

# Editorial

John D. Rempel

**T**he overarching purpose of this issue of *Vision* is to take a reading of how mainstream North American Mennonites think about and practice worship. Two specific goals include placing our diverse ways of worship side by side, to see what light they shed on one another, and testing whether shared convictions about worship emerge. We hope that readers from other traditions will also find this issue worth studying. They will discover a paradox: as we seek ways of worshiping that are authentically Mennonite, we find ourselves turning to the larger Christian tradition for help.

Kevin Drudge's "Living by the Sign of the Sabbath" lays the groundwork for sustainable communal worship. A day of rest is the last remaining practice of premodern, communal culture, in which a rhythm of days given by God and nature determines our

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use of time. In the capitalist West today, time has become a succession of indistinguishable units which individuals use as they see fit. Drudge recaptures the Jewish insight that a collective weekly rhythm that blesses work but also sets limits to it is indispensable for the well-being of humanity and nature.

The pieces by Pam Driedger and Scott Brubaker-Zehr complement each other. Driedger finds fresh language to describe how "ritual and symbols allow the experiences of

our everyday lives to draw us into the mystery of God." Jesus, the original sacrament, is the model of how divinity and humanity meet. Driedger's Christocentrism provides not a limit but the interpretive key, the human face of the unfathomable.

Some have said that Anabaptism was a form of practical Christianity with a tin ear for the mystery of God, the extreme expression of Protestantism, a movement that began the unravel-

ing of the sacramental universe. This assessment is a half-truth that overlooks the sense of the holy evident across the spectrum of Anabaptism from Conrad Grebel to Dirk Philips. Brubaker-Zehr helps us enter that liminal space in which we recognize a divine presence and surrender to it. What is distinctive about Brubaker-Zehr's approach to this subject is his communal orientation. He offers practices of public worship that free us from the iron cage (Max Weber) of linear time and rational knowledge.

Rebecca Slough offers us clear-eyed advice for making judgments about what constitutes good worship music. Her criteria apply equally to traditional and contemporary modes; they give us resources for choosing worship music based not on its style but on its ability to lead us to praise and obey God.

Marlene Kropf steps back from two decades of the practice of worship to reflect on its theology. She offers the profound simplicity of a trinitarian model. After centuries of worship forms prescribed by oral tradition, Mennonites found freedom to experiment. But for communities to thrive, they also need patterns that shape and channel experiments.

The next three articles take on their fullest meaning when read side by side. Without John Ruth's reflection, the articles by Betty Kennedy and Rod Stafford would lack a historical reference point; without Kennedy's and Stafford's descriptions of living worship in and for our time, Ruth's article would be an exercise in nostalgia.

Ruth's evocative and affectionate description reminds us that behind recent decades of experimenting and borrowing in Mennonite worship lay a liturgical tradition that had changed little since 1700. It displayed a communal piety, a suppressed (but not repressed) emotionality, a humility of spirit that can guide our judgments as we create forms different from those historical ones.

Kennedy's writing makes palpable the yearning and praising of her band of pilgrims. Here is a community whose worship has an affinity for the experience of exile and brokenness in scripture and Anabaptism. For these people, the service of Word and Table is literally the bread of life. The raw experience of life is gently given forms that are pliable enough to be inhabited by people from astonishingly diverse pilgrimages and cultures.

Stafford enters our narrative as a prophet, offering those east of the Rockies an image of the future of religious community and

expression in North America. He confronts us with an account of being church in a setting where almost nothing favors Christian identity. This is a starker world by far than that of the sixteenth century, where the question was how—not whether—to worship God. Stafford reports on the ingenuity with which congregations are finding ways of meeting God that are authentic for their settings. He leaves unanswered the question of whether there remains a recognizable core to Mennonite worship.

Pieter Post in the Netherlands writes out of a setting similar to Stafford's, that of Europe's most secular country. Urban Christians there assume that they are strangers in a strange land. He makes a fascinating and heartening case for literally and metaphorically renewing the practice of foot washing, to build congregations of integrity and invitation.

Eleanor Kreider describes the rediscovery and adaptation of the daily office to Mennonite church life. Her summary of the process—considering theological and liturgical principles and casting them into Spirit-filled forms—offers a model for the shaping of worship in our day.

The sermon by Eugene Harder speaks out of a deep vulnerability to the physical and spiritual ravages of suffering. It dares to follow Job in recognizing the limit of human understanding and the time after which arguing with God gains no ground. That opens the door to trusting surrender. We hear in Harder's words echoes of the psalmists and of Jesus.

Allan Rudy-Froese, a preacher and student of preaching, introduces us to the first book-length examination of Mennonite homiletics and sets it within the larger frame of Mennonite approaches to preaching as well as homiletical trends in the larger church.

There is as much ferment in the church's worship today as there was in the sixteenth century. Then there was a bursting of the wineskins—Karlstadt's presiding in the people's language at the Lord's Table in the middle of the congregation without vestments, Grebel's baptism of his companions with a dipper in a farmhouse kitchen. We lack such epoch-marking events, but we witness a similar disenchantment with old forms and discovery of new ones. And as then, our challenge is to embrace the new ways God's Spirit is working, while continuing to cherish the forms in which she spoke to us in the past.