

TRADITION AND EXPERIENCE:  
THE FUNCTIONAL THEOLOGY OF A  
CONGREGATION AT WORSHIP  
[HILLCREST MENNONITE CHURCH]

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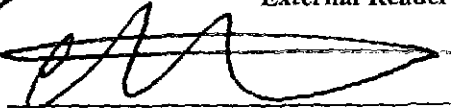
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## ABSTRACT

### TRADITION AND EXPERIENCE: THE FUNCTIONAL THEOLOGY OF A CONGREGATION AT WORSHIP [HILLCREST MENNONITE CHURCH]

The thesis that this dissertation seeks to demonstrate is that the functional theology of a congregation at worship is shaped both by the received theological tradition in which it stands, and by primary theology as experienced and reported by the worshippers. The underlying assumption is that theology and worship are intrinsically linked; each time people worship they "do theology." This is primary theology, while secondary theology consists of reflection on this first-order experience.

The Trinity is a "given" of the received faith in Christian worship. With this assertion as a starting point, the dissertation explores the implications of trinitarian language and thought for worship, beginning with the secondary theology of traditional orthodoxy, then proceeding to the primary theology of worship as experienced and described by those who worship at Hillcrest Mennonite Church.

The dissertation takes a phenomenological approach: using interviews and a questionnaire, congregants were invited to describe their own experiences of worship, both in terms of general Christian orthodoxy and of Anabaptist theology. Hillcrest stands within the Anabaptist tradition, which shapes their theology and experience of worship. The dissertation describes Anabaptist history, theology, practice and worship, from which Mennonite theology and worship is derived. Such a description of the essential characteristics of Anabaptist-Mennonite worship determined a series of questions for the survey project, designed to measure the participants' affinity with Anabaptist indicators. Templates measuring personal piety, degree of communalism, ethics, and the relation to daily life were also used.

The purpose of the project was to discover people's experience (primary theology) of worship. The desired outcome is to ensure that people at Hillcrest are nurtured by a worship which is both relevant to their personal experience, and authentically faithful to the tradition in which they stand.

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Thank you to the congregation-based committee at Hillcrest, Charlene Nafziger, Rebecca Steinmann, Ellis Brown, Vernon Brubacher and Cecil Wagler, who were supportive throughout the process and helped me to draw on the wisdom and experience of the congregation to provide a practical base for my studies. I am grateful too for the people of Hillcrest who participated in the interviews and filled out the questionnaire, and for Steve Brenneman who so faithfully tabulated the data on his computer. Thank you also to the congregational and conference leaders who made my study leave possible.

Finally, to Phyllis, my fellow worshipper and partner on the journey of life and faith; we have come this far, together, and grace will lead us home.

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## INTRODUCTION

### **A. Primary Theology at the Heart of Congregational Worship**

My thesis is that the functional theology of the congregation at worship (of which Hillcrest Mennonite Church is the case study) is shaped both by the received faith or theological tradition in which it stands, and by primary theology experienced by the worshippers. Let me summarize my definitions and choice of terms. First of all, primary theology is theology as experienced by people in their personal lives, which is reflected also in their experience of worship. By contrast, secondary theology is a second-order reflection on first-order experience. There is an interplay between these two levels of theology as we meet in worship. We in turn are directed toward a certain kind of first-order experience by the second-order discourse that we bring with us into worship. In my thesis project I am interested in discovering the primary or experienced theology of persons at worship, which reflects their inherent spirituality or encounter with the divine. As this is experienced and expressed in the context of congregational worship, I shall refer to it as the "functional theology of worship." That is to say, the theology expressed and experienced by people at worship comprises the belief(s) which they hold in both heart and mind, as well as its expression (function) as they participate in worship in the midst of the congregation, and live their lives in the world in the presence of God.

Often people in the congregation make the disclaimer "I am not a theologian." To such persons I would answer that people "do theology" whenever they reflect on their beliefs, because theology is simply faith seeking understanding. They also "do theology" each time they worship, as theology and worship are intrinsically linked.

Don Saliers explains this as follows:

The phrase "worship as theology" may seem odd to some readers...is not theology critical thinking, well-ordered, which argues and interprets

ideas about God? And is not prayer and participation in the public liturgy of the church a matter of "experience" and social practices, or at least of uncritical habit?...I argue that the continuing worship of God in the assembly *is* a form of theology. In fact, it is "primary theology"....It is the worship of God in cultic enactment and service of God in life that constitutes the "primary theology."<sup>1</sup>

So as I did a survey of the Hillcrest Mennonite Church, I attempted to allow persons in the congregation to give voice to their experiences and thus reflect on their primary theology. The results of the survey will be described and assessed in the second half of this thesis. I shall demonstrate the interplay of the primary theology of the congregation as experienced by individuals (and the congregation as a group in worship), and the secondary theology which is also present in the congregation at worship. My methodology is described in Chapter Four.

While we may be able to describe the external and visible manifestations of congregational worship, what is happening beneath the surface within the hearts and minds of the worshippers is not always self-evident. The temptation is to assume that we know what people believe and experience as they worship. After all, are we not in the same place, simultaneously participating in a common event called worship? But while congregational worship is public, in many ways what people are experiencing remains quite private. While congregational worship is communal, the experience is nonetheless unique to each individual. Yet, conversely, the sum total of individual experiences makes up the ethos, style, and mood of the worshipping congregation. The theology or theologies of a congregation both shape and are shaped by the worship of the congregation.

We do not worship in a historical or cultural vacuum, nor do we develop our primary theology entirely on our own. Behind and underlying our worship there is a

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<sup>1</sup>Don E. Saliers, *Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 15,16.

theological tradition which we have inherited, which we might refer to as "the received faith." What is the connection between the received faith in which we participate as inheritors of a tradition and the personal and communal experience thereof in the congregation? Robert Schreiter in his book *Constructing Local Theologies* argues that all theologies have contexts, interests, relationships of power, special concerns, all of which need to be taken seriously. At the same time the tradition or received faith needs to be taken seriously as well, even as we attempt to make theology relevant to the local context. As Schreiter says: "the gospel does not fall from the sky. Our faith is also...a faith we have heard from others."<sup>2</sup>

Who then is the "local theologian" in the midst of the congregation? Not every congregation has scholarly theologians in it. Some might suggest that the pastor is the "resident theologian" in the congregation. Schreiter argues however that the community is the theologian; theology should not be kept as the property of a theologian class. In this regard he says:

...the role of the whole community is often one of raising the questions, of providing the experience of having lived with those questions and struggled with different answers, and of recognizing which solutions are indeed genuine, authentic, and commensurate with their experience.<sup>3</sup>

In this understanding of the faith community, pastors and others who lead worship in the congregation presumably seek to reflect and express the theology of the particular congregation in which they serve and speak a word to the questions which are there in the hearts and lives of the worshippers.

This "local theology" is expressed in the congregationalism of the Free Church movement, of which the Anabaptist tradition provides the first example, a tradition

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<sup>2</sup>Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1985), 21.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 17.

within which Hillcrest Mennonite Church is situated. Free Church worship has two distinctive characteristics, says James F. White. "First, such worship demands freedom to reform worship exclusively on the basis of scripture without any compulsion to dilute the purity of reformation by compromise with human traditions. Second, the ordering of worship is determined locally by each worshipping community."<sup>4</sup> This is particularly true of the Mennonite Church which values congregational autonomy. Consequently each congregation develops its own particular nuances of theological emphasis as well as worship practices. This "local theology" is attested by the witness of a member of the Hillcrest Mennonite Church:

For me and for my husband and my family I guess, Hillcrest was a choice, and I'm really thankful to do it that way, and we didn't do it just because of our parents. We chose to come here because the theology fit in with my theology, and it just felt right. The worship fits in with me too.<sup>5</sup>

As I have said at the outset, my basic thesis is that the functional theology of the congregation is shaped by both the received faith or theological tradition in which it stands, and by the primary theology of the worshippers, individually and as a group. I should say theologies in the plural, since there may be as many variations on theology as there are individual worshippers. While Hillcrest Mennonite Church seems on the surface rather homogeneous, it is increasingly apparent that there are many theologies which play themselves out in the worshipping congregation, perhaps more implicitly than explicitly. The purpose of this thesis project is not necessarily to determine how

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<sup>4</sup>James F. White, *Protestant Worship: Traditions in Transition* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 80.

<sup>5</sup>This is the witness of a thirty-five year old female, from another Mennonite tradition who married a Mennonite from the same tradition as the Hillcrest church, but from another congregation. The question she was answering is "In what ways is our church setting conducive/not conducive to worship for you?"

to make these more unified. Rather, it is to discover what some of the theological variations are and how these might impact the life of the congregation and how one ministers in this context. (My purposes and goals are spelled out more fully in section B of Chapter Four.)

When one describes primary or experienced theology, one is really also describing people's spirituality. Philip H. Pfatteicher offers a provisional definition of spirituality which he draws from the work of Louis Bouyer. He distinguishes between the religious life, the interior life and the spiritual life. The first can mean nothing more than participating in ritual obligations. The second can be carried on apart from religion or spirituality, for example by poets or artists. The spiritual life, which incorporates both the religious life and the interior life, goes beyond them. For this to be truly Christian spirituality it must be Christocentric. Therefore Pfatteicher says there must be an encounter not with some *thing* but with *someone*.<sup>6</sup> He offers the succinct conclusion: "Spirituality is always a response to what God has done."<sup>7</sup> For Christians in particular, a central focus is on what God has done in Christ. In this project I have attempted to hear people's description of their personal encounter with the living God as they worship in the midst of the congregation.

#### **B. The Received Faith and the Experience of Worship**

While I am attempting to discover the primary or experienced theology which is functional in the worship of the Hillcrest congregation, I recognize that the faith tradition in which it stands, that is, the received faith, needs to be taken seriously as well. The received tradition constitutes both what we say we think, expressed for

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<sup>6</sup>Philip H. Pfatteicher, *Liturgical Spirituality* (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press, 1997), 3.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 4.

example in our corporate worship, and the way we act, expressed in worship as well as in daily life. Our understanding of the received tradition is shaped by both a conceptual and a practical framework, expressed as secondary theology on one hand, and primary or experienced theology on the other. It is my judgment that the two levels of discourse are in a constant dynamic, dialectic relationship. Indeed, we need to be careful not to create a false dichotomy between thought and action. One can encounter God intellectually and respond practically and ethically. Or, one can encounter God emotionally and respond in daily living.

There are three factors which influence how individuals in the context of the congregation at worship receive the tradition in which they stand. First of all, their thinking is certainly influenced by what the pastor as worship leader intends. Secondly, each congregation also has its own corporate culture ("the way we do things around here"). The third factor is that of individual preference ("the parts that speak to me"). In combination, these three factors, intersecting also with the received faith of the tradition in which the congregation stands, create the "local theology" of which Schreiter speaks. In worship, the theology of the people gathered is both shaped by and in turn shapes the theology of the congregation, in this dynamic intersection of the received faith and primary experience. This is what will be demonstrated in various ways throughout this thesis, within the following outline:

In Chapter One I shall attempt to describe the essence of Christian worship in terms of general Christian orthodoxy, describing the Trinity as the theological foundation of the Christian tradition and a "given" in Christian worship. In that chapter I shall also offer a brief definition of worship from within the general Christian tradition.

In Chapter Two I shall describe Anabaptist theology and worship, the tradition within which the Hillcrest church stands. In Chapter Three I shall describe the Mennonite experience in the years following the Reformation era, particularly in

North America in the past several hundred years. In Chapter Four I shall describe the local setting in Hillcrest Mennonite Church (my case study). I shall outline my methodology and establish the goals of my thesis project before I proceed in Chapter Five and following to describe the primary theology of the Hillcrest worshipping community with regard to the tradition within which it stands. In Chapter Five I shall ask the question, "To what extent and in what ways do people who worship at Hillcrest participate in general Christian orthodoxy or the received faith?" In Chapter Six I shall ask "To what extent and in what ways do people who worship at Hillcrest participate in Anabaptist theology in particular?" In the first part of Chapter Seven I shall describe several schematic typologies which will help us understand various kinds of religious experience or spirituality. This is of particular value to an understanding of the kind of spirituality (primary theology) experienced by those who worship at Hillcrest Mennonite Church, as described in the second part of Chapter Seven. In Chapter Eight I shall assess the prospects and goals for continued ministry and worship in Hillcrest, based in the findings of the research project.

Let me clarify why I will arrange my material, beginning with a chapter on general orthodoxy, then one on Anabaptist origins and finally the Mennonite experience in North America during the past several hundred years, including the experience of Hillcrest Mennonite Church in recent years. The image of an hour glass may be helpful here. The top bulb of the glass represents the historic Christian faith in its breadth and depth, the "received faith" of the various traditions and movements which funneled into the Church up to the sixteenth century. We must not forget that the sixteenth century Reformers stood within a long tradition, which had various streams and emphases, not the least of which were medieval mysticism, monasticism, a martyr theology, etc. The narrow part in the middle of the hour glass represents the Reformation era, in which for a variety of reasons the issues of theology and worship practices were compressed and given particular focus by various groups, including

Anabaptists. In this era conflicting viewpoints emerged and soon divided the church into factions. All too often the chief players in this drama seemed to forget what they had in common in the received faith and accentuated their differences. Eventually the conflicts subsided and people's viewpoints broadened as they became more tolerant of others in the Christian domain.

Since the Reformation era Mennonites have gone in one of two directions. On the one hand, because of persecution, they hardened the lines between themselves and the world, including other denominations, and established themselves as "a people apart." On the other hand, other groups of Mennonites have borrowed much from other traditions and have become more assimilated into the broader Christian church. In terms used by Max Weber, the social historian, one could describe this assimilation of Mennonites into the mainstream of Christianity as a movement from sect to denomination. That may be an over-simplification of the change and growth which has taken place among Mennonites. Some have retained sectarian values, even within a denominational context. Surely there are also theological as well as cultural reasons why Mennonites have sought to become more assimilated into the broader Church, reflected in a desire for Christian unity. In any case, while some Mennonites may wish they could return to the clarity of the Anabaptist vision of the sixteenth century, in which they were very much a counter-cultural group, Mennonite experience in the succeeding years tells us that we can no more do that than we could force the sand in the hour glass to reverse its flow! We can perhaps stop the cultural clock, as the Amish have done, but we cannot reverse it. However, what is in our control is that we can learn from our faith heritage and set new directions. This is true also of Hillcrest Mennonite Church.

We have to be careful in our description of the worshipping community at Hillcrest as we place a template of secondary theology (the received faith) over the experienced or primary theology of the worshipping community. I suggest that the



distinction between these two levels of theology is not always clear. People who experience God also reflect on God, thus doing both primary and secondary theology. Some people more than others will be consciously aware of the received tradition, others will have more unconsciously inherited it. In any case, it is also apparent that people drink from a variety of spiritual streams, a point which I will elaborate further when I describe the roots of Anabaptist spirituality, and when I show how later Mennonites have borrowed from other theological traditions.

We should note too the importance of the process by which the *primary* theology of one person or group becomes the subject of reflection and analysis in order to provide a *secondary* theology for someone else. We should bear in mind that a primary experience is not repeatable. For example, people sometimes bemoan the fact of the many denominational differences and wish that we could be "just Christian," or that we could become once again a "New Testament Church." They forget that the scriptural witness is already a second-level discourse and reflection on first-level experience. They are doing second-level reflection even as they seek to recapture that primary experience from another time and place.

## CHAPTER ONE

TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY - THE THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION OF  
CHRISTIAN WORSHIP**A. Toward an Understanding of Trinitarian Theology in Worship**

In response to the question, "What is the point of trinitarian theology?" Robert W. Jenson comments: "Theology is not *initially* a second-level discourse...initially it is rather the first-level act of calling on God by the triune name, and of making prayers and sacrifices that follow the triune logic and use the triune rhetoric. And in this mode, trinitarian theology does not have a point, it *is* the point."<sup>8</sup> In other words, the Trinity is a "given" of the received faith in Christian worship. With this assertion as a starting point, I shall explore the implications of trinitarian language and thought for worship, beginning with the "secondary theology" of traditional orthodox theology, then moving to the primary theology as experienced by those who worship.<sup>9</sup>

What Jenson says in the quotation cited above is important for two reasons. First of all, when we worship we need to be clear about *who* it is we worship. Trinitarian language assists us in clarifying our understanding or apprehension of God. Is this the same God that all persons everywhere who worship are worshipping, or is the triune

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<sup>8</sup>Robert W. Jenson in *Trinitarian Theology Today*, editor Christoph Schwobel (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 31.

<sup>9</sup>The second-level discourse to which Jenson refers is the well-ordered reflected theology of critical thinking which argues and interprets ideas about God, as Don E. Saliers says in *Worship as Theology*, 15,16. As Saliers says, first-level theology is expressed and experienced as cultic enactment and the service of God. For our purposes we shall use the terms "secondary theology" and "primary theology" to speak of second-level and first-level theology respectively. Secondary theology is a reflection on primary theology, which is based in experience.

God unique to Christians? (Can one be a "unitarian" Christian, or is that in fact an oxymoron?) Secondly, in our practice of worship itself, *how* do we address God? The *who* and the *how* questions will be kept in mind as we proceed. In some sense the former question is perhaps more of a theoretical construct, the latter a practical outcome.

Though we affirm that trinitarian theology is a given in Christian thought and worship, it did not simply drop instantaneously from the sky in a flash of revelation; rather it evolved through a series of first hand experiences (primary theology) and subsequent reflection (secondary theology). Let us briefly illustrate this, beginning with the biblical witness, keeping in mind both the *who* and the *how* of God's self-revelation in worship. I hasten to add that what we see in the biblical accounts is not in itself trinitarian, but rather lays the groundwork for later full-blown trinitarian theology. For our purposes we might say that in scripture we have the seeds of proto-trinitarian thought.

Concerning how we come to an understanding of the nature of God, Lesslie Newbigin asks:

So which then is the true God, the one we can apprehend by human reason, or the one we can know only by faith? If indeed the God we encounter in the Bible is the true God, how is it conceivable that this God should be a baby in manger or a man on a cross? And, above all, what is one to make of the Trinity? If then the God we encounter in the Bible is the true God, then must we not conclude that the God of natural theology is a construct of the human mind - in other words, an idol?<sup>10</sup>

Can we safely substitute "secondary theology" for the "human reason", and "primary theology" for Newbigin's phrase "by faith"? How can we avoid the idolatry which creates God in our own chosen image? The latter question is always a central concern

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<sup>10</sup>Lesslie Newbigin, in *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1997), 4.

in scripture, as persons of faith attempt to understand who it is they encounter as they meet God in various theophanies. Thus the primary theology (both individual and corporate) which stems from such experiences of theophany soon yields to secondary reflected theology, both in the individual and in the community of faith. Even the records of such encounters with the Divine in scripture constitutes secondary theology. Let me illustrate this briefly with reference to several scriptural witnesses.

In Genesis chapter 28 we find the account of Jacob's dream in which he sees a ladder "the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. *And the Lord stood beside him....*" (emphasis added). We stop there in our reading to emphasize the point that God in God's self-revelation was perceived by Jacob to be standing by his side. The *who* was the God of his fathers Isaac and Abraham. When he awoke from his dream, upon immediate reflection on the event, he remarks "surely the Lord was in this place, and I did not know it." He did not ask *how* this could be, he simply accepted this as a theophany which was full of promise, and which was life-shaping. This occurred within the framework of an emerging monotheism.

The writer of John's Gospel, when he remembers this biblical account, does reflect on the *how*; How is this possible, that God should stand by the side of Jacob? He quotes a saying of Jesus: "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." Jesus is the ladder by which God comes down to us (John 1:51). John's Gospel in its Johannine Logos christology presents a 'high' christology, which lends itself to later affirmations of Christ's pre-existence. The Logos-Son christology of John 1:1-18, and the parallel notion of the pre-existence and divinity of Wisdom at the time of creation according to Pauline Wisdom christology (for example, see Colossians 1:15-20) are but two examples of biblical sources which allow an attribution of deity to Christ. Earlier, Paul could declare "God was in Christ," and thus we see the emergence of binitarian

theology, which later develops into something more like trinitarian thought. Soon in the New Testament Church the designations "God our Father" and "the Lord Jesus Christ" are seen as mutually conditioning referents, the Father and Jesus. Neither one is known apart from the other.

As Ralph Del Colle says, the Fourth Gospel presents the highest christology in the New Testament, first of all in the prologue as we have just noted, then also in the "I am" statements (6:35;8:12;10:9,11;11:25;14:6;15:1). Perhaps the highest moment in John's high christology, from the point of view of a primary witness, comes when Thomas declares, "My Lord and My God" (20:28). In the terms 'Lord' and 'God' both the identity and differentiation between Christ and the Father are simultaneously maintained. Jesus himself is reported by John to have said "I and the Father are one" (10:30). Still, in chapter 17 we see the dialogical relationship between Jesus and the Father, in his 'high priestly prayer.'

John's logic spills over into Matthew and Luke in a statement common to both: "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him" (Matthew 11:27, Luke 10:22). While we cannot derive a full-blown trinitarian theology from the saying, it nevertheless offers further biblical evidence that the meaning of Father must be determined by the life and work of Jesus of Nazareth. This is in continuity with the God already revealed to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the covenant with Israel. In short, "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" is also the God of Abraham and Sarah. Thus is established a clear binitarian theology, the first step towards trinitarian thought. But a trinitarian view of God would be undermined if our study of the New Testament only yielded a biunity between God and Christ. A great deal depends on what we read in New Testament scripture concerning the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit.

When the Spirit is added to the relationship of Father and Son, there is planted the biblical seeds of a full-blown trinitarian theology. In some passages references to Christ and the Spirit are almost interchangeable. For example, Romans 8:9 names the Spirit of Christ. In several Corinthian passages Christ and Spirit appear to be entirely conflated (I Corinthians 15:45; II Corinthians 3:17). Del Colle, citing James D.G. Dunn, suggests "in the experience of the believer there is no difference between the risen Christ and the Spirit."<sup>11</sup> John's Gospel declares that the Spirit is sent by the Father in Christ's name to bear witness to him and continue his work. As Del Colle says, "there the Spirit is the modality of the presence of Christ."<sup>12</sup> This is the same Spirit of God which was present at the conception of Jesus (Luke 1:34,35), inaugurated Jesus into public ministry (Luke 3:21,22) culminating in his redemptive death (Hebrews 9:14), resurrection (Romans 1:4) and exaltation (John 15:16). But the work of the Spirit is not limited to the Godhead. We as Christians also participate in the same Spirit, which allows us to call God "Abba" (Romans 8:15,16).

This is the theological context in which the post New Testament church met to worship. John the revelator declares that he was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. On the Lord's Day (the day of resurrection) he was in the Spirit, and he worshipped the One who was seated on his throne. This One is "the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come." But this One is soon conflated with the risen Christ as the heavenly choir sing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for

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<sup>11</sup>Ralph Del Colle, in Colin E. Gunton editor, *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 125, who also cites James D.G. Dunn, *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 139.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid*, 126.

ever and ever" ( Revelation 4:8;5: 13). Those who worship each Lord's Day, as did John, do so in the anticipation of worship surrounding the Throne of God, where Jesus sits at God's right hand (Revelation 1:10; 4: 10- 11). It is trinitarian thought that allows us to affirm that the Jesus of history is also the Christ of faith and the Lord of the coming eschaton. Oscar Cullmann in his treatment of early Christian worship also cites the Book of Revelation, showing its significance because the revelator sees his heavenly vision on a "Lord's Day", the day of Christian worship. Consequently he argues that the present worship in the church anticipates that worship which is ultimately in the presence of God at the last day.<sup>13</sup> And so in the vivid memory of Jesus' first post-resurrection appearances, and in the anticipation of the resurrection life to come, the church sings "Jesus stand among us, in your risen power." <sup>14</sup>

As Del Colle reflects on the Resurrection accounts of scripture and the events of Pentecost which follow he adds: "...faith in the risen Christ and testimony to the outpoured and indwelling Spirit require a theological explication of the monotheistic confession that is consistent with the awareness of a more pluralistic dimension to the saving action of God and the *graced recognition of the same in worship and doctrine.*"<sup>15</sup> That is to say, in our worship, based in both Old and New Testaments, we proclaim the God who by his grace brought Israel from Egypt and also by grace brought our Lord Jesus from the dead. Both are salvific acts which God has performed in time. This leads to an eschatological framework - that God moves us

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<sup>13</sup>Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship*, Tr. A. Stewart Todd and James B. Torrance (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1953), 11.

<sup>14</sup>Rebecca Slough, Editor, *Hymnal: A Worship Book* (Elgin, Illinois: Brethren Press; Scottdale, Pennsylvania: Mennonite Publishing House; Newton Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1992), 25

<sup>15</sup>Del Colle, 122. The emphasis is mine.

forward through history to an eternal destiny. The biblical witness continually says in various ways that God has saved, is saving, and will save the People of God. This is essential to any complete understanding of salvation history, and it is central to Christian worship. As we have noted earlier, the Spirit and the risen Christ are increasingly conflated in biblical thought. The same Jesus of history who walked among the people is also the Christ of faith throughout time and eternity, and the Lord of the coming eschaton.

The seeds of trinitarian theology and worship which were planted in the New Testament, began to take root in the early church and came to full bloom in the church through the centuries from the Church Fathers (Tertullian and others) and succeeding generations of church theologians. We shall not take the space here to fully describe those developments. Suffice it to say that the doctrine of the Trinity as we know it today is a post-biblical doctrine which was forged in the heat of theological debates within the Church in the first three centuries. The defining question in the debates often is "Is there a unity between the 'essence' of God and the 'mode' in which God is revealed?" The heresy of modalism stated that God has three faces, not unlike the personae or masks of the Greek theatre. The problem is that one never sees past the personae or modes of God to the essence of God behind the masks. In a sense modalism suggests that there is yet a fourth entity, the mysterious unknown God. The particular trinitarian orthodoxy which emerged in Christian theology opposes modalist positions, that is, "that the distinctions of Father, Son and Holy Spirit applied only to the activity of God in the world and did not bespeak any distinction inhering in the divine being itself."<sup>16</sup> Throughout the centuries, modalism always lurks on the fringes and often is brought to the centre of theological discussions of the Trinity.

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<sup>16</sup>Del Colle,123.



For our purposes we must ask what was at stake in those disputes about trinitarian Christological formulae, and in particular, what is the relevance to our discussion of worship? Arius argued for the absolute uniqueness and transcendence of God, thus Christ the Son could not fully be equal to the Father. Therefore, in practice, most early Christian liturgical prayers were made to God the Father. But, further to this matter of praying, let us not forget the *who* and *how* question which Jenson poses, as we noted above. Willimon speaks to both parts of this question when he says:

At stake here is the question "To whom are Christians to address their prayers?" Most early Christian liturgical prayers addressed God the Father. Nicaea through its rather belabored creedal formulation, in order to preserve the equality of Christ, affirmed the Son's worthiness to be the focus of prayer because of his status as divine mediator. We pray to God through Christ.<sup>17</sup>

The question "To whom are Christians to address their prayers" is a question which is asked both by those who experience God in worship (their primary theology) as well as by the subsequent or concurrent reflections of secondary theology. Trinitarian theology addresses both the *who* and the *how* of Christian worship. The conclusion of the matter in the logic of trinitarian thought is that we pray to God, in the name of Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. However, there may be various nuances in this practice, as we shall see in part B below.

Some imagery might assist us in the task of describing the outcome of trinitarian theology in worship. Suppose we imagine the Trinity to be like a three-legged stool on which we base our Christian worship. What then are the implications for worship and the life of the faith community if any one of the legs is too "long" or "short"? That is to say, what happens if one accentuates or diminishes the role of God the Father, Jesus the Son, or the Holy Spirit? In our various acts of worship we tend to

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<sup>17</sup>William H. Willimon, *Word, Water, Wine and Bread: How Worship Has Changed Over the Years* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1980), 43.

address one or the other person of the Trinity based on the apprehension of God in our primary experienced theology.

The "point" of the Trinity in worship (to return to Jenson's term) is first of all that God is self-revealing in three persons; how we address God in worship follows. But the underlying issue in all debates about the self-revealed nature of God is our own inability to apprehend God. Indeed, any attempt to "capture the essence" of God lurks always on the edge of idolatry. We may not create "graven images", but we do create images of God in our minds. Indeed in any description of God, language itself has those inherent limitations of only being able to point to the reality which it describes. Certainly trinitarian language itself is already a second-level discourse on the first-level experience of God within the human spirit. As St. Paul declares, it is the Spirit himself that allows us to give utterance to our experience of God.

The theology of the Church has developed through the centuries, as we have described, through the interplay of experience and reflection. Perhaps again the imagery of an hourglass will help us picture how trinitarian theology emerged. The top bulb of the glass represents all the experience and thinking that fed into the formulation of trinitarian theology. This included the biblical witness as well as the cultural milieu of Graeco-Roman thought and philosophy. The narrowing down in the middle is most evident in the Council of Nicea in 325. Everything which flowed out of that time into the bottom bulb of the glass gave shape to the received faith of the Church, which includes a full-blown trinitarian theology. The question which arises from this is whether the theology which we have received in that form needs to remain a "given", or whether it can be altered in some way through the ongoing dialectic of personal experience and reflected theology. This is the question to which I now turn.

The question can be reframed: Can (must) correct orthodox secondary theology sometimes give way in the face of the primary theology of the worshipping

community, so that the needs of the worshippers can be met? "The trinitarian framework, a traditional way to speak about God, has been particularly problematic for Christian feminists," says Lydia Neufeld Harder, a Mennonite scholar.<sup>18</sup> I would add that the language of trinitarian thought is, if not offensive, certainly difficult for most Christians, pastor and people alike. Are there possibilities for nuances of interpretation which need not necessarily do an injustice to the essence of the concerns for orthodox theology? Harder proposes that we can do this with a reconstructionist (not deconstructionist) approach, "from below" but still using a triune framework for speaking about the God of the Bible. Citing Sallie McFague, Harder says: "freedom to reimagine has been given by noting the metaphorical nature of all religious language about God and accepting human agency as part of the theological enterprise."<sup>19</sup> While McFague may be overstating the case to say that all language about God is metaphorical, it is nonetheless true that much of our apprehension of God is figurative. Often people can best make sense of their personal experience of God through figurative language. The reimagining which McFague speaks of does happen, as we see in the following illustration:

When Count Zinzendorf founded the Christian community in Pennsylvania in 1741 he preached the recognition of the Motherly office of the Holy Spirit: That the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is our true Father and the Spirit of Jesus Christ is our true Mother; because the Son of the living God, his one, only-begotten Son, is our true Brother. Moltmann, who cites this event, concludes that "the personality of the Holy Spirit can be grasped more precisely with the image of the Mother than with other images. The unique fellowship of the Trinity can be understood better with the image of the Mother than with any other ideas of the Spirit...In its feminine and motherly characteristics, 'the

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<sup>18</sup>Lydia Harder, *Obedience, Suspicion and the Gospel of Mark* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1998), 67.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 67.

fellowship of the Holy Spirit' has a healing, liberating and sensitizing effect."<sup>20</sup>

Preachers have long struggled with making trinitarian language understandable for the average person in the pew. (The three-leaf clover becomes a favourite homiletical illustration!) One might well ask whether there is a sense in which any apprehension of God, and any subsequent or concurrent attempt to address God in worship must always to some degree participate in modalism, that is, by what mode we understand and worship God. The answer is no. Any direct experience of God is not modalistic, but points us behind the "mask" (mode) to an encounter with the essence of God. But Christian theology affirms that we can know God only to the extent of God's self-revelation in the "economic trinity," that is, how God relates to the world. For example the statement from the Psalms "The heavens declare the glory of God" reminds us that God is revealed as Father/Creator (Psalm 19:1). The Pauline statement "God was in Christ" tells us that God is revealed in the Redeemer/Son (II Cor.51:19). And St. Paul reminds us that it is by the Spirit that we call God Abba (Romans 8:15).

Using the imagery which I proposed at the outset of this chapter, do we distort the essence of God whenever we lengthen or shorten one leg of that three-legged stool called Trinity? The distinction resides in the human subject, not in the nature of the divine object of our worship, as we consider the functional theology of a congregation at worship. This is the difference between the *economic* Trinity and the *immanent* Trinity. The former is how the three persons of the Godhead serve to reveal facets of God's character made known in the world. The latter is the relationship of the three persons within the Godhead as such. Sometimes we need to understand God as Father/Creator, a God "who has the whole world in His hands." At other times we are profoundly aware of our need for salvation, thus we address God as Redeemer

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<sup>20</sup>Jenson, *Trinitarian Theology Today*, 64, 65.

through the Son, through whom we experience a vision of healing and hope. And we are profoundly aware that it is God's Spirit that gives us freedom to address and experience God at the very core of our being. God reveals Godself according to our needs. That is the genius of Christian trinitarian theology, and is at the heart of Christian worship.

The most popular contemporary rendition of the triune name "Creator', 'Redeemer', and 'Sanctifier' emerged because of feminist concerns to replace the triune name with formulations that avoid the gender specific language 'Father' and 'Son'. One could argue that the shift is in itself not apostasy, but is a response to a particular felt need of persons at worship. Some might argue, however, that this rendition of the triune name is a kind of functional modalism. This is so in the judgment of Robert Jenson, who suggests that both the triune name and the triune vision are immune to the kind of translation we noted above. Maintaining the traditional view of the Trinity, he asserts: "The function of trinitarian theology is to maintain against all compunctions that the biblical story of God and us (set in time) is true of and for God himself (in God's eternal character)."<sup>21</sup> God "set in time" to use Jenson's phrase describes the economic Trinity. God "in God's eternal character" speaks of the immanent Trinity.

Lesslie Newbigin writes about the Trinity in the context of today's popular theological climate. In his essay *The Trinity as Public Truth*, he asserts that "the public image of God is unitarian." He adds: "Insofar as the word 'God' makes its occasional entry into the discourse of the public square, it is certainly not the triune God. Is it unfair to suggest that it is much more recognizable as a conflation of Aristotle's prime mover with the Allah of the Qur'an?"<sup>22</sup> The point of citing this

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<sup>21</sup>Jenson, *Trinitarian Theology Today*, 37. Paranthetical statements are mine.

<sup>22</sup>Newbigin, *The Trinity as Public Truth*, 2, 4.

quote from Newbigin is to ask whether there is any greater clarity regarding the Trinity in Christian worship than there is in the public sphere. In particular we shall later explore what is the functional theology of the Trinity held by those who worship at the Hillcrest Mennonite Church.

I have argued that trinitarian thought begins with the premise that God is self-revealing. Don Saliers then draws an inference from this concerning worship and prayer. He says: "Every prayer in the name of Jesus is radically dependent on the gift of God's presence. Therefore all true worship begins and ends with a calling upon the name of the triune God, whose Holy Spirit gives life to our worship."<sup>23</sup> Again, the presence of God of which Saliers speaks may in trinitarian thought be perceived equally as God in Christ, or God in the Spirit, or God in the Spirit of Christ. We shall see in part B some of the variations on how we call upon the name of the triune God.

I turn now to a sub point which is not usually immediately recognized as part of the discussion about the Trinity, but is one I wish to pose as significant, that is, the connection between trinitarian language and Christian community. Mennonites place considerable emphasis on the Christian community in worship as they meet with their sisters and brothers in Christ. Are we in danger of placing so much emphasis on Christian community (the immanent, horizontal dimension in worship) that we lose a sense of the transcendent (the vertical dimension in worship)? Walter Klaassen, writing from within the Mennonite tradition, attempts to reclaim a sense of the transcendence of God, for a denomination which has in his mind focused much on the horizontal dimension in worship. He says:

We humanize God so much that we locate Him solely in other people and we end up praying to each other...In this situation the Christian Church, including the believers church, has a divine mandate to proclaim the God who

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<sup>23</sup>*Saliers*, 118.

is both transcendent and immanent...In a world in which there are no longer symbols and signs of spiritual reality, we need more indicators of God than our fathers (*sic*) needed.<sup>24</sup>

He adds: "The primary purpose of public worship is to acknowledge God, our Creator and Redeemer...supremely revealed to us in Jesus in the midst of human time and space."<sup>25</sup>

Having made a plea for a stronger sense of the transcendent in worship, Klaassen nevertheless affirms the strongly-held Mennonite view that worship is a community affair when he says:

Worship is confirming and strengthening in each other the awareness of the unfailing nearness of God and His constant love and goodwill, to admonish and encourage each other continually to accept God's grace and to express that grace in our relationship with all people and all the rest of God's creatures. *Worship is a symbolic expression of the unity of the church as the new humanity.*<sup>26</sup>

How does our awareness of each other shape our awareness of God? In our Mennonite emphasis on community, are we indeed in danger of "praying to each other" as Klaassen so provocatively suggests? A clearer sense of the Trinity in worship may avert this problem, as it deals with how the Word becomes flesh among us. Trinitarian language is in itself also the language of relationships. What then is the place of the Christian community in God's design?

C. Norman Kraus wrote a book entitled *The Community of the Spirit*. In a chapter entitled "The Individual-in-Community" he argues that biblical cultures emphasized the community as basic for human identity. Salvation is the work of God in creating

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<sup>24</sup>Walter Klaassen, *Biblical and Theological Bases for Worship in the Believers Church* (Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1978), 17.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid*, 18.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid*, 20. Emphasis added.

covenant community - the messianic community in Christ. The problem of alienation between the individual and society, so characteristic of the modern Western world, is foreign to the Bible. He says: "...the Old Testament concept of the individual-in-community under the covenant of Yahweh...represents a unique understanding of the individual in relation to the God who transcends the community."<sup>27</sup> The point is that we as humans do not exist in God's presence alone. This is equally true in the New Testament as in the Old Testament, in which indeed the Church is called the New Israel of God. But there is in my judgment a significant difference between the Old Testament and New Testament concepts of community, based in the theology of the Trinity.

As the biblical proto-trinitarian theology develops, we increasingly see the logic that the internal "community" of the three persons of the Trinity is a paradigm for the community of the Church itself. John's Gospel perhaps states this idea most clearly when he attributes the words to Jesus: "...that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you...that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me" (John 17: 21, 23). As Jürgen Moltmann says: "The unity of the community is in truth the Trinitarian fellowship of God himself, of which it is a reflection and in which it participates... *The community is the 'lived out' Trinity.*"<sup>28</sup> Lesslie Newbigin adds his word on this: "If, as is said, the unitarian model of deity responds to and perhaps encourages, the atomic view of human society, plainly the trinitarian understanding of God, in which relatedness is constitutive of the divine being, corresponds to a view of society that understands the human person in his or her

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<sup>27</sup>C. Norman Kraus, *The Community of the Spirit* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1993), 13, 15.

<sup>28</sup>Jürgen Moltmann, *History and the Triune God* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 63, 64. The emphasis is mine.



relatedness to others."<sup>29</sup> In other words, if we are indeed to be "like God" in whose image we are created, we are created to be in relationship, and we bear witness to this in the worshipping community.

There are three levels of communion which emerge from the thoughts expressed by Moltmann and Newbigin. First of all, there is an intra-trinitarian communion among God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit, hinted at in the proto-trinitarian language of John 17. That is the immanent Trinity, within the Godhead as such. There is however also an economic Trinity which speaks both of how God relates to the created world and of how God is made known in the world. Christology is the key to the relationship between the Trinity and humanity, hinted at already in the Pauline declaration "God was in Christ." The third level of communion then is the human communion of the Church which was founded at Pentecost as the community of the Spirit. Each time we meet to worship in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, we meet in the presence of the Risen Christ. This is the one who said: "I am the vine, you are the branches." This is the one of whom Paul speaks in terms of body language; he is the head, we are the body. As we are thus intimately linked to Christ, so in turn we are linked to the Father; and all of this by the power of the Spirit. Thus we can argue that true Christian human community participates in the economic Trinity, and is predicated on the internal community of the Trinity.

Let us review what we have established thus far:

First of all we have stated that trinitarian theology is the first-level act of calling on God by the triune name. Trinity is how we know God. Or, to be more precise, it is God's chosen mode of self-revelation. All Christian praying and worship is predicated on the triune logic and rhetoric, that God chooses to be thus self-revealing.

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<sup>29</sup>Newbigin, 6.

Secondly, we have inquired whether contemporary attempts to rename the Trinity participates in the heresy of modalism. We have concluded that, quite to the contrary, it is necessary to keep working with language that communicates to us in any human attempts to apprehend the nature of God, for us who always "look through a glass dimly."

Thirdly, trinitarian language helps our understanding of God as one who acts in history as well as one who has an eternal character. This has eschatological implications that are recognized in worship, as we both remember the acts of God and anticipate worship of God in eternity around God's throne.

Fourthly, I have maintained that trinitarian language is foundational to a sound ecclesiology. Its relational dimensions and language undergird the concept of church as *koinonia*, a covenanted fellowship community. This also has implications for the Church at worship in every local congregation.

### **B. Trinitarian Language and Theology as the Foundation of Christian Worship**

Having laid the foundation for our understanding of the Trinity as the *who* and *how* of Christian worship, we now venture into further exploration of how trinitarian language and theology is foundational to Christian worship. Since trinitarian theology is a given of the Christian tradition, it offers Christian worship and community a distinct and characteristic shape. Christians who follow biblical patterns experience worship in trinitarian form. John Thompson, in his book *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives* devotes a whole chapter to this topic. I shall attempt to capture the essence of his argument.

He begins with the assertion from the British Council of Churches report on Trinitarian Doctrine Today: "It is in our *worship* that most of us become aware of the doctrine of the Trinity. We all sing hymns that address each of the three persons in the

one Godhead and in the more liturgical traditions, we end our recital of the Psalms and Canticles with a threefold ascription of glory to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." He adds, "In this there is implied a coordinated relationship between a trinitarian doctrine of God and what we do when we worship him."<sup>30</sup>

Thompson further cites the BCC report: "There are various ways in which the trinitarian character of worship is understood: as being offered to the Father through the Son and in the Spirit; or to the Father, to the Son and to the Spirit; or to the one triune God. *But all alike witness to the reality of relationship, of communion.*"<sup>31</sup> The latter part of this statement confirms what we described earlier that the relationship of the persons of the Trinity can serve as a model for Christian community and relationship.

Though Thompson suggests, citing the BCC report, that "worship can be offered directly to the Father, the Son, or the Spirit", when he addresses the matter of our Trinitarian stance in prayer he says: "While all three persons in the Trinity are necessary properly to speak of God as one it is primarily to the Father that the Son and the Spirit lead us in prayer."<sup>32</sup> We can cite Pauline scriptures in support of this, for example when Paul says "God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts crying 'Abba,

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<sup>30</sup>John Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives* (Oxford University Press, 1994), 94, who also cites *The Forgotten Trinity, The Report of the B.C.C. Study Commission on Trinitarian Doctrine Today*, (London: British Council of Churches, Inter-Church House, 1989) vol. 2, p.5. The assertion "we all sing hymns that address each of the three persons in the one Godhead" needs to be tested. While the statement is true, it is however, clear that not all Mennonite hymnal editors equally use the Trinity as a guiding principle for the organization of the hymnal. We shall explore this further in chapter five.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 94. The emphasis is mine.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 95.

Father'." (Galatians 4: 6) Likewise, the Lord's Prayer gives to God the distinctive name 'Father'.

On one level, we pray to God "in Jesus' name." Only as we understand Jesus as part of the Godhead can we also pray to Jesus. Popular and often childlike piety does this routinely. The general principle, however, seems to be that Jesus taught us to pray to God the Father and never invites us to address him (Jesus) in prayer.

Scriptures which speak of the Risen and Exalted and Vindicated Christ might allow us not only to say "Jesus is Lord," but also to pray to our Lord who is seated at God's right hand. This would be reminiscent of Thomas' declaration before the risen Christ, "my Lord and my God" (John 20: 28).

The dominant train of thought, however, suggests that Christian prayer is *to* the Father, *through* the Son, *enabled* by the Spirit. Galatians 4:6 states "Only the Spirit enables us to know God as Father." Likewise I Corinthians 12:3 tells us that only the Spirit enables us to confess Jesus as Lord. And of course Romans 8 profoundly expresses the role of Son and Spirit in our praying. Christ's role as High Priest and Intercessor is known to us only by the Spirit. Thus Thompson helpfully and succinctly deals with the role of the Trinity in prayer and in Christian worship.<sup>33</sup>

Though at heart Christian experience of God is directly trinitarian, the Church has through the centuries felt the need for liturgy to direct the experience of God for worshipers, it seems, by formula. The Liturgy of the Hours according to the Roman Rite pays particular attention to the use of the triune name of God in prayer and offers the following formula: "If the prayer is directed to the Father: We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. If it is directed to the Father after a mention of the Son is

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<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*,96.

made: who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. If it is directed to the Son: You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever."<sup>34</sup> The Free Church tradition does not pay such careful attention to the formulae of trinitarian prayer in the liturgy.<sup>35</sup> Nor do the worshippers at the Hillcrest church, as we shall see in Chapter Five.

The doctrine of the Trinity is important also in relation to the Word and preaching. By this I do not mean that we need to regularly preach sermons about the Trinity, though certainly some teaching in this area would not be amiss! Consider for a moment the earliest sermons recorded in the New Testament. That preaching begins in a seminal manner with the simplest assertions in the Book of Acts, repeated in various ways: "You killed him, God raised him." Of what kind of person can this be said? This is an early primitive secondary reflection on the primary experience of the disciples who walked and worked with Jesus and encountered the risen Christ. The apostolic testimony is that the Jesus who was crucified "God raised up....being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear"(Acts 2:33). In this sentence is contained the seminal idea of the Trinity. The three persons of the Godhead are present in the writer's mind, if not in the speaker's mind.

Preaching relates closely to the second and third persons of the Trinity. John's Gospel affirms that Jesus Christ himself was the original Logos (Word) incarnate who was with the Father from the beginning, as we see in the prologue (John 1). Then

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<sup>34</sup>*The Liturgy of the Hours* (New York: Catholic Book Publishing, 1975), 652.

<sup>35</sup>Anecdotal evidence drawn from conversation with a pastoral colleague, suggests that the Dutch branch of the Mennonite Church in North America in which he grew up retained the formula of beginning each worship service with the words "in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost." This was not part of my experience growing up in the Swiss branch of the Mennonite Church.

emerges the notion that the written testimony of Scripture, guided by the Holy Spirit, is also the Word of God. The Word is central to Christian worship because it bears testimony to Jesus Christ and to "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." But the Word can only be received and experienced by the Holy Spirit - it is a gift. Is this then what John means when he writes "They that worship him, must worship him in Spirit and in Truth" (John 4: 24)? Thompson says: "Worship must be by the Holy Spirit, who through the written and preached Word leads us to the living Word... The character of Christian worship is thus based on Jesus Christ who is the Truth (Word) of God."<sup>36</sup> We shall reflect further on this matter in the next chapter as we review the Anabaptist understanding of the relationship of Word and Spirit.

It is in relation to the sacraments, especially in baptism, that the most explicit trinitarian formula in the New Testament is found. We are commanded to "go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 29: 19). This is neither theoretical nor speculative language; it is language based on the central affirmation of our faith as it relates to our salvation in Christ, by the Holy Spirit. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, the sacraments, especially communion, remind us that Christ may be known not simply as past event but as present reality. The sacraments are ways in which God continues to be "fleshed out" in the life of the community of faith, as Thompson says, "from God to humanity and from humanity to God, but set within a trinitarian movement from above to below and vice versa."<sup>37</sup>

Each aspect of worship - preaching, praying, singing, the offering, baptism and communion - all are responses to God on the basis of what God has already done for

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<sup>36</sup>*Thompson, 97.*

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid., 99.*

us. As we come to worship we come with the focus not on our human action, but in worship grounded in God's initiative. The triune God who was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself is the object of our worship, and is the author of our salvation, appropriated by the moving of the Spirit in the human heart. Thus, while we have established that the Trinity is at the heart of orthodox Christian thought and worship, so too is grace. Several writers reflect on the fact of God's initiative of grace in worship, as follows.

Michael Perry, in *The Paradox of Worship*, argues that our understanding of worship is entirely too much grounded in human action, rather than in God's initiative.<sup>38</sup> As his title suggests, Perry works with the various paradoxes between God's actions and our reactions. His basic presupposition is that worship is a divine activity in which we are invited to participate more than a human activity directed towards God. Indeed, all Christian worship is entirely an activity of the Holy Trinity which does not depend on human awareness or human participation. Such worship is centered in the Trinity. He quotes Colin Dunlop:

An individual Christian coming to church comes not so much to offer worship as to join in an offering continually going on. He (*sic*) comes not to initiate worship but to contribute to, and be carried up by, a worship which never ceases, the source and foundation of which lies in the eternal activity of Christ.<sup>39</sup>

Underlying this statement by Dunlop is the theological assumption that God's grace comes to humankind entirely at God's initiative, therefore it also follows that it is only through God's grace that we are enabled to join the worship of God which is always taking place around the heavenly throne.

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<sup>38</sup>Michael Perry, *The Paradox of Worship* (London: SPCK, 1977), 3.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 10, who also quotes Colin Dunlop, *Anglican Public Worship* (London: SCM Press, 1953), 16.

There appears to be some affinity with the views expressed above in the writings of Walter Klaassen, a Mennonite scholar and churchman who wrote:

First, it is recognized that we have been drawn into God's purpose by His sovereign graciousness and goodwill toward us. It is a gift which we receive and which we have not earned. Secondly, we recognize that our response to this divine goodwill is to receive it and to pass it on to our neighbours, human and nonhuman, in the created world. Again it is not a question of our earning God's goodwill by doing His bidding; it is our willing and joyful participation in 'our Father's business.'<sup>40</sup>

John E. Burkhardt, a former student of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich, writes from within the Reformed (Presbyterian) tradition. The pivotal question of his book is asked in his first chapter title "Why worship?" His answer: "Worship is a graced response through symbolic activities that celebrate God."<sup>41</sup> He further asserts that worship is a Christian response to what God has done and continues to do, thus there is no longer any room for *cult* (i.e. to "care for the gods to free them from care," as the Greeks have said). God can be God without our worship, but can we survive as humans without worship? he asks. He concludes that since God does not have the needs of the pagan gods, humans are released from cultic functions and are free to serve one another.<sup>42</sup>

This is a Christian idea which occurs already in the Epistle to the Hebrews. In his letter to the churches the writer describes the role of Christ within the cult of temple worship and sacrifice. He answers the implicit question "What makes Christ's sacrifice greater than all cultic sacrifices practised before him in the Temple?" (See Hebrews 8:6) The answer is that Jesus, the high priest, offers himself (Hebrews 9:12).

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<sup>40</sup>Klaassen, 10.

<sup>41</sup>Burkhardt, John E., *Worship: A Searching Examination of the Liturgical Experience* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1982), 28

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid*, 18



It is of this high priest that God says: "You are my Son; today I have become your Father" (Hebrews 5:5, Psalm 2:7). In this proto-trinitarian designation of Jesus as God's Son, seen also as God's high priest, we see the connection between the initiative of grace in worship and the Trinity. How else except in trinitarian thought can one speak of God offering himself in the acts of worship? It is precisely because of this self-giving attribute of God that we humans can do away with the cultic functions which Burkhardt notes, as quoted above. The Anabaptist understanding of the eucharist does not include the notion of the reenactment of the sacrifice. Instead, modelled after Jesus' life and teachings, as well as his self-giving priestly sacrifice, we devote ourselves to the service of others, in sacrificial living. This view is possible in a Christocentric understanding of the Trinity. This brings us to the question we raised at the outset of this chapter.

The question is "What happens when one or the other leg of this three-legged stool called the Trinity is lengthened or shortened?" The immediate response is to say that it becomes unbalanced. This could be seen as a negative consequence from the point of view of the received faith or orthodox theology. Let me offer a more positive interpretation. Texts such as Ephesians 4 and I Corinthians 12 make the point clearly that not all parts of the body are alike; each one plays his or her unique part, gifted by the Spirit. What is true of individual Christians could also be applied to the various denominations and their congregations within which "local theology" is formulated and given voice. Not all denominations are alike in their emphases, yet each makes its unique contribution to the whole Body of Christ. And this is true also with respect to the emphasis on the Trinity.

So, for example, Anglican worship might emphasize God as Father, accenting the transcendence of God, God's immutability and mystery. Anglican scholars offer clear thinking in this regard. The excess of this is cold intellectualism. The charismatic or Pentecostal emphasis on God as Spirit may yield to what some call excessive

"enthusiasm," but it also emphasizes personal experience. That is their positive contribution to the Body of Christ. And while the emphasis on present personal experience is carried by charismatic worship, the sense of the broader Church and long-range history is carried by the Catholic Church, which also provides the sense of the mystery in sacrament and worship. Mennonites tend to place the emphasis on the second person of the Trinity, Jesus as Son or Word. This can lend itself to a "sweet Jesus" style of piety, in which God in Christ is our friend (as in the song "What a Friend We Have in Jesus"), or it can lend itself to a strong sense of ethical Christianity with the themes of discipleship, as in the Anabaptist motif of "*nachfolge Christi*". So, instead of being critical of where each of us in our local theology or primary theology places the emphasis, we can draw from each other what is good, noble and true in worship.

And so we today, like the Church throughout the ages, keep attempting to use and define theological language which best speaks to us in our present time and place. In Chapter Five we shall reflect on the experience of the Trinity and aspects of worship related to this as reported by those who worship at Hillcrest church.

## CHAPTER TWO

## ANABAPTIST THEOLOGY AND SPIRITUALITY -ROOTS AND STREAMS

**A. Anabaptists: Inheritors of Ancient Traditions, Products of Their Own Time****I. A Brief Overview of Anabaptist Studies**

We turn now to a brief description of Anabaptist history, theology, practice and worship, from which Mennonite theology and worship is derived. This is the tradition in which Hillcrest Mennonite Church stands as a congregation. We shall attempt to define Anabaptist theology ("The Anabaptist Vision," in Bender's terms) and describe the Anabaptist-Mennonite worship which follows from that theological tradition.<sup>43</sup>

Before we proceed, we need to briefly examine the nature of Anabaptist studies, historically and today. In 1935, Harold S. Bender completed his Th.D. at Heidelberg. He entitled his thesis "Conrad Grebel, the first leader of the Swiss Brethren." Eight years later, in 1943, as president of the American Society of Church History, Bender presented his most influential essay, "The Anabaptist Vision," which was published in *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* in April, 1944.<sup>44</sup> In 1941, C. Henry Smith from

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<sup>43</sup>In Chapter Six we shall assess how and to what extent those who worship in Hillcrest Mennonite Church continue to be inheritors of the spiritual tradition which Harold S. Bender called "The Anabaptist Vision." Harold S. Bender, "The Anabaptist Vision," MQR 18 (April, 1944): 67-88. Guy F. Hershberger, ed. *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision* (Scottsdale, Pa: Herald Press, 1957), provides insight into the way in which Bender's summary became "institutionalized" within Mennonite historiography. John Roth portrays a recent re-assessment of the impact of the Anabaptist Vision, in his book *Refocusing a Vision: Shaping Anabaptist Character in the 21st Century*, (Goshen, Ind.: Mennonite Historical Society, 1995).

<sup>44</sup>Harold S. Bender, "The Anabaptist Vision," MQR 18 (April, 1944):67-88.

within the tradition, had published his Mennonite history, *The Story of the Mennonites*.

Scholars from outside the tradition, such as Roland Bainton and Robert Friedmann, were also doing work in Anabaptist studies at the time. Bainton, in his essay entitled "The Left Wing of the Reformation," posited a number of characteristics shared by a broad set of sixteenth-century Protestant sectarians, including general categories such as belief in religious freedom, and separation of church and state. Thus, in his inclusive reading of Anabaptism, Bainton saw many versions of Anabaptism in the sixteenth century.<sup>45</sup>

Bender took an approach opposite of Bainton's, using exclusive categories. For Bender, Anabaptists were the quintessential sixteenth-century Protestants. In his words, they "retained the original vision of Luther and Zwingli, enlarged it, gave it body and form, and set out to achieve it in actual experience."<sup>46</sup> His primary entry into Anabaptist thought was through the eyes of the Swiss Anabaptists, Conrad Grebel and his peers. Bender's Anabaptist "Vision" consisted of three main points. The first, and probably the key point, was the conception of the essence of Christianity as discipleship, which meant the transformation of the entire way of life of both the individual believer and of society so that it should be fashioned after the teachings and example of Christ. This was not, as it was for Luther, the inward experience of the grace of God. It was the outward application of that grace lived out in the daily life of following Christ (*Nachfolge Christi*). The second concept was that of a "voluntary church membership based upon true conversion," with a membership based on a "commitment to holy living and discipleship." This was in contrast to the

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<sup>45</sup>Albert N. Keim, *Harold S. Bender, 1897-1962* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1998), 315.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 317.

*volkskirche* or mass church which the Protestant Reformers accepted. This view of voluntary church membership also embraced the idea of separation from the world, in Bender's terms, "nonconformity." The third element of Bender's "Vision" was the ethic of love and nonresistance, applied to all human relationships. Bender called this "Biblical pacifism." This he considered to be what most distinguished Anabaptists from their sixteenth-century Protestant contemporaries.<sup>47</sup>

Much of historical scholarship has in the past defined the Anabaptists at the point of their differences from, rather than their general affinity to the "received faith" of the Christian church. A more careful study than I have space to pursue here would demonstrate where these similarities and differences exist among the three Reformation era groupings of Catholics, Protestants and Anabaptists. Walter Klaassen did a good piece of work in reminding us that Anabaptists are neither Catholic nor Protestant; they share views from both groups as well as developing their own theological understandings.<sup>48</sup> The same viewpoint was captured in the title of the book by Paul M. Lederach, *A Third Way*.<sup>49</sup>

Arnold Snyder, a student of Walter Klaassen, builds on this revisionist thinking. He with other current historians sees not one "Anabaptist Vision" as Harold S. Bender defined it, but various groups of Anabaptists, with varying beliefs, varying "visions" if you will, emerging from various settings. Yet Snyder is interested in positing a "core" of common beliefs and practices at the heart of the Anabaptist movement. Is this a regression to the H.S. Bender school which introduced an essentialist understanding

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<sup>47</sup>*Ibid*, 318.

<sup>48</sup>Walter Klaassen, *Anabaptism: Neither Catholic Nor Protestant*,(Waterloo: Conrad Press,1973).

<sup>49</sup>Paul M. Lederach, *A Third Way*, (Scottsdale, Pa., Waterloo, Ontario: Herald Press, 1980).

and definition of Anabaptism? Not necessarily, says Snyder. It is not so much a "neither-nor-but" as a "both-and" stance. That is, we can describe some aspects of Anabaptist theology which seem to have been rather consistently and broadly shared among various groups, while at the same time appreciating considerable variations on these themes, both at their origins and in succeeding years. To take this stance, one needs to ask questions that focus on variations of the development of early Anabaptism.<sup>50</sup> In other words, history is not static. The Anabaptists were constantly in conversations with the Reformers and others, and among themselves. Many of the points of discussion should be seen as dialectical, not as fixed opposites.

Snyder, in Chapter 8 of his *Anabaptist History and Theology*, outlines the core teachings of Anabaptism in relation to the rest of the Christian Church. He reminds us that Anabaptists were inheritors of the ancient Christian confessions, such as the Apostles' Creed (We shall expand that point momentarily). He goes on to describe Anabaptist views shared with Evangelical/Protestant groups. These include anti-sacramentalism (critique of Catholic Sacraments), anticlericalism (critique of the Catholic clergy), authority of Scripture (critique of papal authority) and salvation by grace through faith (critique of Catholic view of soteriology).<sup>51</sup> Snyder proposes a developmental approach to Anabaptist studies, beginning with an understanding of their location in general Christian thought, then assessing their place in the theological milieu of the Reformation era.

I would add that while it may at times be helpful, for purposes of precision, to divide our studies into the categories of "pre-Anabaptist," "sixteenth century

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<sup>50</sup>Arnold Snyder, "*Late Medieval Spirituality, Anabaptism, and Pietism: Some Preliminary Notes on Methodology*", (Unpublished paper read at Anabaptist Colloquium, Spring, 2,000, held at Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo).

<sup>51</sup>Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 142.

Anabaptist," and "Anabaptist-Mennonite" (the spiritual successors of the sixteenth century movement) eras, with the developmental approach to Anabaptist studies that Snyder proposes, one can see a stream or streams of a certain kind of spirituality which flow across several centuries, from the fourteenth century to the beginning of the eighteenth century, and presumably to some extent, to today.<sup>52</sup> The dialectic, then, is "continuity and change" rather than fundamental disagreement across the various groups in their own time and place. We need to see how the Anabaptists were a product of their own time (the "local theology" in Schreier's terms), as well as the received faith and theological traditions which they inherited. It is to this "received faith" that we now turn our attention.

## 2. Anabaptists: Inheritors of Christian Orthodoxy and Trinitarian Theology

The issue or quarrel the Anabaptists had with the Church of their time was often more to do with systems and institutions than with actual theological differences, though these too existed. In broad strokes, Anabaptists had no quarrel with general orthodox Christian thought as such. C.J. Dyck, a Mennonite historian, demonstrates

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<sup>52</sup>A burden which is carried by historians from within the tradition is to determine when we are talking about "Anabaptists" per se, or their spiritual successors, "Mennonites." Strictly-speaking, one could reserve "Anabaptist" as a designation of an early sixteenth-century movement, and use the term "Mennonite" for the branch of Anabaptists who followed the leadership of Menno Simons some time after his conversion to Anabaptism in 1534. But would this leave out the Swiss/South German Anabaptists? Thus I, somewhat arbitrarily perhaps, use the hyphenated "Anabaptist-Mennonite" to designate any and all of those spiritual descendants of the 16th. century Anabaptist who are prepared to claim Menno Simons (a Dutch Anabaptist) as one of their spiritual forebears, as well as Conrad Grebel, et al. from the Swiss beginnings. We should note that the Swiss Anabaptists simply called themselves the Swiss Brethren from the start, and for several centuries to come, though they would have accepted the designation "Mennists," given to their Dutch sisters and brothers to the north, especially since that designation often helped to distinguish them from the "Münsterites", the group of Anabaptists who used violent means to achieve their ends. Thus "Mennonite" also came to be a designation for a people of peace.

the essential orthodoxy of Anabaptism by including Leonard Schiemer's interpretation of the Apostles' Creed in his book *Spiritual Life in Anabaptism*.<sup>53</sup> Dyck reminds us that Menno Simons too referred to Nicea, and Peter Riedeman wrote a commentary on the Trinity. Dyck describes Anabaptist views of the Trinity as follows:

Most Anabaptists were devoutly trinitarian. While Christ was God incarnate to them, the Holy Spirit was the enabler who made Christian living possible. The new birth was impossible without the Spirit. Most importantly, the Spirit alone enabled the believer to understand the Word of God and apply it to life. It was the Spirit who guided into all truth, dispensed spiritual gifts, sanctified, comforted in suffering, gave true freedom, and made fruitful living possible.<sup>54</sup>

It appears then, that for early Anabaptists, the Spirit was the person of the Trinity that received considerable emphasis, both in daily living and in worship.

Arnold Snyder notes that Hubmaier, another early Anabaptist leader, included the Apostles' Creed in his catechism, recognizing the need for the youth of the church to learn these basics of the Christian faith.<sup>55</sup> Snyder goes on to point out that, with a few variations, by and large the accusations of Anabaptist heresy were almost never doctrinally based. It was their orthopraxy, not their orthodoxy that was in question. Practices such as believers' baptism, the ban, or an exclusive, memorial Lord's Supper were what caused Anabaptists to be accused of heresy. Anabaptists were orthodox in their confession of the triune God, the deity of Christ, the resurrection of the dead and the authority of Scripture. In these areas Anabaptists and their Mennonite successors are in agreement with most Protestant traditions. The Anabaptist distinctives surface with regard to matters of discipleship, nonresistance, nonconformity, and their view

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<sup>53</sup>Cornelius J. Dyck, translator & editor, *Spiritual Life in Anabaptism* (Scottsdale, Pa., Waterloo, Ontario: Herald Press, 1995), 27ff.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid*, 68,69.

<sup>55</sup>Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 145.



of the nature of the Church. Such themes separated the 16th century Anabaptists from Protestants and Catholics both.

Arnold Snyder concludes: "While Anabaptists affirmed the historic creeds of the Christian Church, the Apostle's Creed did not form a central part of Anabaptist worship, as far as we know."<sup>56</sup> Indeed, while they were quite prepared to use the creeds for purposes of instruction, when it came to worship Anabaptists tended to focus on experience more than credal formulations, as we shall demonstrate later in this chapter. It was not until the latter part of the twentieth century that Mennonites in North America included the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed in a worship resources section in the back of their hymnals.

Yet Anabaptists did produce their own creeds or "confessions of faith," in an attempt to come to some unity of mind on matters of belief and practice for purposes of internal dialogue. A number of these, such as the confession drawn up at Schleithem in 1527, focused mostly on their unique Anabaptist concerns and on setting boundaries within which they could co-exist as sisters and brothers in faith in a group that was very splintered. What defined them internally also served to set them apart or to delineate their place within the broader Christian Church.

The later Dutch Mennonite confession at Dortrecht (1632) paid attention also to the aspects of doctrine shared with general orthodox Christianity, drawing for example on the Apostle's Creed. One might argue that since they had by that time passed the intense period of persecution, and indeed were experiencing considerable prosperity in the midst of toleration, they could now take a less adversarial stance regarding the tenets of the received Christian faith, and thus assume their place within

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<sup>56</sup>*Ibid*, 145.

the larger orthodox doctrinal landscape, always of course with the uniquely Anabaptist interpretation of certain key elements of doctrine.<sup>57</sup>

An example of the blend of orthodox thought with their own unique interpretation occurs in "The Confession of Faith, According to the Holy Word of God," (written ca. 1600) which was inserted into the *Martyrs Mirror*. It consists of thirty-three articles, as the editor says, "concerning the matter of holy baptism, and other articles of Christian worship; with which, we trust, those who fear God and love the truth will content themselves."<sup>58</sup> The first five articles concern themselves with aspects of the Trinity. The next several deal with the creation of humankind and the nature of the Fall. Thus far all appears fairly orthodox. But later articles which deal with the view of Scripture and salvation take a less orthodox turn, one which put them at variance with Reformers and Catholics alike. The Anabaptist view of Scriptures is pivotal, and therefore bears a more detailed analysis. It is my judgement that a significant part of their theological distinctiveness rests on their unique understanding of Scripture, as we shall demonstrate later in this chapter.

Thus we have noted that in general terms, Anabaptists accepted the orthodox Christian beliefs which were passed down through the centuries, though at points they offered their own unique interpretations. In the final analysis, they were more biblicists than credal in their expressions of worship, though they could affirm the essential beliefs expressed in the creeds of the ancient Church.

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<sup>57</sup>It is these eighteen articles of Dortrecht which have been used also by Swiss Mennonites for purposes of catechism in the several centuries since they were drafted, not the articles of Schleithem.

<sup>58</sup>Thieleman J. van Braght, Joseph F. Sohm translator, *The Martyrs Mirror of the Defenseless Christians*, (1660 edition, published at Scottdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1975),410.

### 3. Anabaptists: Inheritors of Medieval Spirituality

Arnold Snyder says: "Our parents in the faith already had tools in hand when they came to forging the Anabaptist spiritual path...Their tools and their map came from their own late medieval spiritual ancestors."<sup>59</sup> In this chapter I shall identify and briefly describe some of those streams to which Snyder alludes. Understanding from what sources Anabaptist piety was nurtured may help us better understand their theology.

One such stream of spirituality is medieval mysticism. Clarence Bauman, in his book, *The Spiritual Legacy of Hans Denck*, describes Denck's mysticism and its sources. He notes that Robert Friedmann had in 1972 discerned that "the narrow path of discipleship" characteristic of Anabaptism is essentially nontheological and represents instead "a reliance on the spiritualistic or semimystical awareness" of the Divine Presence, which enabled the believer by virtue of a certain "spiritual immediacy" to understand and interpret the Scriptures independently from the Reformers.<sup>60</sup>

Bauman asserts, "Of all possible influences upon Denck the most evident appears to be that of the *Theologia Deutsch* (*German Theology*)."<sup>61</sup> Denck's "Propositions" were appended to many later editions of the *German Theology*, either as an interpretation of its content or as an affirmation of its spirit. Bauman notes, "Between

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<sup>59</sup>Arnold Snyder, Professor of History at Conrad Grebel College, in an unpublished paper presented at the College for a Pastors' Breakfast, November 9, 1999.

<sup>60</sup>Clarence Bauman, *The Spiritual Legacy of Hans Denck*, (New York: E.J.Brill, 1991), 22, who also quotes Robert Friedmann, *The Theology of Anabaptism* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1973), 19-20. The term "spiritual immediacy" is pivotal to an understanding of medieval mysticism as such, and also as it pertains to our discussion of Anabaptist worship, as we shall see later in this chapter.

<sup>61</sup>*Bauman*, 38.

Hans Denck and the author of the *Theologia Deutsch* there appears a remarkable affinity of mutual understanding ranging from similarity to identity in vocabulary used to express the way of perfection via self-renunciation and self-transcendence...realized as illumination, sanctification, unification, or divinization."<sup>62</sup>

The mysticism of Hans Denck, and of the *German Theology* from which he appears to have drawn much of his thought, has several key and connected components, ranging from a particular view of scripture to an understanding of salvation. We have already alluded to the way of perfection via self-renunciation, self-transcendence, illumination, sanctification, unification, or divinization in the quotation from Bauman. Here is expressed a high view of humanity, which is linked to a mystical view of scripture. The logic is as follows: The emphasis is on the *inner* versus the *outer* Word. Denck holds the outer word of scripture above all human treasure but not as high as God's own Word which is eternal, "spirit and no letter." Salvation is not tied to scripture (as in Luther's thought, who looked to the objective outer Word of forgiving grace), for, while it informs the mind, it cannot transform the heart. Denck, on the other hand, expressed the clear conviction that the Word within the committed Christian was not only a word of forgiving grace, but also effected an inner transformation in the believer, expressed outwardly in Christlike living.

The question about Christology which people might ask Denck (and the German Theologian) is, "If God's Word is in everyone, how is Jesus unique?" His answer is simply that God created all people in his image, but none except Christ remained so. In Bauman's assessment, it appears that the incarnation rather than the cross was at the center of Denck's theology, not only in the Jesus of history, but in the ongoing cosmic and personal process. The *German Theology* expresses it thus:

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<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, 43.

Man (*sic*) could not do it without God and God has not deigned to do it without man. Hence God assumed human nature or humanity. He became *humanized* and man became *divinized*. That is the way the amends were made.<sup>63</sup>

Thus we see that Anabaptist soteriology, with its emphasis on regeneration, ("the way the amends were made" to use the words of the quotation cited above), like Anabaptist views on scripture, did not emerge in a theological vacuum.

A divinized person, like Christ, demonstrates pure love. We who are in Christ, must also show his love. "To thus know Christ truly, is to follow him in daily life," said Hans Denck, in a strong echo of the thoughts of the *German Theology*. Denck insisted that the inner Word was more important than the outer word. Is there here also an echo of the words of Thomas à Kempis when he said: "I had rather feel contrition than know the definition thereof"?<sup>64</sup> The concern here is with experienced faith, a primary theology rather than a secondary theology. Anabaptists added a mystical emphasis to orthodox theology, which resulted in their experiential understanding of discipleship and worship. But this mysticism did not remain internalized only. As Snyder says: "Hans Denck joined other Anabaptists in opposing the Protestant understanding of being justified simply on the basis of one's faith in Christ's sacrifice alone, without a corresponding walk of discipleship."<sup>65</sup> By saying "He who would know Christ truly, must follow him in daily life," Denck insisted on following Christ in a life of discipleship. Thus Denck countered Luther's *sola gratia*

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<sup>63</sup>Luther, Martin, tr. Bengt Hoffman, *The Theologia Germanica* (New York, Toronto: Paulist Press, 1980), 63.

<sup>64</sup>Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, (Hackensack, New Jersey: Wehman Bros. Publishers & Distributors), 3.

<sup>65</sup>C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: Revised Student Edition* (Kitchener, Ontario: Pandora Press, Copublished with Herald Press, Scottdale, Pa., 1997), 128.

and *sola fide* emphasis to demonstrate instead that the rule of Christ and discipleship are the new possibility and intent of the Gospel.<sup>66</sup>

In the polygenesis understanding of Anabaptist history, we cannot claim that Denck is totally representative of the group as a whole. But he does reflect one important stream of spirituality. Bauman summarizes Denck's position within Anabaptism as follows:

He was too undogmatic to be an evangelical Reformer and too quietistic to be an Anabaptist radical. He was too biblical to be a rationalist and too theological to be a humanist; too ecumenical to be a sectarian and too christological to be a Unitarian....Like Moses and Jesus he found the wisdom and fortitude to think his own thoughts and to dig his own well.<sup>67</sup>

Yet we must remember that he also drank deeply from the well of medieval mysticism which others before him had dug, to use Bauman's analogy.

The direct influence of medieval mysticism on Hans Hut, Melchior Hoffman, Obbe Philips and other Anabaptists who are considered to be spiritualists is not so clear, but a certain degree of residual influence may be surmised. Certainly, as Arnold Snyder points out, all Anabaptists had "a common rootage in late medieval piety which allowed for the linkage of grace and regeneration in a continuous process of sanctification leading to justification before God." Snyder goes on to say, "And, because of their agreement that God's grace could and would regenerate believers, these reformers also expected the preaching of the Gospel to result in a visibly reformed (i.e. moral) church."<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>*Ibid*, 11, 43, 45.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid*, 47.

<sup>68</sup>C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: Revised Student Edition*, 87.

A related well of medieval spirituality from which Anabaptists drank, was asceticism. This was perhaps most consistently expressed in the monastic ideal of a life of penance and renunciation, based on a doctrine of regeneration or the changed life, which was demonstrated in external behaviour. But, as Snyder suggests, the Anabaptists were able to maintain this asceticism without the sacrament of penance and the popular piety of the mediation of the saints.<sup>69</sup> And I would add, without the safety of residing within cloistered monasteries. Though Michael Sattler was a Benedictine prior, he and others believed that in Christ, all Christians (not only monks) can be sanctified and regenerated. Anabaptists such as Pilgram Marpeck (not a monk) often quoted Thomas à Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ*, which in many monasteries was a blueprint for living the changed life.

Related to mystical and ascetic spirituality is a focus on suffering and martyrdom, key themes in both late medieval spirituality and in Anabaptism. For example, there is in *The Imitation of Christ* a suggestion that such imitation could well lead to martyrdom. A Kempis hints at this in several places, for example: "Be mindful of the purpose thou hast embraced, and set always before thee the image of the Crucified," and "Jesus hath now many lovers of His heavenly kingdom, but few bearers of His Cross."<sup>70</sup> There have been periods in Christian history when martyrdom seems to have been gladly sought; and this was certainly especially true of many Anabaptists. For them the willingness to die for one's faith was a significant measure of faithfulness. They eagerly looked forward to their heavenly reward. Whatever we modern people might make of this, Brad Gregory points out that "martyrdom forces us to confront fundamental religious sensibilities."<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>*Ibid*, 93.

<sup>70</sup>à Kempis, *Imitation of Christ*, 42, 63.

<sup>71</sup>Brad Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe*

Martyrdom is an enduring medieval and Anabaptist theme which has not been totally lost on modern Mennonites, although it hangs on a slender thread, in these quite different times. It appears that a martyr theology is expressed explicitly in worship only or primarily in contexts in which the reality or threat of martyrdom is real. That vestiges of martyr theology have lingered in Mennonite worship into the twentieth century simply suggests how profoundly martyrdom affected the Anabaptist-Mennonite group psyche. This is perhaps not unlike the Jewish vivid sense of their history of persecution. So we have noted, in brief, that medieval asceticism and the spirit of martyrdom also were part of the spiritual inheritance of the Anabaptists.

#### 4. Word and Spirit in Anabaptist Theology

The view of and use of scripture is an important Reformation issue. On the surface, it seemed that Anabaptists shared with Luther the "*sola scriptura*" axiom. However, there was a major difficulty as they interpreted scripture; what they saw as simple biblical truth was labeled as heresy by the authorities. They soon realized that those with power could claim the "right interpretation" of scripture for their own ecclesiastical and political ends. Many an uneducated Anabaptist, having memorized much scripture, defended his or her faith against the "learned doctors" of the established order, as one reads often in *Martyrs Mirror*. Their adamant refusal to recant unless they be proven to be in error by the Word was met with frustration by the authorities, as this account dated 1536 illustrates:

When they were examined, and many human institutions were presented to them, which they endeavored to refute with the Word of God, the Burgomaster said: "We care not for your Word of God, but hold to the mandate of the Emperor, and shall ignominiously exterminate all those who act contrary to it."<sup>72</sup>

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(Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), 2.

<sup>72</sup>*Martyrs Mirror*, 445.



They met theological questions, not with reasoned responses, but by quoting many biblical texts. As Stuart Murray says, "Yet this knowledge of the Bible but ignorance of traditional hermeneutics together produced some distinctive features of Anabaptist hermeneutics."<sup>73</sup>

Murray, in his book *Biblical Interpretation in the Anabaptist Tradition*, explores whether there is a coherent and distinctive hermeneutic among Anabaptists. Space does not allow us to state the various nuances of his argument. Suffice it to say that, in keeping with the polygenesis manner of treating Anabaptist history, the picture in this regard too is multi-faceted. What I shall present here therefore is a reading of his central arguments, without describing all the various nuances.

Anabaptists shared with the Reformers the following concerns about biblical interpretation: commitment to the plain sense of scripture; emphasizing the right of all believers to read, discuss and interpret scripture; refusing to let biblical interpretation be governed by ecclesiastical tradition; and concern with the literal sense of texts, not allegorical meanings.<sup>74</sup>

But of course, they often disagreed with the Reformers concerning the "plain sense" of given scriptures, when that principle was put into practice. They believed that, by the work of the Spirit, and not necessarily (indeed, often rather in spite of) scholarship, scripture was self-interpreting, and would lead to salvation, as the writer of the Confession of Faith inserted in *Martyrs Mirror* says:

We confess: That saving faith is not...in us having a historical knowledge derived from the holy scriptures, and that we have much to say about it, without having the real substance or significance thereof. But the real and true faith, which avails

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<sup>73</sup>Stuart Murray, *Biblical Interpretation in the Anabaptist Tradition* (Kitchener, Ontario: Pandora Press, Copublished with Herald Press, Scottdale, Pennsylvania, 2000), 17.

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid*, 23.

before God, is a sure knowledge of the heart in a sure confidence, which we receive from God, not through our own power, will, or ability, but through the hearing of the Word of God; and which, through the illumination of the Holy Spirit is imprinted on, and written in, the heart, and works so effectively in us...<sup>75</sup>

A second hermeneutical principle for Anabaptists is that it is Christocentric.

When judged, they appealed to the words of Christ. Thus emerged the third principle, how they view the relationship between the Two Testaments. Clearly for them, the New Testament superseded the Old Testament, and the life, work and words of Christ were paramount. Thus they did not have a flat view of the Bible.

The fourth hermeneutical principle for Anabaptists is the intrinsic link between Word and Spirit. Time and again in the primary witnesses of Anabaptists, this juxtaposition of Word and Spirit appears. Here we must pause to note that there are various nuances in this regard. Anabaptists were variously criticized both as literalists and as spiritualists. Some inclined towards a literalistic approach in order to be faithful to the commands of Christ. Mantz and Grebel should be placed on the literalist edge. Hubmaier and Sattler displayed a more moderate approach, and Denck and Hut, as we noted earlier, are spiritualists in their biblical hermeneutic. It is, however, a matter of emphasis and degree. All would agree that the work of the Spirit is central to a clear understanding of scripture. For Menno Simons, the willingness to be instructed by the Spirit was a prerequisite for understanding scripture.<sup>76</sup>

Murray states that in groups descended from the Anabaptists, the literalistic element clearly dominated. Yet one often sees the link of Word and Spirit in later collections of prayers such as *Prayer Book for Earnest Christians*, published in 1708.<sup>77</sup> One writer prays: "Yes, holy Father, clothe us with the true genuine faith,

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<sup>75</sup>*Martyrs Mirror*, Article XII, 383.

<sup>76</sup>*Murray*, 139

<sup>77</sup>Leonard Gross, tr. & ed. *Prayer Book for Earnest Christians* (Scottsdale, Pa: Herald Press, 1997).

with steadfastness and truth, and with the knowledge of your holy Word and Spirit." Another prayer says: "O Lord...we ask you to clothe us with faith, love, loyalty and truth, and with the knowledge of your holy Word and Spirit." A third prayer asks: "So now place into our hearts the sword of your Holy Spirit, which is your holy Word and Spirit."<sup>78</sup>

The same Spirit that would guide individual readers would of course also guide the congregation in its corporate teaching and discussion of scripture. A congregational hermeneutic is the fifth hermeneutical principle of Anabaptists, who believed they needed each other to rightly discern the truth of scripture, measured always of course, by the words of Christ. And the sixth hermeneutical principle is that the Word was meant to be lived out in obedience. We earlier quoted Denck's statement: "No one can know Christ unless he follows after him in life." The second part of his statement - "and no one can follow him unless he first know him" - underscores the prerequisite for hermeneutics, namely a living experience of Christ and his Spirit.<sup>79</sup> If Anabaptists had to choose between interpretation and application, they would always choose the latter. Indeed, obedience was the way to a correct understanding of scripture, not education.

Of the six Anabaptist principles of hermeneutics which Murray presents, the principle of the intrinsic link between Word and Spirit is in my mind pivotal. From the view of Word and Spirit emerges an Anabaptist soteriology. From that in turn emerges an ecclesiology. The church simply consists of those who are thus guided by the Spirit and Word to live in newness of life, in their walk with Christ and each other

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<sup>78</sup>*Ibid*, 22, 28, 52, 55. This pairing of Word and Spirit occurs frequently; these are just a few examples.

<sup>79</sup>*Murray*, 189.

in this world. In their belief that faith is so readily accessible and largely unmediated, there was little need for complex ecclesiastical structures, or even for highly trained leadership. There was therefore also little need for sacramental worship, if one lived one's life thus by Word and Spirit. And this leads us then into a brief discussion of the nature of Anabaptist worship which derives from their theology.

### **B. Characteristics of Anabaptist Worship**

Before we can summarize what Anabaptist worship looks like, we must be reminded that there was much variety among Anabaptists, especially in the first decade. On one hand there were the more literal Swiss Anabaptists such as Grebel and Marpeck, on the other hand the more spiritualist group, such as Hut and Denck. They would have differing emphases in their theology and practice of worship.

Arnold Snyder describes the spiritualist approach to the sacraments as follows:

Simply put, if the essential baptism is spiritual, to which the water is only a witness, and if the essential Supper is also spiritual and the physical elements are incidental, why should mere ceremonies be observed - particularly since they are non-essentials that only serve to divide believers from one another?<sup>80</sup>

Marpeck and his group shared some of the same concerns as the spiritualists about the relation of the inner and the outer. On one hand they desired to avoid what they saw to be the essential flaw of both Catholic and the magisterial Reformers' worship, which they perceived to be reduced to a mechanical or magical performance. But on the other hand, they did not want to drive into the ditch of the purely mystical or spiritualistic approach, which stressed only the inner reality and saw no need for external manifestations. Marpeck responded to the spiritualists with two booklets written in 1531: *A Clear Refutation* and *A Clear and Useful Instruction*.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup>Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 205.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*, 205.

Fourteen years later, in 1545, Marpeck wrote a letter on the inner church, which in my view demonstrates the dialectic between the literalists and the spiritualists. He says "The only place of worship is above. There the true worshipers worship in spirit and in truth, and in the fellowship of the saints."<sup>82</sup> The dialectic is really a dialectic between heaven and earth. The argument which proceeds from this in Marpeck's mind is as follows:

Because the Jerusalem, which is above, is only built by Jesus Christ in the Spirit, the heart is the inner and only temple. In this Jerusalem is the place of worship, namely, in Spirit and in truth. The hearts of true believers are the inner choir and sanctuary, into which no one can enter except our high priest, Christ....in it he prays to the Father for our sins... That is the inner church of Christ.

But he keeps the tension in the dialectic between this inner church and its outer manifestations when he says:

In cooperation with the Holy Spirit this inner church of the Spirit is also directed to perform external works, to be a light before the world. It witnesses inwardly between God and us, but it is also formed externally, and testifies in love shown toward our neighbor...Thus, the body of Christ is also built inwardly through the Holy Spirit, and externally through the co-witness of works.<sup>83</sup>

The dialectic noted above, of the inner experience and the outward manifestation leads to another dialectic which soon emerges. If, as I would argue, the very earliest Anabaptists tended to focus on Word and Spirit in their functional theology of worship, there was also an emphasis on Word and Obedience. Their theology of worship clearly called for the evidence of the changed life, in holy living, not only

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<sup>82</sup>Dyck, *Spiritual Life in Anabaptism*, 82. Is there stated here the view expressed by Michael Perry who cites Colin Dunlop, that worship is an activity already going on, which we simply join?

<sup>83</sup>*Ibid.*, 83.

holy words spoken in holy places of worship. Increasingly orthopraxy became at least as important as orthodoxy in some circles in Anabaptist-Mennonite worship.

In keeping with these historical antecedents, Anabaptist-Mennonite worship can fall into either *individualism* or *legalism*. On the one hand are the excesses of personal pietism or the inner experience of the Spirit which can lead to *individualism* and an untested theology. The other extreme is a strong emphasis on communal aspects and the ethical consequences of the changed life that leads to *legalism*. One can detect an appreciable shift in tone in the later writings of Menno Simons, in which he becomes increasingly concerned with how to keep a diverse group together. Let me illustrate the shift of emphasis with a quotation and two citations. In 1537, three years after he began to lead the Anabaptist group he wrote:

The regenerate, therefore, lead a penitent and new life, for they are renewed in Christ and have received a new heart and spirit...A genuine Christian faith cannot lie idle, but it changes, renews, purifies, sanctifies, and justifies more and more. It gives peace and joy.<sup>84</sup>

In 1541 he wrote "A Kind Admonition on Church Discipline." In 1550 he wrote "A Clear Account of Excommunication."<sup>85</sup> The wording in the titles themselves shows a shift in emphasis and tone. He appears to have lost his initial sense of the immediacy of spiritual regeneration. We see here a shift from the freedom of the Spirit of the early Anabaptist movement to something bordering on legalism. This dialectic between the immediate personal experience of Spirit-filled regeneration and its consequences in the ethical life in Christian community continued to play itself out among Mennonites in various times and places in later centuries.

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<sup>84</sup>John Christian Wenger, editor, Leonard Verduin, transl., *The Complete Works of Menno Simons* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1956), 95.

<sup>85</sup>*Ibid.*, 409ff and 457ff.

We see the emergence of a strong concern for right living reflected in the *Prayer Book for Earnest Christians* which we cited above. In addition to the pairing of Word and Spirit, oftentimes Word is also paired with "will", "righteousness," and similar words to show a concern that through God's Word and Spirit come obedience and the possibility of the changed life of discipleship. One of the prayers beseeches God: "Through the strength of your Holy Spirit, make me holy and renew me more and ever more as I grow older. Thus may I improve in my daily living, walk in your paths, and serve you in holiness and righteousness, as is pleasing to you."<sup>86</sup> Thus we see that the concern for holiness and obedience is well-established by the turn of the eighteenth century.

For Anabaptists, true worship maintains an essential linkage between inner experience and outer manifestation. Sometimes these are in tension with each other. If ethical conduct is true worship, how is legalism not? True worship asks always who God is and who we are as a consequence. Legalism tends to allow human constructs to get in the way of our apprehension of God. If inner experience is the characteristic mode of Anabaptist worship, what do we make of over-individualism? The latter is self-centered more than God-centered. In summary, for Anabaptists the inner experience of God, outward transformation in ethics and engagement with the world and community participation in the life of the church exist in balance, each aspect ideally correcting and balancing the other two.

Against the backdrop of what I have described above, how might one portray Anabaptist worship? First of all, Anabaptists were orthodox trinitarian Christians. Having said this, we note that at times they placed much emphasis on the Holy Spirit, at other times on Christ. They often brought the two together as they spoke of the

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<sup>86</sup>Gross, *Prayer Book*, 79, see also 28, 51, 52, 85 etc.

Spirit of Christ. In terms of the analogy we used in Chapter One, of the Trinity as a three-legged stool, it seems clear that, for Anabaptists, Christology was the longest leg. For example, Christology played a central role in their biblical hermeneutics and in their theology of discipleship (*Nachfolge Christi*).

A second characteristic of Anabaptist worship is that they were more concerned with the inner experience than with the outer trappings of worship; even Scripture was seen as an external thing, the true Word was internalized by the Spirit. As we know, Anabaptists worshipped in caves, on boats, in the forests and in barns; wherever they could hide from the authorities. Cathedrals or even ordinary church buildings were not deemed necessary for worship. This does not mean however, that worship was a strictly internalized experience, nor was it private. There is ample evidence to suggest that Anabaptists valued communal worship. They took great risks and went to great lengths to worship together, for mutual support, to give and receive counsel, and to be nurtured by God's Spirit at work in their midst corporately, and in their lives individually.

Thirdly, Anabaptists believed that worship must be participatory, not passive. A group of anonymous Swiss Brethren wrote an answer to the question why they do not attend the churches (both Zwinglian and Lutheran). The answer in brief is simply that the churches did not follow the Pauline pattern set out in I Corinthians 14, in which Spirit-led participation was encouraged. They address the matter of the individual-in-community dialectic when they say:

Thus all things may be done in the best, the most seemly and convenient manner when the congregation assembles, which congregation [*gemein*] is a temple of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 6) where the gifts or inner operation of the spirit in each one (note in *each* one) serve the common good. (I Cor. 12; Eph. 4). Note for the *common* good. How could this be more suitably applied, offered or employed for the common good than in the



coming together precisely for this common good and edification...<sup>87</sup>

Fourthly, Anabaptist worship was always clearly linked to ethics and daily living. Anabaptists met to worship, then went out again to serve and work in the world. The two realms were not "worlds apart." The Anabaptist Schabaelje wrote in 1635:

The soul profits greatly from becoming quiet before God for it allows it (*sic*) to receive his grace. Yet someone might ask: How can a worker, who daily must perform his duties become still before God and still do their work? To this we reply that this quietness does not exist in someone needing to leave their work, that it is not external but within us, drawing us away from vanity and in quietness to God... We see more clearly from this that work and quiet can exist together, that is, our hands working externally while our inner spirit reflects upon God...<sup>88</sup>

Is there here reflected the possibility that indeed, for Anabaptists, worship and work can be one? Here is an echo of the Benedictine motto "*Ora et Labora*" (pray and work), which has at times been variously paraphrased: "He who prays in his heart as he works with his hands, prays twice." Do we see here the possibility of a monastic influence on Anabaptism? In any case, it was clear that what was expressed in worship by the church gathered was meant to be lived out in the church scattered, in a life of ethics, service and mutual aid, some of the values which Anabaptists and their spiritual descendants the Mennonites have held to be important.

What is the essence of Anabaptist worship? Drawing from its sources in orthodox Christianity, from late medieval thought, and shaped on the anvil of the Reformation debates, Anabaptist worship has the following characteristics:

- i) Anabaptist theology and worship is based in the general body of Christian orthodox belief, though it does not regularly utilize the Christian creeds in worship.
- ii) Anabaptist theology in worship speaks of the universal accessibility of the Holy

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid.*,186,187.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*,139.

Spirit, the immediate (largely unmediated) inner experience, demonstrated in conversion and the changed life.

iii) Anabaptist worship is based in scripture, of which especially the life and teachings of Jesus are proclaimed, not only as the Gospel of salvation, but also as a pattern for daily living.

iv) Anabaptist worship is participatory. All can understand scripture, pray, and worship, without need of set forms or external (administrative/sacramental) restraints.

v) Anabaptist-Mennonite worship is non-adorned or non-ornate: because the transcendence which in some traditions is intended to be conveyed in sacramentalism, symbolism and ornateness, in fact resides in people, and is visible in the transformation of the human life (not in the transformation or glorification of objects).

vi) Though Anabaptist-Mennonite worship is not mediated in the usual Christian sense of the word (in the transformation or glorification of material reality as in the sacramental viewpoint), there is a strong emphasis on the community, through which the grace of God is mediated, and which in turn mediates this grace to the world.

vi) Hence an important outcome of worship is faithfulness in engagement in the world in one's work, and in working for justice, peace and ethical living. There are no separate holy places or objects, there is only holiness in a life lived always in the presence of God.

And so we have attempted to describe the roots of Anabaptist theology, including some of the streams of spirituality from which Anabaptists drank. We have summarized some of their beliefs and described the nature and shape of worship which emerged from these. All along we have insisted that Anabaptist theology and the functional theology of worship which ensues from it, should not be totally seen as distinct categories, but as a series of dialectics, in continuity and change. Yet we can,

and indeed have, identified some enduring essentials of Anabaptist thought and practice. How enduring are these essentials? It is to this matter that we now turn our attention.

## CHAPTER THREE

AGAINST ALL ODDS- RETAINING AN ANABAPTIST THREAD IN  
MENNONITE WORSHIP

Various cultural and historical factors have influenced and shaped the Mennonite Church in the years since the sixteenth century Anabaptist movement was born. As we have noted in Chapter Two, Anabaptism did not develop in a vacuum. Any careful reading of the history of the Reformation period itself will show a significant interaction among the various reform movements, a rich and often volatile cross-dissemination of theological ideas and practices. Perhaps the most significant case in point is Luther's concern for Scripture alone, a concern which all the Reformers and Anabaptists paid attention to in various ways. So one would deduce that there would also be some "borrowing" or sharing of ideas for worship among these groups in the centuries to follow. Walter Klaassen says: "The challenge is whether Mennonites will cherish their Anabaptist tradition enough to avoid compromising it by acculturation with other traditions."<sup>89</sup> This question deserves an answer, and it is to this that we turn our attention next.

As we have noted in Chapter Two, much of Anabaptist piety stems from certain aspects of late medieval German Catholicism, in its concern for worship which produces regeneration and the moral life. How else does one explain the infrequency of communion, both in medieval Catholicism and in later Mennonite practice? asks John Rempel in his article on Anabaptist theology of the Lord's Supper. If late

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<sup>89</sup>James White, *Protestant Worship: Traditions in Transition*, 93, who also quotes Walter Klaassen, *Biblical and Theological Bases for Worship in the Believers' Church* (Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1978), 16-24.

medieval Catholics rarely communed because of their dread of unworthy communion, Anabaptists in addition "added a moral dimension to the medieval dread."<sup>90</sup> This concern not to eat or drink unworthily was still dominant in the Mennonite Church in which I grew up in the 1950's. We participated in communion only twice each year, and had a sober "preparatory service" the Sunday before. This is a practice which Mennonites historically share with John Calvin. This illustrates again the phenomenon that some streams of theology and practice come to us filtered through centuries of experience, to become part of the present "local theology."

Borrowing from other traditions became a kind of "habit of the heart" among Mennonites in their North American experience of the past three centuries, as I shall demonstrate. Is the tendency to borrow from other traditions a sign of vitality and change, a sign of a new spirit of ecumenism, or is it a sign of unfaithfulness to our tradition? Depending where one stands in the Mennonite Church, one could argue any or all of these viewpoints.

James F. White in his treatment of Anabaptism reflects on issues of culture and acculturation. He notes that "for all practical purposes, the Amish protected their worship by simply opposing all forms of acculturation."<sup>91</sup> He goes on to say:

More liberal Mennonites have faced increased pressure to acculturate in recent years not from persecutors but from ecumenism, which has accepted them and made them welcome among a wide spectrum of worship traditions. The problem is that other traditions are often well researched, have produced their own liturgical scholars, and have carefully articulated reforms that they are consciously pursuing. Mennonites have had relatively little need in recent centuries to articulate and defend their own tradition.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup>John Rempel in Dale R. Stoffer, editor, *The Lord's Supper: Believers Church Perspectives*, (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1997), 248.

<sup>91</sup>James F. White, *Protestant Worship: Traditions in Transition* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 92.

<sup>92</sup>*Ibid.*, 92.

We turn therefore to the recent centuries of Mennonite history and to the cultural milieu of the Mennonite Church in whose tradition I stand, which is the focus of the present study. (Some of the relevant history which pertains specifically to Hillcrest Mennonite Church will be described in Chapter Four.) Swiss Mennonites from South Germany moved to Pennsylvania in 1683 at the invitation of William Penn. They were soon joined there by the Moravian Brethren, and later by the Wesleyans or Methodists. It should be more surprising that they were *not* influenced by their neighbours than that they indeed were. The ethos of "plain and simple" which has become a hallmark of Mennonite worship would certainly have been shared by the Quakers, whose worship is even more unadorned than Mennonite worship. Initially Methodist worship, so long as it remained rooted in Anglican liturgy and sacrament, had little appeal to or influence on Mennonites. But when Methodism moved away from fixed forms of worship to focus more on preaching and teaching, there was more affinity with Mennonite concerns.

Two centuries later matters came to a head as the influence of Methodism became a source of contention during the Old Order split in 1889 in Pennsylvania and Ontario. Those who wished to retain the old way of doing things accused the church of allowing "creeping Methodism" to infiltrate. This is documented by Isaac Horst, a writer from within the Old Order Mennonite tradition in Ontario. He describes a special conference which was called at Berlin (now Kitchener, Ontario) on February 27, 1873 and summarizes: "From here on until the division (Old Order split) of 1889, such issues as prayer meetings, protracted meetings, and Sunday schools became the main issues."<sup>93</sup> Methodists were not the only ones who became involved in the

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<sup>93</sup>Isaac R. Horst, *Closeups of the Great Awakening* (Mount Forest: Isaac Horst pub., 1985),168.

emerging revivalism, Sunday school movement and other trends in North America of the nineteenth century, but they were certainly prime movers in these endeavors.

These were seen as progressive innovations on the part of many Mennonites, but were seen as a threat to the Mennonite traditional values by others.

The East Zorra Amish Mennonite Church, in which Hillcrest Mennonite Church has its roots, was isolated and untouched by these progressive rumblings until about a generation later. Nevertheless, the majority of East Zorra members favoured the starting of a Sunday School and on May 17, 1903 the first session was held. The first Bible Conferences among Ontario Amish Mennonites were held in 1911 and 1918. Fred Lichti, a local historian, points out: "Bible Conferences did much to educate the church in the message of the Bible and indoctrination in the principles of the Mennonite Church."<sup>94</sup> So clearly Mennonites desired to put their own theological or doctrinal imprint on these methods which they borrowed from the Methodists.

Lichti in his history of the East Zorra church lists a series of guest speakers in that congregation and notes that after 1922, beginning with C. F. Derstine, many of them were in fact revivalists, who preached "new birth" and extended invitations to accept Christ as personal Saviour. It is not that the East Zorra ministry had not been preaching the "new birth" prior to this, but as Orland Gingerich, a historian from within the Amish-Mennonite tradition explains, and Lichti cites him, the new birth was "taught more as a command than an experience." One was expected to join the Church at the right age, behave well in youth and live a good moral life in line with the rules and regulations (*die Ordnung*) of the church. Here is illustrated the extent of the paradigm shift we noted in later Anabaptism, from Word and Spirit to Word and Obedience. Lichti concludes: "The *schaffe und schparre* (work and save) emphasis of

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<sup>94</sup>Fred Lichti, *A History of the East Zorra Amish Mennonite Church* (Tavistock, Ontario: Pub. East Zorra Mennonite Church, 1977), 65, 67.

our Swiss-German tradition was strongly emphasized and possibly equated with good Christianity.<sup>95</sup>

What was it that was so attractive in the Sunday School movement, the use of the English language in worship, and "protracted meetings" for purposes of revival? Perhaps it has to do with the two "ditches" I identified earlier, of an inner spiritualist piety on one side and a legal conformity to rules on the other. For a few generations in Pennsylvania Mennonites were glad to experience a quiet pietism, far removed from the persecution they experienced in Europe. But they were also far removed from their radical charismatic Anabaptist roots, and shifted to a strong communalism bordering on legalism. John Ruth, a Mennonite historian and tour guide commented on a tour he led in 1985 in which I was a participant, "It seems that about every twenty-five years Mennonites need to discover more of a 'heart' religion." When this urge hits some, others react.

This is illustrated by the accounts of further Mennonite splintering in Ontario in the 1930's. Jesse Bauman was part of a group in Ontario, the Markham Mennonite split, which in 1936 wished to retain Old Order concerns, but wished also to drive automobiles. Because of his more charismatic tendencies, he was summarily "silenced" and disowned by that group. Several people recall Jesse telling his critics "If the Spirit leads me back, you will hear from me." Given a choice between what he considered to be church authority and what he understood as biblical authority, Jesse "chose the Bible." (Here we see an echo of the link of Word and Spirit which we described in Chapter Two.) He was eventually welcomed into the Ontario Conference Mennonite church at Elmira. Others of that group joined the Hawkesville Mennonite

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<sup>95</sup>*Ibid.*, 88.



Church, also in the Ontario Mennonite Conference. One of these new enthusiasts refers to the pre-1940 church as being "as cold as an ice-berg."<sup>96</sup>

When Mennonites in Ontario during the first half of the twentieth century looked for a different experience in worship, they had two options. One was to join other groups, be it Pentecostal, Plymouth Brethren, etc. Many in Ontario chose this option. The Brethren, informally known as "Chapel" in Waterloo Region, have continually drawn from Mennonite ranks, including the Old Order and Markham Mennonite groups.

The second option for a renewed worship experience was to borrow from the denominations around them and simply allow their worship to be reshaped, for example by revivalism and the accompanying hymnody. The gospel songs which came out of the Frontier movement, as well as other church music such as that written by Isaac Watts, Fanny Crosby and Charles Wesley, dominated the Mennonite Church in Ontario in the early 1920's. Such music was collected in *The Church and Sunday School Hymnal*, *Life Songs I*, and *Life Songs II* and appeared also to a large extent in the 1927 Church Hymnal produced for the (Swiss) Mennonite Church in North America. However, when the Mennonite Church ( those of Swiss/South German extract) co-operated with the General Conference Mennonite Church (those of Dutch/North German extract) to produce a joint hymnal in 1969, the gospel songs were relegated to a section near the back, and there was a significant addition of the old German chorales.<sup>97</sup> (We shall describe later in this chapter how hymnody is an important vehicle which carries Mennonite theology.)

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<sup>96</sup>Ken Bechtel, *Three Score Years* (Elmira: Pub. Elmira Mennonite Church, 1984), 35.

<sup>97</sup>*The Mennonite Hymnal* (Scottsdale, Pa: Herald Press, Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1969).

A third option, if neither of the options described above was deemed desirable, was to retrench into more conservative modes and split to form several varieties of the Conservative Mennonite church in Ontario. These splits took place in the 1950's both among the (Swiss) Mennonites and those of Amish background in the East Zorra community of Mennonite churches.

We have noted a shift in worship practices or style. Often this was based on the desire for a particular kind of expression of spirituality in a more visceral sense. Some people, however, were also keenly aware of the theological implications of changing worship styles. For example, gospel songs tend to accentuate the personal experience of salvation, with little reference to discipleship, ethics and community, which are important Anabaptist theological themes. In the dialectical interplay of personal experience (*primary theology*) and *secondary theology*, the lines were often blurred. People were not always fully aware of the theological implications of borrowing from other traditions.

So, it could be argued that Methodism, coaching from the sidelines, caused the game of Mennonite worship to be played differently, particularly after 1889. It could also be argued that if one wished to see "Anabaptist" worship in a more pure form one would need to attend Amish or Old Order Mennonite worship services, where things have changed very little through the past several centuries and are clearly unadorned and simple. However, that would assume an ability to discern one core, essentially Anabaptist, style of worship which probably never existed with total uniformity of practice since the sixteenth century. Certainly the one ingredient which would be lacking in those more conservative groups is that sense of the immediate and therefore innovative. "Old" Mennonite and Amish worship has over these many generations become so set in its form that the tone and spirit would be vastly different from the sense of fresh radicality which prevailed in the early Anabaptist era, even if the theological content remains essentially untouched.

As we have described above, Mennonites through the centuries have been shaped by their environment and have in that sense retained an essentially Anabaptist theology and worship practices against all odds. Mennonites in North America today continue to drink from various streams of piety and theological thought. I believe there are at least five such streams which influence Mennonite expressions of worship in various places and to various degrees, as follows:

1. *Conservative/Evangelical*. The focus in this stream is on holiness and morality proclaimed in preaching. There is a clear call to conversion, as expressed in the revival movement. As we noted above, revivalism began to enter the Mennonite Church in North America in the late nineteenth century and came into its full bloom by the middle of the twentieth century when Mennonite evangelists such as George R. Brunk conducted tent meetings across the denomination, both in the United States and in Canada. It was also common practice for local congregations in Ontario to annually invite a guest evangelist to hold a series of weekend revival meetings in their churches. These meetings invariably included the "altar call" for personal commitment to Christ. The practice of holding revival meetings is in Ontario currently limited to the more conservative Mennonite church groups.

2. *Relational*. This stream seeks open, transparent communication within the congregation, through small sharing groups. It attempts to create intentional community and relational Bible study. The emphasis is on God's love, acceptance and forgiveness. This emphasis emerged in the 1960's and 1970's as pastors increasingly included C.P.E. (clinical pastoral training) as part of their seminary education. Often this approach to congregational life is considered to be most faithful to the Anabaptist vision of church as covenanted community.

3. *Charismatic*. This stream seeks personal Spirit-led renewal. It is characterized by heartfelt expressions of joy, love and praise. There is a focus on the empowering work of the Holy Spirit. It is expressed in worship by spontaneity, prayer, healing and

tongues. The charismatic movement made such significant gains in the Mennonite Church in the 1960's and 1970's that several books were written to help members understand the movement. Those "charismatics" who could no longer feel at home within the Mennonite congregations in Ontario either left the church, or formed their own Mennonite congregations with a charismatic style of congregational life and worship. There are several such congregations in Mennonite Conference of Eastern Canada.

4. *Feminist/Liberation theology.* This theology seeks justice in human relationships of equality and mutuality. The emphasis is on God as liberator. It includes expanded images of God, expressed in the hermeneutics of suspicion which seeks new understandings of how to read the patriarchal systems of the Bible. Some congregations consciously choose to use versions of the Bible such as the New Revised Standard Version which uses gender neutral language. Worship leaders who share the concerns of feminist/liberation theology attempt to use inclusive language in worship. They try also to use a variety of terms as they address God in prayers, not limiting themselves to addressing God as Father.

5. *Contemplative.* The emphasis is on God's otherness and God's nearness. The practice is to find ways to meet God and be transformed, through meditation, journaling, and other spiritual disciplines. Some congregations will offer silent retreats in which people can experience such meditation under the guidance of a spiritual director. In such events as well as in other contexts, they may learn how to meditate and pray after the "*lectio divina*" pattern of Ignatius. The Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary now offers courses in spirituality. The Pastoral Leadership Training Commission in Mennonite Conference of Eastern Canada has also offered courses in contemplative spirituality for pastors of the Conference.

The literature written by Mennonites about worship reflects their awareness of other traditions and a willingness to be in dialogue with these traditions. There is also

an occasional willingness to borrow from these other traditions, but always with a concern to keep faith with their own tradition. The theme of the first issue of *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology*, a joint publication of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary and Canadian Mennonite Bible College, focused on spirituality. In his article "A Discriminating Spirituality," Gerald Gerbrandt poses five relevant questions which we may ask in the process of discerning a spirituality which is appropriate for Mennonites. I have summarized these questions as follows:

1. Is the spirituality under consideration human-centred, or God-centred? For the Christian, true spirituality brings a person closer to the spirit of God. To speak about the human spirit is not wrong, but it is not necessarily Christian.
2. Does the spirituality sufficiently recognize the Christian theology of grace? It is possible for an emphasis on spiritual disciplines to become a works righteousness. Salvation is a gift of God which cannot be earned through works, be they acts of mercy or spiritual disciplines.
3. Is the spirituality individualistic or communal in its focus? An important theme in Anabaptist theology is the emphasis on the communal nature of the Christian life.
4. Is the spirituality holistic? Much popular spirituality assumes a dualism of body and spirit, as well as of intellect and emotion. True spirituality is holistic and shapes the total being.
5. Does the spirituality move the person beyond himself or herself into the world? The Christian message is clear: we are called to witness to those around us in word and deed. True spirituality will always move the person or the group beyond self-proccupation into service of the neighbour and society.<sup>98</sup>

Mennonites do drink from various streams of spirituality. Eleanor Kreider, Mennonite musician by training, and a teacher in London, England, wrote the book *Enter His Gates: Fitting Worship Together*. In the Introduction she writes:

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<sup>98</sup>Gerald Gerbrandt, "A Discriminating Spirituality", in Mary Schertz and Gordon Zerbe, editors, *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: The Christian Press, 2000), 10,11.

But for all the strengths of my own tradition, I have learned much from others. I have been enriched by the Anglican tradition through worship in parish churches. I have known the rekindling of fervor and praise in charismatic worship. Among Quaker friends and Christian contemplatives, I have learned to listen to God through corporate silence.<sup>99</sup>

This testimonial is, I believe, representative of the experience of many Mennonites, as we find our place in the current ecumenical climate. Should we see this trend as a threat to our integrity as an Anabaptist-Mennonite people, or can we see this to a greater extent owning our place within the broader Christian tradition, and thereby enriching our worship life together?

Walter Klaassen speaks to this concern. He wrote the first in a series of worship pamphlets for the Mennonite Church and the General Conference Mennonite Church in 1978. In this pamphlet he reflects on the issue of acculturation and assimilation as follows:

We begin to develop a sense of a Christian tradition which is also our tradition; it includes the twelve centuries from 325 to 1525 which we have in the past tended to exclude as one long, tragic error. Once this recognition breaks through, we can no longer ignore the wealth of insight and experience represented by those centuries of Christian devotion. The question becomes clear. How can we honestly and legitimately appropriate that heritage while maintaining our basic stance as a believers' church?<sup>100</sup>

Klaassen's stated concern is not that Mennonites should desist from appropriating worship practices more typical of other Protestant traditions, but that we should do this with careful consideration of how it fits into our basic stance as a believers' church. Thus we might well use the lectionary, participate in a fuller observance of the church year, engage in more frequent eucharistic celebrations, use set forms of

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<sup>99</sup>Eleanor Kreider, *Enter His Gates: Fitting Worship Together* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, Waterloo, Ontario: Herald Press, 1990), 18.

<sup>100</sup>Walter Klaassen, *Biblical and Theological Bases*, 15.

prayer and standard orders of worship. Within these forms and practices, Klaassen and others believe we can maintain an essential Anabaptist theology in worship.

The "more liberal" Mennonites of whom White speaks have in the latter half of the twentieth century indeed begun to articulate and defend their own worship tradition. It seems that approximately every generation there emerges in the Mennonite Church a reason to be more self-reflective concerning our worship life together. In 1968 Alvin Beachey wrote a report on a Consultation on Worship convened by the Mennonite Church and the General Conference Mennonite Church in the previous year. Ten years later, in 1978, Klaassen wrote his *Biblical Bases for Worship in the Believers Church* as the first in a series of pamphlets on worship developed for the two denominations. Perhaps it seemed important, as the two groups began to work more closely together in publishing educational curriculum (The Foundation Series, 1978) and worship materials (The Mennonite Hymnal, 1968), that they come to some common theological understandings.

Still ten years later, in 1987, John D. Rempel emerged on the Mennonite scholarly scene with his doctoral work on Anabaptists and communion entitled "Christology and Lord's Supper in Balthasar Hubmaier, Pilgram Marpeck and Dirk Philips". He did this after spending a sabbatical year in the Philippines where he focused on the relationship between spirituality and justice. Other scholars could be noted; this is simply a brief representative sample of the kind of work which has been done by Mennonites concerning Mennonite worship. Thus we see an increasing readiness on the part of Mennonites to do second-level discourse on their primary experience of worship. There appears to be emerging a core of Mennonite scholarship on the subject, more than I am aware of or have named here. Whether there will be a clear Mennonite consensus on what worship means remains to be seen.

In Chapter Two we described Anabaptist worship. Mennonite worship which follows from that can be described in similar terms. With our Anabaptist forebears we

believe that God has a revelation for each of us, therefore worship is an immediate (largely unmediated) experience of God, in the sense that there is little need of external (administrative/sacramental) set forms. Based in this essential viewpoint both the context and content of Mennonite worship during the past several centuries in North America has been unadorned ("plain and simple"). Mennonite worship, like Anabaptist worship, is participatory. All can understand Scripture, pray and worship, and offer the Word to each other. Thus, though Mennonite worship is not mediated in the usual Christian sense of the word (in the transformation or glorification of objects), there remains a strong emphasis on the community, through which the grace of God is mediated, and which in turn mediates this grace to the world. These are the benchmarks against which Mennonite worship needs to be measured as we continue to assess the impact on Mennonite worship of assimilation and borrowing from other Christian traditions in the North American experience.

By way of conclusion, I shall in the following pages offer a brief summary of some of the ways in which Mennonite writers have conceived the essence of Mennonite worship. In 1988 Rempel was invited to deliver the Benjamin Eby Lecture at Conrad Grebel College entitled "Christian Worship: Surely the Lord is in this Place." In this lecture he grapples with the relationship between matter and spirit, time and eternity. In effect he restates the case for the sacramental viewpoint, which has been disavowed by Mennonites since the Reformation. He argues: "The question of the church's mission cannot be adequately grasped or illuminated without a symbolic understanding of reality: the sacramental worldview sees our life in time and space as the place of grace, as our home to the extent that it is Christ's home."<sup>101</sup> Rempel is calling for a radical Protestant worship rooted in the incarnation. And he

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<sup>101</sup>John D. Rempel, *Christian Worship: Surely the Lord is in this Place* (Waterloo, Ontario: Conrad Grebel College, 1988), 16.



asks, what would that look like? "It would resist the use of worship as the legitimation of the world as it is. It would make love of neighbor a sacrament, the twin of the Lord's Supper."<sup>102</sup> Here is a concern to make worship relevant in the horizontal plane of human relationships, the other side of the dialectic of Godward and human address.

The two dimensions need to be kept in balance, as we have noted in Chapter One in our treatment of community in trinitarian worship. Klaassen attempts to reclaim a sense of the transcendence of God for the Mennonite Church which has in his mind perhaps focused too much on the horizontal dimension of peoplehood in worship. To his critique, "We humanize God so much that we locate Him solely in other people and we end up praying to each other", he adds: "The primary purpose of public worship is to acknowledge God, our Creator and Redeemer... supremely revealed to us in Jesus in the midst of human time and space."<sup>103</sup> One aspect of my study of Hillcrest Mennonite Church will explore the vertical and horizontal relationships in corporate worship. How does our awareness of each other shape our awareness of God? In our Mennonite emphasis on community, are we indeed in danger of "praying to each other" as Klaassen so provocatively suggests?

Mennonites are insistent on being "doers of the Word, and not hearers only." Thus it should not surprise us that when John Rempel tries to define Mennonite worship he posits this disclaimer: "Worship always bursts the bounds we set for it. It is more often in the doing of worship that we are led to its truth than in our abstract thoughts about it."<sup>104</sup> Nonetheless, he goes on to list six assumptions which have emerged to

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<sup>102</sup>*Ibid.*,17.

<sup>103</sup>Klaassen, *Biblical and Theological Bases*,17,18.

<sup>104</sup>John D. Rempel in *Music in Worship: A Mennonite Perspective*, ed. Bernie Neufeld (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press,1998), 39.

provide a foundation for Mennonite worship. There is considerable affinity with the assumptions underlying Anabaptist worship which we outlined in Chapter Two.

There is also a ready affinity with the guiding principles and terminology of my thesis project, which I described in the Introduction. I shall cite his six assumptions, and draw comparisons to Anabaptist thought, and to the guiding principles of my thesis, as follows:

First, those who worship are Christ's sisters and brothers, believers who have confessed their own faith and been baptized. When we worship we are speaking from the heart...We find our own voices rather than having words put in our mouths.

In this articulation of the Believers Church vision of worship, we see a concern that worship be immediate (largely unmediated), spoken "from the heart". Here is expressed the concern for a primary theology to be experienced in the personal lives of those who worship in the gathered community..

Rempel goes on to state his second underlying assumption:

Second, our worship is free in that it is not regulated by the state or fixed in any final form. We begin with the voice of tradition, but it is an open tradition that is expanded every time the community meets.

Here is an articulation of the Free Church tradition. In this assumption underlying Mennonite worship we see a kind of interplay between the received faith of the *tradition in which we stand and the primary experience and expression of worship in the local community.*

According to Anabaptist ideals, there is a clear connection between our worship "in here" and the world around us "out there." There is a kind of dialectical relationship, between the sense of being "a people apart" on one hand, yet a people

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thoroughly engaged in God's work in the world. Rempel's next three assumptions address this dialectic:

Third, our worship is ethical. True praise always overflows into willing sacrifice.

Fourth, only God and people are holy in and of themselves...(yet) ordinary objects can become signs of God's nearness.

Fifth, worship is worldly. To worship God is to serve the groaning creation that waits with anticipation for redemption.

In his fourth assumption, Rempel remains consistent with Anabaptist practice and belief that worship remains unadorned because the transcendence which in some traditions is intended to be conveyed in sacramentalism and symbolism, in fact resides in people and is visible in the transformation of human life rather than in the transformation or glorification of objects. Yet here Rempel makes room for objects as signs of God's nearness.

Rempel's sixth assumption concerning Mennonite worship, stated below, is consistent with the Anabaptist view that worship leads to a changed life, both for the individual person at worship, and also for the world they serve in the name of Christ. The statement which follows accounts for the themes and intent of his third and fifth assumptions which we cited above.

Sixth, worship as often challenges our habits of faith as it confirms them... True worship holds before us a vision of the church and the world as they might be and dares us to bring them about.<sup>105</sup>

Such ideas as these will be part of my definition and understanding of Mennonite worship throughout this study. But I shall also be guided by Rempel's comment noted

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<sup>105</sup>*Ibid.*,39,40.

above that the practice of worship may be more important than our abstract thoughts about it. That is why I shall try to let the people of the congregation have the last word, as they describe their primary experience of worship.

Mennonites have not been inclined to write prayer books to guide our corporate worship. Rather we have chosen to let our singing become an important vehicle by which faith is expressed in worship. In Chapter One we saw John Thompson's assertion "We all sing hymns that address each of the three persons in the one Godhead."<sup>106</sup> Let us now test the veracity of that assertion for Mennonites. A summary browse through some Mennonite hymnals, past and present, is quite revealing in this regard. The *Church Hymnal*, published in 1927, begins with the "anchor hymn" #1 *Come Thou Almighty King*," whose lines include the phrases "Incarnate Word," "Holy Comforter" and concludes in verse 4 "To the great One in three, eternal praises be." This hymn comes at the beginning of a section on God, followed by a block of hymns addressing Christ. The third person of the Trinity is featured in a third section, followed by a section entitled "The Trinity." Clearly trinitarian theology was consciously included in Mennonite hymnody.

*The Mennonite Hymnal*, published jointly in 1969 by the Mennonite Church and General Conference Mennonite Church begins with the "anchor hymn" #1 *Holy God, We Praise Thy Name*. Verse four begins with the line "Holy Father, Holy Son, Holy Spirit, three we name Thee." Though there are no headings, it is clear that the hymns which follow are arranged with respect to the persons of the Trinity.

Then something changes, in the *Hymnal: A Worship Book*, published in 1992. It is arranged in keeping with the order of service borrowed largely from the mainline Protestant churches. One needs to search the index to discover listed under "Trinity,"

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<sup>106</sup>John Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives*, 94.

seventeen songs which are scattered throughout the hymnal. Likewise, hymns addressed to each of the three persons of the Trinity can be found listed in the index. The point is that the Trinity is no longer seen as the cohering principle of the hymnal. Rather, it is organized to reinforce a liturgical flow of themes in the order of service. Nevertheless, *Mennonites do indeed still sing songs of the Trinity*, but perhaps not as self-consciously so as in past years.

Marlene Kropf, part time Worship Consultant for the Mennonite Church and professor of spirituality at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary completed her doctoral studies (D. Ministry) in the area of worship and music. At the Mennonite Consultation on Worship held at the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre on October 22, 1999, Kropf presented a succinct statement, "Toward a Spirituality of Song." She says that in our singing 1. Our vision of God is formed 2. We are formed into Christian community, and 3. Our life is formed as people of the Spirit in the world. Why is singing such a central feature of worship for Mennonites? To explore this more carefully would be a matter for another thesis. In the questionnaire and interviews of my thesis project I do touch on the place of music in the experience of the worshippers at Hillcrest.

Anabaptists of the sixteenth century were wary of the use of symbol and ritual in the Church, because of the concern for their idolatrous use. Mennonites have inherited that concern. However, they have also cautiously begun to reclaim what symbolic acts and rituals might accomplish in worship. Marlene Kropf gives credence to the use of ritual, using trinitarian language. In her article "Trinity as a Template For Worship," she speaks of three fundamental gifts of ritual: order, community, and transformation. Roughly translated, she believes these represent *God, Christ and the Spirit* respectively. Through the orderly use of ritual we are reminded that God created heaven and earth, and we are in God's care. Furthermore, ritual also participates in the making and restoring of order, for example, the funeral ritual.

The second gift of ritual is community, which not only brings people together in physical assembly; it also joins them emotionally and spiritually. Be it at a wedding, funeral, Maundy Thursday or Easter Sunday, we create community. And of course communion is "the delightful assembly and Christian marriage feast," to use the words of Menno Simons (*Complete Works*, 148). The third gift of ritual is transformation. Kropf says "Good ritual not only supports the order that has come down to us; it transforms that order, and it transforms us."<sup>107</sup>

Kropf, in another article, speaks of a model for congregational discipling based in three arenas of action in the life of a congregation: Worship, Mission and Community. These are linked to the components of the Great Commandment (Mark 12:28ff): Love God (Worship), Love Neighbour (Mission), Love Self (Community). She considers this also to reflect a trinitarian theology. She asks: "If love of God, self and neighbour is the sum of the Gospel, what kind of church is need to form people who will live out the gospel?" Her answer is "a church that holds a vision of love at its center and creates structures to form and express that love to God, self, and neighbour."<sup>108</sup> How are these components present in Mennonite worship in the local setting of Hillcrest Mennonite Church? This question too will be touched upon in the thesis project in various ways, through the methodology which I shall use as described in Chapter Four, to which we now turn.

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<sup>107</sup>Marlene Kropf, "Trinity as a Template For Worship," in *Anabaptist Visions For the New Millenium: A Search For Identity*, Dale Schrag and James Juhnke, editors (Kitchener, Ontario: Pandora Press, Copublished with Herald Press, Scottdale, Pennsylvania, 2000), 149,150.

<sup>108</sup>Marlene Kropf et. al.editor, *Congregational Discipling* (Scottdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1997), 16.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## THE LOCAL SETTING, A CASE STUDY OF HILLCREST MENNONITE CHURCH

**A. A Brief History and Description of Hillcrest Mennonite Church**

Hillcrest Mennonite Church was formed in 1964 as a daughter congregation of the East Zorra Mennonite Church, and has a current membership of 260 people. For many people at Hillcrest, the history of the East Zorra congregation is their history, so this needs to be described as well. In turn, East Zorra's history is part of the history of the Amish, an off-shoot of the Mennonite Church. Let me briefly describe this history.

Jacob Amman, a young Mennonite bishop in Alsace-Lorraine in the late seventeenth century, wished to maintain a stricter discipline than some of his fellow bishops. Their views could not be reconciled; hence a parting of ways in 1693 gave rise to two Anabaptist groups known as Mennonites and the Amish - the latter named after Jacob Amman, the former after Menno Simons, an early Anabaptist leader.

Mennonites had settled in Pennsylvania already by 1683 and had further migrated to southern Ontario by 1786 and to Waterloo in the early 1800's. This Waterloo County group was already well-established by 1822 when the Amish came to North America and migrated to townships west of Waterloo - Wilmot Township, South Easthope (Perth County), and East Zorra (Oxford County). The East Zorra group formed its own congregation in 1837, beginning as a house church. In 1883, instead of dividing into several house churches, as Amish are inclined to do, they built a meetinghouse beside the 16th. line cemetery. This is the site of the present East Zorra Mennonite Church. Thus a series of progressive changes was set in motion.

In the first century or more that they were in this area, this group was known as Amish Mennonites. By the mid-1950's they constituted themselves as the Western

Ontario Mennonite Conference, joining twenty other district conferences of the Mennonite Church in North America, effectively adopting the theology and polity of the larger Swiss or Old Mennonite Church.<sup>109</sup> The Amish and Mennonites of Waterloo, Perth and Oxford counties who were neighbours gradually began to cooperate in the mission and work of the church, so that by the 1980's they were integrated into one district conference, the Mennonite Conference of Eastern Canada, with a total membership of approximately 13,500. Thus the name "Amish" was deleted, but the sense of history and rootedness in that tradition remains strong.<sup>110</sup> Some persons in the congregation also have relatives who remained part of the more traditional Amish community that did not make the changes described above.

How strong is the rootedness in the Amish tradition? That will be one of the questions which underlies this project. Through the vagaries of change and splintering and acculturation into less traditional forms, what thread is woven into the current tapestry which extends back behind the Amish roots to the sixteenth-century Anabaptist movement from which it stems? And what are the streams of piety from which worshippers at Hillcrest drink? The demography of the congregation itself is rather homogeneous; the vast majority of names are Swiss (Amish) Mennonite in origin, with rural roots. Yet this is beginning to change, through marriage and

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<sup>109</sup>The designation "Swiss" or "Old" Mennonite Church has been used for a number of decades in North America to distinguish the group of Mennonites from Swiss or South German origins from the group of Mennonites of Dutch or North German origins. For approximately a century, the former group was the Mennonite General Conference, and the latter the General Conference of Mennonites. Now both groups are uniting in North America to become simply the Mennonite Church (U.S.A.) and Mennonite Church (Canada).

<sup>110</sup>For information regarding this history, I am indebted to Fred Lichti's *A History of the East Zorra Amish Mennonite Church: 1837-1977*. (Published at Tavistock, Ontario by the East Zorra Mennonite Church, October, 1977)



outreach. What impact does both this continuity and the degree of identified change have on the theology of the Hillcrest Mennonite Church at worship?

### **B. Goals for the Project**

Guided by the principle that worship *is* theology, primary to and experienced by persons within the worshipping community, the defining question of the Project is: *What is (are) the functional theology (theologies) present in the worship of Hillcrest Mennonite Church?* This will be discovered through interviews and through the use of a survey questionnaire which invites people in the congregation to describe their experience of worship, either in their own words or by choosing from descriptions provided.

The main goals which guide the development of this thesis project are as follows:

1) to discover how the primary theology as experienced in corporate worship relates to the received faith of general orthodoxy and to assess its importance to the life of the congregation. Several questions underlie this goal: Does it matter what people believe? How will we invite individual expression of belief and spirituality through worship, while affirming the veracities of the received Christian faith?

2) to discover from the reported data to what extent persons who worship at Hillcrest maintain an Anabaptist-Mennonite understanding of worship. A desired outcome might be to maintain or regain a conscious and consistently Anabaptist-Mennonite theology in the worship life of the congregation.

A two-fold question emerges from this goal. Is borrowing, assimilation and change a sign of vigor and growth, or a sign of erosion of traditional values and beliefs? If we should discover that persons from a non-Mennonite background come to worship with different theologies, how can we celebrate this as enriching our life together? And if we should discover that they are in fact attracted to us precisely because of our

uniquely Anabaptist-Mennonite theology, expressed in worship, how will we own and celebrate this? What are the implications for outreach?

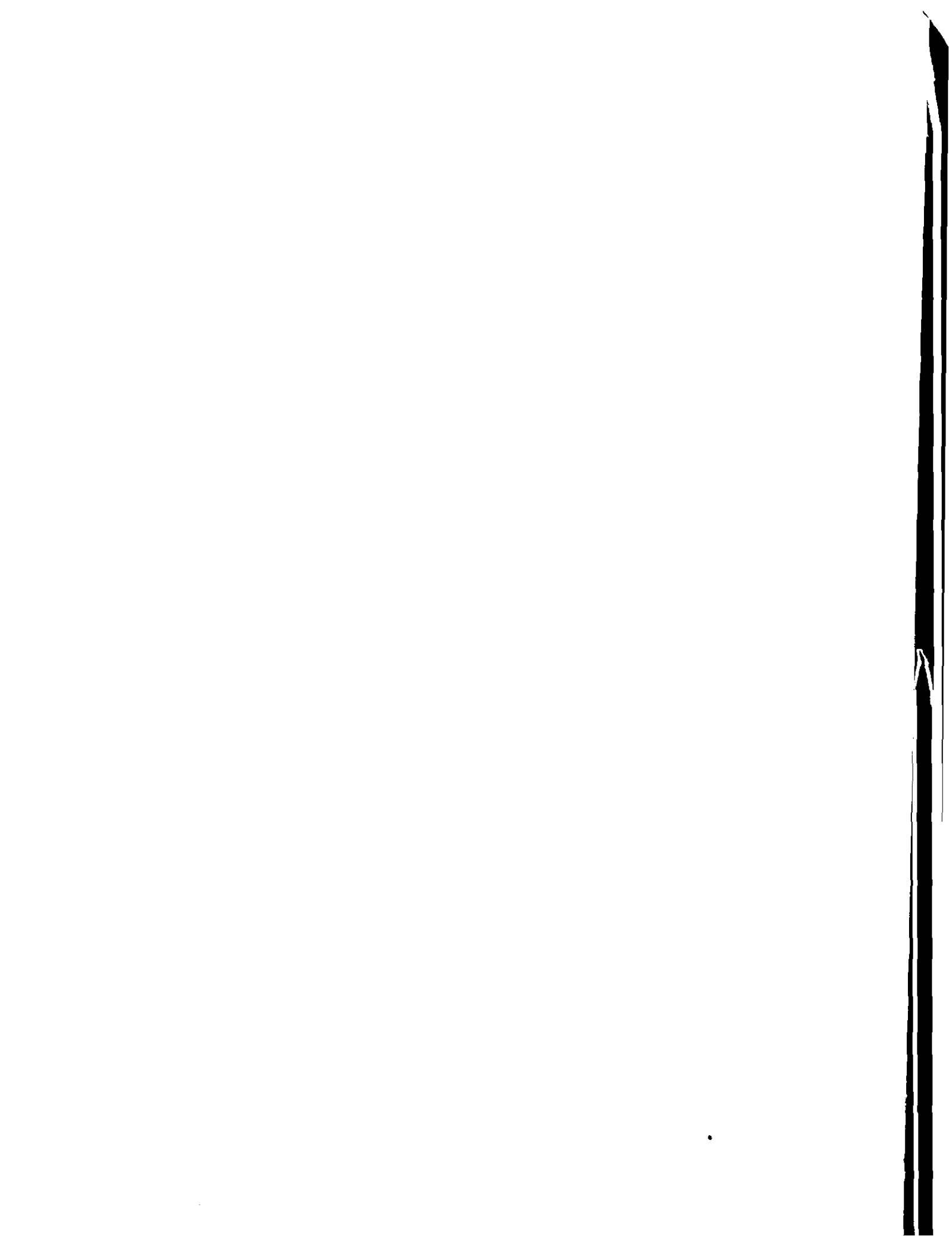
3) The third goal of this study is to raise an awareness of people's primary theology (experience) of worship and their expressions of spirituality, in order to assist those who minister and lead in worship to maintain a vital worship experience for persons of various spiritual types in the congregation.

### C. Methodology

For purposes of my study of Hillcrest Mennonite Church as a worshipping community, I have interviewed seventeen persons, and administered a questionnaire to fifty-five other persons, for a total cohort group of seventy-two in a congregation whose average attendance at worship is approximately 175. Of those who completed the questionnaire, forty have always been Mennonite, fifteen have come to Hillcrest from other denominations. Of those who were interviewed, eleven have always been Mennonite, six came from other denominations. The interviews were based on the twelve questions that appear in Appendix A. These questions were asked in the same order for each interviewee, with as few explanatory comments as possible, to ensure some degree of uniformity. I elected not to ask supplemental questions of clarification, nor did I engage the interviewees in conversation or offer explanations, because I was concerned not to prompt the responses.<sup>111</sup> The responses were transcribed from audio tapes to paper, which yielded in excess of 150 pages of transcribed notes. I have used these notes in two ways. First of all, I draw from them statements which illustrate trends in how persons express their primary or

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<sup>111</sup>In retrospect, I feel I could have enriched the process by allowing the interviews to be more free-flowing and dialogical, in this qualitative approach to my study. There was a methodological trade-off in the choice I made, between uniformity of approach and gaining a broader range of discussion.

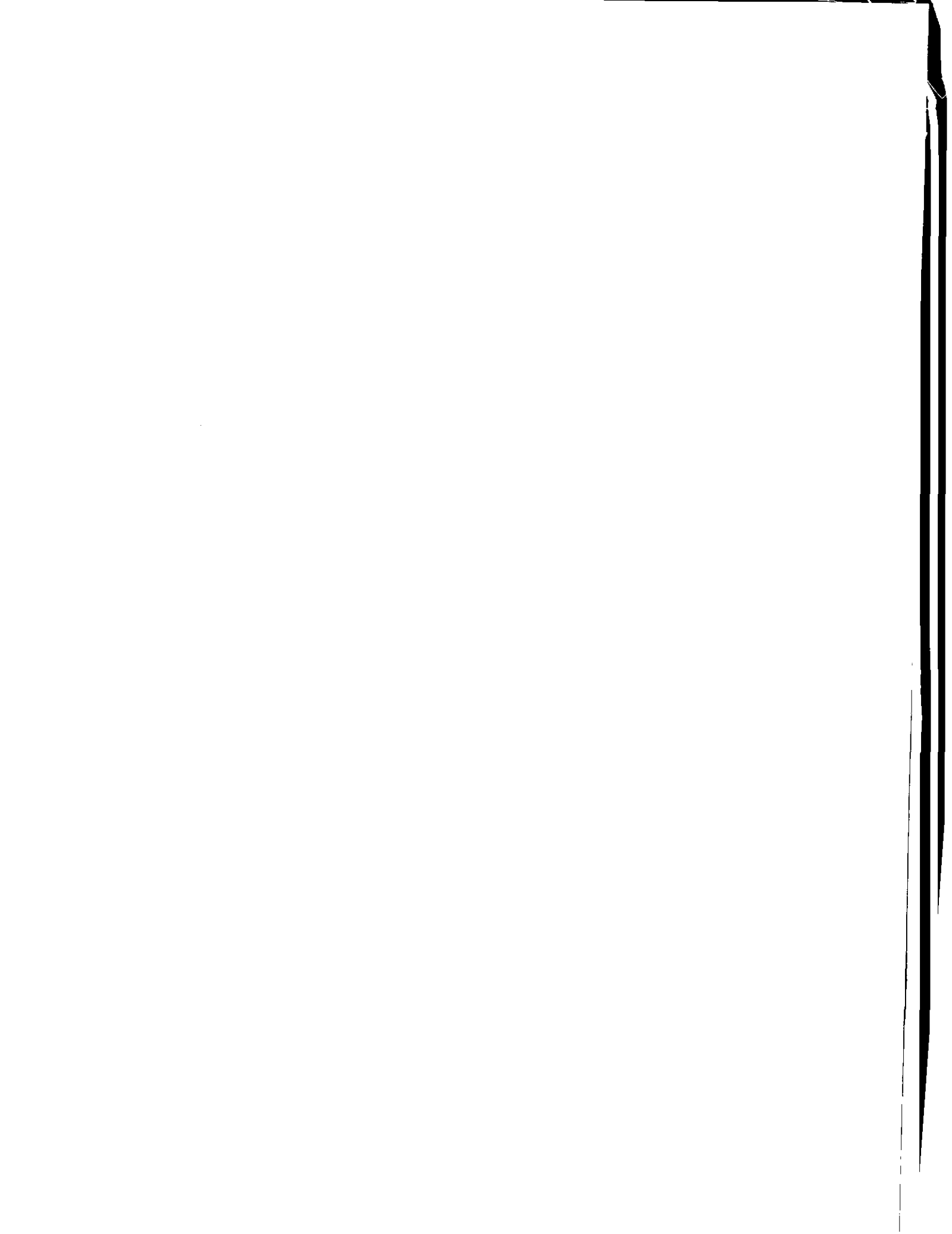


experienced theology. I also use this qualitative material to help me understand the quantitative data derived from the questionnaire, and to give that data an anecdotal voice.

The questionnaire (which appears as Appendix B) consists of fifty-five questions of the quantitative research type, which all respondents were asked to answer. In my analysis of the data, I decided that a score differential of 10% between cohorts was worthy of comment; a differential of 20% or more should especially catch our attention, and may at points be a matter of concern. Two optional questions at the end invited anecdotes that describe respondents' experience of God and /or prayer. Nineteen persons elected to do this additional writing.

In this thesis project I take a phenomenological approach, using the Hillcrest Mennonite Church as my case study. Both the interviews and the questionnaire were designed to invite people's description of their own primary theology as they experience it, using categories typical of the received faith, both in general Christian orthodoxy and in Anabaptism.

With the permission of Howard Kaufman at Goshen College, I have used some of the questions from the Church Member Profile conducted in 1972 and 1989 respectively. The results of the 1972 survey, using a sample of 3,591 members, were summarized by Kauffman and Harder in 1975 in a book entitled *Anabaptists, Four Centuries Later*. The results of the 1989 survey, with a sample of 3,000 members, was published in 1991 in the book entitled *The Mennonite Mosaic: Identity and Modernization*. By citing the data from these surveys I can compare the responses to those questions given by people at Hillcrest. This provides a longitudinal comparison, to the extent that we can assume Hillcrest Church is typical of the cohort sampled in the 1972 and 1989 surveys, although the comparative use of the Church Member Profile has the limitation of comparing current trends to trends from a past decade. The shifts in thought and practice among Mennonites have been so volatile



that identifiable changes could be marked within less than twenty years. Perhaps one could draw a trajectory between the results of 1972 and 1989 to the results shown in the Hillcrest survey.

In consultation with Dr. Arnold Snyder, professor of Anabaptist history at Conrad Grebel College, I have reshaped several of the questions which measure affinity to Anabaptism, and have added several new questions which in our minds more adequately represent the views of current scholarship on what constitutes essential Anabaptist thought. The drawback to this innovation, however, is that I have no results from the 1972 and 1989 churchwide surveys to compare to my findings from these new questions as they were asked of respondents at Hillcrest. In addition, some of the questions in the survey were formulated based on the responses of the interviewees to similar questions. This provides a lateral comparison between the survey data and the stated viewpoints of interviewees.

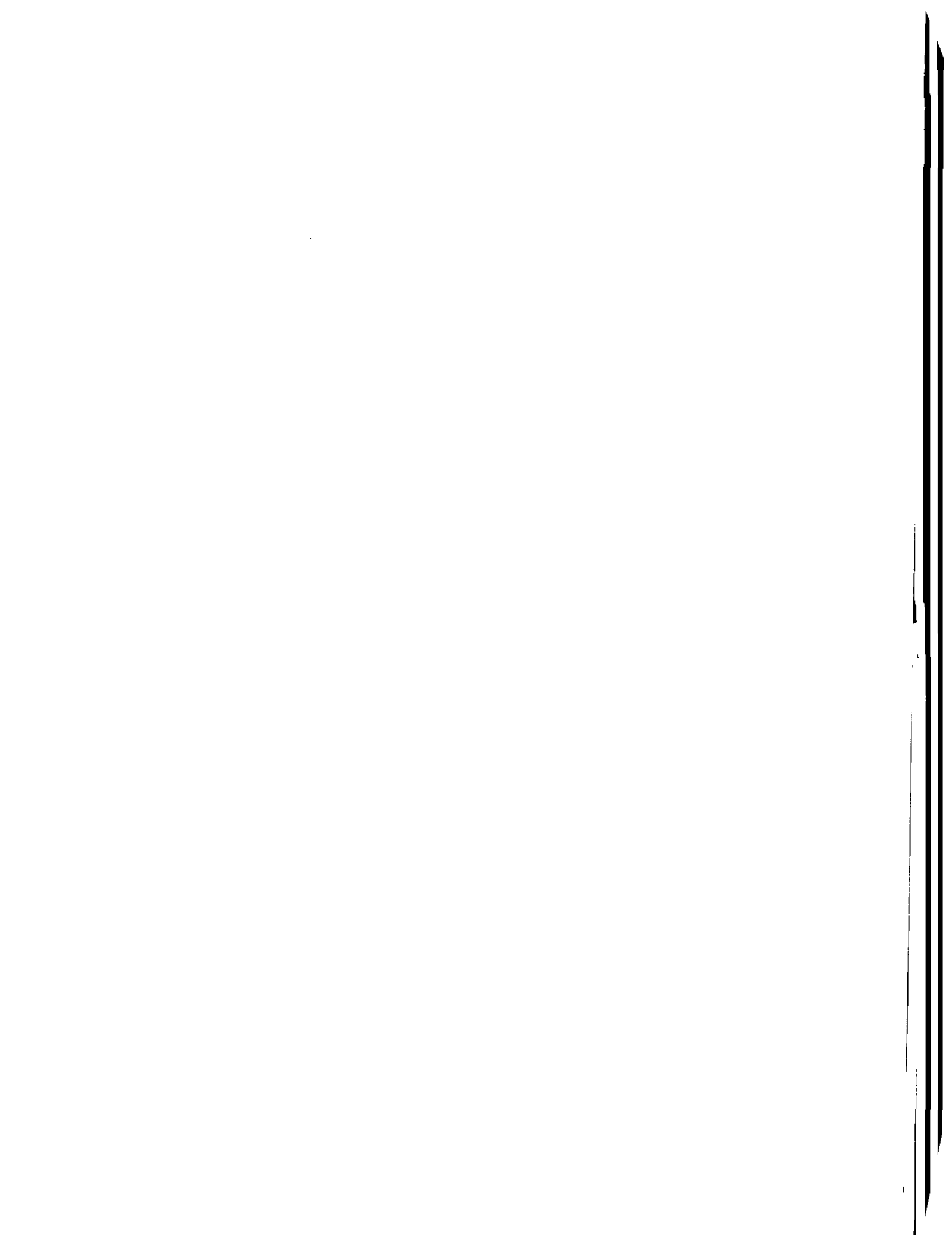
Within the questionnaire there are six identifiable categories of questions which are the "templates" or overlays against which to group the responses. These are as follows:

a) Personal Piety.

Questions 7-15 as well as Question 48 invite people to identify the various ways in which they discover God and express their spirituality. This has in the past been described variously as "piety" or "the devotional life". The current trend is to prefer the term "spirituality". Some of these aspects are contained also in Questions 31-40.

b) Christian Orthodoxy

Questions 16 and 17 are measures of orthodoxy, dealing with some key beliefs of the received Christian faith, for example, their understanding of God in God's three persons. These are questions taken from the 1972 Church Member Profile conducted by Kauffman and Harder. They used a scale measuring general orthodoxy of beliefs which they drew from Stark and Glock's (1968) basic Christian doctrinal items. The



same scale was used again in the 1989 survey conducted by Kauffman and Driedger.<sup>112</sup> Thus we can do a longitudinal comparison between the results of the 1972 and 1989 survey, as well as drawing comparisons to the responses of persons at Hillcrest. Some aspects of general orthodoxy are contained also in questions 31-40.

Question 19 is a question taken from a series of questions used by Kauffman and Harder to measure the degree of fundamentalism among Mennonites. Let me define the two terms "orthodoxy" and "fundamentalism." Orthodoxy holds the commonly accepted or established faith, the correct or sound doctrine which conforms to the early ecumenical creeds. Fundamentalism as a movement is particularly opposed to modernism and its accompanying liberalism pertaining to theological matters. I have selected only the one question which is at the heart of Fundamentalism, the belief that all statements in the Bible are to be taken literally. It could be said in brief that one can be orthodox without being fundamentalist, but the reverse cannot be true, one cannot be fundamentalist without being orthodox.

#### c) Anabaptist Beliefs

Questions 20-30 reflect religious beliefs which have been traditionally held by Mennonites, rooted in Anabaptist history and thought. Some of these questions have been taken from the Church Member Profile of the Mennonite Church conducted in 1972 and repeated in 1989.<sup>113</sup> As I noted above, I have added other questions which in my judgment are good indicators of affinity to Anabaptist theology and practice.

#### d) Typologies of Spirituality

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<sup>112</sup>J. Howard Kauffman and Leo Driedger, *The Mennonite Mosaic* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, Waterloo, Ontario: Herald Press, 1991),69.

<sup>113</sup>J. Howard Kauffman and Leland Harder, *Anabaptists Four Centuries Later* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, Kitchener, Ontario: Herald Press,1975),114-116.



In Part A of Chapter Seven I shall outline various typologies which could be used to assess individual's particular type of spirituality. In Part B of Chapter Seven I shall utilize one typology to assess the kinds of spiritual experiences of persons at Hillcrest, shown by analysis of the results of the pertinent parts of the survey questionnaire and the interviews which I have conducted in the congregation. The questions which most directly pertain to spiritual types include Questions 31-43 and 53-55.

e) Communal focus

Questions 40, 42, 43, 46 and 47 explicitly ask respondents to identify the value(s) they place on community life and worship. This allows us to test and measure the degree to which community life is particularly important in the Mennonite experience of worship.

f) Ethics and daily living

There has also been an assumption, which we described in Chapters Two and Three, that in Anabaptist-Mennonite worship, ethics and daily living are closely related; in some respects one could argue that for Mennonites worship and work are one. The ethical response is contained as an option in each of questions 31, 32, 33, 36, 37, 44, 45, 49, 52. Several questions specifically ask respondents to reflect on the connection of worship and work.

The data in the survey questionnaire has been entered on the computer in such a way that I can draw out various cohorts or sub-groupings for purposes of comparison. It is of primary interest to me to compare those who have always been Mennonite to those who have come to Hillcrest from other denominational or faith backgrounds. Six of the interviewees and fifteen of those who filled out the survey are from various non-Mennonite backgrounds. The central question here is to what extent people identify with our Anabaptist heritage. I shall also be able to compare people on the basis of gender, age, or level of education. The latter two criteria have been divided into three categories each, permitting me to examine whether certain types of primary

theology or experience of God are more prevalent to a particular gender, age or level of education.

There will be much to be mined from these comparisons. It remains important to consistently let the respondents speak for themselves and to be tentative about putting labels on their responses. Again, the concern is not to assume or impose an arbitrary uniformity in the functional theology of worship at the Hillcrest church. Rather, our concern is to ensure that people are nurtured by a worship which is both relevant to their experience, and authentically faithful to the tradition in which they stand.

## CHAPTER FIVE

THE TRINITY AND GENERAL CHRISTIAN ORTHODOXY IN HILLCREST  
MENNONITE CHURCH

## Witness I

*Which of the three aspects of God do I tend to be most aware of when I worship? First of all, sometimes all three. And sometimes all three as the one God. I think my awareness when I worship tends to shift from the Father as Creator to Son as Redeemer, also as friend. And with sometimes a vague awareness that it is in the Spirit that this shift of awareness is happening.<sup>114</sup>*

We turn now to a description of the primary theology of worshippers in the Hillcrest Mennonite Church with respect to the Trinity and related aspects of general Christian Orthodoxy which constitute the received faith of historical Christianity. For purposes of comparison, I utilized three questions from the Churchwide Survey administered by Harder and Kauffman in 1972 and by Kauffman and Driedger in 1989. The results are shown in Table 1-1a and Table 1-1b below. The first two items (16 & 17) measure affinity to general orthodoxy; the third (19) measures the degree of fundamentalism.

The answers to questions 16 and 17 show clearly that Hillcrest people are less orthodox, by at least twenty per cent, than the Mennonite Church was in 1972 and 1989. On the question of knowing with certainty that God exists, 67% were in total agreement. The second possible response to the question is "While I have some doubts, I do believe in God." The degree of agreement to this orthodox, though somewhat softer statement, was 26%. If you add the results of these two responses,

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<sup>114</sup>This is the witness of a male, formerly Roman Catholic, who is in his late fifties. He is responding to an interview question concerning his understanding of the Trinity in worship.

the number rises dramatically, to 93%. Nonetheless, fully a third of the congregation has doubts even about the existence of God. Those who have always been Mennonite

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**Table 1-1a. Responses to items on General Orthodoxy/Fundamentalism\***

	overall group	always Menno.	other denom.	male	female	churchwide	
						1972	1989
<u>Question 16</u> I know beyond a doubt that God exists.	67 (93)	70 (95)	60 (87)	50 (90)	77 (94)	89	88
<u>Question 17</u> I have no doubt that Jesus is both human and divine.	60 (95)	63 (98)	53 (86)	50 (95)	66 (95)	90	88
<u>Question 19</u> I believe the Bible is the divinely inspired and inerrant Word of God.	27 (62)	30 (65)	20 (53)	15 (65)	34 (60)	82	78

\* numbers in parentheses represent combination of first and second most orthodox responses. All other numbers indicate percentage of persons who circled the most orthodox response.

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(hereafter known as cohort A) tend to be more orthodox than those who are formerly from another denomination (hereafter known as cohort B). Women appear to be considerably more orthodox than men. Table 1-1b shows the results of the same questions, with three cohorts according to level of education and three divided according to age.

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**Table 1-1b. Responses to items on General Orthodoxy/fundamentalism \***

	elem. educ.	high school	univer. educ.	age to 39	age to 59	age 60+
<u>Question 16</u> I know beyond doubt God exists.	91 (100)	70 (96)	50 (81)	41 (87)	87 (91)	67 (100)
<u>Question 17</u> I have no doubt that Jesus is both human and divine.	82 (100)	67 (96)	38 (81)	41 (87)	65 (91)	73 (100)
<u>Question 19</u> I believe the Bible is the divinely-inspired and inerrant Word of God.	64 (73)	26 (67)	6 (50)	18 (53)	22 (66)	47 (67)

\* numbers in parenthesis represent combination of first and second most orthodox responses.

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On the question which measures the degree of fundamentalism, based on the view that the Bible is both divinely inspired and inerrant (as we defined it in Chapter Four), Hillcrest is much less fundamentalist than the Churchwide Survey, with a score of 27% overall. Again, those in cohort B are less fundamentalist than those in cohort A, and women at Hillcrest score twice as high as men on that scale. Even the combined overall scores of the first and second highest degrees of agreement to a fundamentalist view of the Bible are considerably lower than the Churchwide Survey result, in which approximately 60% checked the highest degree of agreement with the statement. Based on this singular indicator at least, it is clear that people at Hillcrest are not inclined towards Fundamentalism.

When the responses are shown in terms of level of education and age, there are some significant and perhaps predictable results. Consider for example that certainty about the existence of God appears to diminish as people achieve more education. In the Mennonite Church during the first half of the twentieth century higher education was seen as a risk to faith. (Is there a lingering link between this twentieth century suspicion and that expressed by Anabaptists during the Reformation era concerning the "learned doctors?") In the 1960's the Ontario Mennonite Bible School and Institute conducted classes for Mennonite high school graduates to prepare them for the test of faith which they presumed would come as they entered university. This program disbanded after Conrad Grebel College was formed as a place where Mennonite students could participate both in the rigors of academic study and in their faith development in a safe environment. Goshen College, Eastern Mennonite College, Bluffton College and later, Canadian Mennonite Bible College all became additional viable options for higher education for some Ontario Mennonite students, including persons from Hillcrest. But not all Mennonites who went on to higher education did so in the context of Mennonite church-related schools. In terms of the statistics before us, we did not test persons who were educated in public schools

versus those who went to church colleges. (It would seem clear that there would be some differences between such cohorts, but that would need to be tested.)

I suggested above that the results according to age groupings are also relatively predictable; one would assume that older persons would be more inclined towards the traditionally accepted theology. There is one surprise however, and that is in the response of the over sixty year group to the statement "I know beyond any doubt that God really exists." They are less clear about that than are the middle aged people. However, 33% of them agreed with the still orthodox, though not quite as definitive statement "While I have some doubts, I do believe in God." The combination of their responses to these two questions is 100%. As we examine the overall results pertaining to the question about the existence of God, if you allow some degree of doubt, there is still a very high degree of general orthodoxy across all age groups and educational levels. However, based on the most orthodox response, the degree of orthodoxy at Hillcrest is less than that indicated in the Churchwide Survey of 1989.

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**Table 1-2 Awareness of the persons of the Trinity in worship**  
**Question 35**  
 Which of the three aspects of God do you tend to be most or most often aware of?

	overall group	always Menno.	other denom.	male	female	elem.ed.	high school	university
1. God as Father/Creator	4	0	13	0	6	0	7	0
2. Jesus, as Son/Redeemer	4	5	0	0	6	18	0	0
3. Holy Spirit, as Sustainer	2	3	0	0	3	0	0	6
4. All three equally, I don't distinguish, is all one God	31	38	13	50	20	55	33	13
5. All three variously, depends on theme of the worship	51	50	53	40	57	27	52	69

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We turn now to an examination of how people at Hillcrest understand and experience God as Trinity, as well as the three persons of the Trinity. Question 34 of

the survey defines the three persons of the Trinity, then asks the respondents to indicate which of the three aspects of God they tend to be most or most often aware of when they worship in the congregation. The results are shown in Table 1-2 above.

The responses indicate very little preference for one person of the Trinity. Most respondents (51%) indicate that they are aware of all three persons of the Trinity variously, depending on the theme of the worship service. Those with university education score highest in this regard (69%). Women (57%) are more conscious than men (40%) of all three persons of the Trinity variously depending on the theme of the service. Indeed, 50% of the men did not distinguish among the persons of the Trinity; for them God is all one. Those who have university education are the most discriminating in terms of identifying that there are three persons in the Godhead, with only 13% saying that God is all one, with no distinction among the three persons. Those with the least amount of education are the most likely to say that for them God is all one, they do not distinguish.

It appears from the data that people at Hillcrest have some sense of God as Trinity. However, there is also a significant number who apparently do not distinguish the persons of the Trinity. Do they consciously have a unitarian understanding of God? Or does this simply reflect that during worship they do not discriminate in their functional theology whether they are addressing God, Jesus Christ, or the Holy Spirit? We may gain some clarity as we turn to the responses of the seventeen persons who were interviewed. The question to which they responded is the same as Question 34 in the survey questionnaire: "Which of these three aspects of God do you tend to be most, or most often aware of when you worship in the congregation?"

Six of the interviewees identify that God more than Jesus Christ or the Holy Spirit is foremost in their minds when they come to worship. Let us hear their responses:

Again, as I come to worship what foremost is in my mind is that I'm here to worship God, but also I am aware that Jesus is the one that is our Redeemer,

to save us from our lost estate. I guess I tend to focus least on the Holy Spirit as our Sustainer; I take that for granted, don't think about it much. So I think of God the Father, then Jesus second, and the Holy Spirit last... I guess I think of it more as one.

This respondent (a male in his early sixties, in cohort A) appears to make some distinctions, with a preference for the first person of the Trinity as he comes to worship, but then emerges at the end of his reflections with the assertion "I think of it more as one." His response demonstrates a degree of uncertainty or ambivalence as he is trying to think through his answer.

A second interviewee (a middle-aged male, in cohort A) is more decisive about his choice, but is somewhat unclear about his reasons for his choice. He says: "Definitely God, the Father/Creator. Why? Who knows. I really cannot say why. I think it's probably just because of where I come out academically."

A third interviewee (a middle-aged male, in cohort B) reflects at some length about the functional differences in terms of whom one is addressing as one prays:

You don't know what part to place on Father, Son and Holy Ghost. I have to think praying in Jesus' name, but then I wonder really if you're praying is it appropriate just to skip Jesus and go to the top authority, God, you know. "In Jesus' name" we pray, but he in some ways was a messenger; when you are asking for forgiveness or a miracle or anything, you are asking God, and when you pray, you add emphasis, you say "in Jesus' name." So I see Jesus in a secondary role, like the way he talked and everything he did he attributed to God, praised God and so, that's a role he accepted.

He adds: "Well, in the order that I just said, God is the person you go to ultimately, then Jesus, and to me the Holy Spirit doesn't really enter the picture, so it's God, Jesus."

A young female, from cohort B says:

I guess God is probably the most prominent in my thoughts in worship, definitely very much on my mind. I guess going back to the Catholic Church (from which she came), we always had "in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit," and the sign of the cross - you crossed yourself. When I think of all three together, that's what I think of, but not now in the Mennonite Church.



She reminds us that we do not very often use the trinitarian formula in our worship in the Mennonite Church. This clearly has begun to shape her perception of God in worship. Another young female, from Lutheran background says: "We'd say it, (Father, Son, Holy Spirit), but I never thought of it as separate."

A fifth respondent (a young male, from cohort A) makes his point in brief: "I see God more than the others, not so much the Holy Spirit. He (God) is concerned when I am troubled. The praising part, praising God for what God represents."

The sixth respondent (a young female, from cohort A) describes how her understanding of God has changed. She gives a rationale for speaking of God per se, rather than including the other two persons of the Trinity, as follows:

I think I am most aware of God. That's changing as I said. When I was younger it was Jesus, now it's God. And I am trying to understand the aspect of the Holy Spirit. Among my friends, God is the term we can embrace most freely; in an intellectual sense we can think "yes, there must be a creator behind this universe." I don't try to get away from Father imagery, but I like to also include mother God and other biblical images... I tend toward Jesus as a historical figure more, so it seems strange to worship him, except to think of him as the one who brought us the Gospel of peace and love. The thing about the Spirit has tended to be focused on the emotional in church, and I have a lot of trouble with that.

This respondent identifies that in her early Sunday School days she would have been most aware of Jesus (as an object of worship?). Now, in the intellectual milieu of university studies, she seems to be reflecting a unitarian understanding of God. This allows her the greatest freedom to have sensible dialogue with her friends. Certainly Jesus as a historical figure does not enter the Godhead in her mind in worship.

Five respondents indicated clearly that they do not really separate the three persons of the Trinity in their minds as they worship. Several respondents said the following: "Can you separate them? I don't think I would want to separate one from the other" (a senior woman, cohort A). "How can you separate them? ...I think one is as important as the other... We need all three, we have all three" (a senior woman, in cohort A). "I

think when I pray it's all one; maybe I have a hard time separating them" (a young woman, in cohort A). And, as I cited above, a young woman in cohort B says: "We'd say it (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) but I never thought of it as separate." These persons appear to contradict the characterization which we noted at the end of Chapter One, that Mennonites tend to focus most readily on the second person of the Trinity.

A young woman from cohort A reflects that trinitarian language seems not to have been part of her theology to this point. Does she reflect the fact that this has not been taught in the Mennonite Church in recent years? She says:

I never really have thought of the Trinity very much until our meeting. I haven't even thought of the three persons as separate; I've thought of them all together. Through our discussions I'm starting to think about all three, as opposed to all together.

Four persons, two from each cohort, comment that they think of God in all three persons variously, depending on what is happening in their lives, or how the theme of the worship service is being directed. We have already heard from a formerly Catholic middle-aged male, in Witness I cited at the beginning of this chapter. A senior male, who has always been Mennonite, reflects a similar sense of shift and movement between the persons of the Trinity as he worships:

I think that varies greatly. I think in my own mind they are quite closely connected with each other, but I think that line moves. Between the first two I think there are times I find it more difficult to distinguish between God and Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is probably further removed from them, but the Spirit is what comes from these others too.

A younger male, from cohort A says:

But again for me, the worship service, what's happening has more a function of which part I am experiencing as to how, where I tend to be mostly focused. And so I am aware of all three, but if the worship service leans heavily on one or other area, if I can focus in, that's the area where I'll be most focused at.

The respondent cited above does add: "I think more often Jesus, because at home we (he, his wife and small children) talk more about Jesus, so just for labeling, Jesus."

Only one person, a young male in cohort B, reflected that he most often or first of all thinks of Jesus Christ as he comes to worship. He says: "I'd have to say Jesus Christ the Redeemer...just what Jesus went through to forgive our sins, went through a lot for us, that someone should suffer that much for mankind..."

Three persons, all younger women, two of them from cohort A and one from cohort B identified the Holy Spirit as the person of the Trinity who first or most comes to mind as they come to worship. They bear witness as follows:

Yeah, the Spirit foremost, then God, I guess after that. Yeah, I guess because I sense the Spirit moving I relate my own feelings I guess to the Spirit, how I am touched by something, to me that's the Spirit working. To define God separately is kinda hard for me. I guess I think more in terms of Spirit (spirit?) than God.

Further conversation with this young woman might serve to reveal some nuances of meaning in her statement. When she relates Spirit so closely with her feelings, is she speaking of spirit (lower case) or Spirit (upper case)?

Another young woman from cohort A says something which has a similar tone: "The Holy Spirit, right? Because the other, Jesus Christ was a man to follow as a model, and God is just aughhh! The Spirit is just what's in me, it's internalized very much."

The young woman from cohort B states briefly: "It would be Spirit, as sustainer, keeping me going." So for these three young women at least, the Spirit is most immediately functional in their thoughts and hearts as they come to worship.

As we have examined the responses of the seventeen interviewees regarding which person(s) of the Trinity are most in their minds when they come to worship, we see a mixed response. The majority either think primarily of God the Father/Creator, or they acknowledge that they do not clearly distinguish the three persons of the Trinity. Those who responded to the survey question 34 tend to think mostly of all three, depending on the theme of the service, or they do not distinguish the persons of the

Trinity. Very few of those who answered the survey question choose one person of the Trinity as their primary focus in worship.

It would have been helpful to ask an additional question, inviting respondents to identify to whom it is they pray - to God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, or all three at once, or all three variously? Several persons did reflect on this. In addition to the interviewee whom we cited above who spoke of praying to God as the ultimate authority, another person (an older female, in cohort A) said: "We're told to pray through Jesus to God, but I can't say I always see a clear image (that separates them)."

Several persons who were interviewed reflected the view that since Jesus was simply a man, a historical figure, he should not be an object of worship; he was simply a fellow-worshipper with us of the God whom he followed and invites us to follow in the paths of peace. However, the majority of responses to Question 17 concerning what people believe about Jesus Christ does not support this viewpoint. Nobody in the group surveyed believes that Jesus was only a man, although an extraordinary one. Several people did agree with the statement that though Jesus was a very great and holy man, he was not divine any more than any of us is divine.

We asked earlier in this chapter whether people in the church, as in the public sphere, are increasingly leaning towards a unitarian, non-trinitarian view of God. Trinitarian language is not a central part of the liturgy at Hillcrest Mennonite Church. That is to say, the trinitarian formula "in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit" is not routinely used in the worship service by those who lead worship. My sense is that some people at Hillcrest tend towards a unitarian viewpoint. Conversely, they do not have a clear picture of the Trinity; a number of them seem ambivalent or unclear about what this language means as a theoretical theological construct. They are more clear about where they place the emphasis functionally as they come to worship. When they reframe the question in terms of whom it is they address in worship in prayer, some clarity ensues.

## CHAPTER SIX

ANABAPTISM IN THE LOCAL THEOLOGY OF HILLCREST MENNONITE  
CHURCH**A. The Anabaptist Vision, the Mennonite Reality**

## Witness II

*Whether it's serving each other or halfway across the world, as we come to worship I think service is a very key element. I always find it hard to say "as a Mennonite", because this is about my relationship with God, but this is also not just about me, it is about other people too, and not just the mindset that I have to help people come to God, but I think as a Mennonite I try to live my life as an example, or Mennonites try to live their lives as an example.<sup>115</sup>*

## Witness III

*I think I see much more Mennonite as an ethnicity than a set of beliefs. Sometimes I wish that I could experience what it would feel like to step into a Mennonite church not having been brought up Mennonite, and how that would feel to be energized by that... But what are some key beliefs or values Mennonites hold? Pacifism is a big thing. Helping our neighbor... a strong work ethic. Justice, I've always kinda grasped onto that. And I think just generally the importance of being among other people...the community of faith is something I value about the Mennonite Church.<sup>116</sup>*

The two witnesses cited above provide a window through which we can see where worshippers at Hillcrest Mennonite Church stand within the religious heritage of Anabaptism. They are responding to the interview question, "What do you think are some key beliefs or values Mennonites, or you as a Mennonite hold as they (you)

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<sup>115</sup>A female, formerly non-Mennonite member in her mid-thirties, in response to the interview question: What do you think are some key beliefs or values Mennonites or you as a Mennonite hold as they (you) come to worship?

<sup>116</sup>A female member in her late twenties, who has always been Mennonite, in response to the same question noted above.

come to worship?" As we stated from the outset in the Introduction, there is a dialectical relationship between the received faith or tradition in which one stands and one's primary theology or experience of God in worship. Likewise, there is a dialectical interplay between theology and worship. Does a congregation's theology shape its worship? Or can its worship also shape its theology? I believe both can and do happen.

For purpose of this present study, I have chosen to use portions of the 1972 and 1989 Churchwide Survey study, the work of Kauffman and Harder and Kauffman and Driedger respectively, as described in Chapter Four. To achieve a modest degree of longitudinal comparison, I have asked several of the questions which they posed in the Churchwide Survey reflecting the degree of Mennonite adherence to Anabaptist tenets of faith. I have also asked further questions which in my mind are valid measurements of adherence to Anabaptist practice and theology. It is to these results and related material that we now turn our attention. These are shown in Table 2-1 below, noted as total percentages of those who indicated they Strongly Agree or Agree with the items as stated.

We see that the adherence to a theology of persecution was not overly strong among Mennonites in 1972, had eroded by almost ten per cent in 1989, and again by approximately twenty per cent in the Hillcrest congregation, with no significant difference between those who have always been Mennonite and others in the congregation. Clearly the farther removed we are from that history of being a persecuted people, both in time and circumstances, the less significant it is to us. Of those who have always been Mennonites (cohort A) 20% were undecided, whereas 54% of those from other denominational backgrounds (cohort B) disagreed with the statement. The issue among those who grew up as Mennonites apparently still lingers in their consciousness, but not strongly so.

The question of suffering discipleship was not raised in the interviews, yet when asked the question, "What do you think are some key beliefs or values Mennonites or

Table 2-1. Responses to Items on Anabaptism

	churchwide survey		Hillcrest survey							
	1972	1989	overall group	always Menno.	other denom.	age to 39	age to 59	age 60+	male	female
<b>Anabaptist items:</b>										
20. Should follow the Lordship of Christ even if persecuted.	72	63	51	53	46	42	47	67	60	46
21. Baptism is neither necessary nor proper for infants and small children.	82	85	81	90	54	64	83	94	65	88
22. We should examine ourselves before taking communion.	-	-	84	85	80	77	82	93	80	86
23. Christians should not promote or take part in war.	73	78	86	93	66	71	91	93	75	92
24. A thorough church discipline should be followed.	60	55	30	23	46	18	26	47	35	26
25. We should expect mutual aid in the life of the congregation.	-	-	90	93	80	77	95	93	90	89
26. All gifted members should lead in the congregation, including worship.	-	-	75	81	60	77	78	66	85	69
27. To know God is to follow Christ in daily life.	-	-	91	93	87	89	87	100	90	92
28. No one can be a true follower of Christ without the work of the Spirit.	-	-	80	83	74	65	91	80	70	86
29. We should expect "new birth", the changed life in all Christians.	-	-	75	83	54	35	91	93	75	75
30. The most important measure of faithfulness is obedience to commands of Christ in Scripture.	-	-	73	78	60	47	83	87	85	66

\* Blanks under 1972/1989 survey indicate the question was not asked in those surveys.

you as a Mennonite hold as they (you) come to worship?" one man, a former Roman Catholic comments:

The simplicity that comes with being a suffering church. It is awfully hard to have high ceilings and beautiful walls and a nice organ when you are meeting in a cave because there are people who would like to kill you. That's the way it was in the ancient Church...

On the question of infant versus adult baptism, those in the Hillcrest church who have always been Mennonite actually hold more firmly to this tenet of faith than did

the Mennonite Church as shown in the churchwide survey. Here there is a clear distinction between cohort A and cohort B. Those from other denominational backgrounds, presumably especially those from paedobaptist backgrounds, have not changed their minds about that issue, even though they attend or are now members in a Believers Church congregation. Approximately half of them subscribe to this belief. But they are clearly thinking about it, as twenty seven per cent indicated they were undecided.<sup>117</sup>

Of the seventeen interviewees, when asked the question "What do you think are some key beliefs or values Mennonites hold as they come to worship?" only three persons (all from cohort A) identified adult baptism. One of them, a woman under forty years old, says: "Pacifism and adult baptism are the two that come to mind first of all when people ask me about being Mennonite, I guess those are the two things that always come up first."

Question 22 says in part "Communion is a way for baptized Christians to renew their Christian commitments." For Anabaptists communion is never a private or strictly individual matter between them and God; it also includes a right standing with others in the church. This question was not asked in the churchwide survey of 1972 and 1989 but is in my judgment an important indicator of Anabaptist beliefs. Over 80% of the congregation seems to agree with me. There is no difference in this regard between cohorts A and B though perhaps a few more of the latter are undecided about the matter. This was a question which was asked in the interviews, and we turn to those responses now (see Appendix A, question 9a).

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<sup>117</sup>Cohort B, a group of fifteen respondents, includes the following denominational backgrounds: four Roman Catholics, four United Church, three Lutheran, one Anglican, one Evangelical United Brethren, one Missionary Church, and one Pentecostal. Thirteen of these therefore come from a paedobaptist background.



In retrospect, it might have been significant to divide the survey question into two parts, separately addressing the issues of "good standing before God" and "good standing with others in the church." The interview question makes this division as it asks: "What happens to you as you participate in communion in your relationship with God? With others?" People responded as follows. One person from cohort A said: "They (others in the congregation) are there, but not necessarily part of my experience." Another person, a young woman from cohort A acknowledged at the outset "I have a hard time with communion...I have a hard time with the symbolism... I have a hard time internalizing it..." But she is much more clear about the horizontal dimension of relationships in communion and says:

But you know communion much more gives me a sense of church family... "Others" is probably the most key in communion, because we all go up there and you don't know what group you're going to take communion with, and it's an expression of faith in many ways, to find ourselves standing there in a circle with people that I really maybe would talk to all the time and that, but to say: "I'm up here, and I'm a faithful member of this church and communion is important enough that I at least get up and do it, whatever it means..."

One young woman from cohort B says:

It makes me very aware of God and being right with God, being in a good relationship with God, and beyond with others, it's a whole package deal, because if I'm in turmoil with my family, or am doubting God or angry at God, I shouldn't be taking communion.

Then she adds:

Questioning things can also bring me back to God, it can be a drawing back in, I think we can be in the valley and take communion, I always feel like my relationship has to be right with God, and if my life's in turmoil I have to come to terms with some things... Because if you are upset and in turmoil, there could be a healing aspect too. But I think if I have a bad attitude, then personally I don't think I should take communion.

As she spoke, she was thinking through some of the ambiguities she experiences on the question of when one is ready and worthy to take communion in terms of one's relationship to God.

She is less ambiguous on the question of relationships to others in communion:

I don't think when I take communion, the bread and cup, I feel we are coming together to take communion, but it is a more personal thing, between the pastor that's offering communion to me, and God who is inviting me to accept this communion; it's more about the relationship that way.

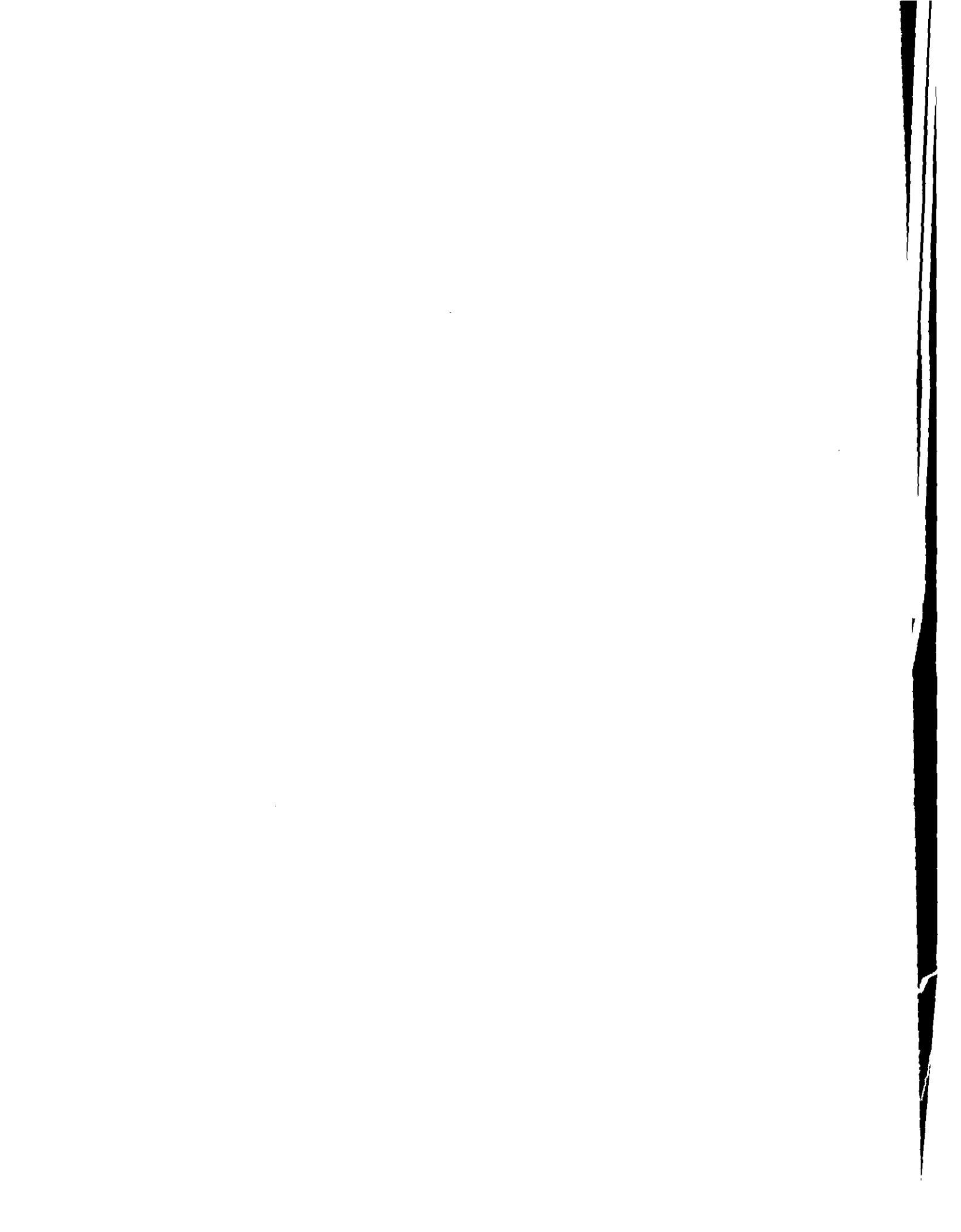
**Table 2-2. regarding relationship with others as you participate in communion**

**Question 40** What happens in your relationship to others when you participate in communion?

	overall group	always Menno.	other denom.	male	female	elem. educ.	high school	univ. educ.	age to 39	age to 59	age 60+
1. It gives me a sense of gratitude for being part of the church family; it draws us together.	47	48	47	35	54	55	44	44	53	44	47
2. There is a sense of being a faithful member of the church, in right relationship with others.	22	28	7	25	20	18	15	38	0	26	40
3. It is more of a personal and private relationship with God, between pastor and me.	18	15	27	5	26	9	30	6	29	22	0
4. Communion does not enhance my sense of relationship with others, since it is a rather meaningless ritual to me.	11	10	13	30	0	18	11	6	18	4	13

The interviewees had a mixed response to the matter of the importance of the worshipping community to their experience of communion. Three or four from each cohort stated that they see no link between themselves and others as they participate in communion; it is largely a matter between themselves and God. Words used to describe this were "It's more personal, more of a one-on-one with God," or words to that effect. More from cohort A than cohort B indicated a moderate or strong sense of connection to those around them as they participate in communion.

The historic practice among Swiss Mennonites is to link footwashing to communion. This has been the normal practice at Hillcrest as well. Thus several respondents in the interview included a discussion of footwashing with communion, even though it was not part of the question being asked. Several persons, from both cohorts, indicated that it is at the point of footwashing that the horizontal relationship is expressed; the vertical relationship is expressed more in communion.



Question 40 in the survey asks "What happens in your relationship to others in communion?" The results shown in Table 2-2 above indicate a clear affinity with the notion that communion is linked to Christian community. As we see in table 2-2, 35% of the males and 54% of the females chose the first option, so there is some gender difference in this regard. There is also a fairly clear sense that cohort B is more likely than cohort A to see communion as something private between them and God. It is also clear that males, more than females who responded to Question 40 felt that communion is a rather meaningless ritual.<sup>118</sup> Nobody in the age group under forty years indicated that communion defines for them a sense of being a faithful member of the church. Conversely, 40% of respondents over 60 years of age indicated this. This no doubt reflects what they were taught or experienced in earlier years, perhaps up to 1960's when the inquiry service the Sunday before communion was routinely practiced in Mennonite churches, as a function of the disciplined community.

I have paid considerable attention to the relationship of communion to community, as a hallmark of Anabaptist-Mennonite theology and practice. While there appears to be some awareness of this connection, it is uneven. For some it remains very important, for others it is of little importance, while others are ambivalent. But it is only one measure of community. We shall deal with this matter again later in part B of this chapter as we look at other indicators of communalism.

Question 23 concerning Christian pacifism is less ambiguous. The Hillcrest congregation overall subscribes more highly to this tenet of Anabaptism than did the Mennonite Church as surveyed in 1972 and 1989. Hillcrest has a number of older members who did alternative service during World War II. The peace witness is alive

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<sup>118</sup>While my primary interest is to note variations of responses between cohorts A and B, I have in hand computer data which gives results of the survey based in gender, three age categories, and three educational level categories. I will refer to these other categories whenever variations between them seem significant enough to note.

and well among all the members, especially of those in cohort A (93%). Cohort B is somewhat less sure of this; while 66% agree with the statement, 13% are uncertain and 7% disagree. Of the seventeen persons who were interviewed, when asked "What are key Mennonite beliefs?" six from cohort A and two from cohort B named pacifism as being important to Mennonites. One female under forty years old added that justice and peace belong together, though she is not quite sure exactly how they fit. "I've always had a hard time putting those two together," she stated. Another younger female person said: "It's really frustrating for me that our church is not more politically active or politically aware...to proclaim the gospel of peace and justice in that context." For these two persons at least, the gospel of peace is more than pacifism, it includes active peacemaking. An older male reflects the more traditional Mennonite pacifist view when he says: "Our nonresistance is probably the biggest one (belief)."

Church discipline (Question 24) lost some ground in the Mennonite Church between 1972 and 1989, and clearly lost even more ground in the Hillcrest church where it received only 30% overall agreement. Here we see a remarkable reversal between cohorts A and B. Only 23% of those who have always been Mennonite agree with this tenet of Anabaptism, 38% are uncertain and 38% disagree. On the other hand, 46% of those from other denominations agree, with only 20% uncertain and 27% disagreeing with the value of a thorough church discipline. What does this mean?<sup>119</sup> I hazard a guess that those who have always been in the Mennonite Church have observed instances of church discipline in the past and have not felt particularly good about the results. Yet, 47% of those persons over 60 years of age agree with the statement, and are people who would have been most likely to have seen or

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<sup>119</sup>It should be noted that a significant proportion of cohort B has a Roman Catholic background. Is there an affinity in that denomination to the practice of church discipline?

experienced church discipline. Thirty per cent of the middle-aged group disagreed with the practice of church discipline, and 47% of the younger group disagreed. It could also be noted that the present generation is more inclined to take a "live and let live" stance to issues of church membership, in keeping with the current societal trend towards individualism.

Mutual aid in the life of the congregation is a strong value at Hillcrest. The survey results indicate a very high rate of agreement in cohort A (93%) and a significantly high rate of agreement in cohort B (80%). The anecdotal evidence supports this. In the year this survey was administered in the congregation, they raised over \$30,000 to help a former refugee family purchase their first house. This was coordinated by the church elders who are responsible to operate a special needs fund for mutual aid within the congregation. When asked in interviews what are some key beliefs or values of Mennonites as they come to worship, five from cohort A identified mutual aid, both within the congregation and in service to those in the world and community around us.<sup>120</sup> Two persons from cohort B also identified this two-fold dimension of mutual aid and service.

On the matter of a broadly-based congregational leadership, including leading in worship (Question 26) those who have always been Mennonite subscribe to this value to a greater extent than those from other denominational backgrounds (81% and 60% respectively). It is of interest to note that males hold this viewpoint more strongly than females (85% and 69% respectively). In practice, however, it would appear that at present there are at least as many women as men in leadership positions in the congregation. There are more women worship leaders than men. Since 1991 the

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<sup>120</sup>The phrase in the interview question, "as you come to worship," is perhaps ambiguous. Did the respondents interpret it to mean as they meet sociologically? Or did they interpret it to mean as they experience God? My assumption is that both are true. How people experience God is shaped by their key beliefs and values, and conversely their experience of God in worship also shapes their beliefs and values.

congregation has had a male-female team of pastors. The current full-time pastor is female.

The middle-aged group holds most strongly to the concept of shared leadership, while those over sixty years of age indicated some uncertainty in this regard (33%). The older folks were more accustomed in their earlier years to having a smaller core of leadership centred around the threefold leadership model of bishop, pastor and deacon. Only in the past twenty or thirty years has the Mennonite Church as a whole, and Hillcrest church as well consciously adopted the principle of shared clergy and lay leadership, often expressed on bulletin mastheads with the words: "Ministers - Every member of the congregation."

We can draw a line back from this contemporary concern for lay leadership to our roots in Anabaptism. Our reading of Anabaptist history in Chapter Two clearly indicates their concern for participation of spiritually gifted persons in the worship of the congregation, often citing the model of I Corinthians 14. For Anabaptists, many of whom were rooted in medieval mysticism, through Word and Spirit grace was accessible to all, in an immediate, that is, largely unmediated sense. In that view there was no need of priests to ensure access to God. (There is some affinity here with Luther's concept of "the priesthood of all believers.") Nevertheless, they valued pastoral leaders as ministers of the Word and shepherds of the flock. The fifth article of the Schleithem confession of 1527 encouraged pastors to be appointed from within each congregation.<sup>121</sup> Though anyone could be an active participant in worship, there was nevertheless concern that each group have a pastoral leader. They were quick to ordain leaders to replace those who were lost to them because of persecution. Thus it

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<sup>121</sup>Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 164.

is not a matter of lay leadership versus ordained clergy as an "either-or", but more as a "both-and" dialectic.

The meaning of ordination and congregational leadership has been much discussed and debated in the Mennonite Church in the last half of the twentieth century. During the Mennonite sojourn in North America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there increasingly emerged a "Word and obedience" mood in the church, with authority often being centralized with the district bishops. This was the case in Ontario as well, up to the 1950's. After that time there was a return to the congregationalism and local authority which was more typical of the early Anabaptists, as we noted above in citing the Schleithem article.

Many persons who trained at Mennonite seminaries during the 1960's questioned the validity of ordination at a time when strong lay leadership was being encouraged. They especially questioned ordination if it meant a certain status for the ordained person which set that person apart from the laity. Thus there emerged an egalitarian leadership style in the Mennonite Church during the 1960's and succeeding decades. It is unclear whether this desire for lay participation and the diminishing of ministerial authority was a conscious return to Anabaptist values, or whether it was more effected by the anti-authoritarian mood of the 1960's. There was probably an element of both. It was in the same period of time that Mennonite scholarship was rediscovering "the Anabaptist vision" and teaching it in our colleges and seminaries. The theological basis was clearly laid for a return to more lay participation than was evident during the era of the bishops in the church.

This move in the 1960's away from appointing bishops in the Western Ontario Mennonite Conference (of which Hillcrest was a member), led to authority being localized within the ministerial leadership of each congregation rather than with the district bishop. Bishop Henry Yantzi voluntarily laid aside the mantle of bishop in the East Zorra community of Mennonite churches to become the first pastor of the



Hillcrest Mennonite Church in 1964. The shift away from the "bishop" system of leadership (the term commonly used by Mennonites for "episcopal") to having an ordained pastor in each congregation very quickly led also to having active lay leadership in every congregation.<sup>122</sup> From its beginnings in 1964, Hillcrest Mennonite Church developed a strong model of lay leadership in all areas of congregational life. This includes worship leadership, with an increasingly wide and diverse group participating in leadership. In the past decade or more however the question emerged, Will we sacrifice quality for the principle of greater participation? Gradually the pendulum is swinging back to a desire to have a stronger core of more qualified or gifted leaders. Not everyone is in agreement with this trend, fearing that this creates a hierarchical form of leadership.

Question 27, to which we now turn, addresses the Anabaptist motif of "nachfolgende Jesus", which was expressed in the words of Hans Denck: "No one can know Christ truly except he follow him daily in life." This theme of discipleship in all of life was of great importance to the Anabaptists. How important is it to people at Hillcrest? All respondents, of both cohorts almost equally deem this to be important. Persons over 60 years old are 100% convinced of this!

One young female interviewee in her mid-twenties comments: "It's definitely a sense of trying to walk in the way of Jesus Christ, a focus on works, for sure, not a lot of focus on grace. And when looking at the Trinity, we would probably focus on Jesus in our theology." A middle-aged male interviewee identified discipleship as a key

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<sup>122</sup>Hillcrest as a member of the Western Ontario Mennonite Conference joined the Mennonite Conference of Eastern Canada (MCEC) in the late 1980's. In the MCEC Ministerial Handbook, ordination is seen to carry a functional mandate rather than one of status; when active ministry ceases, so does the credential of the ordained minister. However, the ordination follows the person throughout life as a clear acknowledgement of having been in ministry. Some hold more strongly to this limiting factor than others. The issue of function versus status continues to be debated.

belief which Mennonites hold, not only when they come to worship, but also as they leave to re-enter the world. So it appears that discipleship remains important for people at Hillcrest. Further conversations might uncover the issue the respondent noted above, of the dialectic between works and grace. Do people at Hillcrest understand discipleship as a joyful experience, or is it a kind of "grit-your-teeth-and-follow" mentality rooted in the history of *schaffe und schparre* which Fred Lichti noted as we cited above? It would be interesting to hear people reflect on this.

Question 28 closely follows the previous question concerning discipleship, but adds the dimension that one is empowered by the Holy Spirit to thus follow Christ. This is in keeping with the Anabaptist view of the centrality of the Spirit in the life of the Christian. Again both cohorts are largely in agreement with the statement as given, though cohort A is more clear on this than cohort B. It is also significant to note that 86% of the female cohort agree with this, whereas 70% of males agree. Is there a hint that the Spirit is seen to be more in the domain of female theological thought and experience? This is not borne out in the responses to Question 33 in which people are invited to chose words that best describe who the Holy Spirit is to them as they worship. With regard to the fourth statement "The Spirit relates to the feeling side of me ...and draws me close to God," 45% of the men, and 40% of the women were in agreement. A slightly higher percentage of men (20%) than women (14%) agreed with the fifth statement, "The Spirit feels more abstract, is a mystery, quite removed from my experience." The second statement says the Holy Spirit "reveals the things of God to me," which contains within it perhaps more of a discipleship motif. Of the men, 30% agreed with this. Of the women, 23% agreed.

Probably the most important tenet of Anabaptist theology is that we are called to be Christians by choice, not by birth. They expressed this in a context in which the "*volkskirche*" prevailed, in which - according to Anabaptists - many people were Christians by convention more than by conviction. The Anabaptists called for the kind

of radical personal commitment to Christ which could be best described in the New Testament language of "new birth." This language is used in Question 29 as an indicator of Anabaptism. In question 7 the language of "dramatic conversion" is approximately equivalent to the term "new birth." Table 2-3 below shows the use of the term "conversion" as one of the varieties of religious experience which respondents could chose as being most descriptive of their religious experience.

**Table 2-3 The varieties of religious experience**

Question 7 There are varieties of religious experience. Which of the following most closely describes your experience?

overall group	always Menno.	other denom.	male	female	elem. educ.	high school	univ. educ.	age to 39	age to 59	age 60+	
1. I had a dramatic conversion experience.	2	3	0	5	0	4	0	0	4	0	
2. I made a conscious and personal decision to be a follower of Christ	44	53	20	30	51	73	41	31	12	48	73
3. I gradually grew in my faith commitment through influence and nurture of family and church.	51	43	73	55	49	18	56	63	88	44	20
4. I am still searching and have not made a clear commitment to Christ.	4	3	7	10	0	9	0	6	0	4	7

Churchwide survey question: Churchwide survey, 1972                      Churchwide survey, 1989  
Had a conversion experience                      79    82

The language of "new birth" contained in Question 29 is clearly somewhat foreign to those of non-Mennonite background. Of those who have always been Mennonite, 83% said we should expect new birth and the changed life in all Christians, whereas only 54% of formerly non-Mennonites agreed with this statement. In the Churchwide survey of 1989 fully 82% of Mennonites reported having had a conversion experience.

In response to Question 7, inviting them to identify the nature of their religious experience, only 2% stated that they had "a dramatic conversion experience." Perhaps the adjective "dramatic" caused people to disavow that statement - it would not be typical of people with Amish roots to make strong claims for their religious experience, for that would constitute spiritual pride! However, 44% agreed with the somewhat softer yet equally clear response, that they had made a conscious and

personal decision to be a follower of Christ. This statement too describes "new birth", though it does not use the term. It does describe the conviction that we should be Christians by choice, not by birth. It perhaps begs the question whether one can gradually grow into such commitment through the nurture of church and family. It is significant to note that persons in cohort B were much less clear about having made a conscious and personal decision to be a follower of Christ (20%) whereas 73% of them said that they had gradually grown in their faith commitment. Age is a factor here; clearly the older one is, the more agreement there is with that description of religious experience.

There is a similar age differentiation in the responses to Question 29 concerning the importance of the "new birth." Among those who are over forty years of age more than 90% are in agreement with the statement. Of those under forty years old, only 35% agreed. Conversion language in Sunday School and in the pulpit was much more in vogue prior to 1960 than in subsequent years.

The final question which invites responses to indicators of Anabaptism also has to do with discipleship. Respondents are asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement: "The most important measure of faithful discipleship is our obedience to the commands of Christ in Scripture." The degree of agreement with this statement is moderately high overall (73%), with cohort A being more inclined to agree than cohort B (78% and 60% respectively). It is of interest to note that males (85%) more than females (66%) subscribe to this view. Are men more than women inclined to propositional truths? Again, the older group subscribes to this view most strongly (87%) and the youngest grouping the least (47%). The younger group is also most likely to have completed university. When broken down by level of education, only 56% of university educated persons agreed that following Jesus' commands in

scripture is the most important measure of faithful discipleship. Over 80% of those with elementary education or high school education are in agreement with the statement.

### **B. Community and Individualism in Hillcrest Mennonite Church**

In *The Sacred Canopy* Peter Berger (1967) suggests that each individual needs to construct a world of identity - as well as to establish identification with a larger community - that involves "an ordering of experience" into "a meaningful order" that is imposed upon the discrete experiences and meanings of individuals. The individual must belong to and identify with others. To be separated from society exposes the individual to a multiplicity of dangers that cannot be dealt with by the individual alone. Berger conceives the idea of a "sacred canopy" or tentlike roof used by Jews as a symbol of protection against terror.<sup>123</sup>

Community is one of the stakes which supports the canopy that protects Mennonite identity, according to Leo Driedger. He goes on to say that in the *ideological* sense, a community is composed of people who know each other, share common understandings (including beliefs) and have a sense of obligation to each other. This is the meaning of *gemeinschaft* as developed by Toennies in Germany in the 1880's. Harold Bender argued in 1945 that the Mennonite understanding treats community and church as virtually synonymous. He said: "And what more is a Christian community than a fellowship of disciples of Christ sharing a common faith."<sup>124</sup> In

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<sup>123</sup>Leo Driedger in *Mennonite Mosaic*, 66, citing Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday.)

<sup>124</sup>Driedger in *Mennonite Mosaic*, 87, who also quotes H.S. Bender "The Mennonite Conception of the Church and its Relation to Community Building." *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 19:90-100.

this sense Mennonites have traditionally used the term *gemeinde* or community as a church-oriented group of people who share a common religious faith.

**Table 2-4 Responses re. what draws people to worship, what needs are met.**  
**Question 42** What draws you to come to church for worship, and what needs are met for you in worship?

	overall group	always Menno.	other denom.	male	female	elem. educ.	high school	univ. educ.	age to 39	age to 59	age 60+
1. To be with like-minded people, to experience caring church community.	36	38	33	25	43	27	41	31	53	30	27
2. To encounter the living God, to feel that God is among us.	20	28	0	25	17	27	15	25	0	22	40
3. It is a 'habit'. It is a sort discipline.	7	8	7	10	6	18	4	6	0	4	20
4. I go to be inspired to be a better person day by day.	20	13	40	30	14	9	22	25	29	26	0
5. To live a balanced life, to receive spiritual healing	15	13	20	5	20	9	19	13	18	17	7

The question which lies before us as we examine Hillcrest Mennonite Church is to ascertain the degree of communalism present in the congregation at worship.

Elements of communalism are measured in Question 42, and Questions 44-47. Some of the responses to these questions are shown in Table 2-4 above, and in the tables below. Items which indicate how much the respondents value participation in church life are also deemed to be indicators of communalism.

Of the five reasons given why people are drawn to attend church at Hillcrest, and what needs are met for them when they attend worship there, the reason which is most favoured by participants is the dimension of caring church community with like-minded people (response 1). This is somewhat more true for cohort A than cohort B. Conversely, those in cohort B somewhat more than cohort A place the emphasis on an encounter with God (response 2). Thus it appears that the horizontal relationship among those who worship is valued somewhat more highly than the vertical relationship with God.

People's responses to items which measure the degree of communalism vary somewhat or are modified according to what other aspects are placed alongside those items, as we see when we compare the results in Table 2-5 and Table 2-4. The

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**Table 2-5 Ranking of descriptors of faith or religion**

**Question 44** Rank these terms used to describe faith or religion in order of their importance to you using numbers 1-5.

Note: The first column represents percentage of those who ranked the item 1st overall.

Columns 2,3,4 represent combined percentages of top three preferred rankings.

	<b>overall 1st rank</b>	<b>overall ranked in top 3</b>	<b>always Menno. ranked top 3</b>	<b>other denom. ranked top 3</b>
1. my beliefs about God	35	75	73	80
2. my emotional response to God	6	38	38	40
3. my commitment to seek God's will	38	82	88	67
4. my relationship to others in life and work of church	11	66	65	67
5. my daily life in the world, in ethical and just living	26	62	68	47

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variable factor between these two questions is that Question 42 places the locus within the gathered community in worship, whereas Question 44 does not specify the context, thus people could be responding out of their private devotional experience. We see then that when people choose terms which for them best describe faith or religion, communalism (response 4) ranks fourth overall. Commitment to seek God's will is deemed to be the most important descriptor of faith or religion, followed by beliefs about God. When placed among other options, not necessarily focused in congregational worship, communalism is not to a great extent seen as an important descriptor of faith or religion.

Communalism in worship is an important aspect of Mennonite identity and faith, according to Gerald Gerbrandt, president of Canadian Mennonite Bible College. In the article entitled "A discriminating spirituality," which we quoted in Chapter Three, Gerbrandt says that a challenge which faces the church is to know how to distinguish between popular spirituality and Christian spirituality. One of the clear marks of

Christian spirituality from his Mennonite point of view is contained in the quote which follows:

Is the spirituality individualistic or communal in its focus? An important theme in Anabaptist theology is the emphasis on the communal nature of the Christian life. One is not a Christian all by oneself, but in fellowship with brothers and sisters. True spirituality should enhance the life of the church and not undermine it.<sup>125</sup>

**Table 2-6 Responses measuring what is perceived to be changed in our lives in worship**  
**Question 45** Which of the following is most likely to be changed for you as you worship?

	overall group	always Menno.	other denom.	male	female	elem. educ.	high school	univ. educ.	age to 39	age to 59	age 60+
1. personal beliefs about God	9	10	7	5	11	0	4	19	18	9	0
2. personal feelings about God	7	8	7	10	6	9	11	0	12	4	7
3. personal commitment to seek God's will	38	43	27	45	34	64	33	31	24	35	60
4. relationship to others in life, work of church	11	8	20	0	17	0	11	19	18	9	7
5. daily life in world, in ethics and just living	31	28	40	40	26	18	37	31	29	39	20

**Table 2-7 Responses indicating where people experience God to be most at work in worship**  
**Question 46** As you meet in worship with the Hillcrest congregation, where do you experience God to be most at work?

	overall group	always Menno.	other denom.	male	female	elem. educ.	high school	univ. educ.	age to 39	age to 59	age 60+
1. in hearts and minds of individuals	20	15	33	10	26	18	22	13	41	9	13
2. in various acts of worship	27	28	27	30	26	27	30	25	18	30	33
3. in community of believers met to share in worship	49	53	33	50	49	54	44	56	41	52	53

The response to Question 45 regarding what is most likely to be transformed in the life of those who worship is similar to that of Question 44; it ranks the element of communalism in third place. Respondents in cohort B are most inclined to believe that the degree of communalism is effected in worship. Also, those persons under

<sup>125</sup>Gerald Gerbrandt, "A discriminating spirituality"



forty years of age are most inclined to believe that their relationship to others in the church will be affected by congregational worship. In the overall ranking however, worship is more often deemed to affect people's personal commitment to seek God's will. A close second is the suggestion that what is most likely to be changed in those who worship is their daily life, in ethics and just living.

As we see in Question 46 above, when people are asked to identify what happens when they meet to worship, communalism emerges as the most significant factor. (This response is similar to the response to Question 42.) Clearly the largest segment of respondents believe that they experience God to be most at work in the community of believers who have met to worship. The variation occurs within cohort B. They are equally convinced that God is most at work in the hearts and minds of individual believers who have met to worship, as well as being at work in the community of believers (33% for each response).

**Table 2-8 Responses indicating importance of regular community worship in personal experience of God**

	overall group	always Menno.	other denom.	male	female	elem. educ.	high school	univ. ed.	age to 39	age 40-59	age 60+
<u>Question 47</u>											
How important is it to your personal experience and awareness of God to be a regular participant in a worshipping Christian community?											
[percentages are combination of responses "very important" and "important."]	96	98	93	95	97	100	100	88	94	96	100
* Churchwide Survey	<u>1972</u> 87	<u>1989</u> 90									

As I noted above, willingness to participate in the community event of worship can be deemed to be a measure of the degree of communalism of the respondents. However, our observations in this regard need to be modified. That is to say, people could conceivably say that it is very important to attend church regularly, as individual worshippers, and yet have little or no appreciation for the importance of the worshipping community that surrounds them - their worship is between them and

God. Or, conversely, they could focus so much on the people that they are not aware of God. The respondents scored uniformly high to the question as stated. There is, however, some ambiguity in the question. It could mean either that regular participation is the *cause* or the *consequence* of experiencing God. As we have said at the outset, there is always that dialectical interplay between people's primary theology and their experience of corporate worship. Worship shapes people's theology and their theology shapes their experience of worship.

While Question 50 is intended to measure how the sense of community relates to people's experience and awareness of God, Question 51 measures people's affinity to a particular act of communalism in the worship at Hillcrest, that of sharing joys and concerns in connection with the pastoral prayer (prayer of the congregation). These results are shown in their entirety in Table 2-9 and Table 2-10 below.

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**Table 2-9 Items relating sense of community to awareness of God in worship**  
**Question 50** How does the sense of community relate to your experience and awareness of God in worship?

	overall group	always Menno.	other denom.	male	female	elem. educ.	high school	univ. educ.	age to 39	age to 59	age 60+
1. Worship is private, between me and God.	15	13	20	15	14	27	11	6	24	4	20
2. I see church community mostly in terms of common human or social ties.	15	13	20	25	9	9	19	13	6	26	7
3. I experience community as bonds of love within the body of Christ.	60	65	47	50	66	46	63	69	59	61	60
4. I see the face of Christ in those who have met to worship.	7	8	7	0	11	9	4	13	6	9	7

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**Table 2-10 Items relating sharing communal joys and concerns to prayer**  
**Question 51** How in your experience does sharing of joys and concerns relate to prayer?

	overall group	always Menno.	other denom.	male	female	elem. educ.	high school	univ. educ.	age to 39	age to 59	age 60+
1. It is good to hear these, whether I pray for them or not.	31	28	40	35	29	27	33	25	47	17	33
2. Sharing joys and concerns are in themselves prayer, further praying is redundant.	2	3	0	0	3	0	4	0	0	4	0
3. Hearing joys and concerns allows me to pray for people at home during the week.	9	13	0	10	9	46	0	0	0	9	20
4. There is a special power when joys and concerns are shared and prayed about in worship service.	55	55	53	45	60	18	63	69	53	65	40

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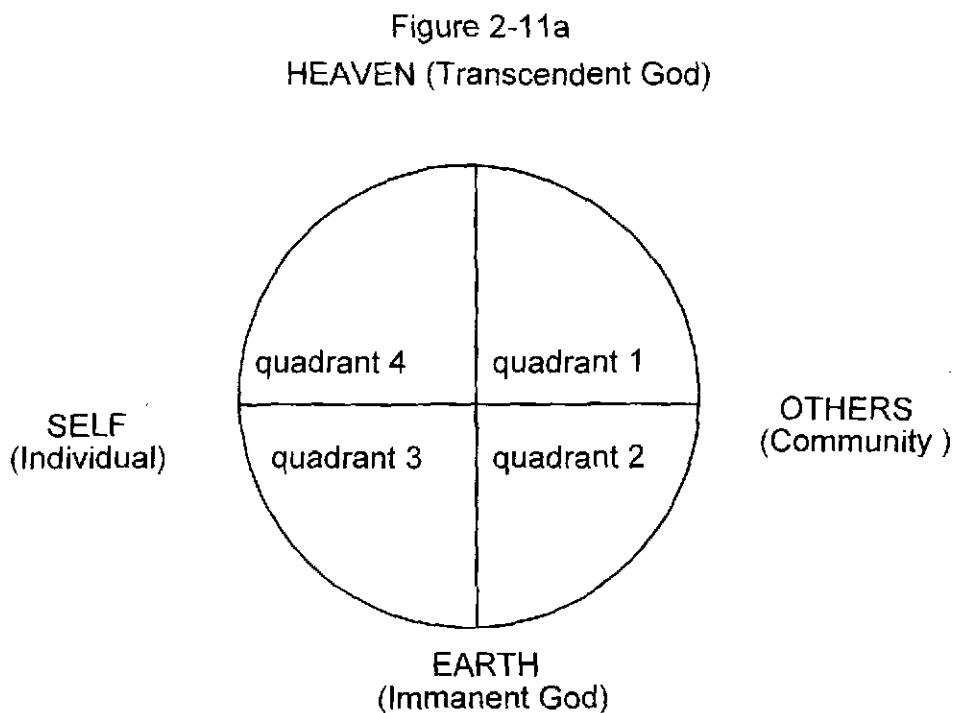
The clear response to Question 50 is that persons experience community as an expression of the bonds of love within the body of Christ. Cohort B is somewhat less certain of that, and indeed is more inclined than cohort A to suggest that they see church community mostly in terms of common human or social ties. This might be deemed to be a more "secular" response.

There is an equally strong affirmation in response to the assertion in Question 51 that there is a "special power and blessing when joys and concerns are shared and as we pray together in the worship service." There is no difference between those who have always been Mennonite and those from other backgrounds in this regard. However, it is interesting to note that women (60%) more than men (45%) experience this to be true. It is also of interest to note that those with university education have a much greater affinity with this aspect than do those with elementary education (69% and 18% respectively). The older group, over sixty years of age is less convinced about the value of corporate sharing and prayer than those under age 40 (40% and 53% respectively). The older people are more inclined than others to hear the joys and concerns expressed in corporate worship, then go home and pray for those people whose concerns have been identified.

Thus we have examined several indicators of communalism which are deemed to be important to Anabaptist-Mennonite congregations. It is clear that there is a high overall degree of communalism among those who worship at Hillcrest Mennonite Church, with some variations between cohort A and cohort B. It is also clear that what is placed opposite communalism within each question shapes the relative value which people give to it. Thus, when stated as one of several options within the context of congregational worship, communalism is deemed to be very important. When stated as one of several options within a personal experience of faith or religion, not necessarily in the locus of congregational worship, other variables may be deemed to

be of equal or greater importance.

A picture may serve to illustrate the various dimensions of communalism versus a more individual or private expression of spirituality, as depicted in Figure 2-11a below. Responses to the questions concerning communalism could be located within various of the quadrants in the circle shown above. For example, when people at Hillcrest say that they expect God to be most at work in the community of believers who have met to share in worship, their response places them in quadrant 2. When they say they experience God to be most at work in worship in the hearts and minds of individual believers who have met to worship, their response places them in quadrant 3. This is a view that God is immanent in individuals. The view that God is more immutable, experienced by the individual worshipper as mystery is typical of quadrant 4. The Hillcrest survey places people in each of the quadrants, but mostly in quadrants 1 and 2.



### **C. The Relationship of Worship to Work and Ethics**

Anabaptist-Mennonites have always believed that what happens in worship "in here" in the midst of the worshipping congregation should have a direct bearing on their life of faithful discipleship "out there" in their daily work, in ethics and in their relationships to those around them in the world. This viewpoint is held by those who worship at Hillcrest, as we shall see in this section.

First of all we return to Tables 2-4, 2-5 and 2-6. Questions 42,44 and 45 each offer one or two responses which have to do with matters of daily living and ethics. As we noted when we first examined the answers to Question 42 (Table 2-4), "What draws you to come to church for worship?" a significant number of respondents said it was "to be inspired to be a better person day by day." Those from other than Mennonite backgrounds ranked this first. Those who have always been Mennonite however, ranked this third, after their desire to experience caring church community and to encounter the living God.

Question 45 (Table 2-6) asks "Which of the following is most likely to be changed for you as you worship?" Response 3 "personal commitment to seek God's will" was first overall, especially clearly so among those in cohort A. Daily life, ethics and just living was ranked in second place overall, but first by cohort B. If one understands a commitment to seek God's will and the concern for ethics and just living as functions of Christian discipleship, 69% of the respondents believe that what changes most for them in worship is their sense of being called to obedient discipleship in daily life.

Questions 49 and 52 specifically address the relationship of worship and work, and of worship and service respectively. The results are shown below in Table 2-12 and Table 2-13. First of all let us examine Table 2-12. Almost as many respondents in the overall cohort felt that worship is completely set apart from work (22%) as said that it is an offering of love and praise to God, and therefore is worship (24%). The majority

(47%), consistent across all cohorts, believe that though our life of worship shapes our life of work, work is not an act of worship. Nobody in cohort B believes that worship and work are one. They, on the contrary, are most inclined to say that our life of worship is quite distinct from our life of work. Those with university education are most inclined to say that worship and work are one (38%)

**Table 2-12 Responses indicating relationship of Worship and Work**  
**Question 49.** Which of the following most closely describes your experience of the relationship between worship and work?

	overall group	always Menno.	other denom.	male	female	elem. educ.	high school	univ. educ.	age to 39	age to 59	age 60+
1. Work is an offering of love and praise to God, therefore it is worship.	24	33	0	15	29	9	22	38	24	22	27
2. Worship shapes our work, but work is not worship.	47	48	47	45	49	46	52	44	41	52	47
3. Worship is a time apart from daily life and work, to encounter God	22	18	33	30	17	36	22	6	29	17	20

In Table 2-13 above we see to what extent people believe that their acts of Christian service in the world are a direct consequence of their relationship with the God of justice and peace in worship. In the overall group, 66% believe this to be the case. Cohort A is especially convinced of this link between worship and service (78%). Those respondents in cohort B are not nearly so convinced of that link. Only

**Table 2-13 Responses to relationship of worship and service in the world**  
**Question 52** How does our worship "in here" at Hillcrest Church relate to our service "out there" in the world?

	overall group	always Menno.	other denom.	male	female	elem. educ.	high school	univ. educ.	age to 39	age to 59	age 60+
1. I do not see a connection between worship and service. Service is a humanitarian thing to do, so I do it.	9	5	20	10	9	0	15	6	12	13	0
2. I think it is my Christian duty to give of myself in service to my fellow humanity. This is what I have been taught in church.	24	15	47	25	23	36	19	19	24	26	20
3. My Christian service is a direct consequence of my encounter with the God of justice and peace in worship.	66	78	33	60	69	55	67	75	65	61	73

33% of them circled that response. Conversely, 20% of them circled the first response, which states that they see no connection between worship and service. Clearly this is a value held predominantly by those with Mennonite roots.

What then is the state of Anabaptism in the Hillcrest congregation? There is a rather high degree of agreement with Anabaptist theology, ranging from 73% to 90%, on the following indicators: 1) Baptism is neither necessary nor proper for infants and small children. 2) Communion is a pledge of good standing before God and others in the church. 3) The Christian should take no part in war. 4) We should offer mutual aid when there is a financial need. 5) All members should share, as they are gifted, in leadership. 6) True knowledge of God comes when we follow Christ in daily life. 7) No one can be a true follower of Christ without the work of the Holy Spirit. 8) We should expect to see a changed life in all Christians. 9) The most important measure of faithful discipleship is obedience to the commands of Christ in scripture.

The items with which people were not very much in agreement were: 1) the possibility that we should follow the Lordship of Christ even if it should lead to persecution (51%) and 2) the expectation that church discipline should be followed in the congregation (30%). The most surprising discovery with regard to the latter is that those from non-Mennonite background were more in agreement than those who have always been Mennonite, to the extent that there was agreement with that expectation.

Clearly Hillcrest people expect Christian faith to be relevant to daily life as a life of discipleship. Their high agreement with the items concerning peace and mutual aid reinforces their agreement with the statement in question 27 "To know God is to follow Christ in daily life." Those in the formerly non-Mennonite group may be a little less clear than those who have always been Mennonite that this type of discipleship would naturally emerge from a combination of the changed life (new birth) and faithful obedience to the commands of Christ in Scripture.

It is furthermore noteworthy, but not surprising, that those from non-Mennonite backgrounds, many of whom come from a paedobaptist tradition, would not be in essential agreement with the principle of Believers Baptism. It is however significant to note that there is some uncertainty in their minds on that matter, and presumably some openness to consider the possibility of holding to that basic tenet of Anabaptist belief. After all, it would be somewhat of an oxymoron to claim to be Anabaptist and not hold to the belief in adult baptism! Would it be equally inconsistent to not hold to that belief, and be a member of a Mennonite church?

Concerning communalism as an indicator of Anabaptism, we have made several observations. A high percentage of those in cohort A believe that they experience God to be most at work in the community of believers who have met to worship. Those in cohort B are equally as inclined to say that God is most at work in the hearts and minds of individual believers. Thus those who have always been Mennonite are most inclined to agree with the indicator of Anabaptism expressed in the view that God is experienced in community, not only within the individual heart and mind.

The vast majority of all cohorts declare that it is important or very important to their awareness of God to regularly worship in Christian community. We raised the question, however, whether it is the worshipping community which is important to them, or the actual worship which takes place. Nonetheless, in response to Question 50 "How does the sense of community relate to your experience and awareness of God in worship?" 60% of the respondents said that they experience community as bonds of love within the body of Christ. They declared furthermore that there is a special power when joys and concerns are shared and prayed about in the worship service.

When asked to identify what draws them to worship, what needs are met for them when they come to worship, the respondents showed mixed motives. They were more inclined to say that they go to meet each other, be with like-minded people and



experience caring church community, than to say that they go to encounter the living God (Question 42). None of those in cohort B indicated that their primary motive for attending worship was to encounter God. Rather, they go to church to be inspired to be a better person day by day.

We have shown that there is a considerable degree of communalism present in the Hillcrest church. What is not so clear is that this communalism is linked directly to the worship of God. If worship may be defined in brief as "Who God is, and who we are as a consequence," we need to inquire whether the communalism at Hillcrest is a consequence of who God is, or whether it is simply a human construct? To cast the problem in trinitarian terms, does the worshipping community at Hillcrest sense that they have come to experience an encounter with God, in the name of Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit? It appears that at least some of the people simply meet because of their family connectedness and friendship circles, without having a strong sense that they do so in the presence of God.

Similar questions might be asked concerning the degree of agreement with other Anabaptist indicators, such as peace, justice and mutual aid, and the relationship of worship and work. For example, in response to Question 52, only 9% of the overall respondents agreed with the statement "I do not see worship and service being connected. Service is a good humanitarian thing to do, and I try to do my part." Conversely, a significant segment (66%) agreed with the statement "I see my Christian service in the world around us to be a direct consequence of my encounter with the God of justice and peace in worship." Of those in cohort A, 78% are in agreement with this link between Christian service and an encounter with God in worship. If this may be seen as a benchmark statement, there is a considerable sense that worship of God effectively influences life and work. However, only 33% of those in cohort B agree with this statement. Twenty percent of those in cohort B simply see service as a good humanitarian thing to do.

It is not always totally clear whether or to what extent people's primary theology is in agreement with the secondary theology of the tradition within which they stand. The data from the questionnaire and interviews offer many clues, but also point to areas in which further questions would need to be asked to gain clarity. In any case, it could be argued that the moment the respondents began to reflect on their experiences of God, as they were asked to do in the questionnaire and in the interviews, they already began to engage in the second-order discourse of secondary theology. The risk then is that people already begin to offer the "expected" answers of the tradition, rather than their own experience. But the fact that at several points they diverged considerably from the tenets of the received faith indicates a level of honest immediacy to their experience.

The question emerges whether these Anabaptist items are always necessarily linked. For example, many persons in the paedobaptist denominational traditions also subscribe to pacifism, mutual aid, etc., which are often deemed to be Mennonite emphases. Thus we are reminded again as we have stated several times, that we should always see Anabaptism in a dialectic with other traditions, even while we attempt to hold certain definitions of what constitutes essential Anabaptism. Hillcrest, which on the surface appears to be a very homogeneous group of Amish extract, is fast becoming more varied as persons from various denominations join the congregation (many of them through marriage). This creates the context for the kind of dialectic we noted above, in which the local theology and the received theology of the tradition in which the congregation stands are in constant juxtaposition.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

THE VARIETIES OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE AND SPIRITUAL  
TYPOLOGIES**A. Spiritual Typologies***Witness IV***Prayer of the Ox**

Dear God, give me time.  
 Men are always so driven!  
 Make them understand that I can never hurry.  
 Give me time to eat.  
 Give me time to plod.  
 Give me time to sleep.  
 Give me time to think.

**Prayer of the Butterfly**

Lord!  
 Where was I?  
 Oh yes! This flower, thus sun,  
 thank you! Your world is beautiful!  
 This scent of roses. . .  
 Where was I?  
 A drop of dew  
 rolls to sparkle in a lily's heart.  
 I have to go. . .  
 Where? I do not know!  
 The wind has painted fancies  
 on my wings.  
 Fancies. . .  
 Where was I?  
 Oh yes! Lord,  
 I had something to tell you:  
 Amen.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>126</sup>Prayers from the Ark', by Carmen Bernos de Gasztold, in Veronica Zundel, ed. *Eerdman's Book of Famous Prayers* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984),101.

The 'Prayers from the Ark' is a unique collection of prayer/poems, written from the point of view of animals, with a great deal to say about human nature. People who find it difficult to enter into spiritual disciplines of silent contemplation might identify with the Prayer of the Butterfly. Others, like the ox, find it much easier to in an unhurried way spend time alone with God. Many modern people are driven and busy and feel keenly the need to find time to develop their spiritual lives. Like the animals in 'Prayers from the Ark', people have a variety of expressions of piety, prayer and the devotional life; in other words, they have various expressions of primary theology as they encounter God.

There are, as William James said in his Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh, "varieties of religious experience." His lectures were first collected in a book in 1902. In his introduction to the 1961 edition of James' book, Reinhold Niebuhr wrote that William James was perhaps the first modern thinker to "combine a positive approach to religion with a non-dogmatic and thoroughly empirical approach to the religious life and various types of religious experience."<sup>127</sup>

Concerning all attempts to define and describe "religious sentiments" William James says:

As there thus seems to be no elementary religious emotion, but only a common storehouse of emotions upon which religious objects may draw, so there might conceivably also prove to be no one specific and essential kind of religious object, and no one specific and essential kind of religious act. <sup>128</sup>

We have from the outset noted the distinction between secondary theology and primary theology couched in terms of the distinction between the received faith of the tradition in which one stands, and one's own personal experience of faith. The latter is

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<sup>127</sup>Reinhold Niebuhr in William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York, N.Y.: Collier Books, Collier-MacMillan Ltd., London, 1961),5.

<sup>128</sup>*Ibid*,40.

the "local theology" in Schreiter's terms, or the "primary theology" as Saliers puts it. Local theology allows for a variety of religious experiences, as James would say. There is "no one specific and essential kind of religious act" except that which is specific and essential to each individual worshipper.

William James adds another partition which divides the religious field, the *institutional* and the *personal*. He describes the differences thus:

*Worship and sacrifice, procedures for working on the dispositions of the deity, theology and ceremony and ecclesiastical organization, are the essentials of religion in the institutional branch. Were we to limit our view to it, we should have to define religion as an external art, the art of winning the favor of the gods. In the more personal branch of religion it is on the contrary the inner dispositions of man himself (sic) which form the center of interest, his conscience, his deserts, his helplessness, his incompleteness...The relation goes direct from heart to heart, from soul to soul, between man (sic) and his maker.*<sup>129</sup>

Here is an echo of the sentiments we identified in Anabaptism as they confronted the religious institutions of their day. They too believed that "the relation goes direct from heart to heart...between man and his maker" and thus promoted the vision of faith which is immediate, that is, not mediated by systems or institutions.

James then offers this definition of religion:

*Religion therefore, as I now ask you arbitrarily to take it, shall mean for us the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men (sic) in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine.*<sup>130</sup>

His primary interest is not to consider (secondary) theology or ecclesiasticism; he is interested in understanding the varieties of personal (primary) religious experience.

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<sup>129</sup>*Ibid*,41.

<sup>130</sup>*Ibid*,42.

This is what we are interested in also in this chapter, as we lay the groundwork to focus more closely on various aspects of personal spirituality and primary theology experienced and expressed by those who meet each Sunday for worship at Hillcrest. However, our interest is not only, in the terms used by William James, "the feelings, acts and experiences of individual men in their solitude." We are interested in these expressions of spirituality by individuals in community, expressed in congregational worship.

In Part B of this chapter we shall examine the survey results and consider what people are saying in the interviews, to ascertain to some extent the variety of religious experiences which are present in the congregation. But before we examine the survey results, we need to further explore how one might go about discerning the varieties of religious experiences, or spiritual types.

Twenty years after William James developed the concept of the varieties of religious experience, Carl G. Jung published his study of personality types. By positing two basic attitudes toward life (Extraversion and Introversion) and four operating functions (Sensation, Intuition, Thinking, Feeling), Jung concluded that there were eight different psychological types. In 1962 Katharine C. Briggs and her daughter, Isabel Briggs Myers, after researching Jung's findings for several decades, devised the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator by which they were able to identify sixteen distinct types of personality. In 1976 David Kiersey and Marilyn Bates published their book *Please Understand Me*. In this work Kiersey attempted to bring together the insights of Jung and Briggs-Myers to arrive at a theory of four basic temperaments: Sensing-Judging (SJ), Sensing-Perceiving (SP), Intuition-Thinking (NT), and Intuition-Feeling (NF).<sup>131</sup> In 1982 Michael P. Chester and Marie C. Norrisey

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<sup>131</sup>Chester P. Michael and Marie C. Norrisey, *Prayer and Temperament* (Charlottesville, Virginia: The Open Door, 1984), 11-14.

conducted a survey to ascertain the relationship between temperament and prayer.

Their basic hypothesis is expressed as follows:

All indicators point to a close relationship between our innate temperament and the type of prayer best suited to our needs. Introverts will prefer a form of prayer different from Extraverts. Intuitives approach God from a point of view different from Sensers. Feelers pray in a different way from Thinkers. Judging persons want structure in their prayer life, while Perceiving persons want flexibility... We are able to make contact with God and experience grace through all four of the psychological functions.<sup>132</sup>

Based on the work of Myers-Briggs and Kiersey, Michael and Norris developed different prayer forms for different personality types. The categories which they have devised, accompanied by brief descriptions, are shown in Figure 3-1 below. Also included are summary words or phrases describing the implications of each type for eucharist and prayer.

**Figure 3-1 Four personality types which appear in society and in church**

Note: The first percentage represents society in general, the second percentage shown in each type represents the incidence of the type in church.

<u>S. J.</u> (40%/50%) <i>Ignatian</i>	<u>S. P.</u> (38%/5-10%) <i>Franciscan</i>	<u>N. F.</u> (12%/20-30%) <i>Augustinian</i>	<u>N. T.</u> (12%/10-15%) <i>Thomistic</i>
task-oriented	action-oriented	people-oriented	idea-oriented
past	present	future	future
practical	impulsive	creative	logical
stabilizers	free of rules	persuasive	thirst for truth
suspect change	seek change	visionary	perfectionists
pessimistic	flourish in midst of crisis	optimistic	optimistic (but can feel inadequate)
want to feel useful	don't respond well to symbols	dislike criticism	desire to understand and control reality
<b>Regarding Eucharist</b> commemoration	celebration	anticipation	contemplation
<b>Regarding Prayer</b> like formal, guided prayers	dislike formal prayers spirit-filled, eclectic	need for intimacy with God. Silence, symbols	study, reflection, logical, rational, orderly, expect change in behaviour

<sup>132</sup>*Ibid*, 16, 17.

They suggested, in a somewhat speculative manner, that those persons of the Sensing-Judging type have an Ignatian spirituality. Those who are Sensing-Perceiving tend to have a spirituality typical of the Franciscan movement. Intuitive-Feeling types are Augustinian, and Intuitive-Thinking types are Thomistic in their style of spirituality.

Time and space does not allow us to develop this schema to any full extent. Figure 3-1 above offers a succinct summary of the four basic personality types which one might safely assume are in any congregation, including Hillcrest. One might also assume that each type exists in the congregation in similar percentages to the general population, as shown, but note that the percentages within the church are deemed by Roy Oswald and Otto Kroeger of the Alban Institute to be different from those in general society. Their research indicates, among other things, that a greater percentage of pastors are Intuitive types, whereas their parishioners are Sensory types. That may help pastors and people understand why they sometimes seem to be talking past each other!<sup>133</sup> Figure 3-1 also indicates what people within each personality type might prefer in terms of their understanding of the eucharist and of prayer.

This is simply another method by which one might describe the experienced faith or primary theology of individual worshipers in a congregation. To do this at Hillcrest would constitute a separate study beyond the scope of my thesis project. It simply serves to illustrate one of several ways in which one might discern the varieties of religious experience in a local setting. Responses to a number of the questions in the survey could be examined with this template as a guide.

In 1981, a year prior to the work of Michael and Norrissey, Urban T. Holmes, Dean of the School of Theology at the University of the South, wrote his book *A History of Christian Spirituality*. He was apparently not aware of the work which Michael and

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<sup>133</sup>Roy Oswald and Otto Kroeger, *Personality Types and Religious Leadership* (Washington, D.C.: The Alban Institute, 1988).



Norrisey were doing at about the same time, as their study was not published until 1984. They each did their work in a decade in which there was much emphasis on personal growth and fulfillment. The social sciences were being harnessed with theological studies to discover the relationship between personality development and one's style of prayer and spirituality.

Urban T. Holmes adds the history of Christianity to this mix. He notes that humankind is not only spiritual; it is historical. In his book he is asking the question: "How has Christian humanity throughout its history understood what it is to seek God and to know him?" He then proceeds with the disclaimer: "We can never know so as to put in words what it is to see God face to face."<sup>134</sup> Here is a hint of his awareness of the difference between primary and secondary theology, the dialectic which has concerned us throughout this thesis. Like Michael and Norrisey, Holmes is aware that Christian spirituality has taken on various forms throughout the centuries. He describes these, from the early church to the modern era. But before he proceeds, he in the introduction to his book, develops a heuristic device which he calls *A Circle of Sensibility*. This device was adapted and utilized by Corinne Ware, so we shall describe it when we describe her work, to which we now turn.

Like Michael and Norrisey, Corinne Ware too is convinced that we can understand our expressions of spirituality by means of a psychological typology. Ware is concerned to enlarge the reader's consciousness of God, of others who worship God, and of oneself. She asks why some people worship one way, while others choose a very different way of expressing religious devotion. Her concerns arise from her experience as a pastoral counselor, through which she has met people who for

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<sup>134</sup>Urban T. Holmes, *A History of Christian Spirituality* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1981), 3.

various reasons feel they do not "fit" in their worship group.<sup>135</sup> Why is it that in many congregations some people feel very satisfied with their worshipping community, while others agitate for change? Sometimes the temptation for people is to believe that their own particular version of spirituality or religious expression is inferior to that of others because of some assumptions they have about how it should look or feel, compared either to the received faith (general orthodoxy), or to the experiences of those around them.

As Corinne Ware attempts to address this point, she also indicates her indebtedness to others who have worked in the area of spirituality when she says:

We are not interested in "how *much* spirituality?" but in "what *kind* of spirituality?" Just as we learned from the temperament types proposed by Carl Jung (and tested by Isabel Myers and Katherine Briggs, and by David Kiersey and Marilyn Bates), so we are able to learn from the study of *spiritual types* proposed by Urban T. Holmes, whose work is foundational for this book.

She notes that we have been able to accept, using personality tests such as the Myers-Briggs test, that we are different types of people who express ourselves in different ways, as a function of our individual *personality*. Why then should we assume less in terms of being different types of persons in the realm of our individual *spirituality*?

Ware draws from the earlier work of Urban T. Holmes who first proposed the study of *spiritual types*.<sup>136</sup> It is his typology, not his history of Christian spirituality, that is of primary interest to her. The four spiritual types proposed by Urban Holmes are described by Ware in the third chapter of her book, in which she utilizes and adapts his Circle of Sensibility. The four types are represented as four quadrants of a circle,

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<sup>135</sup>Corinne Ware, *Discover your Spiritual Type* (Bethesda, Maryland: The Alban Institute, 1995), xiii.

<sup>136</sup>Urban Holmes, *A History of Christian Spirituality*.

which are depicted in Figure 3-2 below [ Her adapted headings appear in parentheses.]<sup>137</sup>

**Type 1: *Speculative/Kataphatic -- a Head Spirituality***

This is an intellectual "thinking" spirituality that favors what it can see, touch or vividly imagine. Persons of this type are concerned about what helps them fulfill their vocation in daily life, which is after all the "real world." God is represented in anthropomorphic terms, i.e. God as Father. Their worship preference centers on scripture, the gathering of the community, and the spoken word. Prayer in this quadrant is almost always language or word-based prayer, whether aloud or silent. The extreme expression of this spiritual type is "rationalism," which tends to overintellectualize one's spiritual life with a consequent loss of feeling. It can be dogmatic and dry. Positively, this style produces clear theological reflection and clear statements on ethics. It makes sense of the Holy which types 2 and 3 experience.

**Type 2: *Affective/Kataphatic -- A Heart Spirituality***

This expression of spirituality is all heart, based in the concrete, real-life situation. It emphasizes the anthropomorphic representation of God and the centrality of scripture. It is expressed with a more affective charismatic spirituality. Its aim is to achieve holiness; the transformational goal is that of personal renewal. Prayer in this spiritual type is still verbal, but usually extemporaneous. Witness and proclamation are important; personal service to others provides opportunity for such witness. The extreme expression of this type is "pietism," with an exclusive focus that results in an "it's us against the world" mentality. In excess it is labeled as too emotional. It demands that others duplicate the experience. Positively, those who express their

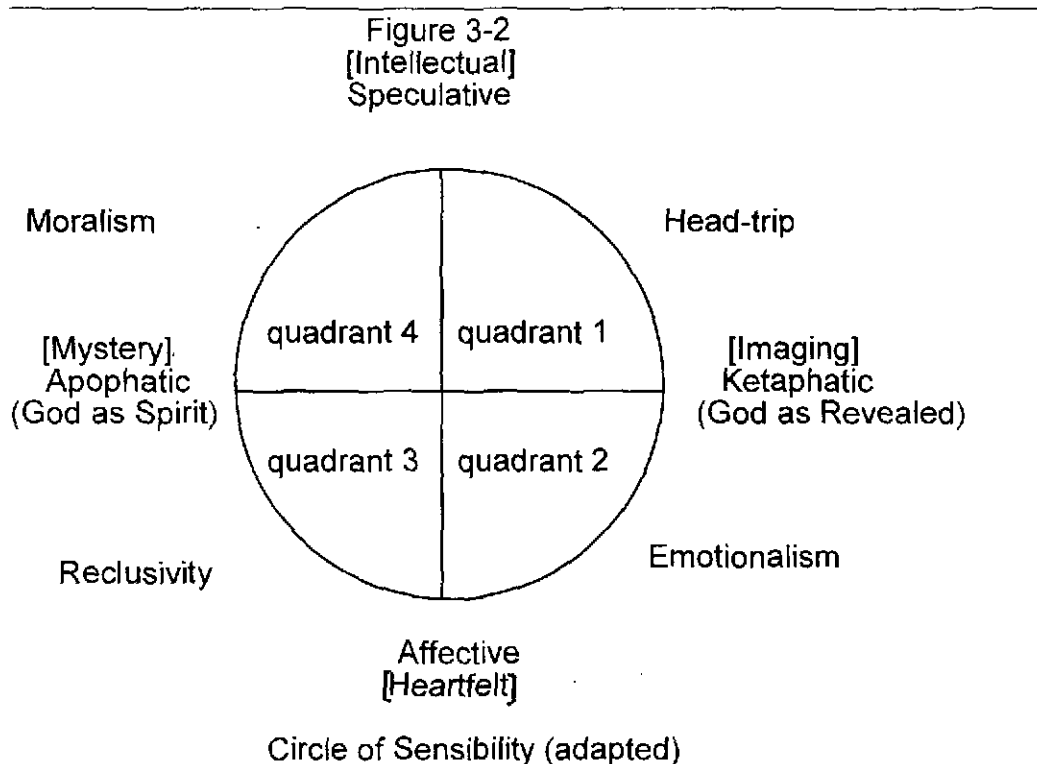
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<sup>137</sup>Corinne Ware, *Discover Your Spiritual Type*, 37-44, excerpts. The diagram is a combination of the diagrams found on pages 8 and 30.

spirituality in this way generate a warmth of feeling, energy and freedom of expression which others may lack.

Type 3: *Affective/Apophatic – A Mystic Spirituality*

God is not seen so much with human characteristics, but rather is ineffable, unnameable, beyond any known category. God is more Creative Force than personality. *Hearing from God* is more important than *speaking to God* for persons in this quadrant, who prefer simplicity and a life of austerity and asceticism. Their aim is unity with the Holy. For them, "the journey is the home"; though they never completely achieve their goals, the continued attempt is satisfactory. This personality type is most often contemplative, introspective, intuitive and focused on an inner world as real to them as the exterior one. The excess or extreme version of this spiritual type is labeled "quietism," an exaggerated retreat from reality and interaction with the world. Positively, persons of this spiritual type push the frontiers of spirituality, encouraging us to be open to God in ways which we might not imagine.



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Type 4: *Speculative/Apophatic – A Kingdom Spirituality*

Those persons whose spirituality is speculative/apophatic aim simply to obey God and to witness God's coming reign. They have a passion for transforming society, to bring in God's kingdom "on earth, as it is in heaven." They equate prayer and theology with action, and might even say: "My work and my prayer are one." They are inclined to assertiveness in the world as they aggressively pursue their ideals. The extreme expression of this type of spirituality is to be moralistic and have a kind of tunnel-vision for their "cause." Positively, they challenge us with a vision of an ideal world.

Where do Anabaptist-Mennonites fit in this Circle of Sensibility? With their emphasis on obedience and discipleship, a literal biblicism, and an emphasis on the visible nature of the church, one could say that Anabaptists are more kataphatic than apophatic. Because Anabaptists have a rational rather than mysterious attitude to the sacraments, and because they used scripture for didactic purposes, one would see them as more speculative than affective. Nonetheless, Mennonites today would find themselves to fit into any of the four quadrants, as we shall see later in this chapter.

Ware continually drives home the point that we need not and indeed should not limit ourselves to existing in one quadrant or type of religious experience. Our lives and our spirituality will be more complete if we look to the other quadrants or types and see what it is in them that we could also gain. Thus, for example, those who tend to live in quadrant 1, having a Head Spirituality, could well benefit by dialogue with those who live in quadrant 2, having a Heart Spirituality. Similarly, those who are more inclined towards a Mystical Spirituality (quadrant 3) might find their lives more complete if they also were challenged by the activism of the Kingdom Spirituality pictured as quadrant 4. The contributions and excesses which we noted in our descriptions above can help to guide people towards some kind of balance in their spirituality. In terms of congregational life and worship, we certainly are reminded

that we really do need each other, all types. But of course, it sometimes seems that it would be easier if we were all alike!

That is also an issue which underlies my thesis project based in Hillcrest Mennonite Church. Is it a matter to be celebrated that the congregation is no longer as homogeneous as it once was, or at least appeared to be? The traditional Mennonite call for conformity to each other and nonconformity to the world which for a period of history resulted in a degree of exclusivity among Mennonites has been largely relaxed. The question which emerges then is to ask what has been gained and what has been lost in this new more heterogeneous expression of congregational life. And what will be the implications for corporate worship when we begin to more openly acknowledge and affirm that we are indeed different *spiritual types*? These questions may be related to the goals of the project as we described them in Chapter Four. Now we turn to the indicators of spiritual types found in the Hillcrest Mennonite Church, as shown by results of the pertinent survey questions.

## **B. Types of Spiritual Experiences Among Those Who Worship at Hillcrest**

### **I. Discovering and Affirming Various Spiritual Types**

Witness V

*I would have to say that one experience of prayer that made me feel "heard" and "understood" by God occurred during a late-night commute in my car after a long, heartfelt and challenging discussion with a friend about our varied backgrounds in Christianity. My friend is a very strong Christian who has much to teach and many ideas to stimulate thought. After talking for many hours about the different ways that our denominations deal with certain rites of passage and beliefs, I left with my head spinning with a lot of questions, and no answers. About halfway home, after praying most of the way, a very clear voice that was not mine said "It's the belief that matters." I drove the rest of the way home in stunned silence, but with a sense of peace. I'm just glad I was listening.<sup>138</sup>*

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<sup>138</sup>This is a male, between 30-39 years of age from cohort B, in response to question 57,

Witness V above responds to an anxious moment full of questions about what is the "right" way to believe. The voice that came to him assured him that "it's the belief that matters." He experienced this clear answer to prayer as an assurance that a variety of expressions of personal belief and religious experience are valued by God. While he framed his questions within the context of inter-denominational dialogue, the same issues rise also with regard to personal differences.

Witness VI

*Just before my wife was ready to give birth to our son, I didn't realize that the umbilical cord was wrapped around his head choking him in her womb every time she had contractions. They performed a "C" section and mother and child came through o.k. At the time I thought how wonderful science, technology, doctors and nurses were for saving my son. But when I think back, as soon as my son came into our world, I felt something of joy in seeing my firstborn. It felt like the doctor, nurses, my wife and son and I and also God were all in the room together. That's when I felt "connected" to God.<sup>139</sup>*

The testimony of this witness indicates a progressive movement from his "head" to his "heart" in a moment of crisis and relief, a shift from quadrant 1 to quadrant 2 of the Circle of Sensibility shown in Figure 3. Of the nineteen respondents to the questionnaire who chose to write an answer to Question 57 inviting them to describe an experience of prayer in which they felt really connected to God, the majority described a moment of crisis. This witness cited above illustrates also that we need not stay in one quadrant in Holmes' spiritual types. Sometimes for example, a crisis will move us from the *Speculative/Kataphatic* to the *Affective/Kataphatic*, or to use Ware's more accessible terminology, from *Head Spirituality* to *Heart Spirituality*.

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"Describe an experience of prayer in which you felt really connected to God."

<sup>139</sup>A male between 30-39 years, in cohort A, answering question 57, "Describe an experience of prayer in which you felt really connected to God."

**Table 4-1 Indicators of preference for spiritual types (Holmes/Ware schema)**

**Question 15** People in the church vary greatly in how they discover God and express their spirituality throughout life. Following are four "spiritual types" which have been identified. Circle the number of the type which most closely represents you.

overall group	always Menno.	other denom.	male	female	elem. educ.	high school	univ. educ.	age to 39	age to 59	age 60+	
1. A Head Spirituality	18	15	27	25	14	27	15	19	18	17	20
2. A Heart Spirituality	42	38	53	30	49	9	59	31	65	39	20
3. A Mystic Spirituality	11	13	7	15	9	9	7	19	18	4	13
4. A Kingdom Spirituality	27	35	7	25	29	55	19	25	0	35	47

Let us then explore the data from the survey which offers some indication of what spiritual "types" people seem to prefer, both through their responses to the questionnaire as well as what we might deduce from the written testimonials attached (Questions 56 and 57) and the verbal witnesses in the interviews. The quantitative data from the questionnaire results is shown in Table 4-1 above, and in Table 4-2, Table 4-3 and Table 4-4 below.

**Table 4-2 Preference regarding Order of Service as indicator of spiritual type**

**Question 53** Which of the following statements about the Order of Service in congregational worship most closely represents your view?

overall group	always Menno.	other denom.	male	female	elem. educ.	high school	univ. educ.	age to 39	age to 59	age 60+	
1. A carefully planned orderly worship program is a glory to God.	36	43	20	40	34	64	22	44	12	35	67
2. A deeply moving and spontaneous meeting is a glory to God.	18	10	40	20	17	0	33	6	24	22	7
3. Simplicity and some silence are important elements needed for worship.	29	33	20	30	24	18	26	38	41	30	13
4. It is not a service, but ordering ourselves to God's service that is important.	9	8	13	0	14	9	11	6	18	4	7

The data shown in the tables is somewhat indefinite. When asked to label themselves according to one of the four spiritual types, the greatest number of



respondents indicated their preference for a Heart Spirituality (42%). The second preference was a Kingdom Spirituality (27%). However, only 7% of those in cohort B preferred a Kingdom Spirituality. They were much more inclined towards a Heart Spirituality (53%).

**Table 4-3 Preference regarding prayer as indicator of spiritual type**  
**Question 54** Which of the following statements about prayer in congregational worship most closely represents your view?

	overall group	always Menno.	other denom.	male	female	elem. educ.	high school	univ. educ.	age to 39	age to 59	age 60+
1. Words express poetic praise; we ask for knowledge and guidance.	18	18	20	30	11	27	19	6	18	13	27
2. Let words and feelings evoke God's presence in this moment.	44	45	40	40	46	55	48	31	35	48	47
3. Empty the mind of distractions and simply BE in the presence of the Holy.	27	30	20	20	31	9	26	44	35	30	13
4. My life and my work are my prayer.	6	5	7	5	6	9	4	6	6	0	13

The responses to the other three questions were not consistent with this, nor were they consistent with each other. Table 4-2 shows their preference for a carefully planned orderly worship program, an indicator of a Head Spirituality. However, their preference regarding prayer is a type two response, indicative of a preference for a Heart Spirituality (44%). There was some preference regarding the order of service for a Mystic Spirituality (29%). Ware would not see the lack of cohesion as a problem. We are not exclusively of only one type. Let us also bear in mind that we have used only a small sample of the complete test which Ware has designed, therefore the results shown are more illustrative than comprehensive.<sup>140</sup>

<sup>140</sup>The complete test constitutes twelve questions which cover various areas of congregational life, including worship, but extending also to issues of church membership, and the emphasis and ethos of the congregation. She has devised a Roman Catholic and Jewish version of the test. It is designed to be given at the conclusion of an eight-session workshop, in which the participants are invited to read about the various spiritual types. Those who take the test are invited to fill in two circles, one representing themselves, and one representing the congregation in which they worship. None of this was done at Hillcrest. I simply used several questions from the test as part of my wider survey, to see what insights the results might yield for my purposes in attempting to

In response to Question 55 "If you were to offer criticism of Hillcrest Mennonite Church worship, which of the following statements most closely represents your view?" the majority who responded said it is too intellectual, dogmatic and "dry." One could see this as an indicator that they conversely prefer worship to be more evocative or emotional. That would be consistent with their response to Question 54 concerning prayer. It is significant to note too that the majority chose not to answer the question concerning what criticism they might offer. They appear to have misunderstood the intent of the question, perhaps thinking it was an optional question because of the conjunctive "if."

**Table 4-4 Criticism of worship tendencies as indicator of spiritual type**  
**Question 55** If you were to offer criticism of Hillcrest Mennonite Church worship, which of the following statements most closely represents your view? \*

	overall group	always Menno.	other denom.	male	female	elem. educ.	high school	univ. educ.	age to 39	age to 59	age 60+
1. Sometimes we are said to be too intellectual, dogmatic and "dry."	38	40	33	30	43	36	44	25	41	44	27
2. Sometimes we are said to be too emotional, dogmatic, anti-intellectual.	2	0	7	5	0	0	4	0	0	4	0
3. Sometimes we are said to be escaping from the world and are not realistic.	11	10	13	15	9	18	4	19	6	4	27
4. Sometimes we are said to have tunnel vision and are too moralistic.	7	8	7	5	9	9	0	19	12	9	0

\* Forty-two per cent chose not to answer this question.

In any case, type four, a Kingdom Spirituality, does not appear as a significant preference with regard to Questions 53,54, and 55, though it is the second choice of those who responded to Question 15 (Table 4-1). However, a cross-reference to Questions 44 and 45 (Table 2-5 and Table 2-6 below) will help us clarify a trend. In each case the first option given in the question can be seen as indicative of a type one

understand the primary theology or experienced spirituality of those who worship at Hillcrest. Thus the results of this part of the survey have a somewhat limited value, but nonetheless, when compared to other parts of the survey, do point out some trends.

response (a Head Spirituality) and the second option as a type two response (a Heart Spirituality). Option 3, which speaks of commitment to seek God's will can be seen as indicative of a type four response (a Kingdom Spirituality). Options 4 and 5 in questions 44 and 45 which speak of daily life and ethics are also indicators of Kingdom Spirituality.

Responding to Question 44 people indicate a preference for the third statement, that faith or religion has to do with their commitment to seeking God's will (38%). This would place those respondents in type four as persons who express a Kingdom Spirituality. This is further reinforced by their response to question 45 regarding what they perceive to be transformed for them as they worship. There is a clear preference for the third response, their personal commitment to seek God's will (38%). This response again represents a type four Kingdom Spirituality. This is further reinforced by the strong response to concern for ethics and just living as indicated in the fifth option in questions 44 and 45 (26% and 31% respectively).

**Table 2-5 Ranking of descriptors of faith or religion \***

Question 44 Rank these terms used to describe faith or religion in order of importance to you.

	overall first choice only	overall group top 3	always Menno. top 3	other denom. top 3	male top 3	female top 3
1. my beliefs about God	35	75	73	80	65	80
2. my emotional response to God	6	38	38	40	40	37
3. my commitment to seek God's will	38	82	88	67	80	83
4. my relationship to others in life and work of church	11	66	65	67	80	57
5. my daily life in the world, in ethical and just living	26	62	68	47	75	54

\* The first column indicates the first choice of the overall respondents. Subsequent columns indicate sum totals of the first, second and third choices of respondents in the various cohorts, that is, the combined per centages of the top three choices ranked by respondents.

**Table 2-6 Responses measuring what is perceived to be changed in our lives in worship**

**Question 45** Which of the following is most likely to be changed for you as you worship?

	overall group	always Menno.	other denom.	male	female	elem. educ.	high school	univ. educ.	age to 39	age to 59	age 60+
1. your personal beliefs about God	9	10	7	5	11	0	4	19	18	9	0
2. your personal feelings about God	7	8	7	10	6	9	11	0	12	4	7
3. your personal commitment to seek God's will	38	43	27	45	34	64	33	31	24	35	60
4. your relationship to others in the life and work of church	11	8	20	0	17	0	11	19	18	9	7
5. your daily life in the world, in ethics and just living	31	28	40	40	26	18	37	31	29	39	20

When asked in Question 15 to identify themselves with regard to one of the four spiritual types, there seemed to be little affinity towards a Mystic Spirituality. However, in responding to Question 53 regarding their preferred style of order of service in congregational worship, they ranked the mystic type second. There is some affinity for simplicity and silence as important elements in worship. Likewise, when responding to Question 54 regarding their preference for a style of prayer, they again ranked the mystic type as second, choosing the statement "Empty the mind of distractions and simply BE in the presence of the Holy." And if people have any criticism of worship at Hillcrest, the criticism which they ranked second is that people lean towards mysticism, stated negatively as escaping from the world.

What does this mean? In a congregation whose ethos is defined largely by seeking to DO God's will, as we noted above, there appears to be a desire on the other hand to sometimes come into worship and simply BE in God's presence. Ware would suggest that we often seek to fill what appears to be a void in our lives, thus are attracted to the opposite quadrant in the "Circle of Sensibility." Ware states that we human beings are able to think in two quite different directions, somewhat parallel to the differences between *doing* and *being*. One is concrete, the other mystical. Ware cites Holmes, who refers to the two ways of thinking as the *receptive* mode and the *action* mode,

which become the tensions within his circle. Ware adds: "Holmes equates spiritual health with staying within the circle and in some way partaking of all its parts, if only in appreciating what the other quadrants have to offer."<sup>141</sup> One might observe that for those who are so much engaged in the doing of God's will (Kingdom Spirituality), sometimes a degree of escape from the world through worship is attractive. A more positive view is that those who are engaged in the doing of God's experience the need to meet to worship both to discern God's will and to gain energy to live it out in daily life and work.

So we have been able to determine some discernible trends by laying the template of Holmes' four spiritual types on top of several questions (Questions 44 and 45) in addition to those which are directly derived from the test model (Questions 15, 53, 54, 55). While there is not a strong degree of consistency or a clearly discernible pattern with response to Questions 53, 54 and 55, there are nonetheless some observations which can be gleaned from the responses of the various cohorts, for example gender and age, and the differences between cohort A and cohort B. It is to these that I now turn.

When asked in Question 15 to identify their spiritual type, 53% of those who come from non-Mennonite background are inclined toward a Heart Spirituality. Of those who have always been Mennonite, 38% agree with that, but almost as many (35%) opt for a Kingdom Spirituality. In response to Question 53 concerning what type of Order of Service they prefer, cohort A was twice as inclined towards a carefully planned and orderly worship program as those in cohort B (43% and 20% respectively). Conversely, those in cohort B were much more inclined towards

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<sup>141</sup>Ware,33.

worship as a deeply moving and spontaneous meeting (40%) than those in cohort A (10%).

It is significant to note that in response to question 15, women (49%) more than men (30%) identify themselves as having a Heart Spirituality (type two). Conversely, men (25%) more than women (14%) said they were type one (Head Spirituality). Yet, when asked in question 44 to choose a term which for them best describes faith or religion, 80% of the women and 65% of the men chose the statement "my beliefs about God." However, somewhat more men than women prefer the order of service to be carefully planned and orderly (40% male, 34% female). Though there is a mixed message given here, the overall sense is still that women lean towards the evocative more than the cerebral. This is reinforced as one compares responses to other questions. For example, when asked in Question 32 to describe who Jesus is to them when they come to worship, women more than men identified with the description of Jesus as "a caring, loving person...a friend I can relate to" (40% female, 30% male). Thus we do observe some gender differences.

There are also some differences based on level of education. Regarding the order of service in congregational worship (Question 53), 64% of those with elementary education and 44% who are university educated prefer a carefully planned orderly worship program. It is those with high school education who are least concerned about that, and who conversely are most concerned that worship be a deeply moving spontaneous meeting (33% circled response 2 in Question 43).

Similarly, in response to question 55 offering criticism of Hillcrest Worship, 44% of high school educated persons expressed concern that worship was too intellectual, dogmatic and "dry." Compare this to 36% of persons with elementary education, and 25% of university graduates. Level of education is not a predictable indicator of concern for head spirituality, expressed in rational acts of worship. It appears that those with the least education are the most concerned for a rational orderliness in

worship. In fact, when asked to describe what term best describes faith or religion (Question 44), 82% of those who chose "my beliefs about God" have elementary education while 56% are university educated. Again we see how people seek to become more spiritually complete by choosing to live also within their opposite quadrants. Do the responses indicate for example that university graduates do not necessarily wish to bring their academic intellectualism into worship? However, they did not choose the opposite quadrant (heart faith). Only 13% of the university educated cohort ranked emotional response to God as being important. They were, however, more inclined to develop relationships with others in the life and work of the church (response 4 in Question 44).

There are also some variances in responses based on age groupings. In response to Question 15 which invites people to place themselves into one of the four spiritual types, we have noted that the majority preferred a Heart Spirituality. Of those persons under age 39, 65% preferred a Heart Spirituality, whereas 39% of those age 40-59 and 20% of those over 60 years old chose this type as being most descriptive of their style of spirituality. When asked their preference about the order of service, 67% of those over 60 years old, compared to 12% of those who are under 39 years old, and 35% who are age 40-59 prefer a carefully planned and orderly worship program. Conversely, the younger group (24%) is more inclined toward a deeply moving and spontaneous meeting, whereas only 7% of the seniors chose this response. Finally, in response to Question 45, it is seniors who are most clearly aware that what is transformed for them in worship is their personal commitment to seek God's will. Sixty percent of those over 60 years of age, and 24% of those under age 39 chose this response.

It should be of no surprise to us that the various cohorts categorized according to age or level of education achieved offer different responses. What is somewhat surprising is the apparent reversal between elementary educated and university

educated persons with regard to their preference for worship as a context in which beliefs are clarified. Would one not have expected university graduates to be interested in a rational style of worship? Apparently their needs for rational thought are better met elsewhere. They find other aspects of worship more important, particularly the communal dimension.

## 2. Expressions of Piety and Spirituality in Hillcrest Mennonite Church

### Witness VII

*In the traditional sense, I don't pray very often. Prayer for me is more often my thoughts throughout the day that I am directing to God... I distinctly remember the second night ( after a family crisis ) when I again was restless in bed and woke at 3 a.m. It was a warm humid night and our windows were wide open. Out of the blue in my mind I started reciting a Bible verse. You have to realize that I had not been a faithful Bible reader for years and had actually taken a very negative stance as to the value of parts of the Bible. So when I started saying John 3:16 in my mind I had no other explanation than that God planted it there. When I finished thinking the word "life", it started to pour rain! We had no rain for almost two months and there was no rain in the forecast. As the rain fell, so did my tears. I truly felt God's presence wash over me -- this was a sign that He was giving new life to the plants so desperately in need of it, and He too will give new life to my child. I was overwhelmed with the sense that God was holding our hand and walking beside us as our family was dealing with the unknown outcome of our situation... There have been times in the past that I questioned the value of prayer -- no longer!<sup>142</sup>*

People in the congregation differ greatly in the way they discover God and express their spirituality throughout life. As Witness VII above illustrates, people can change and grow in their expressions of spirituality, often through crises. In section B of the survey questionnaire people were invited to respond to a variety of items about religious experiences, attitudes and activities, as well as expressions of piety

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<sup>142</sup>A female, between 40-49, from cohort A. This is an excerpt from a longer answer which she wrote to question 57 Describe an experience of prayer in which you felt really connected to God.



(spirituality). The tabulation of responses to the pertinent questions is given in Table 4-5 below. Inserted in this Table are the results to the same questions which were asked of over 3,000 Mennonites in the Churchwide Survey conducted by Kauffman and Harder in 1972 and repeated by Kauffman and Driedger in 1989, as reported in *The Mennonite Mosaic*.<sup>143</sup>

People who gather to worship express their spirituality, have their spirits nurtured, and develop their primary theology in various settings, including church, but not limited to church (see Question 43). In a broader survey conducted in the Hillcrest congregation in 1998 the question was asked: How often do you take time for periods of prayer and/or meditation? Of the 109 respondents, 53% reported that they did so daily, 21% indicated 2-3 times each week, 16% said weekly, and 10% said 2-3 times each month or rarely. The degree of frequency of devotional exercises shown in that survey is comparable to what we have observed in the present survey, shown in the responses to questions 12 and 13 in Table 4-5 below, to which we now turn.

The survey results shown in Table 4-5 below indicate the expressions of piety (spirituality), religious experiences, attitudes and activities of the respondents. It should be noted from the outset that these items do not refer to acts of worship or expressions of spirituality in the context of congregational worship. However, these are some of the contexts in which the primary theology of individual worshipers is shaped. We can safely assume a dialectic relationship between what happens in the spiritual lives of the individual worshippers in daily life, and what takes place in corporate worship. That is to say, the corporate worship is shaped by the spirituality of those who come to worship, and in turn shapes their spirituality as they go again into the world in which they "live and move and have their being."

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<sup>143</sup>*The Mennonite Mosaic*, 72, 73.

<b>Table 4-5 Expressions of piety, religious experiences, attitudes and activities</b>											
[ Results are shown as combined percentages of the two most affirmative statements. ]											
[ Where applicable, comparisons to the Mennonite Church survey of 1972 and 1989 are shown.*]											
<b>group</b>	<b>overall</b>	<b>always</b>	<b>other</b>	<b>male</b>	<b>female</b>	<b>elem. educ.</b>	<b>high school</b>	<b>univ. educ.</b>	<b>age to 39</b>	<b>age to 59</b>	<b>age 60+</b>
<b>Menno. denom.</b>											
7. Had a conversion experience or made a conscious decision to be a follower of Christ.	46	56	20	35	51	73	45	31	12	52	73
* compare to Churchwide Survey					<u>1972</u>	<u>1989</u>					
"had a conversion experience"					79	82					
8. Feel close or very close to God	30	33	20	25	32	45	23	31	18	26	47
* compare to Churchwide Survey					<u>1972</u>	<u>1989</u>					
					53	53					
9. Am conscious of a spiritual goal, purpose in life.	75	80	60	60	83	73	74	81	70	74	80
* compare to Churchwide Survey					<u>1972</u>	<u>1989</u>					
					85	89					
10. Making some or definite progress in my spiritual life.	71	76	60	60	77	54	70	81	70	74	67
* results of Churchwide Survey not reported in <i>Mennonite Mosaic</i>											
11. Often ask God for guidance in making decisions.	45	48	40	45	46	55	41	50	35	48	54
* compare to Churchwide Survey					<u>1972</u>	<u>1989</u>					
					61	63					
12. Pray daily or more	57	58	53	40	65	54	52	69	41	65	60
* compare to Churchwide Survey					<u>1972</u>	<u>1989</u>					
					77	78					
13. Read Bible weekly or more	30	33	20	10	40	45	22	31	24	26	40
* compare to Churchwide Survey					<u>1972</u>	<u>1989</u>					
					67	63					

Table 4-6 below indicates the kind of devotional life experienced by the group that indicated they participate at least weekly in such practices. Let me use an analogy to draw the important connection between the individual devotional life of those who come to worship and their experience of corporate worship. Unless people's hearts and spirits are nurtured in a daily walk with God, when they meet to worship they can sound like empty rattling teacups on a saucer. When people's cups are full to overflowing, they share with each other out of their fullness, not out of empty lives.

Thus the quality and benefits of worship are mutually enhanced. Still, worship is also a place where our emptiness can be filled.

**Table 4-6 Spiritual disciplines used in devotional life**

[ Shows only those who reported in Question 13 that they engage in Bible study weekly or more often.]

<u>Question 14</u>	overall group	always Menno.	other denom.	male	female	elem. educ.	high school	univ.	age to 39	age 40 to 59	age 60+
1. read a short scripture and offer brief prayer	66	80	27	65	66	91	59	63	41	70	87
2. spend 15-20 minutes in reading & prayer	6	3	13	5	6	0	7	6	18	0	0
3. spend 30 minutes, keep journal, reflect, pray	2	0	7	0	3	0	0	6	0	4	0
4. fairly regularly spend part or all of a day in spiritual retreat	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

How do people fill their spiritual "cups" on a daily basis? Let us examine the survey results in reverse order to how they appear in Table 4-5. Of the total group surveyed at Hillcrest, regarding Question 12, "How often do you pray to God privately? 57% report that they pray at least daily, compared to 78% indicated by the Mennonite Church survey of 1989. Clearly there is some erosion in this regard. Similarly, in response to Question 13, "How often do you study the Bible privately?" 30% report that they read the Bible weekly or more often, compared to the Churchwide survey of 1989 in which 63% reported that they do this. Of those with university education, 69% report that they pray daily. This is higher than the overall average. They are however not any more inclined than the congregation as a whole to read their Bible at least weekly (31%). Regarding the two indicators, frequency of prayer and Bible reading, there is also some variance by age. In brief, older persons are more inclined than younger persons to engage in these expressions of their spirituality.

What are people doing when they report that they pray and read the Bible regularly? Table 4-6 above sketches a picture of the nature of people's "devotional life." (The expression which is more in vogue these days is "spiritual disciplines.") By

whatever name one may call it, this is what people do: Of those who report a relatively regular devotional life, 66% report that they read a short scripture and offer a brief prayer. A number of persons in the congregation receive the devotional book *Rejoice*, which offers short daily readings, concluding with a brief prayer. This devotional guide is used most regularly by older persons in the congregation who have always been Mennonite. I surmise a link between this fact and the numbers in Table 4-5. In cohort A, 80% report reading a short scripture and offering a brief prayer. This is reported by 87% of those respondents over 60 years old.

Those respondents in cohort B (other denominational background) are more inclined to report spending a longer period of time in reading and prayer (13%) than those in cohort A (6%). It is also the younger group who engages in this somewhat more extensive exercise (18%). Only several persons spend thirty minutes to keep a journal, reflect and pray. These are persons in cohort B. Nobody reports spending time in spiritual retreats. The results reported above indicate that overall, persons in the Hillcrest congregation are not so inclined to participate in the spiritual disciplines of a regular devotional life. In other words, to apply Holmes' terms, they do not have a tendency towards the *receptive* mode.

We return then to Table 4-5 to examine responses to the rest of the questions noted in that table. Question 11 asks persons to indicate how often they ask God for guidance in making decisions. The implied underlying question is, "How does your piety relate to decisions you make in daily life?" Less than half of the respondents indicate that they often ask God for guidance in making decisions (45%). There does not appear to be much variance between cohort A and cohort B in this regard (48% and 40% respectively). If we add those who report that they sometimes ask God for guidance in making decisions to those who say they often do so, the total is 78%.

The older people are, the more they are inclined to ask God for guidance, as the numbers show - 54% of those over 60 years, compared to 35% of those under 40.

Level of education is not a determining factor. The overall group is less inclined than those in the Churchwide Survey of 1989 (63%) to ask God for guidance in making decisions.

Questions 8,9 and 10 (Table 4-5) speak to similar issues, concerning people's walk with God, so we shall deal with them together. The respondents report that they are quite conscious of a spiritual goal or purpose in life (75% overall). This is somewhat less than that reported in the Churchwide Survey in 1989 (89%). They also believe that they are making some or definite progress in their spiritual lives (71%).

As we compare the response to Question 10 to the responses to Questions 12 and 13, it seems clear that their measure of spiritual progress is not tied to the traditional measures of expressions of piety in the devotional life. There also appears to be a negative correlation between Questions 9,10 and Question 8. That is to say, they do not need to feel particularly close to God to be conscious of a spiritual goal that guides their lives. Nor do they need to feel particularly close to God to report that they are making some or definite progress in their spiritual lives. Only 30% of the overall group reports that they feel close or very close to God. This is lower than reported in the Churchwide Survey of 1972 and 1989 (53%).

How do we explain this rather low number? The majority of persons in cohort A and cohort B prefer to say that they are "fairly close" to God (38% overall). They do not wish to overstate the case. Is there here a residual Amish humility? No, those from other denominational backgrounds are even more reticent to make claims to being close to God. Is there here a degree of agnosticism, in the sense of being uncertain about God's existence? No, because as we saw in the responses to question 16 about God's existence, the vast majority (93%) know beyond a doubt that God exists or while they do have some doubts, nonetheless believe God exists. In responding to Question 31, "How are you aware of God?" 27% of the overall group indicate that they experience God as loving, accepting, welcoming and approachable.

The percentage of persons who report this is similar to the percentage of persons who report that they are close to God. Another 29% of those who responded to Question 31 see God as one who guides them and wants to be Lord of their lives. One might see such a God as being more distant or aloof. There may be some other reasons for their reticence in stating that they feel close to God which cannot be deduced from the statistical analysis.

As we have described in Chapters Two and Three, Mennonites emerged from the Anabaptist branch of the sixteenth century Reformation. From the outset the Anabaptist-Mennonites expressed a concern for personal commitment as conversion (often radical), which would be manifest in the changed life. If the ardor of this conviction abated for several hundred years in their quietist experience in America, *the zeal for radical conversion was once again fanned into flame under the influence of Wesleyan style revivalism.* So Question 7 concerning a conversion experience is asked in the context of a long and mixed historical experience. Revivalism was quite dominant in the early half of the twentieth century. This was particularly true among Ontario Mennonites up to perhaps 1960. The emphasis died out as pastors gained seminary training which focused more on the discipleship (obedience) emphasis in Anabaptism (expressed as peace and justice concerns) than on conversion.

The older members of Hillcrest Mennonite Church were among those who experienced revivalism in the Mennonite Church in Ontario. Thus it should not surprise us that they are most ready to report having had a conversion experience (73%), whereas only 12% of those under age 39 report having such an experience. The question as stated in the survey questionnaire includes the adjective "dramatic" to describe conversion. Very few people claim such an experience. When stated somewhat more moderately as "a conscious and personal decision to be a follower of Christ," more people are prepared to accept that as a valid description of their experience (44%). However, almost an equal number of people chose the response

"I gradually grew in my faith commitment through the influence and nurture of my family and the church" (51%). Of those persons under 40 years old, 88% chose this response.

It seems clear that the emphasis in Hillcrest Mennonite Church since the 1960's has been on the gradual nurturing of children and youth in faith towards making Christian commitments, rather than eliciting critical (often "dramatic" in the term used in the question) conversion experiences. In the book *Identity and Faith: Youth in a Believers' Church*, which was published in 1980, I argued that the term "crisis conversion" most closely parallels the New Testament concept of the "new birth." I suggested however that it should be possible to speak of "a conscious decision," without making it synonymous with a crisis conversion.<sup>144</sup> This viewpoint was shared by many Mennonite pastors in Ontario, and by the pastor who preceded me at Hillcrest. This then explains why younger people do not report having had a conversion experience as such, but are nonetheless ready to claim their place as part of the family of God in the congregation. The question remains though, "How do we encourage Christian commitment in keeping with our Anabaptist faith heritage that calls for a conversion and the changed life?" This is one of the implications for ministry and worship which will be dealt with in Chapter Eight.

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<sup>144</sup>Maurice Martin, *Identity and Faith: Youth in a Believers' Church* (Kitchener, Ontario, Scottdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1981), 12.

Such an understanding lies between the categories of moral-personal conversion predominant in evangelical revivalism, and ethical-moral conversion more typical of the mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions. The latter is increasingly more typical of the experience of Mennonites. In that context, how does one evoke the kind of first-generation radical commitment of the Anabaptists? Is it necessary to do so? Marlin Jeschke grappled with such questions in his book *Baptism for Children of the Believers Church* (Scottdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1980).

### 3. Preferences for Worship - Context and Content

In this final section concerning the varieties of spirituality and expressions of worship at Hillcrest Mennonite Church we consider matters of preference in content and context of worship. First we turn to Question 43 which invites people to rank six settings in which they are most aware of or most often aware of relating to God in worship. The responses are tabulated in Table 5-1 below.

**Table 5-1 Ranking settings in which people are most often aware of relating to God in a worshipful way.**

**Question 43** Rank the following in terms of the settings in which you are most aware of relating to God in worship.

\* percentages are shown as totals of 1st, 2nd and 3rd rankings  
[In parentheses are percentages simply ranked first overall.]

	<b>overall group</b>	<b>always Menno.</b>	<b>other denom.</b>	<b>male</b>	<b>female</b>	<b>elem. educ.</b>	<b>high school</b>	<b>univ. educ.</b>	<b>age to 39</b>	<b>age to 59</b>	<b>age 60+</b>
1. in an outdoor setting, in creation	75 [29]	78	67	75	74	73	74	75	71	74	80
2. in my own quiet time at home	73 [18]	70	80	80	69	73	74	69	53	83	73
3. in congregational worship in church	82 [45]	85	73	85	80	91	78	81	71	83	75
4. special events, e.g. conventions	22 [6]	25	13	20	23	9	26	25	30	17	20
5. Bible study or cluster groups	25 [2]	20	40	30	23	27	22	25	35	26	13
6. in family circle, family worship & prayer	22 [2]	15	40	20	3	0	26	25	47	17	0

The first choice of settings in which respondents overall are most aware of relating to God in a worshipful way is clearly the setting of congregational worship. The second choice is in a natural setting in creation, the third choice is in their own quiet time at home. When the top three choices are conflated, the overall rankings are the same as I just noted. However, when thus weighted, some variations begin to emerge within the various cohorts. Those from other denominational backgrounds prefer worship in their quiet time at home, ranking that among the top three. Their second choice is congregational worship, and their third choice is a natural outdoor setting.



However, when noted as a simple ranking, cohort B strongly favours the natural setting as a context for worship, placing it well ahead of congregational worship (47% and 20% respectively, percentages not shown in Table 5-1).

Again using the conflated percentages (totals of top three rankings), we see that seniors rank the outdoor setting as most conducive to worship for them (80%). However, this appears to be the more highly educated among them. Those persons with elementary education (mostly seniors) strongly favour the congregational setting for worship (91%).

None of the cohorts presents a strong endorsement for Bible study groups, special events or the family worship circle as contexts which are conducive to worship. The gathered congregation is the preferred setting for worship of the vast majority of respondents. The strong affinity for an experience of worship in nature may be in part a reflection of the rural setting in which they live. Thus we have explored the preference for *context* of worship of persons in the Hillcrest congregation.

We turn now to a consideration of people's preferences regarding the *content* of worship. By content I do not mean the themes in worship, though that would also be a significant study. I mean rather the various acts that constitute the total worship event. Can we presume that what people value in worship is not only a matter of personal "taste", but also reflects their primary and experienced theology? Let us examine what people of the Hillcrest congregation report to be the most significant acts of worship to them, as shown in Table 5-2 which appears below.

Clearly the two most significant acts of worship for people at Hillcrest are singing and the sermon, in that order of preference, with two notable exceptions. People from other denominations have reversed that order, preferring the sermon to the singing. This is another indicator that congregational singing is a "habit of the heart" of Mennonites. The men in the overall group prefer the sermon (90% placed it in the top three) to singing (80%). Women preferred singing (80%) to preaching (66%). This

may reflect a slight gender difference between Head and Heart types of spirituality, if we assume that sermons have a more cerebral appeal while singing is more visceral.

**Table 5-2 Aspects of congregational worship, ranked in order of value and meaning to the respondents**

**Question 41** What aspects of worship at Hillcrest are most meaningful to you? (rank them)

\* The numbers are the totals of 1st, 2nd and 3rd ranking for each item.

[Numbers in parentheses are 1st overall rankings]

	overall group	always Menno.	other denom.	male	female	elem. educ.	high school	univ. educ.	age to 39	age to 59	age 60+
1. sermon	75 [35]	73	80	90	66	82	67	81	76	65	87
2. singing	80 [44]	83	73	80	80	82	70	94	71	87	80
3. praying	58 [7]	53	73	65	54	46	70	44	53	74	40
4. communion	22 [7]	23	20	25	20	27	15	25	18	17	33
5. sharing joys & concerns	35 [6]	33	40	35	34	18	37	38	53	26	27
6. footwashing	4 [0]	5	0	5	3	0	7	0	0	4	7
7. scripture readings	22 [2]	20	27	25	20	18	22	19	30	9	33
8. offering	5 [0]	5	7	10	3	9	4	6	0	4	13

Praying is ranked as the third most valued act of worship at Hillcrest, a somewhat distant third for those in cohort A, but equal to singing in the experience of cohort B. Praying in church seems least significant to those over age 60, in comparison to other age cohorts. It is also this age group that is most inclined to pray in their homes. In response to the interview question "What happens to you when you (we) pray in church?" a number of respondents indicated that they find it difficult to pray in church. It feels more like something which is taking place "up there" behind the pulpit, less "down here" in the pews in the experience of the worshipper. For a number of people "prayers" offered by someone else is not necessarily conducive to prayer for themselves. One interviewee, a male in cohort A over thirty years old states it this way:

It's hard for me to pray in church. I get the most out of praying in church when I am the worship leader, that's because I am doing it. There are times when there is silent prayer or time offered for silent prayer that I am able to get into that, then I can have a prayer with God, and so there is closeness to God. But quite often the congregational prayer that's happening in church is "happening," I'm not experiencing it.

A female interviewee, in cohort A, also over thirty years old says:

Sometimes I think it would be nice if we had prayers printed out so we could know them and own them more so. I think for me some of those are more meaningful than listening to someone else pray... I think sometimes we could just join hands or lay hands on people. If we circle someone, that's where prayer is more touching for me... I like prayer as a participation.

A number of persons linked prayer in the congregational setting to an awareness of those persons around them with whom they have shared prayer concerns. An older male in cohort A speaks of his relationship to God and to others around him in prayer:

I think God knows how we should pray. We might question Why do I have to pray? At times the question How? comes to mind. It's a case of we can't if our relationship with each other isn't right, it's difficult to pray to God, it kinda shuts things off. Yeah, I think I'm aware of others around, maybe more than I should be.

A female in her mid-twenties in cohort B offers a different perspective on the relationship of prayer to those around her in worship:

I guess first of all my relationship with God is much closer when I pray, doing it directly, praying to Him I have contact with him. I would say it draws me closer to God when I pray. My relationship with others? I guess I see prayer as maybe being a private sense of worship. When I think of Him directly, it doesn't affect the others around you. Though when we are praying for other people then I guess I think of that family... I would say it's definitely more Godward. I am only aware of the person that's praying in front of the church, but otherwise I'm clearly more focused on God, not so much on others around me.

Further with regard to how prayer is tied to our relationship with others in the congregation, we note that sharing joys and concerns is invariably linked to the pastoral prayer, or prayer of the congregation as it is variously called at Hillcrest.

Indeed, virtually all of the interviewees drew this connection between sharing of joys

and concerns and the pastoral prayer. As we see in Table 5-2, sharing joys and concerns is ranked fourth in terms of its meaningfulness to the respondents, and is particularly valued by those in cohort B.

Communion is ranked lower on the scale of meaningfulness to the worshippers at Hillcrest. There is a certain unevenness within the question with regard to the acts of worship in communion and footwashing, since these occur only twice each year whereas the other acts of worship occur weekly. Would communion be more meaningful if it happened more regularly? The fact that the offering is not perceived to be a significant act of worship suggests some implications for those who plan and lead worship in the congregation. How could the offering become a more integral aspect of congregational worship?

To help complete the picture, we turn also to the responses to Questions 36 and 37, which deal with the sermon and singing respectively. Some of these results are shown in Table 5-3 and Table 5-4 below. A significant majority of those polled indicate that the sermon challenges them to examine their relationship to God, particularly in terms of doing God's will. On the matter of whether a sermon touches

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**Table 5-3 Responses to sermons**

**Question 36** What happens to you when you listen to a sermon, in terms of your awareness and experience of God?

	overall group	always Menno.	other denom.	male	female	elem. educ.	high school	univ. educ.	age to 39	age to 59	age 60+
1. A sermon helps me focus on God, draw closer to God, feel God's care.	18	15	27	10	23	27	22	6	18	22	13
2. A sermon challenges me to examine my relationship to God. What would God want me to do?	56	65	33	60	54	64	52	63	41	61	67
3. I learn about who God is. A sermon is an intellectual assent, more than an experience of God.	13	8	27	20	9	9	15	6	24	4	13
4. It would take a pretty powerful sermon to change how I relate to God.	7	10	0	5	9	0	7	13	18	4	0

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their emotive side ( how they feel about God ), or their intellectual side ( what they think about God ), both received almost equal responses. Clearly the sermon is seen

as a motivational factor in worship, generating responses of obedience to God's will.

If the sermon provides motivational content, singing clearly provides the emotive dimension. As Table 5-4 indicates, singing touches the emotions and draws people

**Table 5-4 Responses to singing**  
**Question 37** What happens to you as you sing in church, in terms of your awareness and experience of God?

	overall group	always Menno.	other denom.	male	female	elem. educ.	high school	univ. educ.	age to 39	age to 59	age 60+
1. Singing draws me closer to God, creates mood for worship, touches emotions more than intellect, feelings of praise or awe.	55	60	40	55	54	27	74	44	53	70	33
2. Through singing I participate with others, create sense of community.	31	28	40	20	37	46	19	38	41	13	47
3. I find myself praying through singing, sometimes it's easier to sing than to say a prayer.	7	8	7	15	3	27	4	0	0	9	13
4. I get too wrapped up intellectually to worship as we sing.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

closer to God (55%) and to each other (31%). It would have been good to ask people to reflect also to what extent singing expresses their beliefs. This issue did emerge in response to the question about singing asked of those persons who were interviewed. One person begins by saying: "When the singing is really good, then good things happen to me, then I feel a sense of awe and holiness, then I feel my vulnerabilities brought to the surface." She goes on to add: "I also try to read the text, so there is a sort of theologizing that goes on...I like the images in songs of cosmic God."

On the other hand, another person declares: "I have a really hard time focusing on the text, for what it means for me...I've been really grappling with this whole praise song issue; the key I think for me is that the music is so simple, it is singable and the text is so plain, it is repetitive and easier to memorize." To this, the first person cited above offers a contradictory viewpoint: "I really like when I'm allowed to experience an emotion on my own. I feel like in the choruses or the more accessible music, the emotion is forced on you, it feels contrived." A third person, also a younger woman in the congregation says: "The praise songs are *to* God, in other songs I learn *about* God,

characteristics, personality." The debate is not primarily one of content versus style, nor even primarily a debate over the function of music in worship; it is quite clear that its function is to help create a mood of worship that draws people close to God. The question is rather what styles of music achieve this end for various people.

Musical preferences in worship may also reflect the spiritual "types" of people, as we described them in Part A. Charismatic choruses might typically tend to be attractive to persons in the lower half of the Circle of Sensibility, which Ware has given the label *Heartfelt*. Classical hymnody may typically have more appeal to persons who tend to function in the upper half of the Circle of Sensibility, which Ware has given the label *Intellectual*. These characterizations are not absolute, and should be seen as somewhat speculative.

What people at Hillcrest church value most in worship is preaching and singing; what the Anabaptists emphasized in worship is Word and Spirit. Is it an oversimplification to place these side by side as parallel paradigms of worship? When the respondents think of preaching (a functional expression and second-level discourse of Word), their focus is on the horizontal dimensions of a faith lived out in daily life, in obedience and discipleship. It is the singing (a functional expression of Spirit), more than the sermon, that lifts the people of Hillcrest upward into that vertical, largely pietistic, maybe even mystical, dimension of relationship with God.

The symbolic acts of communion, footwashing and the offering do not capture the imagination of the worshippers at Hillcrest. Does this reflect an Anabaptist lack of emphasis on the sacraments? One could argue that communion and footwashing are not so meaningful because they are not practised very frequently. Conversely, one could argue that they are practised infrequently precisely because they do not carry the important freight of meaning that sacraments do in other Christian traditions.

Thus we have examined the various styles or expressions of spirituality which are present at Hillcrest. In this chapter I have measured preferences for practices in

worship, as well as beliefs and experience, with the assumption that the practices which people value are indicative of their beliefs and experience.

One could also examine whether or to what extent these expressions of spirituality are compatible with Anabaptist-Mennonite theology and practice. Some of the same questions, (Questions 44 and 45), which were applied in this chapter, can be applied also as indicators of Anabaptism. For example, items which indicate Kingdom Spirituality could also be deemed to be important indicators of Anabaptist theology, in their emphasis on Word and Obedience. These include the commitment to seek God's will in daily life in the world in ethical and just living. At the same time, Anabaptists would also fit into the Heart Faith type, in their emphasis on Word and Spirit. Mennonites have for a long time lived with the dialectic between Obedience and Spirit. Though there is a stream of mysticism which fed into sixteenth century Anabaptism, that stream seems to have dried up among most Mennonites in the years since. Mennonites in general, and it seems also people at Hillcrest, tend to function more in the *active* rather than the *receptive* mode. However, there are some who have some leanings towards life in the quadrant of Mystical experience, to use the Ware/Holmes terminology. Again using Ware's terminology, Mennonites through the centuries have lived within several quadrants on the Spirituality Wheel, with a greater or lesser emphasis on one or the other at various times in their history.

The particular style or type of expression of spirituality is the functional manifestation both of the *primary theology* of the individual worshipper and the *local theology* of the congregation, both that of the received faith of the general Christian Church and the particular expressions of this in Anabaptism. There is always a dynamic interplay or dialectic between this secondary theology and the experiences of God by the individual in the local setting. What are the implications for worship at Hillcrest? To use an analogy, is Anabaptism the basic "soup stock" of our theology in worship, to which are added other ingredients? What "flavour" will Anabaptism have

as it continues to be expressed in this mix? And what "flavour" will the worship experience of the congregation have? This also has implications for discerning the "tastes" of each individual as they worship in the midst of the congregation. How will each one's needs be met? In Chapter Eight which follows we shall examine further implications of these questions for worship and ministry at Hillcrest Mennonite.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

PROSPECTUS - IMPLICATIONS FOR MINISTRY AND WORSHIP  
IN HILLCREST MENNONITE CHURCH**A. When Christian Tradition Encounters Local Theology**

In the early chapters of this thesis I have described aspects of Christian orthodoxy in general, and Anabaptism in particular, as the received faith in which Hillcrest Mennonite Church stands as its people gather weekly for worship. This is the second level discourse in which we engage whenever we are aware of our faith heritage and seek to describe it in terms of secondary theology. The faith tradition in which we stand is expressed also in corporate worship. Then I have attempted to describe the experience of the individual worshippers, as well as the group at worship in the local context at Hillcrest. This is the primary theology or first level discourse of personal experience in worship. The functional theology of the Hillcrest congregation at worship is a combination of the two levels of discourse in a constant dialectical interplay. The theology of those who worship is both shaped by the event of worship, and in turn shapes the worship.

My thesis project, which describes the Hillcrest congregation at worship may be described using the image of a jigsaw puzzle. The description of the historic faith or received tradition in chapter one and chapter two is like the picture on the box of a massive jigsaw puzzle. The many pieces of the puzzle in the box represent the thesis project, using Hillcrest Mennonite Church as the case study. We have examined the various pieces which emerged from the questionnaire results and the interviews within the congregation to ascertain to what extent these pieces resemble the tradition. Then the question might be posed: Is it necessary that the picture which we assemble look entirely like the picture on the box? I have used various templates as boundaries to give some shape to the picture which emerges. We have, as it were, collected the

blues, the greens, the yellows into various groupings and begun to assemble the picture. These templates have been used in Chapter Five through Chapter Seven to help create some categories of what people report as they describe their experience of spirituality in worship. Piece by piece, we have examined the puzzle. Now we turn to the completed picture which emerges and attempt to understand some implications for ministry and worship at Hillcrest Mennonite Church. Does the puzzle on the table look like the picture on the box? What pieces are missing, both for the individual worshipper and the corporate group?

Robert J. Schreiter, whom we cited in the Introduction, says that there are four problems which arise when Christian tradition encounters local theology.<sup>145</sup> I believe that what he says about the church in various cross-cultural contexts applies also to the relationship of a local congregation to its broader denominational context. In my judgement, what Schreiter says from within the Catholic tradition has relevance too for Mennonites, though some level of translation would need to take place to make it fit. I have quoted his four points as follows, in italics, with a brief commentary on each point regarding the study of Hillcrest Mennonite Church.

1. *Cultural diversity among Christians is a fact. At the same time, however, Christians believe that unity is one of the signs of God's church. What unity means in the concrete is differently understood, but it does involve the Pauline "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all" (Ephesians 4:5).*

Schreiter goes on to make several points related to this point. First of all he assumes that a principal charge to those who lead the church is maintaining its unity. The second related point is that unity is not the same as uniformity; yet unity and uniformity are not unrelated. He asks "How many different signs can carry the same message without alteration of the code?"

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<sup>145</sup>Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, 102-103.

These points apply also to the study of Hillcrest Mennonite Church. Let us first of all examine the matter of unity or diversity within the congregation and the degree of agreement with the received faith of general Christian orthodoxy. In response to the statements of Christian belief in Questions 16 and 17 "I have no doubt that God exists" and "Jesus was not only human but also divine and I have no doubts about it," Hillcrest respondents were less orthodox than the Mennonite Church as a whole was in 1989. However, when the second response is factored in, which allows for some doubt while yet affirming the existence of God and the divine nature of Christ, the congregation as a whole is seen to be quite orthodox. It has been twelve years since the Church Member Profile survey was conducted. We do not know whether the denomination as a whole, like Hillcrest church, has also become less orthodox in the years since the survey was conducted. We might assume that Hillcrest is typical of the Mennonite Church as a whole, but have no hard facts to support that assumption.

We do note from the data collected at Hillcrest that those in cohort B are somewhat less orthodox than those who have always been Mennonite, as we saw in Table 1-1a. We also note that people at Hillcrest are more inclined toward a general Christian orthodoxy than to the fundamentalist version of it. Again, cohort B is somewhat less fundamentalist than cohort A, but neither group is much inclined in that direction. Thus, while there is some discrepancy between cohorts A and B on the matters cited above, there is no clear sense that this would create significant disunity in the congregation. Indeed, there is rather greater discrepancy among the other cohorts in the data collected. Sometimes the gender differences are greater than the differences between those who have always been Mennonite and those who have come to the congregation from another tradition. At other times age or education variables are significant. We have seen some occasionally surprising results in which one's stereotypes concerning age, gender or level of education are not supported by the data.

As we apply the data from the Hillcrest survey, what would in our minds constitute a picture of a fractured or disunified congregation? As I noted in the chapter on methodology, in my judgement a differential score of 10% between cohorts on any given question is worth noting as a point of interest. (Of a total cohort of 55 persons, that represents five or six persons.) A differential score of 20% or greater should especially catch our attention, and in some cases may be cause for concern. Much depends on how one views the relationship of *unity* to *uniformity* in the congregation, as Schreiter notes. Stated positively, the congregation might feel that it is a sign of health and vigor when its members are invited to hold differing points of view, even on matters of orthodoxy. Stated negatively, if people prefer a greater degree of uniformity, such variations would be construed to depict a fractured and disunified congregation.

In my judgment, variety of beliefs and attitudes is most problematic when the differences always fall within certain cohorts, for example, when seniors always differ with younger persons, those with university education always disagree with the less educated persons, etc. And certainly differences will threaten the unity of the congregation in which the "Hatfields" are always in disagreement with the "McCoys" (at Hillcrest, the Benders versus the Waglers) on any given matter. In my judgment there is little cause for concern in the data that we have seen regarding Hillcrest, that this is a house divided. A broad overview shows that the variations do not generally fall consistently into certain cohorts. When the variations are thus dispersed, and when open dialogue is invited, unity exists, even within diversity. There may however be some cause for concern when we compare the theology of the Hillcrest church to that of the wider Mennonite Church and general Christian orthodoxy.

The most consistent variations occur between cohort A, those who have always been Mennonite, and cohort B, those who have come from other denominational backgrounds. On a number of items, when the differential score between these two

cohorts exceeds 20%, the congregation may wish to take note and consider the implications, both for nurture and worship within the congregation, and for outreach beyond the congregation.

Those who worship at Hillcrest may not be very comfortable with the second level discourse pertaining to God, such as the use of trinitarian language. As we noted in an earlier chapter, the trinitarian formula is not usually employed in worship. Would that in itself suggest that worship at Hillcrest is not trinitarian? The data from the survey Question 34 shows that as people come to worship 51% of them are aware of God in all three persons variously, depending on the theme of the service. This suggests some awareness of the Trinity in worship. Another 31% said that as they come to worship they are aware of all three persons equally, they do not distinguish among them; it's all one God. Does this reflect a unitarian theology? If so, there is some cause for concern.

The data from the survey, combined with the witnesses of those who were interviewed, suggests that people at Hillcrest are more concerned with orthopraxy than orthodoxy; their faith is a practical faith lived out in daily life, as we see in the responses to Questions 44 and 45. What is important to most people, and what is most likely to be changed in worship is their commitment to seek God's will (the third option in each of those questions). In response to these same two questions, the response which received the second highest score was the statement "my daily life in the world, in ethical and just living." This is closely connected to the concern to seek God's will.

Let us turn to Schreiter's language of semiotics: "How many different signs can carry the same message without alteration of the code?" I reframe the question to ask: What are the signs that Hillcrest is a Mennonite Church, that stands within the Anabaptist tradition? In Chapter Six we noted that, like the Mennonite Church as a whole, there is a lessening of a persecution theology. This is largely so because of the

peaceful context in which Mennonites exist today, compared to the harsh setting from which they emerged in the sixteenth century. Indeed, as White notes, with the exception of the Amish and other conservative Mennonite groups, there has been a large degree of cultural assimilation. This does not generate a persecution or martyrdom mentality. Still, we should be surprised that there is as much residual persecution theology as there is, as indicated by the survey results.

On nine of eleven indicators of Anabaptism, the congregation scored very high. For example, there is at Hillcrest a strong degree of pacifism, of concern for mutual aid, of obedience to Christ in discipleship in daily life, etc. These are often seen by those outside the Mennonite Church as strong indicators of Mennonitism. All the outward signs point to the fact that Hillcrest remains solidly within the Anabaptist-Mennonite fold, made evident in views held both by those who have always been Mennonite as well as by those from another denominational background.

There are some signs within the congregation, less visible to the world, that hint at some erosion of traditional Anabaptist-Mennonite theology and practice. First of all is the matter of congregational discipling and discipline. There is not much taste for that expression of church life, in the current milieu of individualism. We have noted that those in cohort B are, if anything, more inclined towards the disciplined congregation than are those from cohort A. Similarly, if communion was traditionally a sign of communalism and mutual commitment within the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition, it appears that there is some ambivalence on that matter at Hillcrest, especially among those persons who have come from another tradition. For them communion tends to be a private matter between them and God. So we see that these two Anabaptist indicators are not as strong as some others. Should there be some concern among those who lead the congregation in worship? The signs of communion and footwashing are not very highly valued as worship experiences by those who worship

at Hillcrest, yet they have traditionally been important indicators of community and commitment.

On the matter of adult versus infant baptism, those who have always been Mennonite agreed to the same degree as those respondents to the Mennonite Church survey of 1989 that baptism is neither necessary nor proper for infants and small children. However, only 54% of those in cohort B were in agreement with this statement. Some of those persons come from a believers church tradition, others from a paedobaptist tradition. It is presumably the latter who are not in agreement with the Anabaptist-Mennonite position on adult baptism.

There are several implications for ministry and worship. Pastors at Hillcrest Mennonite Church, as in a number of congregations within the Conference have not generally made adult baptism (rebaptism) a prerequisite for church membership for those from paedobaptist traditions who wish to become members of the congregation. The rationale which is usually given is that we should not focus so much on the mode of baptism as on the present stated faith of the applicant for membership. If there is a clear witness to a personal commitment to Christ and the Church, the person is welcome to become a member by confession of faith. However, the option of rebaptism is clearly presented to these persons, some of whom have chosen that as an expression of their faith and commitment to Christ and the local Mennonite church.

Related concerns for ministry and worship emerge. Often persons from paedobaptist backgrounds wish to see a more open form of communion, in which their children could also participate, without having been baptized. There have also been some persons from cohort A who have expressed this wish to be more inclusive. Clearly this is a two-sided issue. On one hand, people and leaders of the Hillcrest congregation wish to be as inclusive as possible, therefore are inclined to relax some of the traditional application of the signs of the church - baptism and communion. But on the other hand, the question remains: How many different signs can carry the same

message without alteration of the code? We might well ask Schreiter's question: "How many different ways can there be of celebrating the same Eucharist before the meaning of that Eucharist begins to come apart?"<sup>146</sup> Will the desire for inclusivity eventually begin to erode the important Anabaptist-Mennonite conviction that we should be Christians by choice, not by birth? Will there emerge the kind of *volkskirche* that Anabaptists reacted against in the sixteenth century?

The second point which Schreiter makes concerning what happens when tradition encounters local theology is as follows:

2. *Closely related to the question of the range of diversity is the possibility of syncretism, that is, a dilution and loss of the Christian message in the local context.*

As we have noted above, Hillcrest is generally situated fairly well within the realms of orthodox Christian theology on matters such as belief in the existence of God and the two natures of Christ, with no significant variation between cohorts A and B. The persons in the cohort group under age 40 are considerably less in agreement than older persons in the congregation. They are in particular less certain about the two natures of Christ. As one such interviewee stated: "Among my friends, 'God' is the term we can embrace most freely; in an intellectual sense (and about) the whole 'Redeemer' thing, that Jesus Christ is the only way to God, a person must be a Christian to be saved, I tend toward Jesus as a historical figure more (*sic*)." There is some reaction among younger persons, with higher education, against the exclusive claims of Christianity. This question has also emerged a number of times among middle-aged persons in the adult education classes of the congregation. How far down the path of inclusivity can one go without being in danger of the possibility of syncretism, a dilution and loss of the Christian message?

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<sup>146</sup>*Ibid.*, 102.



To return to the imagery of the three-legged stool with regard to the Trinity which we used in Chapter One, Anabaptist-Mennonites today tend to lengthen the leg of Christ, the second person of the Trinity. This is not a high Christology. Jesus is seen more as the Master Teacher to be followed in daily life than as the second person of the Trinity who is to be worshipped as Lord of the universe. Thus, though there may remain a degree of trinitarian thought at the secondary level of discourse, one might ask whether at some points the functional theology of the congregation at worship tends toward being unitarian.

As we have seen in Chapter Five some of those who have come from other denominational backgrounds have been accustomed to hear trinitarian formulae routinely expressed in worship. They added however that they did not from that experience gain any clear sense of the meaning of the Trinity. It would seem then that should Hillcrest begin to use trinitarian language more regularly in worship, this may need to be accompanied by some teaching or preaching on the meaning of trinitarian address of God in worship.

The third point which Schreiter makes concerning what happens when the tradition encounters local theology is as follows:

3. *A step back from the possibility of syncretism leads one to deal with the discontinuities that arise in the local theology in a given culture. In this situation, the theology as it is developing in a local setting lays significantly different emphasis on the relationships between parts of the tradition, and may be missing some parts altogether.*

The problem stated by Schreiter above invites a return to the image of a jigsaw puzzle. As we have attempted to assemble the pieces of data from the survey and the interviews, what pieces appear to be missing? This in itself might have been a significant question to pose to the respondents, both in the interviews and in the survey questionnaire. That would have further spoken to personal preferences and tastes in worship. This has, however, not been the central or defining purpose of the

present study. We did note in Chapter Seven that there are varieties of religious experience. For pastoral purposes, one might conclude that each style of spirituality as experienced in the primary theology of each worshipper is legitimate. Is there however a degree of incompleteness if one, in Ware's terms, stays too much in one quadrant of the Spirituality Wheel? And this could be true of the corporate group of worshippers as well.

The evidence from the survey and interviews seems to suggest that the piece of the puzzle which is most absent is a strong sense of the transcendent in worship. The congregation may not, as Klaassen said, humanize God so much that we locate Him solely in other people and we end up praying to each other. But there is at Hillcrest a very strong emphasis on communalism in worship, in which the horizontal relationships take precedence over the vertical. At best, this indicates a clear expression and experience of the immanence of God, an incarnational theology. At worst, it can be seen as a slide towards secularism. To prevent the latter from happening, it seems that Hillcrest church needs to constantly find ways to express that they meet not only as a congenial group, but as a new humanity in Christ, in whose name and presence they worship by God's Spirit. They need to conduct worship that confirms in each other the awareness of the unfailing nearness and constant love of God our Creator and Redeemer. In short, they need to rediscover the richness of Trinitarian worship.

There may be other, smaller or larger, pieces missing as one lays the primary theology expressed in the local setting alongside the tradition, in the Anabaptist-Mennonite heritage. One missing piece which we identified above is that of the disciplined church that calls its members to accountability. The willingness to "give and receive counsel" as the older baptismal vows used to affirm is no longer so much present in the individualistic era in which the congregation finds itself today.

However, an aspect of this can be retained as people continue to desire to remain engaged in the decision-making and formation of congregational life and worship and work. They do not desire a discipline from the top down, but they may still be willing to engage each other in dialogue, to discern as the New Testament Church did "what seems good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Acts 15:28). Thus when a piece appears to be missing, we might together discern a piece of a different shape that will fill the gap. Indeed, we might well challenge the assumption that to be faithful to the tradition, congregational life and worship must always take on a certain particular shape. This leads us to the fourth point which Schreiter makes, as follows.

4. *Finally, if one believes that the purpose of the encounter of local theology with the tradition is to test, affirm, and challenge the new expression of faith, when is it not only legitimate to challenge that expression, but necessary to do so?*

Schreiter goes on to say: "All would agree that it is important not to lapse into a cultural romanticism, whereby any cultural form is automatically accepted as a vehicle of Christ in culture."<sup>147</sup> There are two ditches one can drive into on this matter. On one hand is the extreme acculturation to the local setting, which is sometimes too easily expressed in the radical congregationalism of some Mennonite churches. On the other hand is paternalism which insists on centralized denominational authority, perhaps more indicative of the Roman Catholic Church tradition from within which Schreiter writes. The two sides must be kept in a healthy tension. He describes the two sides of the dialectic as follows:

The Christian tradition is too precious a heritage to be squandered carelessly or treated lightly. But without its continued incarnation in local communities it becomes like that treasure buried in the ground, producing no profit (Matthew 25:18).<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>147</sup>*Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>148</sup>*Ibid.*, 103.

The Christian tradition (general orthodox and Anabaptist) in which Hillcrest church stands could be carelessly squandered if it were not continually placed before its children and youth as a worthwhile inheritance. The congregation makes considerable effort to be intergenerational in its activities, especially in corporate worship. In recent years they have begun to adopt a "Four Keys" approach to nourish the seeds of faith. The four keys are: 1) caring conversation 2) worship/devotions 3) service 4) rituals and traditions. Young families especially are encouraged to practise these Four Keys in their homes, supported by the corporate life, work and worship of the congregation. One can never assume that children of the church will have faith. Faith must be nurtured and the stories of faith passed on "from generation to generation" (Luke 1:50, Psalm 78).

As the congregation does this, they pass on the received faith of the tradition in which they stand. This is a gift to their children, but as we know, a gift needs to be received. It is by baptism and other expressions of Christian commitment that youth in the church express their acceptance of the grace gifts. But, to play on words for a moment, must a gift always remain a "given?" That is to say, can it be shaped and reshaped by those who receive it, in that primary theology of personal experience? Schreiter seems to say that without such continued local incarnation the treasure of the received faith lies buried and without profit.

This has implications for how we understand and assess the data from the research project conducted in Hillcrest Mennonite Church. One could measure the responses of various cohorts (e.g. gender, age, level of education) against certain norms, (the received faith), and consequently devalue certain responses when compared to others. Rather, when there appears to be a significant variation in the data, there is an opportunity for further dialogue to discover what those variations might mean. In

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other words, one needs to be careful not to make this a "test" which some people fail and others pass with flying colours. In particular, our goal is not to compare cohort A and cohort B with the intention of creating a great divide in the congregation. This is not a competition but is rather a joint venture of faith.

In any case, careful examination shows that there is often as much variation within each cohort as there is between them, when we add gender, age and level of education to the mix. Here again the spiritual typologies such as the Myers-Briggs or Holmes-Ware schemas help us to understand the value of various kinds of spiritual expressions in the primary theology of the worshippers in the congregation. We really do need each other in the life of the congregation. We need persons who live within another "quadrant" of the Spirituality Wheel to complete that which we may lack in ourselves. Thus we could make the case for individuality in the life of the church, both the individuality of persons within the congregation and the individual uniqueness of the congregation within its denomination.

This viewpoint not only tolerates but invites change, so that individuals and congregations will experience real faith in the real context in which they live. It also raises the possibility that those who come to us from other traditions may well have something in their beliefs, experiences and practices which we have lacked and from which we could derive great benefits.

### **B. The Value of Continuity and Tradition in Congregational Life**

Schreier says we also can make the case for the important contribution of continuity and tradition to human community, and I would add, to the life of the congregation. He suggests three important contributions of tradition to human community. First of all, tradition provides resources for identity; it is one of the stakes

which holds up the Sacred Canopy, to use Berger's term. It provides a group boundary dividing the world into "us" and "not-us", says Schreiter.<sup>149</sup> Anabaptist-Mennonites have a long history of viewing themselves as "a people apart." In recent years this has been viewed negatively by its members who have had a significant urge to "fit in" to larger society. Perhaps the church will come full circle to once again seek to maintain its own unique place both within broader Christendom and in the world. As we noted above, most of the markers indicate that Hillcrest Mennonite Church is, for the most part, solidly lodged within the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition. We need to continue to express these boundary markers so that our children will understand the tradition in which they stand and accept this "given" as a gift of grace. Hillcrest church is not so solidly lodged within the general orthodox Christian faith as expressed in trinitarian worship. This is of considerable concern, lest the functional theology of the congregation at worship becomes increasingly unitarian.

The second aspect which tradition contributes to human community, according to Schreiter, is "a communication system providing cohesion and continuity in the community. In this sense tradition as a body of lore, includes stories, activities, memories, and the rules governing group boundary and world-view formation."<sup>150</sup> Mennonites in North America have been viewed for many years as an ethnic group, with all of the folklore that adheres to that. This has served to maintain a strong sense of identity and internal cohesiveness. But what are the implications for witness and outreach to the broader society? On the surface, given the preponderance of those who have always been Mennonite, Hillcrest is very much a homogeneous group with Amish Mennonite roots and all the sense of being a unique people which that entails.

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<sup>149</sup>*Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>150</sup>*Ibid.*, 105.

But this is swiftly changing. How will people coming into the group find their path of identification with the congregation, if it is defined in terms of its ethnicity? In this regard, if it wishes to draw others into its fellowship, the congregation needs to differentiate the essential aspects of faith from the non-essential localized cultural manifestations of it. It needs to invite persons who join from other religious traditions to tell their stories, as well as hearing the stories from within the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition. Will these stories of life and faith then add new zest and flavour to the Anabaptist-Mennonite "soup stock" of congregational worship which we identified in an earlier chapter? Or will it so dilute the basic stock that worship at Hillcrest is no longer recognizable as Anabaptist-Mennonite? What will be lost or gained if that should happen?

That brings us to the third contribution that tradition offers to human community and the church, according to Schreiter. He says that tradition provides resources for incorporating innovation into a society. He goes on to say:

When a culture (for our purposes, congregation) is confronted on a regular basis with new data that need to be dealt with, one of two things happens to the culture. Either it becomes invigorated by the expansion and transformation of its codes in accommodating the new signs; or the codes, unable to accommodate the signs and basic messages to one another and to the tradition as a communication network, cease to provide cohesion and continuity to a culture, resulting in its breakdown.<sup>151</sup>

Within the paradigm stated above, we see the potential of Hillcrest Mennonite Church being invigorated by the influx of persons from other traditions, as well as by the innovations brought in by younger persons as they study and live and work and sometimes worship in other contexts. Too much change all at once creates the breakdown of community. The Amish heritage within which Hillcrest stands has been suspicious of change. Yet people at Hillcrest have from its inception as a

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<sup>151</sup>*Ibid.*, 106, 107.

congregation perceived themselves to be on the cutting edge of innovation. The middle-aged or older persons continue to carry this self-image. They remember that they came from East Zorra to form a unique and innovative congregation. Younger persons however, who were not part of that early experience, may well see the congregation as quite staid and stable. Here too is room for dialogue, in this important dialectic between continuity and change in the life and worship of the church. The congregation needs to accommodate change if it wishes to ensure a viable future, both by holding its own youth, and by reaching out to others. But it also needs to maintain a sense of continuity with the past if it wishes to ensure that it stands faithfully within the received faith and the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition.

Thus, using Robert Schreiter's framework, we have briefly examined four problems which arise when Christian tradition encounters local theology. We have also examined the importance of continuity and tradition to the life of the Hillcrest Mennonite Church. Though Schreiter writes from within the Catholic tradition, his concerns are transferable across the denominations. However, we would do well also to let Mennonites speak for themselves on the matter of the future of the Mennonite Church as it stands at the cross-road between its traditions and the present realities. We turn to some current Mennonite literature in this regard, as follows.

### **C. Mennonite Identity and Witness in the Postmodern Age**

Bluffton (Mennonite) College, in cooperation with the Mennonite Historical Society, inaugurated the new C. Henry Smith Series of books with the publication of *Anabaptists and Postmodernity*. The assumption which underlies the series is that Mennonites are affected by the challenges of postmodernity. However, the series of books projected for the C. Henry Smith Series is not about postmodernity or the series of conditions and challenges of early-twenty-first century North American culture per se. "Rather," says J. Denny Weaver, the series editor, "the series will specifically



address theological, cultural, social and historical issues raised for Anabaptists by the ferment in North American and Western society."<sup>152</sup> The concern of the series is the future faithfulness of Anabaptists and the Mennonite churches.

Gerald Biesecker-Mast wrote the chapter in *Anabaptists and Postmodernity* "Recovering the Anabaptist Body (To Separate It for the World)."<sup>153</sup> He reminds us already in the subtitle of the chapter that even in the postmodern era, visibility and separation continue to define Anabaptist-Mennonites from the world in which they live. The contemporaries of the Anabaptists in the Reformation movements could assume, as did Augustine before them, that wheat and tares should be left to grow up together in the church. Anabaptists however could only accept a visible church, "without spot or wrinkle" as they would say. They refused to acknowledge the Erasmian dualistic worldview that distinguishes between the ideal of Christ and the necessary imperfection of Christ's church; nor could they tolerate the Lutheran distinction between the inner spiritual kingdom and the outer, material world. They were left with a more radical distinction, between "darkness and light, the world and those who are come out of the world."<sup>154</sup>

The point Biesecker-Mast is making is that Mennonites have a strong tradition of separation from the world, in terms that are both concrete and literal. He adds that, unfortunately, that goal of separation not only divides the church from the world but also the church from itself. Mennonite splintering has hardly ever been about differing

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<sup>152</sup>Susan Biesecker-Mast and Gerald Biesecker-Mast, editors, *Anabaptists and Postmodernity* (Telford, Pennsylvania: Pandora Press U.S., copublished with Herald Press, Scottdale, Pennsylvania, 2,000), 12,13.

<sup>153</sup>*Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>154</sup>*Ibid.*, 196. Who also quotes article IV of the Schleithem *Brotherly Union*, John Howard Yoder, trans. and ed., *The Legacy of Michael Sattler* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1973), 38.

points of theology, but rather over this one point: "How shall we live and act faithfully in the world so that people know that we are a people "separated unto God?" While we may well agree with Schreiter's first point, that unity is one of the signs of God's church, we have never believed in unity at all costs. Sjouke Voolstra, a Dutch Mennonite whom Biesecker-Mast cites, offers a perspective on this matter when he says: "The pursuit of holiness is always at odds with the pursuit of unity, whether of church and society or of the church itself."<sup>155</sup>

I cite this work to provide a framework within which to evaluate what happens when Anabaptist-Mennonite theology encounters the local theology (to paraphrase Schreiter's words). Have Mennonites in general, and people at Hillcrest Mennonite Church in particular, lost the sense of being a peculiar people, a people set apart from the world? If so, what is lost and what is gained when this occurs? Surely what is at stake is the congregation's unique Mennonite identity and witness in the world. Without retaining that, it will be in danger of blending into some kind of amorphous general Protestantism.

Ted Regehr, in Volume III of the *Mennonites in Canada* series, describes the Mennonite Church in Canada between 1939-1970. In his conclusion he states that if he had to name one defining issue that continues to separate Mennonites from the rest of Christendom it is that notion of the Lordship of Christ, whom we follow as disciples. 'The Lordship of Christ' was the theme of the Mennonite World Conference held in Kitchener, Ontario in 1962. The presidium wanted a theme that would focus on issue that 'concern us as Christians and Churches in the light of contemporary

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<sup>155</sup>*Ibid.*, 196. Who also cites Sjouke Voolstra, "'The colony of heaven': The Anabaptist aspiration to be a church without spot or wrinkle in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries," in *From Martyr to Muppy*, ed. Alastair Hamilton, Sjouke Voolstra, and Piet Visser (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1994), 21.

conditions.<sup>156</sup> This theme, says Regehr, had particular relevance to the Canadian situation where Mennonites had lived for decades in communities in which they sought to separate themselves from the world. They had always believed that their own families, congregations and communities should be under the Lordship of Christ. But in 1962, having begun to venture into the outside world, Mennonites in Kitchener boldly proclaimed:

We acknowledge Jesus our Saviour to be the Lord of our lives in everything. We accept His call to full discipleship. We pledge our obedience to Him and His Word, and dedicate ourselves unreservedly to His cause and Kingdom. We commit ourselves to the Way of life which the gospel and His teaching require.<sup>157</sup>

They were saying in that Conference that all of life must be brought into harmony and wholeness under the Lordship of Christ, allowing for no distinction between sacred and secular. Belief in the lordship of Christ includes all of life; even daily work is included in it. Nothing is too secular to be placed under the Lordship of Christ.

Almost forty years later Gerald Biesecker-Mast expresses a similar view when he says:

We must find a way to live our theology, not merely affirm it. We must learn to become motivated at our very core of being to follow Christ and not merely assent to his views. To do this we must teach a gospel of action and discipleship, of lived faith, and of moral fruits.<sup>158</sup>

Biesecker-Mast reminds the Mennonite Church that our visibility and separation from

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<sup>156</sup>T.D. Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada - 1939-1970: A People Transformed* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 410. Who also quotes AMC MCC Records, file X-9-7, Minutes of the Presidium of the Mennonite World Conference, Bienenberg/Liestal, Switzerland, 1 Aug. 1958.

<sup>157</sup>*Ibid.*, 410. Who also quotes 'The Message of the Seventh World Conference to the Mennonite Congregations of the World,' CM, 10, no.32 (17 Aug.1962), 2.

<sup>158</sup>*Ibid.*, 198.

the world in a life of discipleship begins at baptism. "The baptismal texts of Romans 6 put to rest any idea of God's grace as excuse for moral relativism," he says. He continues: "They provide a theological basis for believers' churches to seek to become communities of regeneration, hope, and healing."<sup>159</sup> For as Paul asks: "How can we who died to sin go on living in it?" Thus baptism in the believers church, the tradition in which Hillcrest Mennonite Church stands, is an important milestone along the journey of discipleship. If baptism is the covenant-making event, communion is the covenant-renewal event for Anabaptist-Mennonites. And accompanying both is the willingness on the part of fellow Christians in the church to give and receive counsel.

Hillcrest Mennonite Church scores high on indicators of communalism. People enjoy being with each other. They report that this is one of the primary reasons they meet to worship. While this is cause for celebration, it is also cause for sober reflection as one asks Will it last; can it last? Communalism may well last so long as the majority of the congregation has strong family connections within Hillcrest church. However, what will hold the congregation together when an increasing number of persons come from other contexts who are not connected by family ties? What will happen when an increasing number of persons in the congregation no longer share the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition within which it stands? Will the congregation then count on its congeniality to hold people together? The Anabaptist vision is that a congregation is held together by the glue of covenant commitment to Christ and each other in the midst of the congregation. Hillcrest will need to continue to hold a vision of being a covenanting community of faith.

A number of persons in Hillcrest Mennonite Church attended the Mennonite World Conference sessions in Kitchener in 1962, just two years before Hillcrest was

<sup>159</sup>*Ibid.*, 199.

established as a congregation. They may not remember the message to the Mennonite Church which was produced from that Conference session, cited above. But the Mennonite Church continues to offer words to live by in the world today. Just such a word is the vision statement, "Vision: Healing and Hope," developed for the Mennonite Church in the U.S. and Canada in the last decade of the twentieth century. It says:

God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace, so that God's healing and hope flow through us to the world.<sup>160</sup>

This statement has been distributed to all congregations in the Mennonite Church in North America. Though the language has a different style and tone from that of the World Conference statement of 1962, it too calls for its members to live under the Lordship of Christ. It is a faithful contemporary statement of the historical tradition Anabaptist-Mennonite in which we stand. Hillcrest Mennonite Church would do well to continue to be guided by such a vision.

In this concluding chapter we have thus far spoken much about the need for the Hillcrest congregation to appropriate the tradition within which it stands. We need to address yet what this means from the viewpoint of the individual worshipper who has his or her own particular style of spirituality and primary theology. Corinne Ware, while very much concerned with how each individual may discover his or her own spiritual type, is nonetheless fully aware that individuals do not exist in a historical vacuum. Ware speaks of the importance of knowing our own tradition as follows:

Each faith group has its character and flavor. It is marked by choices made by others in the past and agreed to by subsequent generations. If your faith group is characterized by a distinctive spirituality, there are reasons behind that

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<sup>160</sup>Adopted by the General Assemblies of the Mennonite Church and the General Conference Mennonite Church in 1995.

distinction; you will want to consider seriously whether that spirituality has value for you. Different faith groups exist because they bring choice to the mix. At some time in the past someone wanted and perhaps fought for an alternative to the status quo, and that legacy is what you now have. It is possible, even desirable, that faith groups should change to reflect growth and new insight or to respond to outside need. Such changes are serious and should be carefully thought out.<sup>161</sup>

What would it mean for Hillcrest to "bring choice to the mix" as Ware says? It means that those who minister and lead in worship do not impose changes onto the congregation without some degree of consultation and explanation. Innovation needs to take place with a purpose. Let me illustrate. If, as I stated earlier in an earlier chapter, there is a perception that Hillcrest worship is quite horizontal in its orientation, that probably reflects the preference of the majority of worshippers. However, they may from time to time feel the need for a more clear sense of the transcendent in worship, more typical of the affective-apophatic type (type 3) which we saw in Ware's schema. For those in type 3, the yearning for silence is often like a deep thirst. Those who lead in worship might consider ways to include silence in the worship service. They may need to introduce it so that those who do not feel as comfortable with this style of spirituality may be encouraged to experience it.

Conversely, in the interviews I heard a number of persons express appreciation for a more informal worship in which people participate and get in touch with each other through the telling of faith stories, and literally get in touch by surrounding each other in prayer and holding hands to pray. Those who lead in worship can facilitate this affective-kataphatic style of worship by experimentation. Again, for those who feel less comfortable with this style of worship, some explanation and encouragement needs to take place.

These two examples illustrate several of the issues which Ware introduces in the quotation which I cited above, concerning the dynamic interplay of personal

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<sup>161</sup>Ware, *Discover Your Spiritual Type*, 78.

preferences and the tradition in which one stands. We need to recognize that while each group (congregation) has its character and flavor, it is never exclusively so. The congregation can invite people to sometimes try to live within another type or style of spirituality, both so that persons who normally function within that type can also have their needs met, but also so that persons may become more complete by not living always within a fixed style of spirituality. The element of choice is important, both the choices made by people in the past, which we have inherited as a gift and a "given", and the choices which need to be made in the present in our walk with God and each other in the midst of the congregation. Above all, as Ware says, "we are not engaged in a competition but a journey."<sup>162</sup>

We find that the primary theology or experienced faith of the individual worshipper is both shaped by the corporate worship which he or she experiences, and also helps to shape the congregational worship. This is never static. We need to pay attention to the ongoing dialectic of continuity and change and growth both within each individual worshipper and in the gathered group which shapes the functional theology of the congregation at worship. Sometimes change takes place by a kind of subconscious evolution; sometimes it takes place through conscious choice and decisions of the congregation. Sometimes one cannot tell until years later that something has changed or remained largely the same. That is the value of doing the kind of research which this project has entailed. By looking at where they have been, the congregation and its leadership might well find good ways to decide its future directions.

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<sup>162</sup>*Ibid.*, 79.

#### **D. Goals For Future Ministry At Hillcrest Mennonite Church**

We conclude by reviewing the goals for this thesis project and stating some goals for the future which emerge from my assessment of the congregation in the research project. With respect to each of the goals which were identified in Chapter Four, I shall state what is the apparent outcome for the future direction of the Hillcrest congregation, given what we have discovered. Then I shall state goals for future ministry and worship at Hillcrest. These ministry goals appear in italics.

1. Our first goal has been to discover how the primary theology as experienced in corporate worship relates to the received faith of general Christian orthodoxy. We have examined to what extent the primary theology reported by the respondents is in agreement with general Christian orthodoxy. In particular we have noted the key element of trinitarian theology at the heart of Christian doctrine and therefore at the heart of Christian worship. The research has indicated that persons in Hillcrest Mennonite Church are either not certain about trinitarian thought, or in some cases may not adhere to that theology at all. My concern is that the congregation will eventually lapse into a kind of amorphous unitarianism, lacking a clear sense of who it is they worship in Jesus' name.

*The goal for ministry is to more routinely use the trinitarian formula in worship, so that it becomes part of the functional theology of the worshipping community, inviting people to worship God, through Christ, in the power of the Spirit. Some teaching and preaching concerning the Trinity will need to occur so that people will grow in their understanding of trinitarian language and thought.*

2. The second goal of the research project was to discover from the reported data to what extent people who worship at Hillcrest maintain an Anabaptist-Mennonite theology and consequently have an Anabaptist-Mennonite understanding of worship. We have ascertained that the congregation as a whole scores high on most Anabaptist indicators, especially those which are related to peace and justice. We have, however,



also noted several areas which bear further examination and are cause for concern. I shall deal with these in terms of what I perceive to be a logical sequence, that is, beliefs and practices which naturally follow each other.

a) First of all, we have noted a lack of clarity about the call to regeneration or "the new birth." This is particularly true of two cohorts, those who have come from other traditions, and those from within the tradition who are under forty years of age. Our first line of witness as we seek to make disciples needs to be with our own youth. There are clear implications for Christian education and nurture, as well as outreach. And there are clear implications for how the call to commitment is expressed in worship.

*A goal for ministry and worship is to regularly extend a call to Christian commitment, which leads to personal regeneration (i.e. "new birth.") and which is expressed in the changed life of Christian discipleship in daily life.*

b) The second area of concern, which follows from the first, has to do with believers' baptism. While the vast majority of the overall group, and 90% of those who have always been Mennonite, affirm believers' baptism, many of those who come from other faith traditions do not. Also, those persons under age forty are less inclined towards holding to this tenet of Anabaptist belief. Hillcrest church may well be on the slippery slope of being Christian by convention, more than by conviction; of being Christian by birth, more than by choice.

*The goal for ministry and worship is to call people to believers baptism, in which the baptismal vows sound a clarion call to Christian discipleship "in newness of life" (Romans 6: 4) and to commitment to walk with God and each other in the life, work and witness of the congregation.*

c) A third aspect which we noted, which follows from the above, is an erosion of the willingness to live in covenanted disciplined community. The congregation scored very low on the Anabaptist indicator that the congregation should practise a thorough church discipline so that faltering or unfaithful members can be built up and restored.

Such discipline is not arbitrarily imposed; it stems from a clear sense of covenant. Traditional Mennonite baptismal vows called baptismal candidates to join with the congregation in "giving and receiving counsel." Anabaptists understood baptism to be a covenant making event, and communion which follows, a covenant renewal event. Hillcrest appears to be faltering on those understandings of the signs of the covenant.

*A goal for ministry and worship is to invite congregants to a regular process of giving and receiving counsel, and to express this covenant in various ways, including, but not limited to, the signs of baptism and communion.*

3. The third goal which we identified in Chapter Four is to raise an awareness of people's primary theology (experience) of worship and their expressions of spirituality in order to assist those who minister and lead the people in worship. We noted in Table 4-5 that only 57% of the total cohort report that they pray daily, and only 30% read the Bible at least once each week. We noted furthermore that of those who do report reading scripture and praying regularly, most do not do so in depth; it seems brief and cursory. What will nurture them in faith on a daily basis as they leave the place of worship to meet the world? And, with regard to the gathered community at worship, there is the danger that the lack of depth in a personal devotional life contributes to a more shallow corporate worship.

In an article in Canadian Mennonite, Matthew Bailey-Dick says:

We each have two legs. One is the leg of spirituality and personal faith, of prayerful devotion. The other is the leg of peacemaking and working for justice, of engagement with the world, of politics.<sup>163</sup>

He goes on to reflect that some hop on one leg or the other, but we need to learn to use both legs. After all, Jesus said both "Blessed are the pure in heart" and "Blessed are the peacemakers." We cannot be whole persons if we hop on the leg of spirituality

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<sup>163</sup>Matthew Bailey-Dick, "Running with a vision, not hopping on one foot" (Canadian Mennonite, Waterloo, Ontario: Mennonite Publishing Service, Dec. 11, 2,000), 7.

and personal piety on one hand, or on the leg of peacemaking and social justice on the other. He calls us to let the Holy Spirit invigorate both legs.<sup>164</sup>

*The ministry goal that emerges from this is to invite people to engage both in the "journey inward" and the "journey outward." Those who minister at Hillcrest should give leadership in providing practical opportunities to engage in each area, in personal piety and in social engagement. Doing the will of God in daily life should be informed by bible study and nurtured by prayer.*

As I interviewed seventeen persons concerning their experience of God in worship, I felt I was standing on holy ground. I also believe that many of those who were interviewed were glad for the opportunity to articulate their experience and be heard. More of these conversations could take place in the life of the congregation.

*A goal for pastoral care that emerges from this is to continue to engage people in conversation about their spirituality and expressions of faith. Pastoral care, among other things, should include the question "How are you experiencing God?"*

*A goal for worship ministry is that worship, among other things, should include opportunity for people to share their experience of God with the congregation. The sharing of joys and concerns before the prayer of the congregation should also invite people to bear witness to their faith.*

So we have explored the thesis that the functional theology of a congregation at worship, of which Hillcrest Mennonite Church is the case study, is comprised of the interplay of the received faith or tradition in which we stand and the primary theology as experienced by the worshippers, individually and corporately. We have said, furthermore, that the theology of the individual worshippers both helps to shape the theology of the congregation at worship, and is in turn shaped by the worship experience. Those who worship at Hillcrest must continually seek to understand this dynamic dialectic between tradition and experience and be responsive to what the Spirit is telling the congregation as they meet each week with God and each other as the body of Christ, the Church. Those who minister and lead in worship at Hillcrest

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<sup>164</sup>*Ibid.*, 8.

Mennonite Church must be ready to present a clear vision of who the congregation is as an Anabaptist-Mennonite community of faith, uniquely situated within the larger Christian community.

**Interview questions regarding ( Appendix A )  
primary ( experienced ) theology in worship**

**1. *When you come to worship, how are you aware of God?***

- a) When you come to worship, what awareness or image of God seems most significant to you? In other words, do you have thoughts about God or a mental picture of the God whom you have come to worship?
- b) Are there certain feelings attached to God as you come to worship?
- c) Does your awareness of God shift or change during the course of worship?

**2. *Describe who Jesus is to you, when you worship.***

- a) What image of Jesus seems most significant to you?
- b) Are there certain feelings attached to Jesus as you come to worship?

**3. *Describe who the Holy Spirit is to you, when you worship.***

- a) What role does the Spirit play for you, as you come to worship?
- b) Are there certain feelings attached to the Holy Spirit as you come to worship?

**4. *We have spoken of God, ( Father/Creator ) Jesus Christ, ( Son/ Redeemer ) and the Holy Spirit ( Sustainer )- the three persons of the Trinity. Which of these three aspects of God do you tend to be most aware of when you worship? Why?***

**5. *What happens to you when you ( we ) pray in church?***

- a) What happens in your relationship with God?  
Your relationship with others?  
Your relationship with the world beyond the church?
- b) Are certain emotions connected with prayer?  
Certain thoughts? Or questions?

**6. *What happens to you when you listen to a sermon?***

- a) What happens in your relationship with God? With others?  
Your relationship with the world beyond the church?  
What images of God are evoked for you as you listen to a sermon?
- b) Are certain feelings connected to preaching? Certain thoughts?  
Or questions?

**7. *What happens to you as you sing in church?***

- a) What happens in your relationship with God? With others?  
What happens in your relationship to the world beyond the church?
- b) Are there certain feelings attached to singing? Certain thoughts?  
Or questions?

**8. *What happens to you as you hear scriptures read in church?***

- a) What happens in your awareness of God when scriptures are read? Your relationship with others?  
Your relationship with the world beyond the church?
- b) What feelings, thoughts or questions come to mind when you hear scriptures read in church?

**9. *What happens to you as you participate in communion and receive the emblems?***

- a) What happens in your relationship with God? With others?  
What happens in your relationship to the world beyond the church?
- b) What feelings are attached to communion? What thoughts?  
Questions?

**10.a) *What aspects of corporate ( congregational ) worship are most meaningful to you? Why?***

- b) What draws you to come to church for worship?
- c) What needs are met for you in worship?

**11. *As an individual, worship can occur in various settings, including church, but not limited to church.***

- a) In what settings are you most aware of being in God's presence in a worshipful way?
- b) In what ways is our church setting conducive/not conducive to worship for you?

**12. *What do you think are some key beliefs or values Mennonites or you as a Mennonite hold as they ( you ) come to worship?***

## A. Life Situation [ Appendix B ]

1. Your gender: 1 male 2 female
2. Your age 1 under 20 2 between 20-29 3 between 30-39  
4 between 40-49 5 between 50-59 6 60 and older
3. Church membership: 1 am a member at Hillcrest 2 am an adherent at Hillcrest
4. Denominational background: 1 have always been Mennonite  
2 have come from another denomination
5. Number of years in attendance at Hillcrest: 1 less than 5 years 2 6-10 years  
3 11 - 20 years 4 more than 20 years
6. How much formal schooling have you had?  
Circle the number of the highest category completed:
  - 1 less than eight grades
  - 2 completed elementary school
  - 3 some high school, but not enough to graduate
  - 4 high school or trade school graduate
  - 5 community college diploma
  - 6 university degree ( undergraduate )
  - 7 some graduate or professional school, but not enough for a degree
  - 8 graduate or professional degree

## B. Spiritual Pilgrimage

People in the church differ greatly in the way they discover God and express their spirituality through life. Following is a series of items about religious experiences, attitudes, and activities. Circle the number of the **one** answer that is correct for you. If in doubt, choose the answer which is **closest** to your situation.

7. There are varieties of religious experiences. Which of the following **most closely** describes your experience? ( Circle one )
  - 1 I had a dramatic conversion experience.
  - 2 I made a conscious and personal decision to be a follower of Christ.
  - 3 I gradually grew in my faith commitment through the influence and nurture of my family and the church.
  - 4 I am still searching and have not made a clear commitment to Christ.

8. In general, how close do you describe your present relationship to God? ( Circle one )
- 1 quite unrelated
  - 2 rather distant
  - 3 between distant and close
  - 4 fairly close
  - 5 close
  - 6 very close
9. To what extent are you conscious of some spiritual goal or purpose in life which serves to give direction to your life? ( Circle one )
- 1 I am not aware of such a goal or purpose.
  - 2 I have a rather vague feeling of purpose.
  - 3 I am somewhat conscious of such a goal or purpose.
  - 4 I definitely feel guided by a spiritual life goal.
10. In regard to the quality of your spiritual life, which of the following best describes your progress during the past couple of years? ( Circle one )
- 1 I am making definite progress.
  - 2 I am making a little progress.
  - 3 I am staying about the same.
  - 4 I have lost ground a little.
  - 5 I have definitely lost ground.
11. When you have decisions to make in your everyday life, how often do you ask yourself what God would want you to do? ( Circle one )
- 1 never
  - 2 seldom
  - 3 sometimes
  - 4 often
  - 5 very often
12. Other than at mealtime, how often do you pray to God privately on the average? ( Circle one )
- 1 never
  - 2 seldom
  - 3 occasionally
  - 4 daily
  - 5 several times per day



13. How often do you study the Bible privately, seeking to understand it and letting it speak to you? ( Circle one )
- 1 never
  - 2 seldom
  - 3 occasionally
  - 4 frequently ( at least once a week but not daily )
  - 5 daily
- If you answered 1 (never ) or 2 ( seldom ), skip question #14*
14. People nurture their spirituality in various ways, and use different terms to describe that experience, for example "spiritual disciplines" or "the devotional life." Which of the following **most closely** describes your experience in this regard? ( Circle one )
- 1 I read a short passage of scripture or other inspirational reading, and offer a brief prayer.
  - 2 I spend 15-20 minutes in fairly intense engagement with the devotional reading and in prayer.
  - 3 I spend 30 minutes or more, in reading, keeping a journal, and in silent reflection and prayer.
  - 4 I fairly regularly spend part or all of a day in a spiritual retreat, in reading, keeping a journal and in reflection and prayer.
15. People in the church vary greatly in how they discover God and express their spirituality throughout life. Following are four "spiritual types" which have been identified. Circle the number of the type which **most closely** represents you.
- 1 A Head Spirituality. An intellectual "thinking" spirituality that favors what I can see, touch and vividly imagine, experienced for example through a good sermon or study group.
  - 2 A Heart Spirituality. A spirituality which is expressed in terms of an emotionally moving experience more in touch with feelings.
  - 3 A Mystic Spirituality. I am as inclined to *hear from* God as to *speak to* God. I am by nature contemplative, intuitive, focused on my inner world.
  - 4 A Kingdom Spirituality. My aim is simply to obey God and to witness to God's coming reign, and do my part to bring about the kingdom of God on earth.

### C. Christian Beliefs

16. Which one of the following statements comes **closest** to expressing what you believe about God? ( Please circle only one answer number. )
- 1 I know beyond any doubt that God really exists.
  - 2 While I have some doubts, I do believe in God.
  - 3 I don't believe in a personal God, but I do believe in a higher power of some kind.
  - 4 I don't know whether there is a God and I don't believe there is any way to find out.
  - 5 I don't believe in God.
17. Which one of the following statements comes **closest** to expressing what you believe about Jesus Christ? ( Circle one )
- 1 Jesus was not only human but also divine and I have no doubts about it.
  - 2 While I have some doubts, basically I believe that Jesus was both human and divine.
  - 3 I feel that Jesus was a very great man and very holy, but I don't believe he was divine any more than any of us are divine.
  - 4 I think Jesus was only a man, although an extraordinary one.
  - 5 I'm not sure there was such a person as Jesus.
18. Which one of the following statements comes **closest** to expressing what you believe about the Holy Spirit? ( Circle one )
- 1 The Spirit is God's presence and power active in the world.
  - 2 The Spirit is that of God within me which helps me experience God and sustains me in faith.
  - 3 The Spirit is basically an expression of my feelings about God.
19. Which one of the following statements comes **closest** to expressing what you believe about the Bible? ( Circle one )
- 1 I believe the Bible is the divinely inspired and inerrant Word of God, the only trustworthy guide for faith and life.
  - 2 I believe the Bible is the authoritative Word of God and a reliable guide, but is not inerrant.
  - 3 I believe that the Bible is a record of God's revelation and thus contains God's Word, but I cannot say that the Bible as such is the Word of God.
  - 4 I think the Bible was written by human authors, some of whom were highly inspired, and should be read and interpreted like any other great book.
  - 5 The Bible does not have relevance for the twenty-first century.

### D. More Beliefs

In this section is a series of statements about religious beliefs which have traditionally been held by Mennonites. Circle the number of the answer that best expresses your feeling of agreement or disagreement. You should think of the "correct" answer as being the answer that best expresses your frank and honest opinion on the matter.

[ SA = Strongly Agree A = Agree U = Undecided  
D = Disagree SD = Strongly Disagree ]

- | SA | A | U | D | SD |  |
|----|---|---|---|----|--|
| 1  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  | 20. If Christian believers proclaim the Lordship of Christ and truly follow him in all of life, they can expect to incur severe criticism and even persecution from society.   |
| 1  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  | 21. Baptism is neither necessary nor proper for infants and small children.  |
| 1  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  | 22. Communion is a way for baptized Christians to renew their Christian commitments; therefore we should examine ourselves before taking part and be able to pledge that we are in good standing before God and with others in the church. |
| 1  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  | 23. The Christian should take no part in war or any activities which promote war.  |
| 1  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  | 24. The congregation should practise a thorough church discipline so that faltering or unfaithful members can be built up and restored, or in exceptional cases, excluded.   |
| 1  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  | 25. We should be able to expect the congregation to follow the example of the New Testament Church in offering mutual aid when there is a financial need in our midst.   |
| 1  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  | 26. A proper view of congregational leadership is that all members should share, as they are gifted, in leadership functions of the congregation, including leading in worship.  |
| 1  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  | 27. True knowledge of God comes when we as Christians follow Christ in daily life.   |
| 1  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  | 28. No one can be a true follower of Christ without the Holy Spirit working in his or her heart.   |

- 1 2 3 4 5 29. The "new birth" is to die to the old self and live to the new. We should expect to see this changed life in all Christians, brought about by the work of the Holy Spirit.
- 1 2 3 4 5 30. The most important measure of faithful discipleship is our obedience to the commands of Christ in Scripture.

### **E. Your personal experience of worship in the Hillcrest congregation**

In February, 17 people in the congregation were interviewed concerning their experience of worship at Hillcrest. What follows in questions 31-43 reflect the responses they most often gave to the questions which were asked.

While several or all of these responses may be true for you as well, please circle only the response with which you **most agree**, or which you **experience most often**:

31. When you come to worship, how are you aware of God? ( Circle one )
- 1 As a Presence, there with me, in calmness and peace.
  - 2 My awareness of God is primarily reflected in people. I have a less clear image of God, my awareness of God comes from those around me.
  - 3 I experience God as loving, accepting, welcoming and approachable.
  - 4 I experience God as all powerful, all knowing, in majesty as creator of all.
  - 5 I experience God as a forgiving God, who redeems me from my sins.
  - 6 I experience God as one who guides me, who wants to be Lord of my life.
32. Describe who Jesus is to you, when you worship in the congregation. ( Circle one )
- 1 A caring, loving person, as a servant, concerned for the down-trodden, helping those in need, a friend I can relate to.
  - 2 A teacher, leader and model who challenges me to follow in him in daily life.
  - 3 The crucified Christ, who through his suffering love died for my sins.
  - 4 A historical person, like one of us.
33. Describe who the Holy Spirit is to you when you worship in the congregation.
- 1 Without the Spirit, I could not pray. God's Spirit makes worship possible. The Spirit guides my thoughts and prompts me in worship.
  - 2 The Holy Spirit is the presence of God, immediate and daily present to me, who reveals the things of God to me.
  - 3 The Holy Spirit is the power of God that causes an inner transformation in me.
  - 4 The Spirit relates to the feeling side of me, is that which stirs me and moves me as I experience God, and draws me close to God.
  - 5 The Spirit feels more abstract, is a mystery, quite removed from my experience.

34. In the church we often speak of God as Father ( Creator ), Jesus Christ as Son ( Redeemer ), and the Holy Spirit as the one who sustains us in faith. Which of these three aspects of God do you tend to be **most**, or **most often** aware of when you worship in the congregation? ( Circle one )
- 1 God, as Father/Creator
  - 2 Jesus, as Son/Redeemer
  - 3 Holy Spirit, as Sustainer
  - 4 All three equally, I don't distinguish among them - it's all one God.
  - 5 All three variously, depending on the theme of the worship service.
35. What happens to you when you ( we ) pray in church, in terms of your awareness and experience of God? ( Circle one )
- 1 I find it difficult to pray in church. I am often distracted. It is something which is "happening" up there, not that I am really participating in it.
  - 2 I feel more like I am praying with God when I am alone in a private setting.
  - 3 Prayer in church draws me closer to God, like God is right there; it strengthens my relationship with God; it is like I am talking to God.
  - 4 In congregational prayer, we let God know our concerns and feelings, about ourselves and other people, and I feel and believe that God hears us when we pray with and for each other in the midst of the congregation.
36. What happens to you when you listen to a sermon, in terms of your awareness and experience of God? ( Circle one )
- 1 A sermon can help me focus on God, draw closer to God and feel God's care.
  - 2 Often I am challenged by a sermon to examine my relationship to God. What would God want me to do? How am I to live and love as a child of God?
  - 3 Often I learn about God, get a clearer picture of who God is. A sermon for me is more intellectual assent than an experience of God.
  - 4 Most often nothing happens in my awareness of God in a sermon. It would take a pretty powerful sermon to change how I relate to God.
37. What happens to you as you sing in church, in terms of your awareness and experience of God? ( Circle one )
- 1 Singing draws me closer to God, establishes a mood for worship. It touches my emotions more than my intellect, generating feelings of praise or awe.
  - 2 In singing, I participate with others, creating a sense of community, God's family, as we make harmony in our singing together.
  - 3 I find myself praying through singing; sometimes it's just easier to sing than to say a prayer.
  - 4 I get too wrapped up intellectually to worship as we sing. Is it good music? Is it being sung well? Poor singing distracts from my awareness of God.

38. What happens to your experience and awareness of God as you hear scriptures read in church? ( Circle one )
- 1 Scripture is a retelling of God's activities in the world that helps me get in touch with the character of God, the one who created me and loves me.
  - 2 Scripture is the story of God's People, of which I am a part, if I put myself into the story.
  - 3 Scripture makes me ask how I can live more faithfully according to God's Word and will. This is God teaching me, these are the very words of God.
  - 4 I concentrate on interpreting scripture as it is read, to be in conversation with it, more as an intellectual reflection on doctrine than an experience of God.
  - 5 Quite frankly, most times I have difficulty staying focused and following the scripture as it is being read.
39. What happens in your awareness of and relationship with God as you participate in communion? ( Circle one )
- 1 Even though God is everywhere, communion is an event in which God appears in a mysterious way to be more present to me.
  - 2 As an act of worship, communion makes me aware of what God did for me in Christ, and by participating in communion, I am thanking God.
  - 3 To be honest, not much happens for me in communion. The symbolism of body and blood doesn't speak to me, so it is a rather meaningless ritual.
40. What happens in your relationship with others in the congregation as you participate with them in communion? ( Circle one )
- 1 It gives me a sense of gratitude for being part of the church family, even with people I may not know all that well; it draws us together.
  - 2 For me there is a sense of being a faithful member of the church, seeking to be in right relationship with those around me in the congregation.
  - 3 For me, communion is meaningful, but it is more of a personal and private relationship with God; it is between the officiating pastor, God and me.
  - 4 Communion does not enhance my sense of community with others, since it is a rather meaningless ritual to me.
41. What aspects of congregational worship at Hillcrest church are most meaningful to you? Rank the following acts of worship in order of value and meaning for you ( using #1-8 in the spaces provided, # 1 being high, # 8 low ).
- |                   |                                 |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1 _____ sermon    | 5 _____ sharing joys & concerns |
| 2 _____ singing   | 6 _____ footwashing             |
| 3 _____ praying   | 7 _____ scripture reading       |
| 4 _____ communion | 8 _____ offering                |

42. When people were asked "What draws you to come to church for worship, and what needs are met for you in worship?" they offered the following responses. Circle the number of the response that **most closely**, or **most often** represents your response. ( Circle one )
- 1 To be with like-minded people, to experience the caring church community.
  - 2 To encounter the living God, to feel that God is among us, to have spiritual needs met in the congregational worship.
  - 3 It is a "habit" I have gotten into, I was brought up to go to church. If I didn't go to church, I would miss it. It is a sort of discipline.
  - 4 I go to church for inspiration, to help me through another week, to learn how to be a better person from day to day.
  - 5 To live a balanced life; to get a grounding; to experience quiet; to unwind mentally; to receive spiritual healing.
43. Individuals report that they can worship or sense the presence of God in a variety of settings, including church, but not limited to church. Rank the following in terms of the setting in which you are **most** aware, or **most often** aware of relating to God in worship. ( #1 is high, # 6 is low - in the spaces provided )
- 1 \_\_\_\_\_ in an outdoor natural setting, in creation
  - 2 \_\_\_\_\_ in my own quiet time at home
  - 3 \_\_\_\_\_ in church, in congregational worship
  - 4 \_\_\_\_\_ in special events, such as Christian conventions
  - 5 \_\_\_\_\_ in Bible study groups or cluster groups
  - 6 \_\_\_\_\_ in our family circle, in family worship and prayer

### **F. More questions about your experience of faith, life and worship**

44. Various people describe faith or religion differently, sometimes in the terms which are given below. Using numbers 1-5, in the spaces provided, rank the following in order of importance to you. ( # 1 is high, 5 is low )
- 1 \_\_\_\_\_ my beliefs about God
  - 2 \_\_\_\_\_ my emotional response to God
  - 3 \_\_\_\_\_ my commitment to seek God's will
  - 4 \_\_\_\_\_ my relationship to others, in the life and work of the church
  - 5 \_\_\_\_\_ my daily life in the world, in ethical and just living

45. Our worship together can bring about a transformation in our lives. Which of the following is **most likely** to be changed for you as you worship? ( Circle one )
- 1 your personal beliefs about God
  - 2 your personal feelings about God
  - 3 your personal commitment to seek God's will
  - 4 your relationship to others in the life and work of the church
  - 5 your daily life in the world, in ethical and just living
46. As you meet in worship with the Hillcrest congregation, where do you experience God to be **most** at work? ( Circle one )
- 1 In the hearts and minds of individual believers who have met to worship?
  - 2 In the various acts of worship ( singing, praying, preaching, communion, etc.)
  - 3 In the community of believers who have met to share in worship.
47. How important is it to your personal experience and awareness of God to be a regular participant in a worshipping Christian community? ( Circle one )
- 1 very important
  - 2 fairly important
  - 3 of little importance
  - 4 of no importance
48. How much spiritual inspiration and strengthening do you think you get from a typical Sunday morning worship service at Hillcrest? ( Circle one )
- 1 very much
  - 2 quite a lot
  - 3 some
  - 4 very little
  - 5 none at all
49. Mennonites have traditionally said that what happens on Sunday morning in worship should carry over to our work on Monday morning. Which of the following **most closely** describes your experience of the relationship between worship and work? ( Circle one )
- 1 What happens in our work is an offering of love and praise to God, and therefore it is worship.
  - 2 Our life of worship shapes our life of work, but work is not the same thing as the act of worship with the gathered body.
  - 3 Congregational worship is totally different from daily work. It is a time to come apart from the daily round of life and work, to encounter God.



50. People report that their experience of community at Hillcrest church is very important to them. How does the sense of community relate to your experience and awareness of God in worship? Circle the answer which **most closely** represents your view. ( Circle one )
- 1 For me, worship is very private, between me and God, even though I enjoy meeting the people before and after the worship service.
  - 2 While I value the church community, I do not see it in relation to the worship of God; I see it mostly in terms of common human or social ties.
  - 3 When I experience community in worship, I am experiencing the bonds of love and relationships within the body of Christ.
  - 4 When I speak of my experience of community in worship, I would go so far as to say that as we worship together, I see the face of Christ in those who have met to worship.
51. People report that sharing of joys and concerns is an important aspect of worship at Hillcrest. How in your experience does this sharing relate to prayer? Circle the response that **most closely** fits for you. ( Circle one )
- 1 It is good to hear what is happening in the lives of my fellow worshippers, so I can share in their joys and concerns, whether I pray for them or not.
  - 2 As joy and concerns are expressed in the context of the worship service, they are in themselves prayers to God. Further praying seems redundant.
  - 3 Hearing people express their joys and concerns allows me to go home and lift them up to God in prayer during the week.
  - 4 I believe there is a special power and blessing when people's joys and concerns are shared and as we pray together in the worship service.
52. How does our worship "in here" at the Hillcrest church relate to our service in the world "out there"? Which of the following **most closely** describes for you the connection of worship and Christian service? ( Circle one )
- 1 I do not see worship and service being connected. Service is a good humanitarian thing to do, and I try to do my part.
  - 2 I think it is my Christian duty to give of myself in service to my fellow humanity. This is what I have been taught in church.
  - 3 I see my Christian service in the world around us to be a direct consequence of my encounter with the God of justice and peace in worship.
53. Which of the following statements about the Order of Service in congregational worship **most closely** represents your view?
- 1 A carefully planned and orderly worship program is a glory to God.
  - 2 A deeply moving and spontaneous meeting is a glory to God.
  - 3 Simplicity and some silence are important elements needed for worship.
  - 4 It is not a service, but ordering ourselves to God's service that is important.

54. Which of the following statements about prayer in congregational worship **most closely** represents your view?
- 1 Words express poetic praise; we ask for knowledge and guidance.
  - 2 Let words and feelings evoke God's presence in this moment.
  - 3 Empty the mind of distractions and simply BE in the presence of the Holy.
  - 4 My life and my work are my prayer.
55. If you were to offer criticism of Hillcrest Mennonite Church worship, which of the following statements **most closely** represent your view?
- 1 Sometimes we are said to be too intellectual, dogmatic, and "dry".
  - 2 Sometimes we are said to be too emotional, dogmatic, anti-intellectual.
  - 3 Sometimes we are said to be escaping from the world and are not realistic.
  - 4 Sometimes we are said to have tunnel vision and are too moralistic.

***Congratulations on reaching the end of the questions!***

And thank you for sharing of yourself in this way...

... Questions #56 and #57 which appear on the last page are optional, but we would appreciate your thoughts on these as well, if you have something you feel free to share.

... You are *also invited to share* in one or both of the following questions, to tell a bit of the story of your experience of worship and prayer. ( Use the back of this page or the attached sheet if you need more space: )

56. Describe a time when you were especially aware of God, or Jesus, or the Holy Spirit in worship. What was the situation? What would be more typical for you - an awareness of God, or Jesus, or the Holy Spirit? Why?

57. Describe an experience of prayer in which you felt really connected to God. What was the situation? The setting? How were you made aware of God? What were some of your thoughts and feelings in the experience?

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