect or make an early conversion decision. He expounds the position that people are condemned because of Adam's sin, but because of their own sin when they reach the age of accountability. It is the best study on the subject I have found.



## Lectionary Readings:

*Psalm 68*

*Luke 14:1–14*

*Acts 2:32–37, 44–47*



# Community: God's Design for Humanity

*by Jennifer Kornelsen with Stephanie Unger*

**T**his lesson is not only on the *topic* of community; it is the *result* of community as other people have been drawn into dialogue and planning for it. Let this be a challenge: preach, teach and plan worship in a way that also models the message. How can you involve others and build bonds of affection as you prepare a sermon and plan worship, tasks often done in quiet offices and isolated corners of coffee shops?

Involving community is in no way efficient or clean. Including others is most often time-consuming and messy. Even in the collaborative efforts made in assembling this lesson hurt was caused and one writer was inwardly confronted about individualism and pride. And the community involvement that did happen seemed to make the process of writing take even longer and be more complicated.

## Collaboration

But collaboration is something modeled for us by God. God, in His plan to bring us all into eternal glory with Him, has partnered with His creation, with us who are slow, ignorant, powerless, distracted and sinful. If God has allowed for us to be fellow workers with Him in spreading the gospel, why would we not include others in the church in our preparation for worship and in the delivery of our message about community?

God, in his plan to bring us all into eternal glory with Him, has partnered with His Creation.

You are encouraged as a worship planner or leader, as a pastor or a preacher, to creatively think of how you might engage your congregation actively in communicating the message of community.

Consider some of the following ways you might involve the whole congregation:

- Have a young child read the scripture.
- Invite a rebellious teenager to read a poem.
- Ask a man who is never involved in the service to join you as you prepare the sermon and to offer his insights on the subject.
- Interview the elderly woman during your sermon so the congregation can hear from her.
- Encourage all ministry areas of the church to be actively discipling new leaders who are not necessarily the obvious choice for the role.
- Share the pastoral prayer with the person who is disabled.

The community of believers is diverse and inclusive; one theme in this paper urges a vision for community that does not show favoritism (see commentary on Psalm 68). Let your congregation be this type of radical community in your common worship.

## Why Community?

Community is a core Anabaptist value. Reformers modeled themselves after the early church in Acts and practiced a more common way of life in obedience to the scriptures. They also did this out of necessity in the face of outside persecution. During the Reformation, as Anabaptists separated themselves from involvement in the state they naturally formed strong interdependence. Anabaptists today are known as hospitable and charitable, and as having strong families and churches.

But Anabaptists are not unique among Christians in forming strong communities. Throughout church history groups of believers from different denominations have left conventional religious structures in pursuit of deeper devotion, and this has often included some form of intentional community and interdependence.

Many of us are familiar with the Hutterites, one branch of the Reformation that has remained communal. Roman Catholics have been the major contributors of theological and devotional publications on the topic of intentional community. It is important, therefore, to include Catholic writings as we look at the Christian quest for deeper devotion to God and a life of committed service to those around us.

Anabaptists and other Christian groups are not unique among religions in pursuing community as a strong value. Other religions and cults have often experimented with community life and hold community as a strong value. Nor is the formation of religious communities a recent phenomenon. Even as the Early Church began, it was one among many such voluntary associations that was forming among Jews, Nazarenes, and Hellenists.<sup>1</sup>

So what is it that causes people across cultures, religions, denominations and eras to value community? Let me suggest that it is God's design for humanity, the way we are created. And if God has designed us for community, what are the distinctives of Christian Anabaptist community life?

## **What Do We Mean By Community?**

There is a wide range of meanings for the word *community*, and people describe community anywhere from intentional shared living and communities sharing a common purse to “on-line communities” of people who use the Internet to network with others that have shared interests. Somewhere in between lies the typical North American Evangelical Anabaptist congregation.

Our churches meet weekly for Sunday worship services in public buildings, and throughout the week in programs and ministries. Because we live in a relatively affluent society that values self-reliance, we don't depend heavily on one another in material things and we see our churches as gatherings for religious instruction, worship, and giving. In our context, how do we live faithfully and obediently to God's calling to be His body, a body united?

When we look at the New Testament Church we see groups of believers forming wherever the gospel was proclaimed. These believers were becoming interdependent with each other.

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1 Banks, Robert. *Paul's Idea of Community* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994), 14.

Acts 4:32–35,

<sup>32</sup>All the believers were in one heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. <sup>33</sup>With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. <sup>34</sup>There were no needy persons among them. From time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales <sup>35</sup>and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need (NIV).

The church in Acts was so revolutionary because it changed people's way of relating to each other. The New Testament is clear that the gospel of Christ not only brings reconciliation between God and an individual, but also between people. Jesus affirms that the two great commandments are, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and, to love your neighbour as yourself" (Luke 10:27).

The consequence of a changed relationship with God is a changed relationship with others.

The first and second commandments are not separate items on a list as the Ten Commandments appear. If they were itemized, separated, one could obey the first command and fail to obey the second, or vice versa. No, love of God *consists* of loving others. The consequence of a changed

relationship with God is a changed relationship with others. The gospel is not simply a matter of personal piety and commitment to God; it has a social element. It binds believers to God and to one another. It is certainly obvious that the church in Acts understood this. When they entered new life in Christ, they entered a new social order radically different from what they had before.

Acts 2:44–47,

<sup>44</sup>All the believers were together and had everything in common. <sup>45</sup>Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to everyone as he had need. <sup>46</sup>Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, <sup>47</sup>praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (NIV).

God's plan for Christian Community was not that it should blend in nicely with society, but that it should stand out radically. Christian communities model a different type of kingdom, an up-side down kingdom with different priorities and rules than the kingdoms of this world. Our expressions of love and compassion toward each other are a demonstration of how God loves and embraces all His people, and draws them to Himself and into right relationships with others.

## Commentary on Psalm 68 (Stephanie Unger)

### *God Models How to Build a Community*

When reflecting on the importance of community (common unity) to our faith, taking a look at Psalm 68 is both inspiring and informative. It certainly puts to rest any doubts about whether the God we serve desires churches (His people) to be nurturing, inclusive, empowering communities.

If we are to be like our community-building God, we need to be offering ourselves as parents or siblings to those who are lacking that support.

In Psalm 68, David paints a picture of what it looks like when God builds a community. Drawing from God's actions in the past, especially God's deliverance of Israel out of Egypt to the Promised Land, David describes how God takes a group of captives and makes them a strong and powerful people. The Psalm provides an important list of priorities or characteristics of God for Christians to imitate when seeking to be builders in the community of faith.

In verses 5 and 6 David describes what God is like: "Father to the fatherless, defender of widows—this is God...God places the lonely in families; he sets the prisoners free and gives them joy." Here we see that God notices and lifts up the "underdog." God comes to the aid, first and foremost, of those who are defenceless, marginalized or disadvantaged. And the aid He brings comes in the form of His own presence filling the empty spaces in their lives. We also see that God values the family unit, that He sees the family as an entity that will prevent loneliness.

But God does not see family as a something you either have or don't have, but as a malleable unit in which He can place people as he chooses. Perhaps this is because from God's perspective there is only one family; we who believe in Jesus are all adopted children with the same Father. Do we view family or community in the way God does? Do we seek out lonely people with the assumption that they are meant to be part of our family circle? If we are to be like our community-building God, we need to be offering ourselves as parents or siblings to those who are lacking that support.

### *God Provides for Community*

In verses 9 and 10, David describes how God sends "abundant rain to refresh the weary land." God then produces a bountiful harvest to provide for his needy people. When God builds a community He refreshes and provides for both the land and the

people. Throughout this psalm, there is a sense of God providing out of His abundance. There is no need for God to require more of the land or the people than they can give. Instead, He provides what is needed for both land and people to live abundantly.

God builds community by freeing His people and saving His people from enemies. In verse 6, it says that “He sets the prisoners free and gives them joy” and in verses 19 and 20 David praises the Lord who “carries us in His arms...The Sovereign Lord rescues us from death.” God does not leave His people to fight their own battles or to find their own freedom. He carries those who are weak, frees those trapped in prison (perhaps of their own making), and fights fiercely to defeat their enemies.

In building our church communities, we need to have this kind of passionate commitment to one another. When one of us is losing the battle to sin, we need to fight for that person. When one of us is too weak to move forward, we need to carry them, even though it slows our own progress. God’s community is not a meeting place for those who have it all together, but a refuge for those who are being saved from death.

### *God Includes His People in the Victories*

Verse 23 describes God’s people being invited to wash their feet in the blood of the enemies God has defeated. God doesn’t keep the feeling of victory to himself, but

God’s community is not a meeting place for those who have it all together, but a refuge for those who are being saved from death.

makes sure that his people know, as only walking in blood can do, that they are truly victorious. It is not only the powerful that are included in the victory. Verses 12 and 13 describe the women of Israel dividing the plunder in an age where women were not usually even near the battle, and the homeless, or those living among the sheepfolds, sharing in the treasure.

The Psalm begins with celebrating the awesome might and power of God and it ends with a God who “gives power and strength to his people” (v. 35). How many victorious kings share their power and strength with their people? Our God does! So, what does this mean for our church communities? Are they places where everyone can know the taste of victory and each experience the benefits of power and strength that is freely shared?

In Psalm 68, God is clearly described as one who does not leave any of His children on the fringes, but shares out of His abundance, giving each one an honoured place in His family.

# Worship Aids

## Scripture Passages for Reflection and Use in Worship

*Leviticus 19:15* urges for justice and fairness, making no distinction in the treatment of poor and rich.

*Jeremiah 29* is a command given to the exiled community of Israel, an encouragement for them to invest in building homes and communities in a land where they are refugees, to love the land and pray for the welfare of the city.

*Psalms 68* is a psalm of comfort to the fatherless and the lonely. God provides for the poor and the outcasts and puts them in families.

*Matthew 25:31–46* tells the drama of the sheep and the goats to illustrate that what we do for those in our community we have done to Jesus.

*Luke 14:1–14* is a passage about Jesus' visit to the Pharisee's house, an occasion where he instructed the honoured guests to take lowly places at the table and He said to his host that it would be better if he threw dinner parties for the poor, crippled, lame and blind, not just for his relatives and wealthy neighbours.

*Acts 2:44–47* tells about the new believers, how they shared their money and their dinner, and how people were being saved daily.

*Acts 4:32–37* describes how radically the believers shared their possessions.

*Ephesians 4:1–6, 11–12* entreats the Ephesians to live lives worthy of their Christian calling.

*1 Thessalonians 4:9–12* urges those in the church to love each other more and to work hard as a community to earn the respect of outsiders.

*James 2:1–9* is a warning not to show favouritism to the rich, but to love your neighbour as yourself without showing partiality.

## Prayer Suggestions for Worship

### *Welcome*

We gather today as a family, united by our bond in Christ. We are created by God to love and serve one another; we are redeemed by Jesus Christ and empowered to heal and forgive; we are guided by the Holy Spirit to fulfil the great commission together. The

Trinity provides for us an example of community and equips us to follow this example. Let us join our hearts and voices to worship the One in whom all things hold together.

### *Responsive Prayer*

*Leader:* O Lord, you have opened your door to us, who are strangers. You have welcomed us as friends. As we meet the stranger today,

***Congregation:* Move in us to welcome you as friend in these, our kin.**

*Leader:* O Lord, you have fed yourself to us. You have shared your table with us. As we meet the hungry today,

***Congregation:* Move in us to feed you in these, our kin.**

*Leader:* O Lord, you have seen us naked in body and in spirit. You have cleansed and clothed, warmed and comforted us. As we meet the naked today,

***Congregation:* Move in us to cleanse and clothe, warm and comfort you in these, our kin.**

*Leader:* O Lord, you have found us in darkness. You have not hidden yourself, but have recognized and freed us. As we meet those hidden in darkness today,

***Congregation:* Move in us to recognise and free you in these, our kin.**

### *Pastoral Prayer*

Dear God

Your will is that we may be one.

We thank you that you call us into communion with you and each other.

Your generosity and mercy are always taking us by surprise.

We bless you for the vision of inclusion, solidarity and compassion which opens our minds, widens our sympathies, and enlarges our hearts.

We commend to your gracious care all those whom it would be easy for us to forget—the homeless and the hungry, the addicted and the lost, abandoned people and hurting children.

We thank you for the imagination and generosity of those who minister out of love and compassion to those who are most in need.

Strengthen us and give us togetherness to serve the needy, the rejected, and the forgotten.



Confront our indifference, break down our barriers, surprise us with joy.  
Dear Christ, be with us in this suffering yet glorious world.  
Amen.

~ Anonymous

### *Prayer of Invitation*

Come to our houses, Lord Jesus,  
To the tables where we eat,  
And the places where we argue,  
And the rooms where we sleep  
Or lie awake  
Wondering if our life is worthwhile.

Come to our houses,  
To broaden our hospitality  
And deepen our conversation  
And keep our souls company

And come to our houses of prayer,  
To save our churches  
From being so absorbed with what needs to be done  
That our plans have no place  
For any hint of salvation  
Or of all things being made new.

And come to this place  
As week by week we meet,  
And show us the cross we must carry  
So that we may be shaped by your love,  
Amen.

### *Prayer of Gratitude and Confession*

God of love, thank you that you desire to move in us, to gather us into yourself. Thank you that your arms are open, your door is flung wide, your table is abundant.

Forgive us when we have neglected you in friend and stranger, when we have not welcomed interruptions or invited others to our table, when we have kept for ourselves the gifts you have given.

May we receive you and be moved by you. We long to feast from the abundance of your grace and to enter into the fullness of your kingdom. In Jesus' name. Amen.

### *Prayer of Intercession*

We pray for the lonely, alienated, and stranger in our midst...

We pray for those building community and fostering hospitality...

We pray for You to break down barriers to hospitality and community in our neighbourhood and world....

### **Music Suggestions for Worship**

All That We Are  
Blest Be the Tie That Binds  
Break Dividing Walls  
Heart with Loving Heart United  
The Gathering  
The Servant Song (Brother, Sister)  
Unity (Jesus Help Us Live in Peace)  
We Are God's People  
We Are One in the Spirit

### **Additional Worship Suggestions**

Consider choosing songs that are oriented toward *We* and not *I*. Or use a song typically sung with *I* and alter it to *We*.

A Sunday service that has a theme of community would be an opportune time to celebrate communion together. In many churches trays with bread and juice are circulated throughout the pews of people. A more active and communal sharing of the elements invites partakers to walk forward and receive from a fellow congregant and then to take the trays from them, turn, and serve the next person in line. God has given us all the power and privilege of extending his grace in our communities.

*Jennifer Kornelsen, BA, and Stephanie Unger, BEd, are part of Many Rooms Church Community (Winnipeg, Man.).*

# Annotated Bibliography

**Banks, Robert. *Paul's Idea of Community*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994.**

This book studies the social and cultural setting of New Testament churches. It is written to be accessible and not overly technical for readers. Banks illustrates that the gospel requires a radical revision of our social paradigms, as is demonstrated by the early church. The Apostle Paul's letters give the church a map for how to build radical Christian community. Paul's writings are the main source of instruction for modern Christian communities and Banks helps us to understand that church within the context of the Greco-Roman world.

**Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1954.**

This is a classic on the life of Christian fellowship. Born of Bonhoeffer's experience of community in an underground seminary in Nazi Germany, this book reads like one of Apostle Paul's letters. It provides instruction on personal prayer, common worship, work and service. Of particular note is Bonhoeffer's insistence that the life of fellowship must also include the personal solitude with the individual and God. He stresses that life in Christian community should not be sought out of a fear of being alone, and that joining others in fellowship does not replace our need to have a personal and intimate relationship with God.

**Crabb, Larry. *Connecting: Healing Ourselves and Our Relationships*. Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 1997.**

This book has been described as the product of Larry Crabb's mid-life crisis. Crabb introduces this work by claiming he has experienced a shift in thinking. He proposes that more is needed to minister to emotional needs than just psychological training or biblical theology. He asserts that connected relationships are the missing link in touching the hearts and souls of hurting people.

Dr. Crabb envisions a day when communities of God's people—ordinary Christians whose lives connect as husband to wife, brother to sister, friend to friend—will accomplish most of the healing that we now depend on mental health professionals to provide. He urges us to believe that God has deposited within us the power to heal soul-disease. That power is released to do its work as we relate to each other in revolutionary new ways, through the leading of the Holy Spirit.

**Franzee, Randy. *The Connecting Church: Beyond Small Groups to Authentic Community*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001.**

Franzee writes to those who wish to see their churches alive and vibrant, where people are connecting deeply with God and with one another. This book shows churches how to reclaim being a united body as the New Testament describes the church. It is particularly pertinent to the social dynamics of North American churches today. The themes explored in the book are the churches' connections through having a common purpose, common place, and common possessions.

**Rutba House, Editors. *Schools for Conversion: 12 Marks of a New Monasticism*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2005.**

This is an unfortunately vague and intimidating title for quite an inspiring, anecdotal book. It is edited

by an intentional Christian community and contains contributions by various other intentional communities who have found that they all embrace similar values (the 12 marks). This book is an excellent resource for those seeking to understand the counter-cultural movement present in some parts of the church today towards a more radical embodiment of community.

The 12 marks that these communities believe to be central to their life together include relocating to abandoned places, sharing economic resources, hospitality to the stranger, lament for racial divisions, submission to Christ's body, intentional formation (discipleship), nurturing a common life, support for celibacy and marriage, geographical proximity, creation care, peacemaking and commitment to a disciplined contemplative life. These are also important values for the church at large to grapple with and building blocks for all types of Christian community.

**Smith, Luther E. *Intimacy and Mission: Intentional Community as a Crucible for Radical Discipleship*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1994.**

Five case studies are presented in this book. Smith explores five intentional communities to provide a profile of what radical discipleship looks like in this context. As the title suggests, intimacy and mission are key elements of intentional communities and are often more developed than in conventional churches. While the book focuses heavily on Christian communities that are unlike our typical EMC churches, Smith writes a section For the Church Today to relate the case studies to our own contexts.

**Vanier, Jean. *Community and Growth*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1989.**

The founder of L'Arche, a community for people with mental handicaps and their helpers, Vanier writes on the nature and meaning of Christian community. Community is a place of growth, as those who participate in it explore together the depth of their relationship with God through the relationships they share with one another. Vanier writes about communities of people who have joined together to live under the same roof. But much of what he shares can be applied to families and churches where the essential elements of the group are "inter-personal relationship, a sense of belonging and an orientation of life to a common goal and common witness" (10).

**Yoder, John Howard. *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World*. Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1992.**

Yoder illustrates how the common practices of the Early Church witnessed to the people and the culture around them. Christian religious rituals are not only for the edification of the congregation, but also serve to demonstrate to the dominant culture an alternative kingdom under the lordship of Christ. His body, the Church, is "called to be today what the world is ultimately called to be" (ix). The five practices of New Testament believers that Yoder studies are: binding and loosing, baptism, Eucharist, multiplicity of gifts, open meeting.

## Lectionary Readings:

*Genesis 1*

*Psalms 19:1–6*

*Jeremiah 23:33–40*

*John 1:1–18*

*Matthew 5:17–22, 27–28, 38–39, 43–44*

*Hebrews 1:1–4*

*Colossians 1:15–19*



## Hermeneutics: Interpreting Scripture with a Focus on Christ

*by Henry Friesen*

**H**ermeneutics is just a big word for the process by which we come to understand something. In Christian theology it usually refers to how we arrive at an understanding of Scripture, but it also has a much broader application as the process by which we make sense of our world.

The science or practice of hermeneutics is usually thought of as a conscious effort in which we are quite deliberate and focused on achieving understanding. More recently

it is widely recognized that a large part of the process of understanding is, in fact, subconscious and pre-intentional.<sup>1</sup>

There are many factors that influence our understanding of our world and the texts we read. The physical, cultural, social, and religious context in which we were raised all have an impact on our understanding long before we consciously evaluate the role these factors play in all our understanding.<sup>2</sup>

## **An Illustration**

I was raised in Manitoba where the rigors of winter, and the wide panorama of flat prairies and wide open, deep blue skies were a fact of life. I always knew that not everyone everywhere experienced our winters, but it was not until we lived in Southern Ontario for several years that I experienced this alternate reality; and that experience has changed my perspective on winter.

I understand now that winter is not a necessary fact of life, but it is part of a much larger package of the choices we make in where and how we live. Having personally experienced an alternative gives that alternative a much larger role in my thinking than the mere awareness of such an alternative lurking at the edges of my consciousness. However, I also gained a new appreciation for the deep blue hue, and the incredibly brilliant starry nights, of the prairie sky.

I had often heard people comment on the flatness of the prairie, but I understood those comments in a new way after living in the rolling country of southern Ontario. My experience was a very significant factor in how I viewed and understood my world.

## **Home is where our interpretation is shaped!**

A similar dynamic operates in our understanding of texts, particularly religious texts. A person raised in an Evangelical Mennonite home will understand Scripture somewhat differently than a person raised in a Reformed setting, and both of these will

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1 Gadamer's *Truth and Method* is his treatise showing that our access to truth is always mediated, and it stands as the classical text on philosophical hermeneutics. Lakoff and Johnson's *Philosophy in the Flesh* explores how our existence in a human body exerts a formative influence on our thought, language, and knowledge. Yoder introduces *The Politics of Jesus* as "an exercise in fundamental philosophical hermeneutics, trying to apply in the area of the life of the Christian community the insights with regard to the distinct biblical worldview which has previously been promoted under the name of 'biblical realism.'" (5).

2 "...every reader is, at the same time, an interpreter....We invariably bring to the text all that we are, with all of our experiences, culture, and prior understandings of words and ideas." Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 18.

understand Scripture differently than an individual raised in a Pentecostal context. Not all of these variations of understanding will be at odds with each other.

Sometimes the difference may be a matter of an emphasis that leads to an understanding that gives rise to different expressions of a faith that, at root, remain fairly consistent across all of these communities. Some variations of understanding in these communities will be harder to reconcile, and yet all of them are part of the same family of theology that is Christianity.

A person who believes that God exists will read the Bible very differently from one who does not believe God exists.

In any event, the difference in understanding is based on differences in hermeneutics, or different ways of understanding Scripture. Sometimes the ways of arriving at an understanding are much less dissimilar than the understandings seem to indicate. That is because the process is just one part of the hermeneutic exercise. There are also foundational values that affect understanding.<sup>3</sup>

## Foundational values

For example, a person who believes that God exists will read the Bible very differently from one who does not believe God exists. The person who believes that God exists and created the world, then left it alone to function by the natural laws God ordained (a Deist), will read Scripture somewhat differently than the person who believes that God is still intimately involved in the day to day function of creation.

Both of these will read Scripture and find support for their prior beliefs. This occurs when each will read passages that seem to most clearly support their view. When they read passages that do not support their particular viewpoint, they will call those passages unclear. They will employ the principle that unclear passages should be understood in light of clear passages, and so each individual finds strong support in Scripture for their different points of view. It is very likely neither person realizes that the support they find is based on the values that colour their reading of the text, rather than being grounded in the text itself.

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3 "Accept the reality of my distorted understanding" in Louise Renich Fraser and Louis A. Kilgore, *Making Friends with the Bible* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1994), 87ff. This book is a very accessible introduction to the inescapability of pre-understandings.

## Principles of hermeneutics

There are several principles of hermeneutics which are commonly accepted as important factors in one's understanding of Scripture.

- *One's view of God* is clearly a pivotal factor in how one reads Scripture and what one gleans from Scripture.
- Closely related is one's view of *what it is to be human*.
- A knowledge of *the historical and cultural context* of Scripture is also important as such details can infuse statements that otherwise seem meaningless with a whole new significance.
- A *basic understanding of language and grammar* is indispensable.
- A well-rounded understanding of *what language is and how it functions* will have implications for how one reads and understands any text.
- One of the most important principles for understanding Scripture is *the role of Scripture as its own most reliable interpreter*. The first place one should look for an understanding of Scripture is Scripture itself. The only way to develop this

The first place one should look for an understanding of Scripture is Scripture itself.

sensitivity is to spend time reading Scripture. This should not be confused with the notion that whatever one hears Scripture saying is somehow identical with what Scripture says. We have already noted that there are factors that influence our understanding of Scripture that operate beyond the level of our consciousness.

- For this reason the *Anabaptist value of community*, and reading and understanding Scripture in community, is a critical corrective to some of the excesses that arise from an individualistic interpretation of Scripture.<sup>4</sup>
- Also significant is *one's view of Scripture*. The realization that Scripture was given to, and recorded by, real people living in real times will yield a different reading than a reading that views Scripture as a sacred text that just fell from the sky.

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4 Stuart Murray in his list of core Anabaptist convictions says, "Jesus is the focal point of God's revelation. We are committed to a Jesus-centered approach to the Bible, and to the community of faith as the primary context in which we read the Bible and discern and apply its implications for discipleship." Stuart Murray, *The Naked Anabaptist: The Bare Essentials of a Radical Faith* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2010), 45.



## Aids to interpretation

There are a host of interpretive aids that we do well to consult in our attempt to understand our Bible:

- The best helps are *concordances* that give you a basic definition of words used in the original languages, and direct you to other uses of that particular word throughout Scripture.
- *Commentaries* can also be helpful, but one must always keep in mind that all commentaries are written from a particular perspective and will always portray an understanding that includes a lot of interpretation that is projected onto Scripture, not necessarily read out of Scripture.

## A Christ-centred reading

For this study we are not primarily concerned with such hermeneutic principles, though they are important for understanding Scripture. This study will emphasize the Christ-centred reading of Scripture that is not entirely unique to Anabaptist theology, yet it lies at the root of Anabaptist distinctives.<sup>5</sup>

We will read several passages to take note of what the word of God is, and how it functions in God's communication with his creation. In particular, we will trace an expansion of the significance of "word" from its earliest meaning as the spoken and creating word in Genesis 1, to its culmination in the Word understood as the Living Word, God with skin on, in John 1. This understanding that the fullest expression of God's Word is seen in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ is the foundation for the Anabaptist insistence that all of Scripture must be read through the life and teachings

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5 "Of course, all Christian traditions are Christocentric, which is what makes them "Christian" in the first place. But in the mainstream traditions, doctrinal Christocentrism has tended to eclipse ethical Christocentrism. In other words, what one believes about Christ has been more important than whether one actually obeys him in action." Christopher Marshal in John D. Roth, ed., *Engaging Anabaptism: Conversations with a Radical Tradition* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001), 46f.

Though Menno Simons never specifically enunciates a theology of Scripture or an extended hermeneutic, the Christocentric reading of Scripture permeates his writings. This is particularly true in his "Foundation of Christian Doctrine." See Menno Simons, *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, ed. J. C. Wenger, trans. Leonard Verduin (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956, 1984), 105–226. Several examples can be found on pages 173, 202, 206, 219, including these from page 220: "...for by the Spirit, Word, actions, and example of Christ, all must be judged until the last judgment" "Or if an Elijah should still come, he must propose and teach us nothing but the foundation and Word of Christ according to the Scriptures." "I would then herewith sincerely admonish you all to weigh and prove all spirits, doctrine, faith, and conduct with the Spirit of Christ." See also Paul M. Lederach, *A Third Way* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1980), 20f.

of Jesus, because Jesus is, in fact, the Author of all Scripture. This study focuses on the Scriptural basis for the Christ-centred reading of Scripture because, in my view, that is the pivotal distinctive of Anabaptist theology.

There are several questions that will highlight some of the issues that we encounter as we read Scripture. They will provide the groundwork for the hermeneutic by which we learn to live the truth of Scripture in our homes, at our jobs, and in our community.

Keep these questions in mind as we read some passages that deal with God's word to us: What is meant by "word"? What is communication? How do we hear God speak? How do we learn to recognize God's word in the abundance of words claimed to be from God?

## Lectionary Readings

### *Genesis 1*

#### The Word Spoken and More

Creation happened when God said "Let there be... And it was..." God's word is the creative force by which everything was made that was made. This is a very good indication that we should be open to understanding "word" as something more than simply the unit of communication we commonly take it to be. Our immediate reaction is to think of this word as a unit of communication that is either spoken or written. This seems to be supported by the text indicating that God said "Let there be... and it was."

However, John later tells us that this Word that creates all things is Jesus Christ, and that Jesus Christ is God in the flesh. Clearly there is a different sort of "speaking" and "word" that is intended in this case, rather than simple language. "Word" does indicate a form of communication, but not only the units of communication we ordinarily think of. "Word" includes a broader spectrum of units of communication (such as signs, actions, etc.) and a similarly wider range of speech acts.

When you tell your children to clean their room, and they do so, you have aided the cleaning by an act of speech; but the action that accomplishes the cleaning is more than only the unit of communication that is your word. It could be said that "you spoke, and it was so," but to think that the action that resulted in the clean room was only the unit of communication that you spoke would be

God's word is the creative force by which everything was made that was made.

incorrect. The actions that result in a clean room are inseparably linked, but they are not indistinguishable.

In Isaiah 55:11 God tells Israel that, “As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it” (NIV).

We know that it is not only water and snow that fosters life in nature; and it is not, strictly speaking, the earth that buds and flourishes. It is seeds and organic matter that draws life from the earth, and is enabled to draw this life when it is nurtured by rain and snow. In a similar way, it is not simply spoken or written words that accomplish God’s purposes, but the whole range of communicative and life-giving acts that God sends forth to nurture his creation and his people.

That word is heard in communicative acts of speech and writing, but it also experienced in the necessities of life found in plants and animals, in sunshine and rain, in nurturing communities that care for one another, and in all of these we can “hear” God’s word when we learn to listen for the right kinds of language. After all, these are the results and expressions of God’s creative word in Genesis.

### *Psalm 19:1–6*

#### The Word through Creation Itself

God’s spoken word expressed in creation is a communication through creation that is the proto-type for language: “There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard.” We think of words as the means of communication, but communication experts tell us that the actual words we use are only seven per cent of what we communicate.

God speaks and things happen. Things that never enunciate words speak with a voice far more forceful than anything we understand as spoken words. Therefore, we need to be aware that “word” and “words” are used to indicate communication in a much broader sense than only the words we use when we speak or write. All of creation speaks God’s language. We hear this language not only with our physical ears, but with our eyes, with our hands as we dig in the created soil. And we “hear” the “words” as we bask in the sunshine of God’s love in creation, recognizing that creation as an expression of the God Who is.

What we call our Bible is a very precious part of God’s communication to us. But the testimony of Scripture itself is that there is far more to God’s communication than

what we commonly understand as spoken or written words. In fact, words that are presented as being words from God are often not words from God at all, as the next passage shows us.

### *Jeremiah 23:33–40*

#### Test Words that Claim to Be from God!

Jeremiah repeatedly invokes divine authority for his words: “The word of the Lord came to me... The Lord said to me... This is what the Lord says... Hear the word of the Lord.” Then in chapter 23, Jeremiah has a lengthy lament regarding the spurious injunctions of false prophets, decrying the easy way in which everybody is always claiming to speak God’s word for him. Finally, Jeremiah has God telling the people to quit all such talk—no more claiming visions, dreams, and words from God!

In a play on words, the people’s response to those who claim to have a burden from God to lay on His people is to be, “You are the burden.” There is to be no more simple acceptance of claims to speak in God’s name. All such claims are to be tested by the religious community in a communal conversation in which the words of self-styled prophets are diligently compared with previously known words from God.

It is not just words that matter, but the *substance* of those words. As if to highlight the point, in the very next chapter Jeremiah claims more visions from God and again introduces his words as words that came from the Lord. This prophet has always claimed to speak the words of God. He then issued an unequivocal edict against claims to speak of words and dreams that come from God. And yet he now continues in the same vein!

However, in his declaration of words from God he invites the audience to listen carefully. He wants them to compare his words to other words known to have come from God.

### *John 1:1–18*

#### The Word of God in the Flesh

The word by which God created in Genesis 1 is now the Word that becomes flesh. The Word that becomes flesh is none other than the God who created in Genesis 1. The Word become flesh is God the One and Only God. This is the God that all of history has been about.

This is the God who created all that is, who called Abraham to a Promised Land; the God who called his children out of bondage in Egypt back to the Promised Land; the God who called his people, delivered His people, bought them back out of prostitution time and again. This God—whom Israel had alternately desired and spurned, worshiped and despised—is now here in the flesh.

The Author of Scripture is here to show us what it is that He has been trying to tell us all along. The Author is here to fulfill the meaning of the text. The Author is here to show us how to read his message. He does so, not only by words or by just adding more words of commentary to the text we already have, but by living with us and giving us an example of what the Word looks like in real life.

The Author is here to show us how to read his message. He does so by giving us an example of what the Word looks like in real life.

In doing so, he not only turns our understanding of the words of Scripture upside down, but he turns our understanding of the Word of Scripture upside down as well. Where previously the Israelites always insisted on an intermediary to buffer God's word to them, now the Word becomes flesh and moves into the neighbourhood!

## The God We Need to Be Near!

At Mount Sinai the Israelites were terrified at God's presence, sensing certain destruction if they got too close. Now God is the Word made Flesh and lives among us, and destruction results from being too far removed from the presence of God. God's presence has become our salvation and his absence is our demise.

This notion that God is our salvation has, in fact, permeated all of Scripture; but it takes on a whole new dimension when God becomes the Lamb who turns aside the wrath we feared in the Old Testament. "The law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). Any lingering questions we had after our encounters with God in the Old Testament are now definitively answered in the God who takes on flesh.

The stories we have been told about God are flickering candles in the blazing Light of the world who is God Incarnate.

### *Matthew 5:17–22, 27–28, 38–39, 43–44*

## Going Beyond Wrong Uses of the Law

The Pharisees and teachers of the law had 613 additions to the law to help ensure that the law was kept. Unfortunately, that kind of keeping the letter of the law was often in violation of the spirit of the law. Their focus on keeping the letter of the law set the bar too low.

Jesus' example of keeping the spirit of the law would look like a violation of the law

to many people who knew only the letter; but, as the Giver of the law, Jesus through example was a recovery of what the law really meant. It was not just about the words, but about the communication.<sup>6</sup>

The law is not only in the words of Scripture, but Scripture itself tells us that the law is written into the universe, into all of creation, and on our hearts.

Jesus is saying, “Don’t get stuck in the text! Listen to the Spirit of my Word! What I was trying to tell you was much more than just the words! If you only hear the words, you are missing the point. You can obey the words and still be sinning grievously against yourself, your neighbour, and me.”

At another time Jesus recounted incidents in which people had broken the law and desecrated the temple, and yet were innocent (Matthew 12). All of this is not a license to ignore the law, or to arbitrarily decide which laws must be obeyed and which are optional. Jesus says all of the law is critical, but the law is much larger than the words which point to the law.

The law is not only in the words of Scripture, but Scripture itself tells us that the law is written into the universe, into all of creation, and on our hearts. We have a responsibility to go beyond a superficial satisfaction that we have the Scriptures and yet refuse to go to Jesus for life that is promised in those very Scriptures (John 5:39–40).

Paul, in 2 Corinthians 3, talks about the church’s role as the minister of a new covenant, and he says the letter kills but the Spirit gives life! We are competent, Paul says, not on our own merit but because God has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant, with letters written not in ink on tablets of stone, but by the Spirit on tablets of human hearts.

And, says Paul, if the ministry that brought death, the ministry that was engraved in letters on stone, was of such glory that the Israelites could not look at the face of Moses, how much more magnificent is the ministry that brings righteousness, the letter written in human hearts, the word of God in the flesh!

Jesus and Paul are in full agreement that the message written, be it on stone, paper, or memory, is never sufficient. The pivotal message is the one written on our hearts. The relative authority of text and Person is perhaps most clearly indicated, next, in Hebrews.

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6 The most forthright interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount is frequently a matter of contention between Anabaptists and other Christian interpreters. Donald Kraybill has written the classical text on how the kingdom of God as described by Jesus does not fit with common ideas about how kingdoms should be built. Donald B. Kraybill, *The Upside Down Kingdom* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1978).

## *Hebrews 1:1-4*

### Listen, Above All, to Jesus!

The word translated *angel* in Hebrews 1 is the same word that is translated *messenger* and applied to John the Baptist: “I will send my messenger ahead of you.” Jesus is being declared to be superior to any previous messengers. Jesus himself said that, while no one greater than John the Baptist had ever been born to woman, the least in God’s kingdom was greater than he (Luke 7:28). Having the Son is clearly the most intimate, accurate and reliable expression of God’s word to his people, particularly since the Son is God in the Flesh (John 1:1-18).

Even in Jesus’ day there was a perception that God’s earlier written word stood contrary to the Living Word, God made Flesh. Jesus’ clear message to those who would keep his law was that they should look to him first if they wished to understand the law.

Jesus also said unequivocally that no stroke of the law would ever fail, and yet we pay little attention to most of the Old Testament law today. This is because Jesus’ own testimony was that he had come not to break the law, but to fulfill it, and yet the most devoted law keepers had him crucified for transgressing the law.

Jesus came to show us what the law was all about. It was not primarily a list of do’s and don’ts, though in some instances that is what was recorded. The law, and all of God’s communication in spoken word, written word, created word, and ultimately in the Word made Flesh, was about God creating and then saving that creation as an object of God’s incredible love and grace.

The earlier word spoken through the prophets at many times and in various ways is hugely significant and always to be dearly cherished, but never at the expense of the Word made flesh. If the word spoken in Creation, and through the prophets, is holy, how much more the Word made Flesh that is very God!

Wherever, and whenever, you see a picture of God that does not look like Jesus, look again. All the stories and pictures and words in Scripture are there to show us who God is and what God is like, but only in Jesus do

we see God. All the stories of God’s word to his people are instructive for us, but those words, even though dispatched through chosen messengers and angels, should never be allowed to obscure, much less trump, the Word of God in Person.

Even in Jesus’ day there was a perception that God’s earlier written word stood contrary to the Living Word, God made Flesh.

## Benediction

Colossians 1:15–19,

<sup>15</sup>He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. <sup>16</sup>For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. <sup>17</sup>He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup>And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. <sup>19</sup>For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross (NIV).

## Worship Aids

### Welcome

The word of God is living and active. It sifts through the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Today, as we hear God's word, let our hearts be open and willing to hear. Let us be formed and transformed.

### Prayer of Confession

Jesus, you are the word made flesh. In you God fulfilled his promise to save humankind from their sins. You have the words of life and we need you.

...We know that too often we neglect the scriptures and do not feed on your words daily.

**Forgive us, Lord.**

...We avoid those parts of scripture that offend us and that require us to repent and change our ways.

**Forgive us Lord.**

...We fail to believe the miracles and promises of the Bible and so we limit your work among us.

**Forgive us, Lord.**

...We fall asleep when you are asking us to stay with you, to watch and to pray.

**Forgive us, Lord.**



...We continue to stubbornly pursue our addictions and live in bondage even though your word tells us we can be liberated and made free.

**Forgive us, Lord.**

Jesus, we receive your gift of forgiveness and renewal, extended to us so generously. You have the words of life, and we need you. Amen.

## **Responsive Prayer**

At Your word, O Lord, the worlds were created, and by your word new life is given. Open our ears that we may hear your words spoken to us today. Equip us with boldness to not only be hearers of the word but also doers. Help us to be a sweet fragrance to those around us because we have dwelt in your word, meditating on it and obeying it. Amen.

Or...

“Let us go up then, at long last, for the scriptures rouse us when they say: It is high time for us to rise from sleep. Let us open our eyes to the light that comes from God, and our ears to the voice from heaven that every day calls out this charge: If you hear his voice today, do not harden your hearts.”

~ Rule of St. Benedict

## **Benediction**

Shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life (adapted from Philippians 2:15–16). Amen.

## **Music Suggestions for Worship**

### *Contemporary*

Faithful One  
Forever  
In Christ Alone  
We Believe

### *Hymns*

How Firm a Foundation  
My Faith Has Found a Resting Place  
Standing on the Promises  
We Have Come to Praise and Worship  
Thanks to God Whose Word  
God Has Spoken by His Prophets  
Wonderful Words of Life

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A non-technical approach to biblical interpretation, this book emphasizes a relational approach to understanding the Bible in which the goal is a life-changing encounter with Scripture, rather than a technical mastery of the text. This is a very accessible and practical guide for how to read the Bible.

**Murray, Stuart. *Biblical Interpretation in the Anabaptist Tradition*. Kitchener, ON: Pandora, 2000.**

A recent work that reads the history of Anabaptist tradition to discern a stream that is broadly representative of what was a healthy diversity within Anabaptist hermeneutical practice. Murray deciphers six commonly shared values: the Bible as self-interpreting, Christocentrism, the two Testaments, Spirit and Word, congregational hermeneutics, and hermeneutics of obedience. A short paper based on his book, which is touted as the most comprehensive study of biblical interpretation in the Anabaptist tradition, is available at: [www.anabaptistnetwork.com/node/247](http://www.anabaptistnetwork.com/node/247).

**Thiessen, Arden. *The Biblical Case for Equality*. Belleville, ON: Guardian Books, 2002.**

While this book specifically addresses gender justness in the church, what makes it a valuable resource in interpretation is its careful explanation of how we read Scripture. After laying the groundwork of interpretation by addressing some fundamental hermeneutical issues the rest of the book provides a model of an Anabaptist reading of Scripture in the context of gender issues.

## ***Biblical Hermeneutics***

**Fee, Gordon D. and Douglas Stuart. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003.**

A well-rounded introduction to the issues and practices of good hermeneutics, specifically addressed to biblical interpretation, and emphasizing technical skills. It lays out the issues and provides models for how these issues could be addressed using good hermeneutical tools and skills.

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# The Church and the State: Principles and Imagination

*by Layton Friesen and Eric Jordan Doerksen*

**W**hat follows is a guide to the major issues, scriptures, sermon themes, and worship resources at stake in leading a congregation in worship around this theme.

## Introduction

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, politics have invaded everyday life in an unprecedented way. For previous generations, politicking was for the elite—the movement termed “modernism” held the ideal that knowledge was not only certain but it was also best left in the care of intellectual elite. The rise of the “post-modern” movement has brought the notion of relative truth along with decentralisation—the moving of power and knowledge from the upper classes to the general community.

Post-modernism placed ultimate authority into the general population, thereby emphasising the importance of human relations. Thus, as democracy ideologically became increasingly popular and information became globally accessible, more and more of the lower tiers of society were able to put their hand into what used to be

strictly for the elite. In this way, it has become common for each average citizen to have their own political point of view—often times a strong one.

Because of post-modernism's strong recognition of communal influence, a current major issue is that of ethical conduct; this includes the focus on environmental ethics, which has increasingly become more prevalent. Political issues have now become

For the Christian, the question of participation in the government has always been important.

household topics and the ever-present question of the relationship of the civilian toward the government has taken on a renewed vigour.

For the Christian, the question of participation in the government has always been important and in our current circumstances has taken on even more significance: How does one represent God's love through political participation? Better said, *can* one represent God's love through political participation? Such a question is increasingly relevant among Christians as more and more issues are brought to their immediate and individual attentions.

## A Continual Debate

For the Evangelical Anabaptist, that question is more dramatically relevant, since historically Anabaptists have continually debated over the issue of the relationship between church and state.

How much should a Christian support its government? Should Christians be permitted to hold political office? How intimately should Christians be involved with governments and their affairs? These are all questions which our Anabaptist spiritual forebears have struggled with and debated.

To them, the world was more or less clearly divided into two kingdoms: the Kingdom of Christ and the Kingdom of the World. The Kingdom of Christ was comprised of non-violence and forgiveness, of love and service—as Menno Simons wrote, it is a kingdom of “righteousness, peace, and joy.”<sup>1</sup> The Kingdom of the World was just the opposite, involving violence and vengeance, anger and pride—it is distinct from Christ's for His is a kingdom not of this world (John 18:32).

Most notably, the Kingdom of the World utilised “the sword,” which was an instrument of destruction and death—not of creation and life as would characterise Christ's Kingdom. Where Anabaptists wielded a sword, it was the “sharp sword of the

1 Menno Simons, *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, ed. J. C. Wenger, trans. Leonard Verduin (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956, 1984), 200.

Spirit, God’s Word,” whereas the “civil sword” was believed to be appointed to those in power.<sup>2</sup> The Schleithem Articles, written on February 24, 1527, stated in Article 6 that the sword is outside the perfection of Christ, leaving no room for doubt as to its place.<sup>3</sup>

While many Anabaptists believed, for the most part, governments were institutions instigated and blessed by God, they were strongly viewed to be a part of this world’s kingdom, and, therefore, contradictory to what Christ represents.

Certainly, it was believed, in accordance with Romans 13:1–7, that government was set by God and the ruler in power was the authority; however, the exhortation in verse 5 to submit to the authorities was only taken as far as the authority’s methods and decrees did not conflict with those of God’s. Once a conflict did arise, it was in God whom the ultimate loyalty was to be placed—and here lies the heart of the issue for the Christian.

If the government is to be followed in as far as it is in sync with God’s will, what is the Christian’s relationship to the government supposed to look like, knowing—especially now in this age of unrestricted information—that a large percentage of political affairs are questionable as far as Christian ethics are concerned?

Historically, Anabaptists have had widely differing views on the relationship between Christians and the government.

### *Balthasar Hubmaier*

Balthasar Hubmaier, for instance, had no objection to Christians fully participating in the government: “Christians may very well and with good conscience sit in court and council.”<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, he had no issue with Christians and the sword, stating that if “a Christian, by power of the divine Word, may and should be a judge with the mouth, he may also be a protector with the hand,” to which he adds that “a Christian may also, according to God’s order, carry the sword in God’s place over the evildoer and punish him.”<sup>5</sup>

Of course, he qualifies this later in his letter by noting that the Christian is, although

Historically, Anabaptists have had widely differing views on the relationship between Christians and the government.

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2 Ibid.

3 C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: Revised Student Edition* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 1997), 115.

4 Balthasar Hubmaier, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, trans. and ed. H. Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1989), 503.

5 Ibid.

in political authority, to continue acting out of Christ's love; thus, through a holy mentality of discipline the Christian wields the sword so that "he punishes evil persons... not out of envy or hate, but out of righteousness" for he is (that is, should be) "wholeheartedly sorry that such culpable people have not watched themselves."<sup>6</sup> Hubmaier maintains that the Christian in office remains and functions as a servant of God.

### *Schleitheim Confession*

While his theology paralleled that of Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli, Hubmaier's outlook is not shared by all Anabaptists of his time. As noted above, the Anabaptists who composed the Schleitheim Confession had a strong dual kingdom theology; therefore, according to them, a Christian was led by the Spirit whereas government was led by the flesh. Such strong kingdom theology did not permit a Christian to partake of the world's governmental office for it was outside and opposite the Kingdom of Christ.

### *Menno Simons*

Menno Simons implied that it is the unenlightened and the unsaved "magistrates and princes" who accept the sword instead of oppose it—because they are "nothing but earth and flesh, and lack the Spirit of Christ," they can only act by "stake, water, fire, wheel, and sword," in contrast to the Christian whose acts and pursuits are all toward the glory of the loving God.<sup>7</sup>

### *Hans Denck*

Additionally, Hans Denck argued the highest law was that of Christ's love—for which the standard of the Christian ethical guideline was to be compared.<sup>8</sup>

### *Pilgram Marpeck*

Pilgram Marpeck, writing around 1540, exhorted all Christians to affirm their citizenship in the Kingdom of Christ and in this way reject all other loyalties.<sup>9</sup>

While Marpeck contended that holding governmental office was open to Christians insofar as they could rule in accordance with the law of Christ's love, he also believed

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6 Ibid., 511.

7 Simons, *Complete Writings*, 424–425.

8 Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 269.

9 Ibid., 271.



that such a position between both kingdoms was nearly impossible to maintain.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the Christian is in a paradoxical situation if he or she desires a political position, for the laws of government, as perceived by this particular Anabaptist group, fundamentally opposed the laws of Christ.

When one summarizes Anabaptism one sees a difficult balance being attempted, perhaps even an ambivalence. The state clearly had a mandate from God, part of which might be to use the sword. Anabaptists were not anarchists. However, even granting this mandate to use the sword, Anabaptists were deeply critical of the way it was *in fact* being used, and would hold officials to account using scriptural teaching, calling attention to the officials' claims to be Christians.

Furthermore, many taught that though the state was mandated by God, being a Christian government official entailed difficult, even impossible contradictions with the mandate of the Kingdom of God. For some this meant absolutely no involvement with the state, for others it meant a limited involvement. A small minority following Balthasar saw few limits to a Christian's level of involvement. This ambivalence makes it difficult to clearly outline "the Anabaptist position" on the church and state.

## Categories Have Remained

Despite the debates and strong opinions endorsed by each group, the differing views historically held by Anabaptists have not changed through the years—and Christians in our present day struggle with many of the same questions. Every church consists of individuals with differing biases and beliefs, and the major categories have all more or less remained.

The attitudes of Christians toward the state which one is likely to encounter in any body of believers can be pithily summarised by borrowing from H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture*:

1. The *Christ Against Culture* stance is essentially that of the Anabaptists' two kingdoms model, which places the state apart from Christianity, "the world" apart from God's people. It is the belief of those who subscribe to this view that sin abounds and therefore "separation from the world is the preservation of the holy community."<sup>11</sup>
2. The *Christ of Culture* view attempts to harmonise Christ with the ideals of this world, therefore identifying the best of the state with the paradigms of God.

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10 Ibid.

11 H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1951), 78.

Those who subscribe to this attitude believe history will be fulfilled through the kingdom of this world by Jesus' utilisation of the good already existing within humanity, thereby disallowing any notion of God's entering into history to establish a new "holy order."

3. The *Christ Above Culture* position holds the Christian church as superior to the world's state. This view only perceives good in the state because it is believed to be an institution based on God's design—and is believed to be moving toward a future blending of the human order with God's law. God's grace is crucial for this position for it is the only means by which Jesus' teachings can be incorporated into human life—as opposed to the previous *Christ of Culture* view where such good is already present in humanity.
4. The *Christ and Culture in Paradox* stance recognises the separation of both Christianity and the state, while simultaneously acknowledging the necessary function of each. Therefore, the Christian holding to this posture participates in both worlds—in effect, possessing dual citizenship in both kingdoms.
5. The *Christ Transforming Culture* approach holds that Christians are able to “renovate” the Kingdom of the World and thereby convert it. Those holding this position recognize the sin of the state, but simultaneously believe that by the power of God it, too, along with fallen humanity, can be redeemed.

The *Christ Above Culture* position holds the Christian church as superior to the world's state.

These are the major background issues that need to be understood as one wades into this topic in an Evangelical Anabaptist congregation.

## Scripture Passages for Reflection and Use in Worship

***Psalms 146 to 149*** are expressions of worship that will set the agenda if they are read in the service. God's care for the little ones and his direction for the nation are both described.

***Philippians 2:5–11*** will be familiar to many of your listeners, but perhaps not as a text for understanding the relation between Christ and the state. Both the lordship and the love of God are poetically described. This could serve well as the main preaching text.

***Romans 13:1–7*** is the go-to text the church has used to teach on the role of the state. An Anabaptist distinctive can be portrayed simply by attaching 12:14–21 and 13:8 to the reading as brackets to the customary text.

*1 Peter 2:13–17* encourages Christians to honour and obey the government. It demonstrates that Christians are not against institutions as such, but are only against the abusive arrogance of institutions.

*Revelation* is probably one of the richest sections of the Bible in terms of the relationship between Christ and earthly powers. Chapter 5:1–14 and chapter 12 are great places to begin. Many Evangelical Anabaptist commentaries will highlight the message of Revelation in this regard.

## Sermon Guidelines

It will be the temptation of the preacher (as with many topics in this series) to provide a comprehensive guide on all the in's and out's of political participation by Christians. This is not wise. It is also probably not wise to try to define precisely what is or is not appropriate political involvement for a Christian, though some examples will be helpful.

Rather, we suggest that the sermon convey *two big convictions* kept in tension to portray the basic posture of Anabaptist wisdom on the church and the state, and then some stories.

## The Lordship of Christ

The first conviction is *the Lordship of Christ*. All humans have a truncated view of the intent and extent of the reign of Jesus in the world. Make it your intent in the sermon to inspire the listener with a glimpse of how much of the world Jesus intends to reign: He will rule *all* of it.

The realms of agriculture, health and medicine, marriage and family, transportation, communication and media, the arts, international relations, leisure and recreation, books, friendships, construction and architecture, the judiciary, religion, etc., will someday all in their own way declare the beauty and glory of God. *There is no realm in creation that is not presently destined for the worship and service of Jesus Christ.*

### *A Tectonic Plate*

Imagine the Kingdom of God as a tectonic plate slowly inching into the world. It is invincible, but its advance is undetectable to the common eye. The kingdom of this world is a tectonic plate too and does not budge easily. But it will and it is.

Where the two kingdoms meet there is fierce pressure as the world resists and kicks back against the good king's coming. This is why there is evil and suffering. According

to scripture these are but birth pangs of the Messiah being birthed into the world. (Jesus does not *cause* the evil, but the suffering happens as the dark kingdom revolts against his invincible arrival.)

The Church is called to live in the fault line between the Kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of this passing world. It is called to stand in this place of pressure and live in ways that announce the inevitable coming of Jesus into the world.

To preach the Anabaptist conviction about the church and state, this clash between the two kingdoms must be vividly imagined. Without it, Anabaptist suspicions of political power look like mere isolationism. We are not suspicious of the state because we think the world does not belong to Christ, but precisely because we think it does.

However, this suspicion does not mean that the Church is necessarily against everything the state is and does. It is possible for the state at times to lead in the direction the kingdom of God is headed. To the extent that government leads society into justice, order, respect for dignity, food for the poor, and education for all, it is working with, rather than against, the Kingdom of God. However, the Lordship belongs utterly to Christ.

Wherever there is a clash the Christian will instinctively follow Christ against the world. If listeners can see how the claims of the state are completely judged by the inevitable arrival of the Kingdom of God, they will have one cornerstone in place for thinking about the state and the church.

## **God's Self-Abandoning Love**

The second basic conviction is *the self-abandoning love* with which God has loved his creation and all who live in it. God has given himself completely for the well-being of the world, and this is important to imagine as we ask how and why Christians should be involved in politics.

### *Love in the Concrete*

There are several things about the love of God which will lead us to a full Anabaptist view of the church and state. First, this love is for persons as they live in their concrete individual lives and existences. God does not love us as an abstraction, as we necessarily do when we say we love the world. God loves each person like we love our best friend.

Where the work of the state brings about prosperity and well-being for real people, it is working the love of God. Where the state tramples some persons as abstractions (the unborn, the “enemy”) for the well-being of itself, it is fighting against the love of Christ

for the world and it is thereby judged and marked as passing away with the kingdom of this world.

### *Suffering, Non-resistant Love*

Secondly, the love of God for the world is a suffering, non-resistant love. God loves by taking evil and suffering onto Himself rather than passing it off to another. His love is shaped by the cross rather than the sword. Where the state enables this kind of love (and sometimes it does), it operates in keeping with the love of Christ. The question to be explored here: is it possible for a Christian, whose entire existence is determined by this kind of evil-absorbing love, use the violent means sometimes expected of government officials?

Having vividly imagined the complete lordship of Christ and the utter love of God for humans in their individual lives, you have given your listener a framework for discerning why and how to become involved in the state. You have shown them why it is important to obey the government whenever possible and why it is foolish to obey a government when it throws itself against the inevitable direction the world is headed.

### **Close With Stories**

Close the sermon by telling stories of people who have been involved in politics in ways that you think reflect the lordship and love of Christ. (If you don't know specific stories, make up examples using your imagination.)

God loves by taking evil and suffering onto Himself rather than passing it off to another. His love is shaped by the cross rather than the sword.

Did some farmland in your area get better drainage? Did someone change the way healthcare was delivered? Did someone change the way a bill was worded for the better? Has a voiceless people-group found empowerment? Was relief delivered to the site of a disaster? Did some Member of Parliament in your area make the government more transparent and accountable?

These are all forms of political involvement and could be celebrated by an Anabaptist preacher. It may also be helpful to tell stories of people who decided to disobey their government and accept the consequences.

To see the lordship of Christ and the love of God as two guideposts to understanding how we relate to powers around us is vital to maintaining the Anabaptist view of the state.

## Prayer Suggestions for Worship

Pastoral prayers for a worship service focusing on the relationship between the church and state should reflect a genuine Christian concern of the affairs of the government insofar as the love of God is represented toward our neighbours—both local as well as global. The pastoral prayer by nature already covers the lives of the congregants. Expanding it to the surrounding societal concerns, most of which will be politically addressed on some level, will not be a great leap and will keep a divinely inspired awareness.

### *Pastoral Prayer*

King of kings, we pray for those in political power,  
that they may have a sense of the importance and significance of their position.  
We pray that they may not govern their nations  
out of selfish ambition or vain conceit  
but instead to lead in ways of peace and true justice.

We pray that You would influence them,  
in the mysterious ways through which Your Spirit works,  
to strive for a better world by wisdom and mercy.

We pray that they might be filled with a sense of dedication  
to the welfare of the land and people;  
that they might govern in ways of peace and justice  
and not out of selfishness.

We pray that the alliances they make will better the state of humanity  
and not contribute to its down-fall.

We also pray for those in judicial authority,  
be it police, lawyers and the like;  
may their racial prejudices, discriminatory mindsets  
and desires to abuse power not move them to act,  
but instead we pray that they might use  
discretion, discernment and wisdom.

### *A Prayer of Confession*

A prayer of confession recognizing the lordship of Christ within our lives is fundamental, as Christians too often give in to the powers of the work world, the governing world, etc.

In addition, if Christ is the example by which we are to live (our chief goal to life), then our imitation of self-abandoning love is primary. Thus, a confessional prayer for the strength, and wisdom for such (genuine) service-oriented discipleship will be spiritually beneficial.

Grant us, O Lord, that we may live as bold citizens of the Kingdom.  
We pledge our allegiance to You, for You are the King.  
Lord, as we follow You, help us to wage war against our enemy.  
We know that our enemy is not flesh and blood; let us wage war as You do.  
You overcome evil with good.  
Help us to overcome evil with good.

You are the Peacemaker; make us be peacemakers.  
Help us to turn the other cheek; help us to resist evil with love.  
Grant us the wisdom, strength, courage and peace  
to stand rooted in Your will;  
help us to be an example,  
to be ambassadors and representatives of Your Word,  
for You alone are holy and good  
and apart from You, we are but dust.

### *A Prayer of Sending*

A final prayer of sending should incorporate a benediction of world-attentiveness grounded in the framework of Christ's teachings. As Christians, our citizenship is placed in the Kingdom of God, and a dismissal with such a reminder will be invaluable.

May the presence of the Lord go with you,  
that all may know He is pleased with you.  
May the Lord cause all His goodness to pass in front of You  
and may He call you by name.

May you go out into the week with the full assurance of God's presence.  
May you be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.  
May you not be ashamed of the gospel but live fully,  
live abundantly, live freely in the power of God's salvation.

May you place all your trust, hope and strength  
in the Lord Almighty and allow Him to lead.

## Music Suggestions for Worship

You will not find many songs on the Anabaptist view of the church and state. However, the singing in this worship service will do its part if it announces the reign of Christ over all things. Here are several examples of many your congregation may know.

### *Hymns*

All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name  
Crown Him with Many Crowns  
Jesus Shall Reign  
Joy to the World  
A Mighty Fortress is Our God  
Lead on O King Eternal  
God of Grace and God of Glory

### *Worship Songs*

Beautiful Saviour  
Awesome God  
He is Lord  
Come Now is the Time to Worship  
Shout to the North

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# Annotated Bibliography

**Clapp, Rodney. *A Peculiar People: The Church as Culture in a Post-Christian Society*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996.**

This book quite profoundly follows the changes over recent years of the church amidst a society becoming increasingly secularised. While this book does not deal directly with the matter of church and state, its discussion on the clash and re-creation of Christianity as a counter-culture can parallel as well as be drawn into the matter of governments. The stance Clapp might take for Christians in politics is, as a result, ambiguous.

The main thrust of his thesis is Christians are a part of a separate people, distinct from the world's cultural community, while at the same time necessarily interacting with it. It could be deduced that Christians should be self-governed and the state is in need of reform, for he mostly leans toward a dual kingdom theology.

**Hubmaier, Balthasar. *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*. trans. and eds. H. Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder, Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1989.**

Named by many as the leading Anabaptist theologian of the Reformation, Hubmaier has much to say on a variety of issues. Hubmaier held a position of note among the Waldshut Council, and in his letter *On the Sword*—which he wrote at a time when the pacifist position was only beginning to be formulated coherently—he argues that a Christian should have no problem in participating fully in governmental affairs insofar as the Christian remains true to the law of Christ's love and acts out of righteousness.

The treatise is divided into 16 "passages," each beginning with a Biblical text supporting his position. The last passage upholds the government as divinely instituted—and he outright declares, as he does previously, that any who do not submit to the rulers stand in opposition to God.

**Klaassen, Walter, ed. *Anabaptism in Outline: Selected Primary Sources*. Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1981.**

This book helpfully organises excerpts from an assortment of Anabaptist writings into succinct topics. This is an accessible resource to get an overview of the variety of theologies circulating at the time of early Anabaptism.

**Neufeld, Elmer. *Christian Responsibility in the Political Situation*. Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1958.**

This essay, first published in *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, is of great relevance to the topic and will be most beneficial to read. Writing from insights gleaned through a personal history with the subject at hand, the author makes keen observations while summarising contemporary theologies.

The shape of the state as overassertive as well as ostensibly sympathetic is here the underlying notion of North American governments, mingled with the exhortation for Christians to be fully participating in the compassion of Christ, and placing our loyalty in God as primary. The ultimate posture for the Christian, as argued in this paper, is to be involved in political affairs through the love of Christ without submitting ourselves to involvement with "the state."

**Niebuhr, H. Richard. *Christ and Culture*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1951.**

In one of the most widely known theological books on its subject, Niebuhr does an excellent job summarizing the five major categories of perspectives regarding Christians and culture. However, as any human work, it has its flaws—namely, the fluctuation in definitions of what “culture” is to mean.

Furthermore, the book is not specifically addressing issues of church and state, but rather more generally describes the encounter between Christianity and its surrounding ethos. Regardless, it is beneficial for its insights on the matter of the church within an increasingly secular society and can be easily applied to issues of politics and governments.

**Redekop, John H. *Politics Under God*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2007.**

A good description of appropriate ways for Christians to be involved in politics written by a contemporary Canadian Mennonite. Very accessible and practical.

**Simons, Menno. *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*. Edited by J. C. Wenger. Translated by Leonard Verduin. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956, 1984.**

Although often a difficult read, Menno Simons’ works are rich in theological insight. While Simons does not have an entire single writing devoted to the issue, he does refer to matters of the Christian and the state—as well as writes on it for portions of his missives (see *Foundation of Christian Doctrine*, 1539; and *Brief Confession on the Incarnation*, 1544).

His views on church and state, nevertheless, are obvious: they are two separate identities, which are wholly incompatible. The Kingdom of the World and the Kingdom of Christ operate on two entirely different sets of principles that in no way coincide; thus, Menno Simons argues for a complete separation of the church from the state, especially on matters of violence.

**Snyder, C. Arnold. *Anabaptist History and Theology: Revised Student Edition*. Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 1997.**

Snyder’s textbook is, as the title suggests, an overview of the Anabaptist movement. It is attentively detailed—when it isn’t slightly confusing—in its depiction of the birth and growth of each movement in the early centuries. Snyder, a professor of history, catalogues and categorises each of the major theologians and leaders of Anabaptism, summarising the positions held as well as the relations each individual had with contemporary and preceding Anabaptist thinkers and reformers. It is a rich treasury, both accessible and astute.

**Yoder, John Howard. *The Christian Witness to the State*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2002.**

No one has shaped contemporary Anabaptist approaches to the state like John Howard Yoder. In this book he describes his counter-intuitive and provocative thesis that the state exists for the church, rather than the church for the state. As such, the state can be useful to the church. Not a light piece to read, but certainly worth it.

## Lectionary Readings:

For the Old Testament vision: *Isaiah 2:1–4; 11:1–9*

For the teaching of Jesus: *Matthew 5:9, 38–48*

For the teaching of the Early Church: *1 Peter 3:8–17*



## Preaching Peace: Imitating the Presence of Jesus

*by Arden Thiessen, DMin*

One of the simplest ways of understanding the Christian life is that it is to be a matter of imitating God. Those who are children of God should resemble God. That's the clear message of Ephesians 5:1, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children." If we want it more explicitly we can simply look at the next line, "And live in love, as Christ loved us." To imitate God is associated with loving others as Christ did. Those who love others do not hurt or destroy, they practice peace.

Some Evangelical Anabaptist pastors find it difficult to preach peace. They suspect that the non-resistance we profess is just an old tradition passed on from those naively idealistic radicals of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. They say, "Yes, Yes" to their *Statement of Faith* because the church requires it. But in their preaching they don't touch the themes of peace and non-violence. They just "preach the gospel," as they put it. What is the

problem? Don't they read their Bibles? Well, yes, they may have read it quite carefully, but they find in their Bibles a wild and violent God.

So we need to talk about this God of the Bible. Did you know that eight times in the New Testament God is referred to as the God of peace? It is the most common descriptive term that the New Testament uses of God. These writers were well acquainted with the history of God as it is told in the Old Testament. Still, when they think of God they refer to him as "the God of peace."

## **I. The Severity of God**

Willard Swartley says we should not speak of God's violence. Violence is, by definition, evil, he says.

However, we can certainly speak of God's severity; the Bible even speaks of his vengeance. The apostle Paul advises, "Note then the kindness and the severity of God" (Romans 11:22). We should heed him.

The severity of God should be considered against the backdrop of human evil. When God looks at the good world that he created he sees a society broken by violence. God announced, or predicted, this brokenness when Adam and Eve sinned. Relationships would be marred between the man and the woman, between both of them and God, and between them and nature (Genesis 3).

This brokenness expressed itself essentially in violence. The first son born on earth murdered his brother. That was a sad omen of things to come. By Genesis 6 the narrator says God saw the world as saturated with violence (Genesis 6:12). The biblical history that follows, like the rest of the human story, is largely a litany of greed, fear, lust for power, war, and brutality.

However, God works with this world; he does not reject or abandon it. He does not allow the world to sink into total chaos. His severity is a matter of disciplining and guiding the broken world toward a better future; it is always a response to the wickedness of the people he created.

Consider the severity of God as it is revealed in the Bible.

### *1. The deadly judgments of God in the early Scriptural passages*

First, there was the flood that destroyed the first violent civilization. It consisted of a natural element, rain. But notice that Genesis 7:4, 23 describes the rain as sent by God for dealing with the sinful world.

Then, secondly, there was the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by a firestorm; it may have been a volcanic eruption. But the somewhat enigmatic line in Genesis 19:24 explains that the destruction came from the Lord out of heaven.

If we today are shocked by God's severity, we must remember that it is the severity of love.

Thirdly, the Exodus narrative describes the death of the firstborn in Egypt. It was by a plague, some mysterious fatal illness. But in Exodus 12:12 the Lord says *he* will strike the firstborn.

How would the people of Israel, telling these stories to their children, have understood their God? They must have sensed that the gracious Creator God remains Sovereign of his world in spite of human rebellion and violence. They will have recognized that the God who created life assumes the right to terminate life. If we today are shocked by his severity, we must remember that it is the severity of love.

It is how a God of holy love responds to the violence of sinful people. It is his way of keeping the world that he loves from destroying itself totally. God is severe because he is kind. As Paul said, "Note then the kindness and severity..." (Romans 11:22).

## *2. God's directives about Israelite warfare*

Israel's move out of Egypt was a major act of civil disobedience, like a declaration of war against their overlords. God protected them as they left. However, after only a few days in the Sinai desert they had to learn how to fight and defend themselves. Thus began a 600-year odyssey of militarism, both for expansion and for self defence. Sometimes they were victorious; sometimes they lost. Sometimes they waged war under God's direct orders, often they just fought as nations do. It is the wars that God ordained that are of interest to us when we think of preaching a peace message.

The biblical record suggests that God's favourite method of influence is to work indirectly through people. Occasionally, he acts directly, as demonstrated by the three cases above. Most of the time, however, his sovereign oversight, both his mercy and severity, is worked out through the interactions of people. In keeping with this method, God's plan for world salvation also required a special people:

- To whom he would reveal himself
- Through whom he would then make himself known to the world
- Who would be witnesses to the one God among the confusing polytheisms of the day

- Through whom he would demonstrate the marvel of his enduring love as well as the severity of his discipline
- Who would be developed into a people through whom he would physically step into the world. When he would become flesh he would be one of them. To keep such a people in existence the Lord sometimes allowed them to fight as their neighbours did.

### 3. *The Wrath of God*

Many times, especially in the prophetic writings, God is preached as a God of wrath. This is not only an Old Testament theme; it carries right over into the New. God's wrath, or anger, is his opposition to sin.

Wherever we read in the Old Testament, the themes of love and grace are never far away.

Again, as I noted above, if we read the Scriptures carefully we notice that the wrath is usually effected indirectly. Because God is angry the enemies come to attack and loot and kill. Because God is angry the skies refuse to rain or the locust swarms move in. And then there is

Paul's definition of the wrath of God in Romans 1. He says the wrath of God is *now* revealed against human evil, allowing them to go their own way, deeper into sin. God gives people up to experience the consequences of their rebellious evil. As Paul sees it, people bring the wrath upon themselves when they reject God and harden themselves against him.

## II. The Inclusive Mercy of God

One of our problems is that we have heard the war stories of Israel since childhood and we assume they capture the essence of the Old Testament. However, wherever we read in the Old Testament, the themes of love and grace are never far away. When God formally introduced himself for the first time he lists his mercy, grace, patience, steadfast love, faithfulness, and forgiveness. Only after this does he mention severity (Exodus 34:6-7).

Many believers, and the ministers who teach them, don't seem to know much about the prophets and their message. They don't realize that the writing prophets did not anticipate military glory or encourage fighting. They saw no future for their people in war and violence.

Instead of calling for strength and courage in their leadership, they preached humility and repentance. When they promised victory at all, it was God's victory. Some of them

gave specific counsel against war; even self-defence is futile, they said. Learning how to live with defeat, how to serve God in weakness, was now their agenda. What was necessary when Israel started out as a new entity among the little nations of the Middle East was, apparently, not necessary anymore for the survival of the covenant people.

In 581 BC Jerusalem was razed; that was the end of Judah as an independent kingdom. Now they had to learn they could be the people of God, and serve him in defeat and subjection. War had to be abandoned.

This led on to an inclusiveness in the later prophets that was not obvious earlier. The message now is that God loves all people; he is the Lord of the world. The prophets begin to sing about a time when all people will join Israel and worship God. This will happen not because the nations have been overpowered, but because they have accepted the truth. This vision of world peace and unity is especially powerful in Isaiah and Malachi.

Further, we notice that the singers of Israel have a vision for the whole world. The Psalms invite all the nations to worship with them and serve God with them. They pray that the glory of God may fill the earth. Ideas of sectarian domination have been discarded. The story that began with military conflict concludes with hope for a future of universal non-violence and peace.

So, has God changed? Some believe so. God must be evolving into a God of love, they say. Rather, let's see the change as evidence that God's work is effective; his program is moving forward. The ultimate message of the Old Testament is that God is moving the world forward to the future of peace that has been his goal all along.

### **III. The Jesus Event**

The basic New Testament idea is that the God of Moses and Joshua has visited this earth. God has been here in human flesh. His name was Jesus, the man from Nazareth. God appeared here to make himself known to us; he wanted us to become acquainted with him. He wanted us to know him in a different way than just by reading about the wars of Israel.

As the apostles understood it, what they saw in Jesus is what is to be known about God. Hebrews 1:3 says Christ is "the exact imprint of God's very being." Colossians 2:9 says, "In him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily." That is why we can say, "God is like Jesus."

Whatever we make of the Old Testament, nothing can change the fact that Jesus came with a message of peace. A lot of people thought the God of Moses, Joshua, and

King David would come to fight. The Messiah would be a warrior. However, the peace message of Jesus challenged them to revise their thinking about God. A few got the idea; most didn't. Instead, they murdered the messenger of peace. "Of what use is a Messiah who will not fight our wars for us, and does not even want us to fight? Crucify him! He doesn't belong here in our world!"

The apostles knew all about the wars and sundry violence of the Old Testament. But they speak of God as "the God of peace." How could they do that? They had spent time with Jesus. Jesus had revealed to them how God is to be known, that his sun rises on the evil as well as on the good, that he sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous, that those who love their enemies and pray for their persecutors are children of the Father, and that the peacemakers in this violent world will be called the children of God (Matthew 5:9, 43-48). That's what the presence of Jesus had made clear to them.

## IV. The Kingdom Plan

Jesus started his preaching by going from village to village and announcing that the kingdom of heaven is now here. Initially it seemed like an exciting idea; the Galileans loved it. Ever since Judah collapsed in 581 BC, they had been in subjection to foreign powers. By Jesus' day Jewish life in Palestine was relatively normal. But they were not free; they had no army to safeguard or expand their borders. As they saw it, they were still in exile, still waiting for the Anointed Deliverer. They hoped and prayed for some heaven-appointed hero who would lead them to victory again. The message of Jesus, backed up by his miracle power, seemed like the answer to their hopes. But then it all turned sour.

God had no plan to take part in the power games that were so common among the nations. Instead, he was inserting into the whirlpool of human violence a brand new idea, the idea of love. Among the kingdoms that vied for power, domination, and control, Jesus introduced a kingdom of gentleness and forgiveness.

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The idea was so unusual and unearthly that Matthew keeps on calling it the kingdom of heaven. It was as if the ideas and values of heaven had been transplanted to earth.

### *The Lord's Prayer*

In fact, The Lord's Prayer speaks of it that way: "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." That one line, even if there was nothing else on peace



in the Bible, should transform all believers. Will there be war in heaven? Do you think we will envy and lust and kill in heaven? You can't pray as Jesus taught and support the idea of war on earth.

The new kingdom that Jesus preached should be understood as a movement of peace. It was as if the principles of heaven had been parachuted into this world of proud and selfish people. The kingdom plan seems strange to worldly people; it doesn't seem to fit this life. The Jewish leaders in Jesus' day didn't like it either. A kingdom that will look like heaven instead of like old Israel or Babylon or Rome? They could not buy into it; it was too foreign. Should we not agree that those who reject the kingdom plan today are acting more like those old enemies of Jesus than like disciples of Christ?

One of the most important aspects of being a member of the kingdom of God is that one must dare to differ from the world, if necessary. Among many other things it must mean believing in peace.

## **V. The Peace Idea**

The teachings of Jesus seem abnormal to those who are used to worldly ways. The new kingdom plan, and the ethical teaching that came with it, has often been called countercultural. Peace is countercultural. We need to understand that all human cultures have been influenced by the evil kingdom that tries to rule here; every society has marks of this evil influence.

However, the idea that violence is necessary—it has been called the “myth of redemptive violence” because it says all our problems can be solved by violence—is the most universal of all such evil cultural intrusions. It is found everywhere. And maybe it is the most destructive.

Jesus' teaching on being non-violent went completely against this cultural grain. Read Luke 6:27–36 and notice how outrageously, jarringly contrary it sounds to normal human sensitivities. This is not what human cultures teach.

### *Temptation*

The Gospels tell us Jesus was actually tempted to fit himself into the world system and take the worldly way. Before Jesus began his ministry, the devil put this thought into his mind, “If I would worship the devil, that is, accept him as my lord and obey him, then I could have this whole world right now. I could then be lord over all this murderous, destructive mayhem as the devil's deputy” (Luke 4:5–7). We know how the story continues. Jesus rejected the temptation decisively.

Violence does not stamp out violence. Always, sooner or later, it leads to more, which is how the enemy of our souls wants it.

Jesus encountered a similar temptation a few years later. He knew the leaders in Jerusalem were plotting his death. They sent a mob into the Garden of Olives to get him. When Peter pulled out a sword to fight, Jesus said, “You know, I could muster twelve armies of angel forces if I wanted to” (Matthew 26:53). But he didn’t. He didn’t let Peter use his one sword either. Heaven doesn’t function according to

the ways of the world. To use the sword would have been to submit to the devil’s way of taking care of problems.

Violence does not stamp out violence. Always, sooner or later, it leads to more, which is how the enemy of our souls wants it. Destruction is his thing. However, God is the author of life and healing. Jesus resisted the violence by refusing to respond on their terms. Consequently, he was crucified. And on the cross he prayed, “Father, forgive them.” That is God’s way. That is how the kingdom works. That is the kind of thing for which we pray when we say, “May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

## **VI. The Responsibilities of Citizenship**

The apostles of Jesus in their practice, their preaching, and their writing were totally committed to Jesus’ way of peace. They understood clearly that it would be highly unconventional. They also knew it would be dangerous; they might lose their lives. They did not arm themselves and they never defended themselves. They understood that they were a defenceless community in a violent world.

Since then, some Christians have thought the only way to live in peace would be to escape from the world. The pious people of the Middle Ages gathered in monastic communities. Some separated from the world as wandering, begging, homeless hermits. Some Anabaptists have tried to resolve the conflict between the values of Jesus and the ways of the world by moving to remote, secluded settlements.

It seems quite clear that Jesus expected his people to be in the world. The world would need them; they were to function as witnesses to the world. The people of Jesus are to be a transformational influence in the world. How can that be done?

Peter’s first letter deals quite specifically with the nuts and bolts of living here; his advice agrees completely with the teachings of Jesus. Peter knows life may be difficult and complicated; he speaks of the fiery ordeal Christians may have to face (1 Peter 4:12). But the Christians are to respond with a clear witness and a good life (1 Peter 3:13–17).

Paul's letter to the Roman Christians has the same theme. It seems Paul appreciated the fact that there were Christian groups right in the Empire's capital. He advises them to respect the government, pay their taxes, and honour the leaders (Romans 13:1–7). Christians will not start a revolution in Rome, if Paul can help it. What the Christian influence on the Empire is supposed to look like is described in Romans 12:14–21. Their role is to overcome evil with good. After the lesson about citizenship he returns once more to the essence of the Christian influence. It all boils down to this, "Love your neighbour as yourself" (Romans 13:9).

## **Conclusion**

Some years ago an American minister, John K. Stoner, coined the slogan: "Let the Christians of the world agree that they will not kill each other." His words have appeared in various places, including on an MCC poster. With that thought the apostle Peter, and the apostle Paul, and our Lord Jesus would agree.

# **Worship Aids**

## **Welcome**

The Prince of Peace is among us! The God who restores and reconciles is here. He has made peace with each of us through our Lord Jesus Christ. And we are called to make peace with one another. We are called to live in love, as Christ loved us.

## **Prayer of Gratitude and Confession**

Holy God,

Thank you for creating the world in love.

Thank you that while violence runs deep in our beings,

because we are made in your image love runs deeper yet.

Thank you that no person and no circumstance exists outside of your

restoring love.

We confess that we have lived as though we believed otherwise:

...Instead of praying for our enemies we have spoken ill of them.

...Instead of pursuing truth we have clung to what is comfortable.

...Instead of resisting fear we have set "us" against "them."

...Instead of trusting in the gift of abundance, we have submitted to the lie of scarcity.

Forgive us our violence toward others in thought, word, and deed, as we forgive those

who have acted violently against us. May we continue to move into your peaceable

kingdom until it is the only home we know, both in this world and the next. Amen.

Or...

**We confess** to You, Lord, who we are: we are not the people we like others to think we are; we are afraid to admit even to ourselves what lies in the depths of our souls. But we do not want to hide our true selves from You. We believe that You know us as we are, and yet You love us. Help us not to shrink from self-knowledge; teach us to respect ourselves for your sake; give us the courage to put our trust in Your guidance and power.

**We also confess** to You, Lord, the unrest of the world, to which we contribute and in which we share. Forgive us that so many of us are indifferent to the needs of others.

**Forgive** our reliance on weapons of terror, our discrimination against people of different race, and our preoccupation with material standards. And forgive us for being so unsure of our Good News and so unready to tell it.

**Raise us** out of the paralysis of guilt into the freedom and energy of forgiven people. And for those who through long habit find forgiveness hard to accept, we ask You to break their bondage and set them free, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

~ from *Worship Together* #116

## **Responsive Prayer**

**Draw us into your love, Christ Jesus, and deliver us from fear.**

Because you were born fully God and fully human, you overcame the violence that separates us from our true identity as children of God.

**Draw us into your love, Christ Jesus, and deliver us from fear.**

Because you ate with tax collectors and sinners, you overcame the violence of discrimination and exclusion.

**Draw us into your love, Christ Jesus, and deliver us from fear.**

Because you made the blind to see and the lame to walk, you overcame the violence of victimization and powerlessness.

**Draw us into your love, Christ Jesus, and deliver us from fear.**

Because you taught your followers to pray for their enemies, you overcame the violence of hatred and judgment.

**Draw us into your love, Christ Jesus, and deliver us from fear.**

Because you gave yourself over to suffering and death, you overcame the violence of retribution and blame.

**Draw us into your love, Christ Jesus, and deliver us from fear.**

Because you were raised to life on the third day, you exposed the lie that violence is the most effective way to confront evil.

**Draw us into your love, Christ Jesus, and deliver us from fear.**

Because you have left us with the joyful promise of your return, you overcame the violence of hopelessness and despair.

**Draw us into your love, Christ Jesus, and deliver us from fear.**

**Prayer of Intercession**

May your unfailing love rest upon those we fear and those who have hurt us...

May your everlasting peace reign in places of war...

May your merciful justice deliver those who are suffering as well as those who are abusive....

**Benediction**

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

~ Philippians 4:7 NIV

**Music Suggestions for Worship:**

*Contemporary*

We Will Break Dividing Walls  
Unity (Jesus Help Us Live in Peace)  
Hear Our Prayer (by Steve Bell)  
House of Peace (by Steve Bell)

*Hymns*

It Is Well with My Soul  
God of Grace and God of Glory  
For the Healing of the Nations  
We Are People of God's Peace  
Peace Is Flowing Like a River

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# Annotated Bibliography

## Old Testament

**Craigie, Peter C.** *The Problem of War in the Old Testament.* Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978.

Peter Craigie, a former Royal Air Force pilot, treats the Old Testament narratives as historically reliable. He pays special attention to the “God as Warrior” theme and the “Holy War” edicts. His view is that war was necessary for Israel in their times, but that the overall message of the Old Testament points toward peace.

**Lind, Millard.** *Yahweh Is a Warrior.* Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1980.

Widely researched and carefully biblical, this older book is still a better resource on the subject of God’s vengeance and severity than some later studies. Lind is committed to Christian non-violence, but he does not argue that God is non-resistant, as do some recent Mennonite and Roman Catholic scholars.

## New Testament

**Swartley, Willard.** *Covenant of Peace.* Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006.

Swartley’s book is a thorough and comprehensive study of the New Testament peace theme. It is the most complete resource available for an intensive study of peace. He demonstrates that peace is an integral aspect of the gospel. The final three chapters deal with the theological and practical aspects of the peace witness.

## Theological

**Thiessen, Arden.** *Keeping in Step with the God of Peace.* Steinbach: Steinbach Bible College, 2008.

In contrast to some pacifists who build their case mainly on the teachings of Jesus, Thiessen is canonical and Trinitarian. He begins with God being a God of peace and then follows that theme from Genesis to Revelation. He is committed to the idea that when the Bible is properly interpreted it can be seen to have a unified, integrated message of peace. He argues that God is for peace, that Jesus taught non-violence, and that the church is to bear witness to his peace.

**Yoder, John H.** *The Politics of Jesus.* Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972.

Yoder’s book is probably the most widely read and most influential argument for Christian pacifism of recent years. While it seems to read like a collection of essays, it is actually a consistent and forceful theology of peace, although based essentially on Luke’s Gospel. The case for peace is placed within the framework of an Anabaptist view of the church.

**Lassere, Jean. *War and the Gospel*. Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1962.**

Keenly aware of the horrors of war, and disillusioned by the complicity between church and state as practiced during World War Two, this French Reformed theologian argues that the church must reject war. It is an older work, but is still used as a resource. The book is marked by biblical realism, a clear style, and vigorous convictions.

**Volf, Miroslav. *Exclusion and Embrace*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996.**

This is a theological analysis of the alienation created by discrimination and violence. Out of his personal background in the fractured Balkans, Volf sees the only hope as lying in forgiveness, or, as he puts it, in the embrace. Volf, a non-Mennonite pacifist and a Yale professor, finds the inspiration for his theology in the embrace of the suffering servant Jesus.

## **Practical**

**Kreider, Alan, Eleanor Kreider, and Paulus Widjaja. *A Culture of Peace*. Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2005.**

The authors present a plea for the development of a culture of peace in the church. Every congregation should be a community of peace, demonstrating peace and speaking peace to the wider community, the workplace, and international conflicts. They have a vision for integrating evangelism and the witness for peace. The book is light on theology, but has value for its persuasive anecdotes.