Preaching and Peacemaking:

A Mennonite Homiletic of Justice, Peace, and Reconciliation

by

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Abstract

This project seeks to form an approach to preaching that creates sermons that do justice, peace, and reconciliation. The New Hermeneutic and New Homiletic emphasize preaching that actively does something rather than solely being about a topic. Although the New Homiletic focuses on preaching that does invoke the presence of God in preaching, my primary interest lies in forming sermons that do justice, peace, and reconciliation for a Mennonite context. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s Rhetorical-Emancipatory Approach provides a methodological framework for exploring justice, peace, and reconciliation. These concepts are then explored in the specific biblical context of the book of Philemon. The work of John Howard Yoder, a Mennonite theologian, compliments Schüssler Fiorenza’s hermeneutical method by emphasizing the role of the church in transformation. Examining key Mennonite themes through a Trinitarian, ecclesiological lens, including the priesthood of all believers, Zeugnis, adult baptism, pneumatology, and methods of biblical interpretation, further develops a Mennonite context. A Trinitarian ecclesiological reading of these themes
particularly emphasizes the importance of both the individual and the community in Mennonite preaching.

After exploring the Mennonite ecclesial context, I provide an overview of the current approaches to justice, peace, and reconciliation in homiletics, highlighting areas where preaching has tended to focus on justice, peace, and reconciliation as topics rather than embodying and *doing* them. I present David Buttrick’s ‘moves’ as a homiletical method adaptable to preaching that *does* justice, peace, and reconciliation in Mennonite churches. Finally, in order to empower a diversity of voices to create sermons that *do* justice, peace, and reconciliation, I provide a sample sermon and practical curriculum primarily designed for Mennonite churches. These nine lessons provide resources, including sermon samples, for guiding church members through the steps of preparing and delivering sermons that *do* justice, peace, and reconciliation.
Any significant piece of work embodies years of excitement, discovery, joy, frustration, and perhaps even tears. Hopefully, there are friends, family, and mentors to guide us along the journey. I want to offer my gratitude to those people who walked alongside me on the path to completing my PhD.

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To my grandparents, Earl and Clara, for making theological reflection a part of everyday life at the cottage and for making concepts like Polytheism and Pantheism topics for after dinner conversation around the picnic table, and for slipping us “popsicle money.”

To my parents, Wayne and Wendy for supporting me in immeasurable ways throughout my many years of education. You often had no idea what I was studying or even talking about, but you supported me anyways, trusting that my work was worth the time and dedication. Perhaps most of all, thank-you for instilling a love of reading right from the beginning.

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This project is dedicated to my daughter, Chloe-Jordan. I could never have imagined you when this journey began. I can only hope, pray, and imagine that someday you can live in a world where justice, peace, and reconciliation are commonplace actions and a project discussing oppression and suffering is no longer needed.
Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. ii
Dedication .............................................................................................................................. iv
List of Appendices ................................................................................................................ ix

Introduction ........................................................................................................................... 1
  Sermon as Doing .................................................................................................................. 2
  Defining Justice, Peace, and Reconciliation From a Mennonite Perspective .................... 4
  Methodology .................................................................................................................... 9
  Thesis Statement .............................................................................................................. 12
  Conclusion ....................................................................................................................... 12

Chapter One
A Biblical Foundation and Methodology: Reading Philemon in light of Elisabeth Schüessler Fiorenza’s Rhetorical-Emancipatory Approach ......................................................... 14

I. Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 14

II. Elisabeth Schüessler Fiorenza and Justice ........................................................................ 16
  a. A Hermeneutics of Experience ..................................................................................... 16
  b. A Hermeneutics of Domination .................................................................................... 19
  c. A Hermeneutics of Suspicion ....................................................................................... 20
  d. A Hermeneutics of Proclamation/Evaluation .............................................................. 21

III. Philemon and Justice .......................................................................................................... 23
  a. A Hermeneutics of Experience in Philemon ................................................................. 23
  b. A Hermeneutics of Domination in Philemon ............................................................... 25
  c. A Hermeneutics of Suspicion in Philemon ................................................................. 26
  d. A Hermeneutics of Proclamation/Evaluation in Philemon ............................................ 28

IV. Elisabeth Schüessler Fiorenza and Peace .......................................................................... 29
  a. A Hermeneutics of Imagination .................................................................................... 29
  b. A Hermeneutics of Remembrance .............................................................................. 30

V. Philemon and Peace ............................................................................................................ 32
  a. A Hermeneutics of Imagination in Philemon ............................................................... 32
  b. A Hermeneutics of Remembrance in Philemon ......................................................... 35

VI. Elisabeth Schüessler Fiorenza and Reconciliation .............................................................. 37
  a. Hermeneutics of Transformation ............................................................................... 37

VII. Philemon and Reconciliation .......................................................................................... 39
  a. A Hermeneutics of Transformation in Philemon ......................................................... 39
Chapter Two
Mennonite Peace Theology: Yoder’s Eschatology and Ecclesiology ................. 45

I. Introduction ........................................................................................................... 45

II. Justice and the Church Community ................................................................. 48
   a. Listening to the Experiences of Others ......................................................... 48
   b. Principalities and Powers .............................................................................. 53

III. Peace and the Church Community ................................................................. 58
   a. Imagination .................................................................................................... 58
   b. Remembrance ................................................................................................. 60

IV. Reconciliation and the Church Community .................................................... 63
   a. A New Community ......................................................................................... 63
   b. Discernment .................................................................................................. 65

V. Implications for Preaching .................................................................................. 66
   a. A Diversity of Experiences ............................................................................ 66
   b. Speak Truth to Power .................................................................................... 67
   c. Ecclesiology .................................................................................................. 67

VI. Conclusion .......................................................................................................... 69

Chapter Three
A Mennonite Context for Preaching: History, Theology, and Bible ...................... 70

I. Introduction .......................................................................................................... 70

II. Unique Theological Aspects: The Priesthood of All Believers and Zeugnis ...... 78

III. Unique Historical Aspects: Baptism and the Holy Spirit ............................... 83

IV. Unique Biblical Aspects: Scriptural Discernment and the Rule of Paul ........... 88
V. Implications of Mennonite Ecclesiology for Preaching ........................................ 93
   a. The Gap between Pulpit and Congregation ................................................. 93
   b. Biblical Interpretation .................................................................................... 94
   c. The Word of God ............................................................................................ 96

VI. Preaching that does Justice, Peace, and Reconciliation in a Mennonite Context:
    David Buttrick’s Moves ................................................................................... 97
    a. Moves ............................................................................................................ 98
    b. Language Constructs ..................................................................................... 101
    c. Image Grid .................................................................................................... 103

VII. Conclusion ...................................................................................................... 105

Chapter Four
The Homiletical Canon: Current Homiletical Resources for a Homiletic of Justice,
Peace, and Reconciliation ...................................................................................... 108

I. Introduction ........................................................................................................ 108

II. Homiletical Background and Analytical Framework ......................................... 109

III. Justice in Homiletics from 1950 to the Present .............................................. 111

IV. Peace in Homiletics from 1950 to the Present ................................................ 122

V. Reconciliation in Homiletics from 1950 to the Present .................................... 132

VI. Implications ..................................................................................................... 141
   a. Preaching that does Justice, Peace, and Reconciliation empowers a diversity of
      voices to speak ................................................................................................. 141
   b. The Past, Present and Future are Interconnected when Preaching does Justice,
      Peace, and Reconciliation .............................................................................. 143

VII. A Return to David Buttrick ............................................................................. 146

VIII. Conclusion .................................................................................................... 151

Chapter Five
A Homiletic that Does Justice, Peace, and Reconciliation: A Curriculum ............ 153

I. Introduction ........................................................................................................ 153
II. Comprehensive Sermon Sample ................................................................. 154
  a. Preamble ............................................................................................... 154
  b. Sermon on Matthew 18:15-17 “Being Church” .................................... 157
  c. Conclusion ......................................................................................... 163

III. Curriculum ............................................................................................. 164
  a. Preamble ............................................................................................... 164
  b. Lessons ................................................................................................ 166
  c. Preaching in the Weeks Following the Series of Lessons .................... 200

IV. Conclusion .............................................................................................. 201

Conclusion .................................................................................................... 203

Bibliography .................................................................................................. 207
List of Appendices

Appendix One

Worship Resources
Introduction

When I was introduced to the history of homiletics in a survey course, I was startled by how much violence was represented in sermons.\footnote{For example, a sermon from approximately 165 A.D. depicts the cries of first-born children who died during the last plague on Egypt. This passage includes children crying out as the “shadowy body” death approaches, and other children try to deny their position as the first-born in order to escape death. Melito of Sardis, “Homily on the Passover,” in A History of Preaching, ed. O. C. Edwards, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 8-9. Other sermons include anti-Semitic statements describing Jews as engaging in endless “chatter” about Sabbath laws, as “ungrateful,” or as condemned by Christ for not recognizing Christ as the Messiah. Origen, “On First Principles,” in A History of Preaching, ed. O. C. Edwards, (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004), 27; John Chrysostom, “Sermons on the Statues, Homily 12 “ in A History of Preaching, ed. O. C. Edwards, (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004), 61; Jonathan Edwards, “Sermon on a Divine and Supernatural Light,” in A History of Preaching, ed. O. C. Edwards, (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004), 392.} Samples from historical sermons included overt calls for violence during Holy Wars and indicated support for Just Wars.\footnote{During the Middle Ages, Bernard of Clairvaux spoke in support of Holy Wars preaching that “the knight of Christ...may strike with confidence and die yet more confidently, for he serves Christ when he strikes, and serves himself when he falls.” The knight does not kill people but kills “evil.” St. Bernard of Clairvaux, “In Praise of the New Knighthood” http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/~amtower/bernard.html (accessed December 30 2013). Furthermore, knights should “slaughter pagans” only when “there is any other way to prevent them from harassing and persecuting the faithful, but only that it now seems better to destroy them than that the rod of sinners be lifted over the lot of the just, and the righteous perhaps put forth their hands unto iniquity.” Ibid.} Sermons also committed covert acts of violence by remaining silent about topics such as domestic abuse, environmental destruction, and economic disparity.\footnote{For example, sermons do violence to women when they promise peace from “brutal husbands” in a vague distant future, or state that women are subjugated to their husbands. Charles Albert Tindley, “Heaven’s Christmas Tree,” in A History of Preaching, ed. O. C. Edwards, (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004), 428-429; Phoebe Palmer, “Promise of the Father,” in A History of Preaching, ed. O. C. Edwards, (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004), 453.} As a member of a Mennonite church, a historical peace church, such violence is in direct opposition to the Mennonite convictions of nonviolently working for peace, and love for the enemy. Surprisingly, there is no homiletical method built on peace theology for use in Mennonite churches.

Mennonite churches have a long history of emphasizing actions above academic reflection. Historically, our clergy have not received rigorous theological and biblical...
training. Church leaders were selected from the congregation, and possessed varying levels of education. Action-focused organizations, such as the Mennonite Central Committee, who provide relief aid around the world, have thrived. Mennonite academic scholarship, however, is a relatively recent phenomenon. As a result, although Mennonite congregations gather for worship and hear sermons, the emphasis has been on what congregations and individuals do through their actions and lifestyle. Moreover, Mennonites tend to view preaching as a teaching tool for shaping and improving the actions of the congregation. For example, a sermon might call for listeners to be peacemakers, rather than viewing preaching itself as an act of peacemaking.

**Sermon as Doing**

The idea of a sermon actively doing something is a common theme in the broader field of homiletics. The New Hermeneutic and New Homiletic emphasize what preaching does, rather than solely focusing on what a sermon is about. Rudolf Bultmann, Gerhard Ebeling, and Ernst Fuchs have drawn upon Martin Heidegger’s understanding of language in their formation of the New Hermeneutic, specifically focusing on what preaching does when it facilitates an “event.” The New Homiletic applied this New Hermeneutic emphasis on event to preaching.⁴ David James Randolph, writing in 1969, relates the language of event to preaching and uses the term in his very definition of preaching.⁵ In his introduction, he states, “what is critical for homiletics is not so much what the sermon ‘is’ as what the sermon

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⁵ David Randolph defines preaching as “the event in which the biblical text is interpreted in order that its meaning will come to expression in the concrete situation of the hearers.” David James Randolph, *The Renewal of Preaching* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 1.
Fred B. Craddock echoes these earlier works, stating that “all considerations of structure, unity, movement, use of text, and so forth, must wait upon the prior consideration of what words are and what they do.” In other words, although a sermon conveys information about a topic, the sermon itself also does something within the congregation.

This emphasis on the doing of preaching spans a breadth of homiletical approaches. Charles L. Campbell forms sermons that confront the principalities and powers rather than solely talking about the principalities and powers. In a similar manner, Brian K. Blount shapes sermons that embody the Kingdom of God rather than discuss the Kingdom of God in the gospel of Mark. Paul Scott Wilson argues that sermons should speak the words from God rather than simply speak about God. Anna Carter Florence argues that preaching is not about the good news, “it is making good news” because “something happens.” Similarly, Charles L. Bartow states that sermons should not be about reality, but rather they should evoke reality. The above examples demonstrate the breadth of homiletical styles advocating a shift from preaching about to preaching that does.

Given the range of approaches focusing on preaching as doing, and Mennonites’ theology of valuing action, I want to explore how preaching can deepen its ability to do

6. Ibid., vii.
7. Fred B. Craddock, As One without Authority (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001), 7.
something rather than be about something. This shift can be seen in preaching by women in the last decades. When women began preaching, there was a penchant for preaching sermons about women. Sermons focused on female Bible characters or topics such as domestic abuse in an effort to bring women and their experiences into sermons. Over time, sermons shifted from viewing women as a topic to be preached, and instead focused on doing, or acting out inclusion and equality by utilizing a diversity of examples from the lives of women in sermons that did not focus on women per se. I seek to deepen the conversation already begun concerning preaching that does by specifically focusing on the treatment of justice, peace, and reconciliation in the field of homiletics.

**Defining Justice, Peace, and Reconciliation From a Mennonite Perspective**

In order to augment the homiletical conversation, I utilize Mennonite theology and the context of Mennonite churches to define justice, peace, and reconciliation. The *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* states that Mennonites participate in peacemaking because we are “led by the spirit, and following Christ in the way of peace, doing justice, bringing reconciliation, and practicing nonresistance….“¹² These three areas, justice, peace, and reconciliation, are central to Mennonites.¹³

¹². *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1995), 81. The *Confession of Faith* distinguishes peace from nonviolence. I include nonviolence as an aspect of peace in that nonviolence is a critical aspect of seeking the eschatological goal of peace, in juxtaposition to Holy War or Just War, which seeks peace through some degree of violence.

¹³. Although the Mennonite church tends towards congregationalism, individual churches are connected through local and national conferences, as well as a global organization named Mennonite World Conference. As a result, it is possible to speak of “The Mennonite Church” as a singular entity, such as Mennonite World Conference. However, there is a great deal of diversity in the Mennonite church, both locally and globally. Although I focus on Mennonite preaching in a North American context, I refer to Mennonite churches, in plural, whenever possible to honour the diversity found in Mennonite churches both in North America and around the world.
Seeking justice includes aiding the weak, the poor, the suffering, and the oppressed.\(^{14}\) God aids those in distress by transforming situations and reversing fortunes so that the powerless are raised up.\(^{15}\) Working for justice also involves challenging the powers that cause oppression.\(^{16}\) By critiquing the causes of oppression, justice seeks to “make things right by transforming the status quo.”\(^{17}\) Mennonite theologies recognize that those who aid the oppressed and critique the powers that cause oppression may themselves suffer because of their voluntary actions.

To suffer on behalf of others is not about being passive, nor is it about suffering for the sake of suffering. In a discussion of the use of the sword versus the use of nonviolent resistance in order to create change, Yoder writes, “the coercion by the sword, which majority Western moral traditions consider legitimate, says to the adversary, ‘Do what I say or you will suffer.’ The adversary, in order to avoid the suffering, does what I say, if I am stronger. If he does not, I impose on him the suffering that I threatened.”\(^{18}\) He continues, the coercion I apply by nonviolent techniques is of a different kind. Gandhi and King says to the adversary, “Do what I say is right or I will suffer.” If the adversaries concede to my moral pressure, it is because of their unwillingness to impose on me suffering I was ready to bear. This act is itself an honor to their self-respect and heightens their own humanity. If, on the other hand, they refuse to concede, then it is I who suffer at their hand, as I had said I would be ready to do. It may well be that the persons who concede to my pressure, out of the humane self-respect with which they


\(^{15}\) Ibid., 31, 34.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 33.

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 34.

\(^{18}\) John Howard Yoder and others, *The War of the Lamb: The Ethics of Nonviolence and Peacemaking* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 150. Since John Howard Yoder is prominent throughout the paper, I simply use “Yoder” to reference John Howard’s work and initials to denote the other scholars also with the last name Yoder.
hesitate to hurt me, will still be dissatisfied or unconvinced about the issue that was at stake.\textsuperscript{19}

In this manner, Christians bring about change and seek justice not by causing others to suffer, but by taking suffering upon themselves in order to identify and encourage the humanity of both participants in the conflict. For example, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Gandhi both accepted the possibility of their own suffering because they sought justice by critiquing the status quo and demanding the transformation of the oppressive systems. Doing justice involves listening to those in need while also challenging the systems of domination that cause injustice; such critique may result in suffering for the sake of others.

The definition of peace transcends the mere absence of war. Both Ted Grimsrud and Perry Yoder, for example, link peace and shalom in order to understand peace as including nonviolence, “wholeness, harmony, restoration of relationships, healing of brokenness.”\textsuperscript{20} A theology of peace seeks to apply the truths of nonviolence, pacifism, or nonviolent resistance to the full breadth of human experience and thought, including, but not limited to: God, church life, political systems, violence, war, suffering, and personal, corporate, and international conflict. Peace theology also reads scriptures and does systematic theology according to nonviolent, pacifist, or nonviolent resistance principles.\textsuperscript{21} Such principles

\textsuperscript{19.} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{21.} Although “peace theology” is frequently used in Mennonite writing, it is not defined. The definition provided here is rooted in several Mennonite sources. I am indebted to the definition of “theology” found in \textit{Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms} and \textit{How to Think Theologically}. Howard W. Stone and James O. Duke, \textit{How to Think Theologically} (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 125-126; Stanley J. Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, \textit{Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms} (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 113. I also reference the definitions of peace, nonviolence, pacifism, and nonviolent resistance in A. James Reimer’s \textit{Christians and War} and the definition of peace and shalom found in Perry Yoder’s \textit{Shalom} and Ted Grimsrud’s “A Pacifist Way of Knowing.” A. James Reimer, \textit{Christians and War : A Brief History of
include loving both neighbour and enemy, a separation of the church from the power and military conquests of the state, an eschatological non-violent future that begins in the present, and acceptance of suffering for the sake of others, just as Christ died on the cross for our sake.\footnote{Yoder, The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).}

Seeking peace includes listening to others, especially the enemy. Alan Kreider, Eleanor Kreider, and Paulus Widjaja describe an enemy as “someone we talk about but not to. An enemy is someone we don’t listen to. An enemy is someone whom we depersonalize and label.”\footnote{Alan Kreider, Eleanor Kreider, and Paulus Widjaja, A Culture of Peace: God’s Vision for the Church (Intercourse: Good Books, 2005), 63.} Listening to the enemy is one step in transforming an enemy into a conversation partner. These scholars argue that those in conflict want to be heard and so peace requires listening, paying close attention, and gaining awareness of the other person’s experiences and perspectives.\footnote{Ibid., 81, 83.}

Peace is also proclamation. As John Howard Yoder writes, peace “is a gospel message...given to us in proclamation and to be proclaimed.”\footnote{John Howard Yoder, Radical Christian Discipleship, ed. John C. Nugent, Andy Alexis-Baker, and Branson L. Parler (Harrisonburg: Herald Press, 2012), 160.} Peace as proclamation means that peace is not a strategy, or an impossible task to be accomplished, but “a victory already won” that continues to “make ripples” throughout history.\footnote{Ibid.} This combination of victory won and ripples in history is critical to preaching that does peace. God has already acted in the past, and continues to act in the present and, we believe by faith, will in the future. God’s

\footnote{Grimsrud, “A Pacifist Way of Knowing: Postmodern Sensibilities and Peace Theology.”}
past actions provide examples and inspirations for striving for a peaceful eschatological future.\textsuperscript{27} Yoder notes that the term peace is a “singularly apt example” of an eschatological vision.\textsuperscript{28} He writes, “’peace’ is not an accurate description of what has generally happened to nonresistant Christians throughout history, nor of the way the conscientious objector is treated in most countries today. Nor does Christian pacifism guarantee a warless world.”\textsuperscript{29} Peace, rather, is the goal that shapes actions.\textsuperscript{30} Doing peace includes recognizing and proclaiming God’s work towards peace in the past, present, and eschatological future.

Reconciliation is often defined as something akin to the bringing together of two or more formerly separated parties. Reconciliation seeks to form a bridge between those previously estranged. This type of reconciliation is certainly beneficial in various situations. Healed relationships create mutuality and solidarity amongst people rather than fostering separation, hostility, and derision.

Nevertheless, I focus on forming a reconciled community rather than on the details of individual relationships. Community is a key element in Mennonite history, as well as in current Mennonite faith and life. Historically, Mennonites lived in insular communities removed from the larger society. Although some contemporary Mennonites work and socialize with those outside of the Mennonite faith, community formation remains a significant aspect of the Mennonite faith. Activities such as Sunday school for children, youth, and adults, monthly potlucks, annual church camping, corn roasts, knitting prayer

\begin{itemize}
  \item 27. Yoder, \textit{Shalom}, 1.
  \item 29. Ibid.
  \item 30. Ibid.
\end{itemize}
shawls, and delivering meals to those in need, emphasize the importance of community to Mennonites.

In trying to live as a community, Mennonite churches seek to bring together diverse people into a reconciled whole. John Paul Lederach describes reconciliation as a journey that is “embodied in Christ...who creates space that brings people and things together.” 31 Although the church is composed of “estranged and broken people,” the community seeks to “embody God’s reconciling love and make it present in the world.” 32 Maintaining such a community requires reconciling many differences, including different ages, genders, races, cultures, theologies, political views, personalities, and economic statuses. As a result, even though members of the congregation might have dissenting views and perhaps even hostility towards one another, through Christ they seek to come together as one community. 33 Lederach writes, “it is not possible to pursue reconciliation except through people who risk the journey to relate across the social divides...In other words, through people who reach across the lines of hostility, a new relationship between enemies becomes possible.” 34 Doing reconciliation includes taking the risk of listening to the voices of others across social divides, even enemy voices, in order to form new relationships and a reconciled community.

Methodology

This focus on the community influences my choice of methodology for this dissertation. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s rhetorical-emancipatory paradigm includes seven hermeneutical steps, which augment an understanding of justice, peace, and reconciliation.

32. Ibid.
33. Ibid., 163.
34. Ibid., 164.
Of equal importance, she consistently places her paradigm within the context of a specific community - for example, in her treatment of 1 Peter in *The Power of the Word*. By holding together analysis and the context of a specific community, Schüssler Fiorenza’s work provides a methodology that values the academic rigour of exploring justice, peace, and reconciliation while also being mindful of how that debate influences and is influenced by the actions of a specific community in a particular context.

Schüssler Fiorenza’s rhetorical-emancipatory paradigm begins by enriching our understanding of justice, peace, and reconciliation through her seven hermeneutical steps. Her hermeneutics of experience, domination, suspicion, and proclamation seek justice for the oppressed. Justice includes valuing a diversity of voices by listening for God’s presence in the midst of everyday life. In particular, Schüssler Fiorenza listens for the voices of those previously silenced. A hermeneutics of imagination and a hermeneutics of remembrance work together to deepen our understanding of peace. Imagination envisions God’s alternative, peace-filled eschatological future. Remembrance identifies and recounts the ripples God makes throughout history and into the present and future. Remembrance also looks for examples of how people struggled and sometimes failed to seek transformation. A hermeneutics of transformation seeks a community that is comprised of reconciled, mutual relationships.

As mentioned earlier, Schüssler Fiorenza’s method provides a means for fleshing out what these concepts look like in a particular context. In chapter one, I pair Schüssler Fiorenza’s paradigm with the community identified in the book of Philemon. An analysis of the book of Philemon emphasizes themes from the definitions of justice, peace, and reconciliation, such as listening to the experiences of others, critiquing systems of
oppression, seeking community reconciliation, and imagining an alternative eschatological future.

This pairing of a deepened understanding of justice, peace, and reconciliation with the identification of justice, peace and reconciliation in the context of a specific community continues throughout the rest of my project. Chapter two and three work together to develop a Mennonite approach, particularly through the work of John Howard Yoder, to first deepen the understanding of justice, peace, and reconciliation and then place that understanding in a Mennonite, Trinitarian ecclesiological context.

Similarly, chapters four and five function as a unit to explore the homiletical conversation around preaching justice, peace, and reconciliation and then provide a sample sermon and the outline for a practical curriculum for preaching that does justice, peace, and reconciliation within the context of Mennonite congregations.

35. During his tenure as a professor, John Howard Yoder committed various sexual improprieties with his students. This history resulted in some Mennonite scholars refusing to engage with his works because of the pain associated with him. Recently, a New York Times article discussed the situation and the Mennonite response to Yoder’s actions. Mark Oppenheimer, “A Theologian’s Influence, and Stained Past, Live On,” New York Times, October 12, 2013. Mennonite Church USA has recently formed a discernment group to facilitate the healing of those affected by Yoder’s behavior. An online blog is also debating how Yoder’s work should be referenced and utilized given his past. Ted Grimsrud, “Reflections of a Chagrined “Yoderian” (Part Five—Where to Now?)” http://thinkingpacifism.net (accessed September 13, 2013). I have chosen to use Yoder’s work for two reasons. First, Yoder’s theology permeates Mennonite theology, church practice, and preaching. Regardless of his past, the current Mennonite church is awash in his influence. Second, although I want to stand in solidarity with Yoder’s victims and I understand their particular need to distance themselves from him and his work, neglecting to engage his work allows those who agree with his theology to be the primary voices in publishing. Instead, I hope that a new generation of scholars who are further removed from his violence can critique, challenge, and name those areas of his theology that could lead to his actions. For the purposes of this paper, I primarily critique his failure to recognize that not only the world, but also the church, is imperfect and influenced by the principalities and powers. Moreover, I critique his lack of recognition that members of the church have different levels of power and so arguments concerning the Rule of Paul or Matthew 18:15 have to recognize that imbalance and find ways to empower those without power. Chapter five includes a sermon on Matthew 18 that provides an example of using Yoder’s scholarship in combination with suspicion and naming possible abuses.
Thesis Statement

By integrating Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s rhetorical-emancipatory paradigm and John Howard Yoder’s peace theology, this study develops an approach to Mennonite preaching that does justice, peace, and reconciliation, an approach which results in sermons that include a diversity of voices, the eschatological imagination, remembrance, and the building-up of the local church community. This thesis statement is distinctive for three reasons. First, although homiletical theory since the New Hermeneutic emphasizes preaching that does something rather than solely being about a topic, homiletical theory that addresses the doing of justice, peace, and reconciliation is underdeveloped. Second, although Mennonite churches have a long history of peace in relation to theology, biblical interpretation, and practical action, no homiletical theory integrates peace theology with preaching. Third, in addition to Mennonites, other Christian denominations are interested in peace. In 2008 and 2009 the World Council of Churches produced worship material encouraging churches to focus on peace. These materials are not specifically preaching resources, but through stories, short Bible reflections, and music show the importance of the topic of peace in the church internationally. I hope that my project will also be a resource for those outside of the Mennonite faith to examine their own context and explore how their own preaching can do justice, peace, and reconciliation.

Conclusion

Preaching in Mennonite churches and in other denominational contexts can actively participate in doing justice, peace, and reconciliation. Sermons can voice the stories of

struggles against oppression, name God’s presence into those struggles, empower the voices of those silenced both in the past and in the present, imagine alternative, peace-filled futures, and nurture congregational relationships that foster mutuality, love, and peace toward both neighbor and enemy. This project attends to the voices of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, John Howard Yoder, Mennonite, Trinitarian ecclesiology, and various homileticians to deepen the understanding of justice, peace, and reconciliation in order to do justice, peace, and reconciliation in Christian pulpits.
Chapter One

A Biblical Foundation and Methodology: Reading Philemon in light of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s Rhetorical-Emancipatory Approach.

I. Introduction

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s hermeneutics enrich the definitions of justice, peace, and reconciliation presented in the introduction. In Memory of Her, published in 1983, challenged the traditional approaches to biblical interpretation.¹ She was one of a growing number of scholars questioning the objectivity of the historical-critical method. Her particular lens re-storied the participation of women in the Bible. Schüssler Fiorenza began systematizing a series of hermeneutics in order to further develop her approach to biblical interpretation in Bread Not Stone.² However, as her approach gained recognition, women outside of a North American context challenged her privileged position as an educated, successful North American. Her ongoing dialogue with others led Schüssler Fiorenza to continually adapt her approach to include the experiences of others. This work eventually developed into her rhetorical-emanicipatory approach to biblical interpretation.

A rhetorical-emancipatory approach seeks to name the systems that undergird violence while providing tools to envision liberating alternatives. Her present work consists of seven hermeneutics. A hermeneutics of experience, a hermeneutics of domination, a hermeneutics of suspicion, and a hermeneutics of evaluation demonstrate characteristics of justice. These

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hermeneutics seek transformation and justice by listening to those who suffer and by critiquing and challenging the systems that cause oppression. A hermeneutics of evaluation, furthermore, considers the specific context and audience of a particular message in order to determine areas in need of critique and areas of liberation.

A hermeneutics of imagination and a hermeneutics of remembrance reflect the characteristics of peace. Peace includes remembering and listening to others, including the enemy, as well as imagining and working towards God’s peace-filled eschatological future. A hermeneutics of imagination seeks to envision an alternative future, similar to how peacemaking works towards a future without violence. A hermeneutics of remembrance deconstructs and reconstructs narratives recounting the past. Reconstructed narratives tell the stories of God’s presence amidst struggle, in order to inspire and encourage similar work in the present and future.

Finally, a hermeneutics of transformation demonstrates characteristics of reconciliation. This hermeneutics seeks to form a new community acting together for transformation just as reconciliation seeks to bring a diversity of people together into community. It is important to note that in Schüssler Fiorenza’s work, the seven hermeneutics are interrelated and interconnected. The progression through the series of hermeneutics is not linear, but a dance or spiral that continually returns to previous hermeneutics. As a result, transformation is the final hermeneutics named by Schüssler Fiorenza, but it is not the end of the process.

Not only does Schüssler Fiorenza’s work aid in enriching justice, peace, and reconciliation, it also brings together theory and context by applying her work to a particular community. In the course of In Memory of Her, for example, Schüssler Fiorenza applies her
method to both early church canonical and non-canonical sources and in *The Power of the Word* she analyzes 1 Peter. Similarly, as mentioned earlier, her work changed and developed as women in a variety of locations applied her work to their particular context. Facilitating conversation between theory and the context of a specific community is particularly important for my project because I seek to bring Mennonite theories related to justice, peace, and reconciliation together with preaching practices in a Mennonite context. As a result, this chapter begins with Schüssler Fiorenza’s hermeneutics, and then applies them to the book of Philemon. An exploration of Philemon draws out themes of critiquing injustice, loving others, and the responsibility of the community for seeking transformation within community, which are key elements for *doing* justice, peace, and reconciliation.

Furthermore, focusing on Philemon demonstrates that sermons can *do* justice, peace, and reconciliation using a diversity of scriptures designated as the preaching text. Historically, Mennonite churches relied upon the teachings of Jesus, such as the Beatitudes, to support pacifism. These scriptures are of tremendous value to Mennonite churches and their peace witness, but it is important to demonstrate that a diversity of scriptures can *do* justice, peace, and reconciliation because the method itself creates this embodiment.

II. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Justice

a. A Hermeneutics of Experience

A hermeneutics of experience enriches the definition of justice. Justice seeks to listen to those in need in order to correct injustices and challenge the systems that cause suffering

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and oppression. In other words, before people can seek justice, experiences of injustices must be identified and named. A hermeneutics of experience aids in naming and listening to these experiences of injustices and oppression. Schüssler Fiorenza writes that we should listen to “the experiences of wo/men’s struggles at the bottom of the kyriarchal pyramid of domination and exploitation, because their situation lays open the fulcrum of oppression and dehumanization threatening every wo/man.”

The term kyriarchy “is best theorized as a complex pyramidal system of intersecting multiplicative social structures of superordination and subordination, of ruling and oppression.” Essentially, kyriarchy is a, “diagnostic, analytic instrument that allows us to investigate the multiplicative interdependence of gender, race, and class stratifications as well as their discursive inscriptions and ideological reproductions.”

Schüssler Fiorenza is careful to articulate that there is not a single “universal a-historical ‘master paradigm.’ But rather the kyriarchal pyramid shifts and transforms according to each particular context.” The kyriarchal pyramid assists us in recognizing how our own experiences contribute to the oppression of others. We listen to the experiences of others in order to hear experiences of oppression, in order to change the systems that cause the injustices.

Naming struggles and injustices also requires acknowledging the vast diversity of experiences encountered by individuals. Early in North American feminism, women argued that their experiences were distinct from the normative experiences prescribed by their


6. Ibid., 119.

7. Ibid., 120.
churches. Soon after, in reaction to white, North American feminism, women from around the world identified a plethora of experiences divergent from the experiences of North American women. Schüssler Fiorenza writes, “very soon the concept of wo/men’s experience came to be problematic…Wo/men’s experience was often understood in universalist essentialist terms, although it was articulated mostly with respect to white middle-class wo/men. Wo/men’s experience is as variegated and as complex as are the wo/men articulating it.”8 Many of these experiences include stories of suffering and oppression and, at times, interpretations of the Bible reinforce the systems causing the harm.

Schüssler Fiorenza explains that experiences are

socially constructed and coded in kyriocentric language, a coding that is dualistic and asymmetric: male-positive, female-negative, white-positive, black-negative, elite-positive, subaltern-negative, west-positive, Orient-negative, Christian-positive, Jew/Muslim-negative. Therefore, the reading of kyriocentric biblical texts reinforces wo/men’s experiences of inferiority and second-class citizenship as divine revelation.9

As a result, justice requires not only the recognition of, but also critical reflection upon, our own experiences while acknowledging that our experiences are not normative or authoritative, but instead often constructed in a way to reinforce oppression.

These experiences, however, are not named solely as a means for voicing the diversity of personal hardships, but seek to name God’s presence alongside those who struggle. Expressing and critiquing experience can reveal God’s presence within struggles. When those suffering oppression challenge the systems causing harm, their struggles and victories reveal the presence of God. Schüssler Fiorenza writes, “victories in the struggles of multiply

8. Ibid., 170.
9. Ibid.
oppressed wo/men in turn reveal the liberatory presence of G*d in our midst.”

A hermeneutics of experience does not seek the experiences of private individuals solely for the sake of storytelling, but rather celebrates the victories of those oppressed by multiple factors amidst their struggles in order to reveal the liberating presence of God.

b. A Hermeneutics of Domination

The definition of justice named in the introduction includes challenging the structures and systems that cause oppression. A hermeneutics of domination, together with a hermeneutics of suspicion, provides a means for identifying these structures, including our role within them. A hermeneutics of domination begins by questioning “your own social location and participation in kyriarchal power relations. In so doing, you become conscious of how your experiences are constructed…in terms of gender, race, class, religion, or nationalism.”

These “systemic inscriptions” are “multiplicative structures of domination that determine wo/men’s lives,” such as gender, race, class, and ethnicity which we cannot simply “opt out of.” Through “grammar, language, biology, and culture” women and men are inscribed with socio-cultural classifications. Defying these classifications results in censure through separation and exclusion from particular spheres of society. A hermeneutics of domination allows us to recognize how systems are inscribed upon us and how we participate in the inscription of other systems. This hermeneutics can then “assists us in

10. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric*, 49; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom*, 170-171. Schüssler Fiorenza uses an asterisk in the spelling of “G*d” or, in her earlier work, a hyphenated spelling for “G-d,” in order to acknowledge “the insufficiency and inability of human language to adequately name the Divine.” Ibid., 210.


13. Ibid., 159.
seeking possibilities and ways of transforming such socially defined categories of domination.”

### c. A Hermeneutics of Suspicion

A hermeneutics of suspicion is perhaps the most well-known of Schüssler Fiorenza’s hermeneutics due to its early and continuing prevalence in feminist theology. A hermeneutics of suspicion asks questions about the authority of worldviews and biblical texts rather than granting a hermeneutics of consent or affirmation. Schüssler Fiorenza writes, as biblical readers we are taught to approach the bible [sic] with a hermeneutics of respect, acceptance, consent, and obedience. Instead of cultivating a hermeneutics of appreciation and consent, [Schüssler Fiorenza has] argued, a critical feminist interpretation of liberation develops a hermeneutics of suspicion that places on all biblical texts the warning ‘Caution—could be dangerous to your health and survival.’

In her earliest exploration of a hermeneutics of suspicion, Schüssler Fiorenza argues that the “starting point [is] the assumption that biblical texts and their interpretations are androcentric and serve patriarchal functions.” Essentially, most biblical authors as well as the members of the church and academy were men and so the language is androcentric. As a result, a hermeneutics of suspicion “clears away” “mistranslations, patriarchal...”


15. A hermeneutics of suspicion is the first paradigm in Schüssler Fiorenza’s early work. However, in the later constructions, a hermeneutics of suspicion becomes the third step, behind a hermeneutics of experience and a hermeneutics of domination. This shift is notable because by placing a hermeneutics of suspicion later in the paradigm, Schüssler Fiorenza emphasizes beginning interpretation by acknowledging our own participation within kyriarchy through an analysis of experience and domination.


interpretations, and one-sided reconstructions” as well as recovers lost material concerning women.  

A hermeneutics of suspicion also challenges “common sense” assumptions. Schüssler Fiorenza explains that a hermeneutics of suspicion challenges “common sense” and the accepted norms of society by recognizing the constructed systems that dominate, oppress and subjugate people. In other words, a hermeneutics of suspicion questions accepted norms; it “denaturalizes and demystifies practices of domination.”

d. A Hermeneutics of Proclamation/Evaluation

A hermeneutics of proclamation, later named a hermeneutics of evaluation, examines how Bible passages influence those who hear and submit to them. Schüssler Fiorenza argues that words and language influence their audience. Language and texts have power to either condone or critique power, values, and worldviews. As a result, we must repeatedly examine how particular texts influence the audience and whether or not people hear the text as liberative or oppressive. In essence, this hermeneutics asks, “what does a text do to those who submit to its world of visions and values?”

In a Christian context, a hermeneutics of proclamation/evaluation calls into question the traditional practice of accepting every scripture as the unchallenged Word of God. A hermeneutics of proclamation/evaluation determines theologically which scriptures should or

20. Schüssler Fiorenza, Bread, 16.
22. Schüssler Fiorenza, Wisdom, 177.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid., 178.
25. Ibid.
should not be “proclaimed as the word of G-d” by critically examining which texts provide liberation and transformation.\textsuperscript{26} Schüssler Fiorenza provides the example of those scriptures that preach a message of love your neighbor. She argues that “one might agree that a biblical injunction such as ‘love your neighbor’ does not promote oppressive relations. Yet when it is quoted by a minister who is counseling a battered woman to remain in a destructive marriage, such an injunction serves patriarchal purposes.”\textsuperscript{27} A hermeneutics of evaluation identifies a particular scripture in a particular situation as “emancipatory” only after the scripture passes through a hermeneutics of experience, a hermeneutics of domination, and a hermeneutics of suspicion.\textsuperscript{28}

Moreover, rather than understanding the Bible as a source of authority requiring “obedience, submission, and consent,” Schüssler Fiorenza envisions the authority of scripture as “radical democratic creative authority” that “invites debate, risk, vision, empowerment, and transformation.”\textsuperscript{29} In other words, the “criterion or standard of evaluation” for a hermeneutics of evaluation is not conformity but discussion that leads to “the well-being of every wo/man.”\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{26} Schüssler Fiorenza, \textit{But She Said}, 54.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{28} Schüssler Fiorenza, \textit{Wisdom}, 177.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 178-179.
\textsuperscript{30} Schüssler Fiorenza, \textit{Rhetoric}, 51.
III. Philemon and Justice

a. A Hermeneutics of Experience in Philemon

Examining Philemon in light of Schüssler Fiorenza’s hermeneutics provides a practical method for understanding justice and injustice in a particular context. The majority of scholarly work on Philemon has occurred in the past three decades. Various commentaries note that although Philemon is recognized as an authentically Pauline letter, scholarship has neglected it as trivial because of its short length and attention to practical, earthly matters.\textsuperscript{31} A hermeneutics of experience begins to question the trivial nature of Philemon by listening to the experiences of others with this text. For those who experienced slavery in the past, particularly slavery perceived to be biblically-supported, or for those who continue to experience forms of slavery such as human trafficking, this passage can be oppressive. For women who have been told to return to an abusive husband either in the name of reconciliation, the sanctity of marriage, or because their husband is the “master” of the household, Philemon may not be liberating. A hermeneutics of experience challenges our notions of the book of Philemon and explores the consequences of this letter for a diversity of people.


Several commentaries include reader experiences with the Philemon text. The *Africa Bible Commentary* begins by noting the suffering caused in Africa because of slavery.\(^3^2\) Marianne Meye Thompson observes that since Paul returned Onesimus to his master rather than directly asking for Onesimus’ freedom, “what would [Paul] have said to those slaves who sought their freedom on the Underground Railroad to the north and to those who aided them on the way?”\(^3^3\) S.C. Winter begins in a similar fashion but specifically mentions the “tragic consequences” of this passage for enslaved women.\(^3^4\) John Koenig begins his commentary by describing a stained-glass window in San Francisco’s Grace Cathedral that depicts the story of Philemon. Koenig’s notes that underneath the stained glass window that portrays Philemon is a portrait of William Wilberforce and below him Walter Rauchenbusch. Wilberforce played a role in changing the laws concerning slavery and Rauchenbusch developed the “Social Gospel.”\(^3^5\)

By noting the experiences of slaves, these commentaries begin the process of exposing Philemon as more than a trivial story of reconciliation. A hermeneutics of experience, moreover, searches for “victories in the struggles of multiply oppressed” that “reveal the liberatory presence of G*d in our midst.”\(^3^6\) The *Africa Bible Commentary* and Winter’s commentary are perhaps the most promising examples of listening to stories of struggle for


\(^3^3\) Thompson, *Colossians and Philemon*, 194.

\(^3^4\) Winter, “Philemon,” 302.


the purpose of discovering God’s presence, because they argue “it should be a source of hope for Africa that, according to tradition, Onesimus was not only freed but later became a bishop in the church of Jesus Christ.”

b. A Hermeneutics of Domination in Philemon

A hermeneutics of domination explores how systems of kyriarchy affect people. These systems are structures of domination such as gender, race, class and ethnicity that we cannot “opt out of.” In Philemon, the systems of domination are inscribed directly onto the name Onesimus, which means “useful” or “profitable,” reflecting the category of slave.

Norman R. Petersen in Rediscovering Paul provides a comprehensive listing of each of Paul, Philemon and Onesimus’ roles in the narrative world of the letter to Philemon. For my purposes, I focus on the roles of Philemon and Onesimus. The roles of Philemon include: fellow worker of Paul; master/lord of Onesimus; child of Paul and of God; slave of Christ; debtee of Onesimus; debtor of Paul; partner with Paul; brother of Paul and of Onesimus. Onesimus’ roles include child of God; slave of Philemon and of Christ; debtor to Philemon; brother of Paul and of Philemon.

37. Soungalo, “Philemon,” 1488. Winter makes a similar observation, but does not directly mention Onesimus as bishop as a source of hope for Africans and African Americans. Winter, “Philemon,” 311. The historical accuracy of the Onesimus named by Paul in Philemon becoming a bishop is debated, but juxtaposing the African experience of slavery with the hope of God working in mysterious ways, such as possibility making a former slave into a bishop, seeks the liberatory presence of God in suffering as described by Schüssler Fiorenza.


roles not only in relationship to each other but also in relation to the church versus the world, and highlights the importance of Onesimus and Philemon becoming named brothers. 40

Petersen’s analysis of the transformation of the master-slave relationship into a brother-brother relationship in Philemon exemplifies the purposes of this paper. Petersen argues that the roles of master and slave are categories from the “world.” Through the life, death and resurrection of Christ, the roles of master and slave are transformed into a relationship of brotherhood in Christ. Petersen writes,

in the world, Philemon and Onesimus are related in terms of two unmediated hierarchical structures, those of master and slave and of debtee and debtor. These relationships are, through Paul’s letter, invaded by the church’s ultimate mediation, the relationship between brothers, and brotherhood is anti-structurally opposed to the worldly social structures in such a way as to permit no other mediation, only a decision by Philemon as to which domain he is to occupy. 41

Petersen, paralleling Schüssler Fiorenza, identifies the various roles of Paul, Philemon and Onesimus and traces how the local church transforms these roles and identities. I will return to Petersen’s brother-to-brother relationship when I discuss a hermeneutics of imagination.

c. A Hermeneutics of Suspicion in Philemon

In a hermeneutics of suspicion, Schüssler Fiorenza challenges “common sense” assumptions. Examples of “common sense” approaches to Philemon include interpretations that assume Onesimus is untrustworthy because he is a slave. The book of Philemon is typically considered the story of how Onesimus, the slave, stole from his master and ran

40. See chapter two “Social Structures and Social Relations in the Story of Philemon” for a complete exploration of these roles in terms of their place in the world versus in the church and the relationship of the roles to one another. Ibid.

41. Ibid., 169.
away. S.C. Winter names this the “fugitive-slave” interpretation. However, the text does not actually state that Onesimus ran away nor does it claim that Onesimus stole from Philemon. Systems of domination through language and tradition have shaped the identity of Onesimus as well as the perception of slaves as deceitful traitors of their masters. “Common sense” interpretations also assume that the powerful and wealthy Philemon operates autonomously, deciding the future of Onesimus. Instead, Paul’s words suggest that Philemon cannot act autonomously because Paul addresses the greetings to members of the local church community. Philemon is thus accountable to the church community, and the opinions of the church community are essential to the discussion. The autonomy of Philemon and the theory that Paul’s letter is an individual, private matter will be further challenged in a hermeneutics of imagination and a hermeneutics of remembrance.

A hermeneutics of suspicion also considers the “health risks” to those who submit to the text; therefore, a hermeneutics of suspicion’s approach to Philemon may also explore the silencing of Onesimus in the narrative. A hermeneutics of suspicion questions whether those who “submit” to the Philemon text are similarly encouraged not to tell their own story.


44. Winter, “Philemon,” 310.
d. A Hermeneutics of Proclamation/Evaluation in Philemon

A hermeneutics of proclamation/evaluation assesses what can be proclaimed as good news, and in which contexts. As is already evident from a hermeneutics of experience, the return of so-called run-away slaves to their masters would not constitute proclamation of good news for Africans and African Americans/Canadians. Furthermore, I would be cautious of preaching Philemon as a liberating word to abused women. Such a use could potentially reinforce notions of forced reconciliation and continual slavery, especially since the text is unclear whether or not Philemon changed the nature of his relationship to Onesimus. I propose, however, that Philemon could be proclaimed as good news in certain contexts of community. Several commentators argue for Philemon as an example of the formation of new communities in love and reconciliation by following the loving example of Christ.

Todd D. Still argues that Philemon is relevant today because Philemon and Onesimus are in relationship with each other as well as the larger community. He writes, “they are not spiritual freelance artists or lone rangers; they are integrally related to and mutually dependent upon one another.”45 The church today exists as a community in relationship. Ernest Martin refers to the term koinonia, a Greek word for the bonds of community.46 Marianne Meye Thompson notes that Paul seeks a “Christian community bound together by mutual love and commitment...the concrete embodiment of the reconciling gospel of Christ.”47 Imagining a context where Philemon and the church accept Onesimus as a brother


47. Thompson, *Colossians and Philemon*, 213-216.
can empower current congregations to show a similar love to others. 48 I will return to the potentially liberating message of Philemon, love, and koinonia in my reading of Philemon through a hermeneutics of imagination and a hermeneutics of remembrance.

IV. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Peace

a. A Hermeneutics of Imagination

In the introduction to this dissertation, peace is understood as “a victory already won” that continues to “make ripples” throughout history. 49 In other words, God and humanity work for peace in the past, present, and future. A hermeneutics of imagination envisions what peace may resemble in the future.

Schüssler Fiorenza’s approach to imagination, echoing the definition of peace, envisions “a world that is different from the world determined by empire and domination and seeks to identify visions of hope and transformation also inscribed in biblical texts.” 50 A hermeneutics of imagination seeks to “generate utopian visions” and “dream a different world of justice and well-being.” 51 By engaging our imagination we can dream a world of peace because the “space of the imagination is that of freedom, a space in which boundaries

48. We do not know the outcome of Paul’s letter and how Philemon and the church treated Onesimus on his return. I will return to this inability to know the outcome in a hermeneutics of transformation. It provides an important reminder of the difficult realities of seeking transformation and the changes required of both individuals and the church when struggling for freedom from oppression.


50. Schüssler Fiorenza, The Power, 163.

51. Schüssler Fiorenza, Rhetoric, 52; Schüssler Fiorenza, Wisdom, 179; Schüssler Fiorenza, The Power, 188.
are crossed, possibilities are explored.” As Schüssler Fiorenza writes, “what we cannot imagine will not take place.” In The Power of the Word, Schüssler Fiorenza elaborates, “because of the imagination we are able to conceive of change, of how situations can be altered.” In other words, the imagination envisions how violence can cease and peace may be established.

b. A Hermeneutics of Remembrance

A hermeneutics of remembrance seeks to recover and tell stories of the past. In particular, remembrance seeks those stories that have been lost or silenced. It seeks these stories of struggles in the past in order to inspire those people who are struggling for transformation in the present and future. It also shares stories of God’s presence in the past so that people can recognize God’s presence in the present and future. Schüssler Fiorenza writes,

Rather than abandoning the memory of our foresisters’ sufferings and hopes in our patriarchal Christian past, a hermeneutics of remembrance reclains their suffering and struggles through the subversive power of the “remembered past.” If the enslavement of people becomes total when their history is destroyed and solidarity with the dead is made impossible, then a feminist biblical hermeneutics of remembrance has the task of becoming a “dangerous memory” that reclains the visions and suffering of the dead.

52. Schüssler Fiorenza, Rhetoric, 52; Schüssler Fiorenza, Wisdom, 179; Schüssler Fiorenza, The Power, 188.

53. Schüssler Fiorenza, Wisdom, 179.


55. Schüssler Fiorenza, Bread, 19.
Reclaiming and rediscovering lost stories creates a “universal solidarity among women of the past, present, and future.” A hermeneutics of remembrance illuminates the invisible and listens for the stories that are silenced today.

In her later works, Schüssler Fiorenza further explores the nature of historical study. She explains that her approach does “not understand texts as windows to the world, or as mirrors of the past and it does not read historical sources as objective data and evidence of how things really were. Neither does it understand historiography as a transcript and report of ‘what actually happened’. Nor does it mistake its scientific models of reconstruction as describing reality.” Rather, Schüssler Fiorenza writes, “historical understanding…is narrative laden and amounts to a remaking and retelling of reality, but it is not reality itself.” Such “remaking” and “retelling” is critical because, “if it is a sign of oppression when a people does not have a written history, then feminists and other subaltern scholars cannot afford to eschew such rhetorical and historical re-constructive work.”

A hermeneutics of remembrance provides examples of overcoming oppression and violence in order to inspire similar acts of peace and nonviolence today and in the future. Through rediscovering how the oppressed struggled and succeeded in the past, the stories of the past become audible and provide hope for those struggling today.

56. Ibid.
57. Schüssler Fiorenza, Rhetoric, 52; Schüssler Fiorenza, Wisdom, 183; Schüssler Fiorenza, The Power, 191.
58. Schüssler Fiorenza, Rhetoric, 52; Schüssler Fiorenza, Wisdom, 183.
59. Schüssler Fiorenza, Rhetoric, 52; Schüssler Fiorenza, Wisdom, 184.
60. Schüssler Fiorenza, Rhetoric, 52; Schüssler Fiorenza, Wisdom, 183; Schüssler Fiorenza, The Power, 190. Although preaching does not create a written history, preaching that remembers can voice the stories of the silenced and begin bringing these marginalized voices to the attention of the congregation.
V. Philemon and Peace

a. A Hermeneutics of Imagination in Philemon

Paul practices imagination in Philemon by envisioning an alternative local church community founded in love, community, and brother and sisterhood. Such an image is directly related to peace because reformulating relationships according to love and community is an imaginative act critical to ending violence towards others. In Philemon, the church forms community through bonds of sisterhood and brotherhood in Christ.

Norman Petersen traces the importance of brotherhood terminology in Philemon. In his sociological study, Petersen argues that in the narrative world of Paul’s letter to Philemon, the church and the world are two “spatially distinct” spaces. Baptism is the rite of entry into the church and, although there is a “road” leading between the two spheres, Petersen argues that Paul views the “traffic” as largely one way, moving from the world into the church. In this arrangement, hierarchical structures, such as master and slave, are not valid in the sphere of the local church. If Philemon refuses to forsake the master-slave hierarchy and will not “accept a brother as a brother, then Philemon’s status in the brotherhood is at stake, for he has not shown himself to be a brother.” Petersen argues that Philemon’s decision effects Philemon’s own position as a child of God. Petersen writes, “to

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61. Petersen does not subject the term “brother” to a hermeneutics of domination, suspicion or evaluation but rather categorically states that Paul uses “brother” and “man” as inclusive terms. “Brother” would have to be analyzed according to a hermeneutics of domination and suspicion before women and others who are oppressed could submit to the Philemon passages. I would also argue that the term “slave,” either to each other, or, as Petersen often uses it, as a slave to Christ, would also have to undergo a similar critique.


63. Ibid., 158.

64. Ibid., 158, 160.

65. Ibid., 78.
know oneself to be a child of God means knowing that one is in the process of transformation from a radically negative form of existence into a radically positive and antithetically different form. Therefore, to be a ‘brother’ to a ‘brother’ is vastly more than a matter of social relations. In Paul’s terms, it is a matter of life or death.  

If Philemon refuses to recognize Onesimus as a brother, Philemon refutes the “processes of adoption and mediation” of all humanity begun by God through Christ. Envisioning the new community, new world, and new identity begun through Christ is an act of imagination. Petersen writes that the perspective and behavior of Christians are,

now governed by new terms, by new knowledge, and by a new conviction of what is really real. They have entered into a new reality. They have a new world, a new identity, and new motives for their behavior in this world. Their former individual identities, together with the world that defined them, has been replaced. Their former individuality is absorbed into their unity in Christ, into whose image they are being shaped during the process that leads to their becoming sons of God with him. This process begins with their reconciliation to God through Christ’s actions in human form and it ends with their adoption as sons. Christ is thus in his human activity the agent of their reconciliation.

It is important to note that Petersen considers “individuality” to be “absorbed” into the “unity in Christ” of the church. As a result, Philemon’s decision is not a personal, individual, matter but a concern for the entire congregation. Petersen argues that Paul addresses the letters to various members of the local church and, as a result, there is communal pressure on Philemon from the entire church to accept or reject Paul’s message. Furthermore, it is likely that the church met in Philemon’s house, and so if Philemon were no longer a

66. Ibid., 222.
67. Ibid., 215.
68. Ibid., 239-240.
69. Ibid., 99.
“brother” in Christ, there would be repercussions for the church.70 Petersen writes, “for this reason, Philemon’s refusal to accept Onesimus as his brother would not only disrupt the social fabric of the community, but it would also threaten the whole rationale, the ‘reality,’ of the international brotherhood.”71

Ernest Martin also notes the importance of the church community. He uses koinonia to refer to the fellowship bonds of members of a church.72 He draws attention to verse six. In this verse, Paul uses a unique phrase, “the koinonia of the faith,” which “establishes the link between being ‘called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord’ (1 Cor. 1:9) and the ‘fellowship’ to which the church was devoted following Pentecost.”73 Koinonia is translated as “fellowship, sharing, community, participation, partnership, contribution, generosity or communion.”74 Martin explains that the New Testament “speaks of koinonia with God, with Christ, and in (or of) the Spirit.”75 He explains that the “breadth and depth” of koinonia displays all that “Christians have in common because they are Christians.”76

Marianne Meye Thompson makes a similar argument using the term “love” instead of koinonia. She observes, “in the short letter to Philemon, Paul will appeal, directly and indirectly, to the powerful bonds of Christian love as he seeks to reconcile Philemon and

70. Ibid., 100.
71. Ibid., 101.
72. Martin, Colossians, Philemon, 256. It is important to note that both koinonia and love develop out of characteristics that Paul assigns to Philemon. As a result, both koinonia and love would have to be subjected to the first four hermeneutics in order to assure that characteristics of the wealthy and powerful Philemon are not unjustly being considered normative for all Christians. This spiraling back to previous hermeneutics is a central characteristic of Schüssler Fiorenza’s paradigm.
73. Ibid.
74. Ibid.
75. Ibid.
76. Ibid.
Onesimus” because, for Paul, love bears witness to Christ amidst the relationships of the congregation. Words such as “love,” “fellowship,” and “brother” “show that Paul’s letter circles around the central theme of the Christian community bound together by mutual love and commitment.” In other words, Paul expects of himself and of all Christians “the concrete embodiment of the reconciling gospel of Christ.” Paul imagines a community built on Christ’s love for us and our love for one another.

A hermeneutics of imagination fosters these visions of a new koinonia church community composed of the daughters and sons of Christ. A koinonia community is shaped by the love of Christ and, in turn, loves others. As noted in the dissertation introduction, this love for others is critical to the nonviolent resistance and peace dreamed of through the imagination. In the local church, members of the community relate to one another through the love of Christ. They love one another as sisters and brothers rather than through structural categories such as master and slave or, in the case of a Mennonite emphasis on peace, enemy and ally.

b. A Hermeneutics of Remembrance in Philemon

As explored earlier, a hermeneutics of suspicion considers which stories are missing or silenced from the traditional narrative. A hermeneutics of remembrance narrates the missing stories as a means for liberation and transformation today. The silenced story that I have yet to explore is the story of the local church or churches that stand on the fringes of the

77. Thompson, Colossians and Philemon, 213. Thompson refers to verses 4-7.
78. Ibid., 214. “Love” is found in vv. 5 and 9, “fellowship” in vv. 6 and 17 and “brother” in vv. 7 and 20.
79. Ibid.
Philemon narrative as well as those churches who actively struggled against slavery. As noted in the section describing a hermeneutics of imagination, Paul’s letter to Philemon is not an individual letter, but a letter read to the entire congregation, similar to a sermon. Not only will the congregation hear the letter, the letter has the potential to change the community, or do something in the church. The letter could cause conflict in whether or not Philemon chose to acknowledge Onesimus as a brother, since the church probably meets in Philemon’s home. Moreover, other congregants may face a similar decision to free their slaves after receiving Paul’s letter. Furthermore, the local church is not a passive observer. Pheme Perkins argues that the church acts as a judge of Philemon’s actions. In her article in the Women’s Bible Commentary, she writes, “Paul’s strategy is to use persons who are Philemon’s equals as well as the larger community as an audience who will judge whether or not Philemon has taken the apostle’s advice.” Furthermore, this congregational audience may also have to determine whether or not Philemon should follow Paul’s instructions. Despite being recipients of the letter, being directly affected by Philemon’s choice and possibly even acting as judges, the members of the local church are silent in the text.

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80. The New Testament also contains various passages used in support of slavery, such as 1 Timothy 6:1-2 and Colossians 3:22-24. These stories should also be remembered, highlighting the ambiguity of the Christian response to slavery. This ambiguity can be remembered as a failure to seek justice and liberation for slaves. I will return to remembering failures in the next chapter.

81. Petersen, Rediscovering Paul, 99-100. Koenig argues that the letter itself is addressed to Philemon, but Paul’s language suggests the entire church will read the letter. Koenig, Galatians, 194. Winter argues that Paul’s address frames the entire contents of the letter as a church matter. Winter, “Philemon,” 309.

Paul J. Achtemeier, Joel B. Green and Marianne Meye Thompson voice the stories of those churches that actively pursued freedom for slaves. They vividly depict early Christians’ response to slavery. They write,

Christians would at times purchase the freedom of their own members who were slaves. And there is evidence the Christians would on occasion also sell themselves into slavery, and use the proceeds to feed the hungry…Given the political structure of the empire, these were apparently the only ways Christians could give vent to their dislike of the institution of slavery.83

A hermeneutics of remembrance retells the stories of early Christians actively freeing slaves, as well as forming a community of love and koinonia in Christ. Remembrance reclaims the stories of Christians struggling against slavery, towards liberation for all, even to the point of giving up their own freedom for the liberation of others.

A hermeneutics of remembrance reclaims and retells stories of the past in such a fashion as to empower present work towards peace and transformation. In the book of Philemon, a hermeneutics of remembrance tells the stories of the early church in order to highlight the struggles of the congregations as they seek to live as a reconciled community in Christ.

VI. Elisabeth Schüessler Fiorenza and Reconciliation

a. Hermeneutics of Transformation

Reconciliation is defined as a group of imperfect people seeking to live as a community embodying God’s love to each other and the world. The hermeneutics of imagination and remembrance introduces the importance of community building critical to

83. Achtemeier, Green, and Thompson, Introducing, 424.
reconciliation, but a hermeneutics of transformation brings reconciliation to fruition by emphasizing the role of community. A hermeneutics of transformation focuses on how communities are empowered to create change and seek the transformation of suffering and oppression. Schüssler Fiorenza writes, “biblical texts have the power to evoke potent emotions and creative responses and thereby create a sense of community necessary to sustain contemporary visions and struggles for a different society, church and world.” 84 In other words, communities, rather than individuals, seek transformation and act for change by working together, struggling together, and dreaming together. Schüssler Fiorenza names this community the ekklesia of wo/men. 85 She defines an ekklesia as “the radical democratic assembly of free citizens who gather in order to conduct critical debate and to determine their own communal, political, and spiritual well-being. When found in the Christian Testament (New Testament) the word is translated as ‘church.’” 86 Schüssler Fiorenza is hesitant, however, to equate ekklesia or “ekklesia of women” with terms such as “wo/men-church” because she argues that a term like “wo/men-church” is “in danger of losing the radical democratic meaning of the expression.” 87 The ekklesia is both a “virtual, utopian space but also...an already partially realized space.” 88 Ekklesia is a “radical democratic construct that is at once a historical and an imagined political-cultural-religious reality” that “struggles for transformation.” 89

84. Schüssler Fiorenza, The Power, 192.
85. Schüssler Fiorenza, Wisdom, 129.
86. Ibid., 209, 127-128.
87. Ibid., 129.
88. Ibid., 128.
89. Ibid.
VII. Philemon and Reconciliation

a. A Hermeneutics of Transformation in Philemon

A hermeneutics of transformation seeks to form a community characterized by relationships shaped by God’s love. Love, new relationships, and community have already been discussed in relation to other hermeneutics. A hermeneutics of domination and a hermeneutics of imagination traced Paul’s desire for new relationships of brotherhood and koinonia between Philemon and Onesimus. A hermeneutics of imagination also noted the hope for a community comprised of loving relationships. A hermeneutics of remembrance suggested that the voice of the church community is silenced in the narrative. The relationship between Philemon and Onesimus influenced the entire church, but the experiences of the congregation are absent from the text.

A hermeneutics of transformation also seeks to empower the community to struggle for the transformation of the principalities and powers in the present. This aspect of a hermeneutics of transformation is difficult to trace in Philemon. Since we do not know the outcome of Paul’s letter, we do not know if the church was empowered to challenge oppression.

We can assume that the letter affected the congregation in some manner. Ernest Martin argues that the individual problems of Onesimus and Philemon cannot be separated from the life of the congregation as a whole. By referencing family systems theory, he argues, “individuals are so much a part of their family infrastructure that when one member of a
family has a problem, it is in fact a problem involving the whole family.” Paul’s letter reminds Philemon that his church community is his family and his problems concern the entire congregation. However, we do not know how Paul’s letter influenced the congregation. It is uncertain whether or not Philemon or the congregation welcomed Onesimus as a brother. We do not know if the local church became actively involved in the lives of slaves outside of the church. It is debatable whether or not the local church community responded to Paul’s letter and formed a more inclusive community of brothers and sisters in Christ by freeing slaves.

According to James M. G. Barclay, not only are we unaware of the letter’s outcome, there is also ambiguity concerning what Paul wanted Philemon and the congregation to do. He argues that the opacity of the letter may stem from Paul’s own uncertainty of what to recommend. If Paul recommended the freeing of all Christian slaves, then the households that relied on slaves to operate, and perhaps host a church congregation, would suffer. Alternatively, if Paul did not recommend Onesimus’ freedom then Onesimus and Philemon would remain slave and master while also attempting to be brothers in Christ.

Applying a hermeneutics of transformation to Philemon reminds us of the complicated nature of struggling for transformation. Although other hermeneutics can imagine the future


91. Ibid., 251.


93. Ibid.

94. Ibid.

95. Ibid., 116-117.
and hope for transformation, a hermeneutics of transformation begins in the present with the difficult questions of how to work towards God’s imagined eschatological future, today.

Schüssler Fiorenza’s method, applied to Philemon, seems to end on a pessimistic note because she recognizes the realities of struggling for transformation. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that her method is not a linear, sequential set of steps, but rather a spiral dance continually moving between the various hermeneutics. As a result, although we do not know the events that transpired after Paul’s letter to Philemon, we are not at the end of our interpretational endeavors. We are continually re-reading and re-imagining our text, community, and world. As Schüssler Fiorenza writes, “one never arrives but always struggles on the way.”

VIII. Implications for Preaching

a. Doing Justice, Peace, and Reconciliation is a Dance

Schüssler Fiorenza describes her rhetorical-emancipatory approach as a dance that spirals, circles, and turns. Dancing involves technique, practice, skills, natural talent, and the freedom to move and adjust as needed. Preaching that does justice, peace, and reconciliation, likewise brings together, justice, peace, and reconciliation into a circular dance with many elements moving together in partnership. This movement between justice, peace, and reconciliation recognizes that each area is interconnected and informed by the others. Justice includes listening to others and hearing God’s presence in struggles with oppression, but also entails loving others as an act of peace in order to create a space where

97. Schüssler Fiorenza, Wisdom, 166.
those who have been silenced can safely speak. Peace cannot happen unless we engage in acts of justice by listening to those silenced in the past and seeking an alternative liberating future. Reconciliation cannot exist without the ability to openly and honestly listen to one another and recognize that there is not a definitive, normative type of experience.

These interconnections also moderate how people may attempt to do justice, peace, and reconciliation. For example, speaking stories of oppression in the pursuit of doing justice should not lead to denigrating those who caused the suffering, because peace and reconciliation seek love for the enemy. Similarly, seeking peace cannot mean simply silencing opposing voices because justice and reconciliation listen to a diversity of voices. Finally, reconciliation cannot take a “forgive and forget” approach to mending relationships because peace and justice listen to stories of suffering in the past and present in order to envision an alternative eschatological future.

Finally, as noted in this chapter, Schüssler Fiorenza’s hermeneutics continually overlap with one another and the process of interpretation has no end. Preaching that does justice, peace, and reconciliation is also a continual enfolding of the three elements onto one another and cannot announce an end to the process.

b. Doing Justice, Peace, and Reconciliation is a Community Initiative

The community is essential in the process of doing justice, peace, and reconciliation. Although Schüssler Fiorenza’s approach often does not highlight the role the local church plays in the process of liberation, using her method to exegete Philemon demonstrates the congregation’s responsibility in doing justice, peace, and reconciliation. Paul addresses and appeals to the entire congregation because Philemon is not alone in his decisions. When preaching does justice, peace, and reconciliation, the entire congregation is a key participant
in the conversation. *Doing* justice may have consequences for the congregation, just as slaveholders in Philemon’s church may have faced freeing their slaves, losing a congregant member, or losing their place of worship.

Preaching can truthfully name injustices, as well as potential consequences for the local church as a result of challenging the systems of domination. Acts of peace name the struggles of the past, including the stories of the local or denominational church, as examples of God’s presence with us today in the midst of oppression and into the future. Preaching can share stories of the past as a means of inspiring those who struggle today. Preaching can also envision alternative liberating futures in which oppression and struggles cease.

Even in the midst of all of its imperfections, the church community can be a glimpse of that future today. Acts of reconciliation require different relationships between congregants. Relationships based on hierarchical positions such as slave and master are transformed as all congregants are brothers and sisters under Christ. Preaching can form these relationships by incorporating the life of the local church into preaching, naming God in the midst of relationships, and envisioning how these transformed relationships may develop within the congregation.

**IX. Conclusion**

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s rhetorical-emancipatory paradigm applied to the book of Philemon provides a basis for preaching that *does* justice, peace, and reconciliation. Preaching that *does* justice gives voice to a diversity of experiences, critiques systems of domination, questions common sense assumptions, and recognizes that good news for some is harmful to others. Sermons that *do* peace imagine peace-filled futures and nonviolent
approaches to situations where violence is assumed as common sense. Finally, preaching that does reconciliation seeks to form a community that is primarily concerned with loving others.

Schüssler Fiorenza’s approach, however, could include an even greater emphasis on the role of the local church community within transformation, liberation, justice, peace, and reconciliation. Although a community of love is an appropriate goal for preaching that does justice, peace, and reconciliation, the community is also a critical instrument for all areas of Schüssler Fiorenza’s paradigm. It is the community who speaks and listens to the experiences of others; the community supports one another when challenging the systems of domination; the community discerns good news; the community imagines together and remembers together. A koinonia community is the result of preaching that does justice, peace, and reconciliation, but it is also an instrument in doing justice, peace, and reconciliation. The focus in Mennonite theology on community provides resources for infusing the community into the entire process of transformation and liberation.
Chapter Two

Mennonite Peace Theology: Yoder’s Eschatology and Ecclesiology

I. Introduction

From the 1960s until his death in 1997, John Howard Yoder wrote a series of books and articles articulating various aspects of Mennonite ethics and biblical interpretation. Unlike Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Yoder did not develop a systematized method. Instead, his publications often answer specific questions, reflect debates current at the time, or address topics arising from his lectures as a guest in a variety of settings. His seminal work, *The Politics of Jesus*, centers around Christology and eschatology. Yoder’s Christology understands Jesus’ life as an example for Christian living, and views Jesus’ death as a means for overcoming the principalities and powers. Yoder especially emphasizes Christ’s willingness to suffer rather than engage in violence as the basis for pacifism. His pacifism is further augmented by eschatology. Yoder argues that God’s Kingdom has come through Christ’s death on the cross, but the church can live into that Kingdom in the present.

The call of the church to live into the Kingdom of God in the present results in specific ecclesiological arguments in Yoder’s work. His view of baptism, communion, church discipline, and congregational discernment are all shaped by his ideal that the church today is the living witness of what the Kingdom of God will be like in the future.  

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Yoder, similar to Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza in the previous chapter, hesitates to use the term ‘church’ to describe this group of people living into the future Kingdom of God in the present. He argues,

when we use the word “church” in our day we mean by it a gathering for worship, or the group of persons who gather for worship, or who might so gather, and who otherwise have little to do with each other. Sometimes it even means the building they meet in, or the organization which provides that there will be an officiant at the meeting, or even the national agency which manages the pension fund for the officiates’ widows.  

Yoder instead argues that the local church should be a people “gathered to do business in His name to find what it means here and now to put into practice this different quality of life which is God’s promise to them and to the world and their promise to God and service to the world.”

This chapter argues that the local church is a place of democratic conversation and transformation both in the present and in the future. Such actions shape the local church as a crucial participant in the struggle against oppression. Through this definition of church, I perceive that Yoder supplements Schüssler Fiorenza’s approach to transformation. He recognizes the central role of the local church in the transformation of oppression. This perspective is evident in his theology of the local church’s role in suffering, critique of oppression, use of remembrance for creating peace, and the utilization of imagination in order to dream of a different future.


3. Ibid.

4. Echoing Yoder’s approach, I use the term “church” to refer to those congregants gathered on a Sunday morning that form a particular congregation, many who have made an adult commitment to God and to the church through their adult baptism. I provide a more comprehensive definition of church in chapter three.
In chapter one, I detailed Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s rhetorical-emancipatory paradigm employing it as a methodology for shaping an approach to preaching that does justice, peace, and reconciliation. I then applied her method to the specific community of Philemon. In this chapter, I use her method to explore doing justice, peace, and reconciliation from a Mennonite perspective. In particular, a Mennonite lens emphasizes the role of the church in transformation and liberation. Given the centrality of the church in preaching that does justice, peace, and reconciliation, I further explore the Mennonite context by articulating a Trinitarian approach to Mennonite ecclesiology and its implications for preaching in chapter three.

5. Although Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and John Howard Yoder have seemingly contradictory approaches to the Bible (Schüssler Fiorenza wants suspicion of the Bible while Yoder wants obedience) Mennonite theologian Lydia Neufeld Harder has already laid the foundations for bringing these two theologians into conversation. Neufeld Harder, while acknowledging that there are continuing points of tension between Mennonite theology and feminist theology, argues that a “hermeneutics of discipleship” offers a position that resists the “false polarity” created by only looking at obedience verses suspicion. Lydia Neufeld Harder, *Obedience, Suspicion and the Gospel of Mark: A Mennonite-Feminist Exploration of Biblical Authority* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1998), 147. A hermeneutics of discipleship is “a process of following Jesus, who is clearly confessed as the Lord. This process, empowered by the Spirit, embraces moments of both obedience and suspicion as the way is discerned and the path is followed. This is because God’s authority is powerful in its ability to reveal and save but vulnerable in its embodiment in humanity and in human structures.” Ibid., 147-148. I will follow Neufeld Harder’s lead and work on the assumption that Yoder and Schüssler Fiorenza are not at irreconcilable odds with one another over their different approaches to the Bible, but that at times the Holy Spirit requires critique and at other times obedience. As a result, I use Yoder’s work primarily as a supplement to Schüssler Fiorenza’s without spending considerable time building the relationship between Mennonite theology and feminist theology.

6. In the previous chapter I divided Schüssler Fiorenza’s seven hermeneutical steps according to the themes of justice, peace, and reconciliation. I maintain the overarching themes of justice, peace, and reconciliation again in this chapter, but I do not align Yoder’s work with each of Schüssler Fiorenza’s seven hermeneutical approaches. Whereas Schüssler Fiorenza clearly divides her work into seven distinctive sections, corresponding material in Yoder’s theology is often scattered across several chapters in a diversity of sources.
II. Justice and the Church Community

a. Listening to the Experiences of Others

The previous chapter argued that by listening to the experiences of others we learn about the struggles and oppression of others.\(^7\) These experiences demonstrate the “oppression and dehumanization” which threaten us all.\(^8\) John Howard Yoder also addresses the need to listen to the experiences of others. He refers to 1 Corinthians 14: 26-33 as the “Rule of Paul,” according to which everyone in the early Christian congregation “who has something to say, something given by the Holy Spirit to him or her to say, can have the floor. The others who were speaking before are instructed to yield the floor to him or her.”\(^9\) In this system, there is not an identified leader or moderator and the entire body of gathered Christians together weigh the importance of each speaker’s contribution.\(^10\) Yoder argues that this method has two implications. First, when everyone can speak, “I have to act nonviolently in order to get the adversary to hear me, but I need as well to hear the adversary.”\(^11\) Second, “the voice of the underdog is to be heard.”\(^12\) He argues, “liberation theologians today speak of ‘the epistemological privilege of the oppressed.’ There is no


\(^9\) Yoder, *Body Politics*, 61. Yoder refers to 1 Corinthians 14 as the source for the Rule of Paul without citing specific verses. He focuses on 1 Corinthians 14: 29-31 and notes that verses 34 and 35 concerning women remaining silent should not be taken literally because chapter 11 describes women praying and prophesying. Ibid., 62.

\(^10\) Ibid., 61.

\(^11\) Ibid., 69.

\(^12\) Ibid.
blunter instrument to guarantee such a hearing for hitherto inadequately spoken-for causes than to remember Paul’s simple rule that everyone must be given the floor.”\textsuperscript{13}

The Rule of Paul certainly causes concern. Apart from the procedural questions of how to prevent anarchy, which Yoder addresses, he also assumes that everyone will honestly and openly listen to one another with respect and appreciation. He also assumes that everyone will have the confidence and encouragement to speak and that all will have an equal voice. Schüssler Fiorenza’s approach is a corrective to Yoder’s work in that by specifically seeking out the experiences of those who suffer and struggle, she encourages, supports, and searches out the voices that may be too timid, too insecure, or too habitually silenced to speak in the type of setting described by the Rule of Paul.\textsuperscript{14}

In order to listen to the voices of others, we must voluntarily accept the occasional silencing of our own voice. Voluntarily sacrificing our own privilege, including our own personal safety, for the sake of others is a key theme in Yoder’s work. He utilizes the term “suffering servant” to refer to Christians’ responsibility to accept the possibility of suffering when working for transformation. It is helpful to define the terms “suffering” and “servant” to avoid possible misunderstandings. Yoder argues, “the believer’s cross is no longer any and every kind of suffering, sickness, or tension.”\textsuperscript{15} He writes,

the cross of Christ was not an inexplicable or chance event, which happened to strike him, like illness or accident. To accept the cross as his destiny, to move toward it and even to provoke it, when he could well have done otherwise, was Jesus’ constantly reiterated free choice. He warns his disciples lest their embarking on the same path be less conscious of its cost (Luke 14:25-33).\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 72.

\textsuperscript{15} Yoder, \textit{The Politics of Jesus}, 96.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 129.
Suffering, then, is the freely chosen consequence of accepting Christ’s call to nonconformity and social critique. It is suffering for the sake of change and for the sake of others, rather than suffering for the sake of suffering.

A suffering servant theology articulates not only the voluntary nature of suffering, but also the types of suffering that are or are not intended by the theology. In her work, Mennonite womanist Nekeisha Alexis-Baker reiterates the importance of voluntarily choosing to accept suffering from a Black women’s perspective. She argues that Black women have been encouraged to silently “bear their cross in faith;” however, “Yoder’s theology of the cross...undercuts religious rationales for Black people’s subjugation precisely because the suffering they experience is not a valid ‘way of the cross.’”\textsuperscript{17} When suffering is voluntary, the church can thoroughly denounce any and all abuses that are imposed upon Black women and other underprivileged groups. When the church understands that Jesus’ cross is the response of a hostile world to his freely chosen path of nonviolence, identification with the poor, justice and reconciliation, it is better able to expose, critique, and confront suffering that does not fit Jesus’ example – whether its racial discrimination, domestic violence, sexual abuse or emotional neglect.\textsuperscript{18}

As a result, involuntary suffering can be critiqued as oppressive. Suffering caused by abuse, sickness, injury, poverty, racism etc. is involuntary and in need of critique and transformation. By acknowledging that involuntary forms of suffering are unjust, the churches can then critique the types and causes of suffering that are not intended by this theology.


\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 88.
A suffering servant theology also requires mutuality. Mennonite theologian Lydia Neufeld Harder’s exploration of the term “servant” identifies the mutuality necessary for service. In “Singing a Subversive Song of Hope,” Neufeld Harder explores three approaches to service. The first approach is service “arising from a condition of inequality,” such as a child serving a parent or an employee serving a boss. This type of service has a clear hierarchy and those higher up the hierarchy determine the nature of service. This approach to service is particularly prone to “power struggles as well as domination and oppression.”

The second approach is service arising because of the need of the other, such as a therapist to a patient, the rich to the poor, or the healthy to the sick. Although this approach to service appears helpful because those with resources share with those in need, an inequality remains. Neufeld Harder notes, for example, that “those serving view themselves as magnanimous givers, not admitting their own needs.” Furthermore, those receiving service do not determine whether they will receive assistance, nor do they participate in shaping the form of aid that they will receive. Neufeld Harder writes, “the lack of choice given to those being served provides opportunities for abuse, including sexual or physical abuse.”

20. Ibid., 16.
21. Ibid., 17.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid., 18.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
The third approach to service, and the option advocated by Neufeld Harder, is the model of solidarity and friendship, such as service between friends. Neufeld Harder explains, “service in this model is freely chosen both by the giver and the receiver. Therefore, it is liberating and freeing. At its best, service between friends affirms equality and promotes mutual dignity, is not demanding and creates no debts, expects no return but freely evokes reciprocity.” In terms of the church, this approach to service means putting “all the gifts of the individual persons at the service of the community or institution for the good of each as it is needed…[It] describes an interdependence of everyone, where the dignity of each is enhanced, and where coercion and violence are not needed to call anyone to serve.” Furthermore, this method “is not something that is achieved once and for all; rather it must become a dynamic force that works itself out in practice.” Service becomes “dynamic, continually creating new opportunities as gifts are [mutually] discovered.” In this approach both the servant and the recipient have the opportunity to refuse to give or refuse to receive.

The combination of these two terms, ‘suffering’ and ‘servant,’ contributes to a theology of justice and transformation rooted within relationships and community. Justice involves listening with mutuality and respect to the voices of others. Justice also critiques the current systems of domination in order to identify oppression. However, critiquing these

26. Ibid., 19. This model seems to assume that a friendship exists prior to service. I am curious whether or not there is a means of serving that creates friendship through the process of service.

27. Ibid., 20.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.
systems and discovering necessary solutions cannot be conducted solely by the rich benefactors or by the poor recipients. Rather, servanthood requires an ongoing mutuality, a reciprocal relationship between persons of equal dignity. This mutuality may result in the former ‘benefactors’ having to sacrifice, or suffer, as they surrender their claims of superiority and their hierarchical structures of power that benefit them.  

b. Principalities and Powers

Listening to others and willingly accepting the possibility of suffering further acts to reveal the systems that cause suffering and oppression. Yoder refers to the overarching systems of oppression as the ‘principalities and powers,’ or simply ‘the powers,’ and calls for their transformation. The Bible views the principalities and powers as “superhuman” powers “invisibly determining human events.” Yoder cites “modern day structures” as “roughly the equivalent” to the biblical concept of the principalities and powers. These

31. I consider Neufeld Harder’s option of mutual relationships akin to Yoder’s suffering because both scholars are exploring how those in traditionally defined positions of privilege and power interact with, or on behalf of, those who are oppressed and in need of justice. However, Neufeld Harder goes beyond Yoder in also looking at how those in traditionally defined positions of powerlessness interact with those who seem more powerful. Her paper challenges Yoder’s discussion of suffering by recognizing the often painful struggle of those without apparent power to gain enough of a sense of self-worth and autonomy so that they can choose their own response to the relationship, thus making it mutual.

32. Methodist scholar Walter Wink writes on the principalities and powers. In The Powers That Be, Wink describes the principalities and powers as more than just people; they are “institutions and structures that weave society into an intricate fabric of power and relationships. They are useful. We could do nothing without them.” Walter Wink, The Powers That Be : Theology for a New Millennium (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 1. The principalities and powers are our banks, our postal systems, our schools, our corporations, and an endless number of entities; “but the Powers are also the source of unmitigated evils.” Ibid. Examples include: the industrial military complex, capitalism, education systems that reward competition rather than co-operation, the beast of Revelation, and the angel of Persia in Daniel. For a more complete analysis of the principalities and powers I direct readers to Walter Wink’s powers trilogy, Walter Wink, Naming the Powers : The Language of Power in the New Testament (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984); Walter Wink, Unmasking the Powers : The Invisible Forces That Determine Human Existence (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986); Walter Wink, Engaging the Powers : Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).


34. Ibid.
structures began as “part of the good creation of God.” Nevertheless, the principalities and powers fell and “responded to Christ with hostility.” The principalities and powers are no longer active only as mediators of the saving creative purposes of God; now we find them seeking to separate us from the love of God (Rom. 8:38); we find them ruling over the lives of those who live far from the love of God (Eph. 2:2); we find them holding us in servitude to their rules (Col. 2:20); we find them holding us under their tutelage (Gal. 4:3). These structures which were suppose to be our servants have become our masters and our guardians.

The structures and systems created for humanity’s benefit have rebelled against the purposes of God and now attempt to control, dominate, and subjugate humanity.

Nevertheless, Christ is ultimately ruler over the principalities and powers. Christ defeated the principalities and powers through his actions as a suffering servant and although the principalities and powers remain operative, Christ reigns over them. Citing the work of Hendrik Berkhof, Yoder argues, “on the cross He ‘disarmed’ the Powers [and] ‘made a public example of them and thereby triumphed over them.’” Furthermore, Christ “unmasked” them as “false gods,” and “displayed that He is stronger than they.” The ethical actions of Christ during his life refuted the principalities and his resurrection defeated them, because the power of God is stronger than the power of death. Christ defeated the principalities and powers by willingly suffering, even suffering to the point of death, rather than trying to defeat them through force.

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than conforming to the principalities and powers. It is the example of Christ’s suffering that forms the theological basis for Mennonites’ ethical discipleship, including acting as suffering servants. Mennonites view Christ’s life as an example for our own resistance to the principalities and powers, and the cross is a possible outcome of such resistance, just as it was for Christ.

The principalities and powers remain operative, although ultimately defeated. Yoder argues that the local church is critically important in challenging their present operation because the church demonstrates a lifestyle in resistance to the principalities and powers. The local church follows the calling of God by removing itself from reliance on, and collaboration with the principalities and powers. He observes that each generation blames the blindness of the church on earlier generations for having accepted identification with an unworthy political cause. This sense of being right, over against the error of others, seems largely to blind each generation to the observation that the fundamental structural error, that of identifying the cause of God with one particular power structure, is not thereby overcome but only transposed into a new key.

Yoder continues, “should we not rather call into question the tendency – or shall we call it a temptation – of the church to establish symbiotic relations with every social order rather than be critical only of the tactics of having chosen the wrong partner at the wrong time?” Instead, the local church should maintain “her identity distinct from the rebellious powers” because history demonstrates that “the Christian church has been more successful…when she has avoided alliances with the dominant political or cultural powers.” This is not to say

41. Ibid., 145.
43. Ibid., 152.
44. Ibid.
that churches always correctly discern God’s voice, nor that churches always speak for God, because churches often succumb to the temptations of the principalities and powers. Rather, churches seek to discern God’s plan instead of the plan of any particular political or societal organization.

Yoder does not acknowledge that the principalities and the powers may operate in the church community, corrupting structures and exerting power and rule that is in rebellion to Christ. As Philip LeMasters writes, when Yoder speaks of the church, “one gets a strong sense that [he] is describing a perfectly sanctified community.”45 Neufeld Harder makes a similar observation based on traditional Mennonite hermeneutic practices. She argues that Mennonite theology believes that the church community, through discipleship and biblical interpretation, will discern God’s will.46 The church emphasizes “the continuity” between Jesus’ actions and our discipleship today.47 This ability to discern God’s will and correctly follow Christ’s example results in “an understanding of the Bible and the church as pure, ‘without spot or wrinkle,’ able to truly incarnate God’s presence in history.”48

In order to correct these idealistic visions of the church, Schüessler Fiorenza recognizes that systems of domination operate in the Bible text, in the history of the church, and in the


46. Neufeld Harder, Obedience, 37-38.

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid.
church today. Such recognition is crucial if preaching is to name how the principalities and powers tempt and corrupt the church community.

Furthermore, Neufeld Harder argues that the church community can acknowledge the difference between human authority and divine revelation, in order to recognize how the principalities and powers cause the church to fall short of God’s perfection. This separation between divine and human authority influences preaching’s understanding of the Word of God, which I will explore in more detail in the next chapter.

When preaching acknowledges that the principalities and powers are operative both inside and outside the church, sermons can name and challenge them. Providing space to name the structures of oppression operating within the church begins to do justice to those experiencing the suffering by listening to their experiences of oppression, critiquing the causes of that suffering, and seeking to transform injustice.

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49. Yoder does recognize that the church is imperfect and identifies three particular types of imperfection. *First*, individuals can be in conflict with one another and they need reconciliation, following the “binding and loosing” practices described in Matthew 18:15-18. Yoder, *Body Politics*, 1-13. *Second*, the church, as an institution, can make mistakes and in these cases the church should admit their failings, apologize, and repent. John Howard Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood : Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*, ed. Michael Cartwright (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 250-251. *Finally*, there are divisions in the church “between rich and poor, between liberal and conservative, between races, between east and west. These divisions go down through the middle of existing denominations and are the separations that really would demand reconciling initiative.” *Ibid.*, 234. Yoder recognizes that there are problems in the church and yet Yoder does not apply his theology of principalities and powers to the church, instead placing the principalities and powers as operative in the world.


III. Peace and the Church Community

a. Imagination

As noted in the definition of peace in the introduction to the dissertation, peace is intimately connected to eschatology. For Yoder, eschatology is “a hope which, defying present frustration, defines a present position in terms of the yet unseen goal which gives it meaning.” He writes,

> there should be room for the expectation (hope may be too strong a word in modern English) that something saving may happen, something that did not previously seem possible…people who believe in the resurrection are responsible, on the grounds of that faith context, to go through life believing that problems can be solved for which the solution is not yet evident. Such people are more likely to find new answers than people who believe there are none. The solution will be more likely to come if you don’t shortcut for a violent solution. If you allow yourself to resort to violence, then you won’t wait for the resurrection.

Hope for God’s future encourages Christians to seek creative peace-filled solutions to violent situations.

Yoder argues that those with access to conventional arenas of power, such as political power or wealth, have difficulty utilizing the eschatological imagination. Those with political or social power, no matter their original intentions, always find themselves tied to

52. Yoder, The Original Revolution, 53.

53. Yoder and others, The War of the Lamb, 197-198. John Paul Lederach develops the theology of imagination as well as a theology of remembrance for the Mennonite context further than Yoder. Lederach argues, “a defining characteristic of the moral imagination” is the “capacity to give birth to something new that in its very birthing changes our world and the way we see things.” John Paul Lederach, The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 27. He writes, “in conflict resolution we have for far too long taken the art out of education and learning. With art removed, the former becomes training and the latter becomes evaluation.” Ibid., 124. Lederach reflects that he is “struck rather constantly with how [the creativity involved in peacemaking] is pushed into categories that we seem to understand and to which we refer as the building of skills and technical expertise. The case I wish to make is that we must give room to the artistic side of this work.” Ibid., 174. He continues, “reconciliation is dealing with the worst of the human condition, the effort to repair the brokenness of relationships and life itself. It appears as a very serious business. Ironically, the pathway to healing may not lie with becoming more serious.” Ibid., 160. In fact, Lederach observes, “too much seriousness creates art with a message but rarely creates great art.” Ibid.
those people who put them in positions of power.\textsuperscript{54} People in power are continually working to maintain their power, if not advance their power.\textsuperscript{55} Politicians in a democracy, for example, measure their decisions according to the wishes of the electorate who voted the politician into office and in accordance with those options that are the most likely to result in re-election. Alternatively, in business, those with power, such as a CEO, will base his or her decisions on the most profitable returns for the shareholders, thus ensuring that the CEO will maintain his or her job, advance in the company, or gain an end of year bonus.

Unlike those in positions of power, minority groups have a particular gift for imaging creative eschatological visions. Yoder names this gift the ability to “exercise pioneering creativity.”\textsuperscript{56} Pioneering creativity dreams new worlds. Minority groups can imagine, and invent creative responses to problems that “are unrealistic for the present [but] come to be credible later.”\textsuperscript{57} Yoder names popular education as an example of a church led initiative later adopted by the state.\textsuperscript{58} When the ruling powers adopt these programs, there is reason to rejoice, because churches can move on to other problems.\textsuperscript{59}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{54} Yoder, \textit{The Original Revolution}, 171. Yoder does not qualify the type of power he refers to, but his description includes those at the “‘top’ of society” including the “dominant group...which provides [society’s] judges, lawyers, teachers, and prelates.” Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{56} John Howard Yoder, \textit{The Priestly Kingdom : Social Ethics as Gospel} (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 97.
\item \textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 96.
\item \textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 92. Yoder simply lists popular education without providing details about what countries or programs he specifically has in mind. I presume that he is referring to Sunday school initiatives in the 18th century in England, which predated government-run education.
\item \textsuperscript{59} This exchange between church initiatives and government regulations makes it difficult to comprehend why government legislation could not have initially addressed the problem. Perhaps a current example, like buying food locally or buying organic food, is a better example. Governments cannot currently legislate that all food be grown organically because farmers would require changes in farming practices, consumers would possibly reject the increase in prices and the legislation could jeopardize the political party’s
\end{itemize}
Pioneering creativity also includes the ability to draw attention to neglected areas. This occurs when theological minority groups work in areas where nobody else is interested in working.\textsuperscript{60} Victim Offender Reconciliation Programs are one such example.\textsuperscript{61} These programs bring together victims and offenders to seek healing for both parties. In this example, individuals from Mennonite churches worked with victims and offenders to find a better system to reform, heal, and reconcile offenders and victims than that provided by the judicial system. By working in these areas, these minority groups “draw attention” to a particular need when it would have been “impossible to find an imposed solution.”\textsuperscript{62}

b. Remembrance

A local church cannot exclusively focus on the future. Instead, imagination needs to be rooted in the past so that the struggles in the present and future become part of the ongoing story of God for peace and justice. Yoder adds the local church to the process of transformation by emphasizing the recovery of stories from the community’s past.\textsuperscript{63} He argues,

a community that genuinely exists has a story to tell. Its members remember and tell one another, and tell their children and their neighbors, the stories of victories and defeats, sacrifices and successes, heroes and renegades. Any significant resistance

\textsuperscript{60}. Yoder, \textit{The Priestly Kingdom}, 97.

\textsuperscript{61}. Ibid.

\textsuperscript{62}. Ibid.

\textsuperscript{63}. Yoder and others, \textit{The War of the Lamb}, 159. I want to note that groups of people and community stories are not foreign to Schüssler Fiorenza’s work. For example, she notes the importance of reclaiming the stories of women as a whole in her earlier works or the collective “oppressed” in her later works. Schüssler Fiorenza speaks of these broad general groups like “the oppressed” and the need for reclaiming, rediscovering and rewriting the histories of these groups, but she does not speak of the stories of the church community or the role of the church in remembering. Schüssler Fiorenza, \textit{Rhetoric}, 52; Schüssler Fiorenza, \textit{Wisdom}, 183; Schüssler Fiorenza, \textit{The Power}, 190.
community has its own distinctive way of reading not only its own story but the story of the wider society, against whose stream it affirms its criticism. It has a reading of the past with the evident implication of an alternative future. Every solid resistance community has its own songs, stories, and distinctive humor.64

These groups tell unique stories because “the believing community has a longer sense of history past and future than do their oppressors...They also see the same facts differently. They do not assume that the only way to read national and political history is from the perspective of the winners.”65 These alternative narratives critique the majority’s narrative and encourage viewing the past from a perspective different than that of the ‘winners.’ For example, acts of remembrance can recall stories that tell of times before warring parties became enemies or stories of when peace and nonviolence, rather than weapons and death, created powerful change.

Yoder also includes the remembrance of failures in his approach.66 Remembering failure is critically important because it provides the space for naming injustices and identifying those areas in need of transformation. As John Paul Lederach proposes, the slogan for reconciliation and peace should not be “forgive and forget” but rather “remember and change.”67

Remembrance is the sparest area of Yoder’s theology. Although he examines tradition, such as the traditions of the early church and 16th century Anabaptism, he does not fully explore how Mennonites can interact with or remember that history. He also does not connect remembrance to peacemaking. As a result, although Yoder often speaks of the past

64. Yoder and others, The War of the Lamb, 159.

65. Yoder, The Priestly Kingdom, 95.

66. Ibid., 30.

he does not reflect on his practices, provide a means for others to also engage in
remembrance, or explore why remembrance is important to peacemaking. To develop a
more complete understanding of how remembrance relates to peace in a Mennonite context, I
turn to Mennonite theologian John Paul Lederach.

Lederach argues that the loss of stories is at the heart of violent action and regaining
stories is an act of peacemaking. Lederach, in conversation with Aküm Longchari, a human
rights activist from Nagaland, writes, “original violence might best be understood as the
disruption - and far too often, outright destruction – of a people’s story.”68 He continues,
“when deep narrative is broken, the journey toward the past that lies before us is
marginalized, truncated. We lose more than just the thoughts of a few old people. We lose
our bearings. We lose the capacity to find our place in this world. And we lose the capacity
to find our way back to humanity.”69 As a result, “this is the deeper challenge of
peacebuilding: How to reconstitute, or restory, the narrative and thereby restore the people’s
place in history.”70 Remembering and regaining lost stories not only inserts an oppressed
group back into history, it is an act of peacemaking. It is the “storytellers, the traditional
sages, the shamans, and the healers” who are often not afforded their “due place as
peacebuilders.”71

Remembrance does peacemaking when it remembers alternative stories from the past
that demonstrate how God works in mysterious ways distinct from the dominant narrative
written by the winners. Such remembrance brings the voices of the past into conversation

68. Ibid., 140.
69. Ibid., 147.
70. Ibid., 146.
71. Ibid., 147.
with the present in order to imagine how God may continue working in the future. These imaginings are eschatological and envision God’s future free of violence, oppression, war, and suffering.

IV. Reconciliation and the Church Community

a. A New Community

According to Yoder, mutuality, love, and suffering are able to resist the principalities and powers only in a voluntary, intentional community. This means that churches practice adult baptism for only through adult baptism can members demonstrate their voluntary commitment to the congregation and bring together “all kinds of people into the same people.” Only a voluntary, adult commitment has the strength to withstand suffering and to support others’ struggles as they resist the principalities and powers because these adults covenant with the local church in full knowledge of the possible consequences. Marc Gopin, reflecting on the strength of Mennonite community, writes, “the Mennonite creation of community gives peacemakers the tools to endure great psychological stress. Communal support allows them to engage in peacemaking for extended terms, which they believe in

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73. Yoder, Body Politics, 32.

74. In an article applying Yoder’s theology to conflict resolution practices, Mark Thiessen Nation identifies the strength of the church community as one aspect of Mennonite peacemaking efforts. Thiessen Nation, however, relies on Marc Gopin for his argument, so I have focused on Gopin’s work. Mark Thiessen Nation, “Toward a Theology for Conflict Transformation: Learnings from John Howard Yoder,” Mennonite Quarterly Review 80, no. (2006).
spiritually and which also may be far more effective than short-term engagements.”\textsuperscript{75} Gopin adds that the community formation of Mennonite churches can be an example of the long-term relationship building necessary for transformation of violent areas outside of the church.

The local church forms a community of mutual relationships with those both inside and outside of the church. The local church members relate to one another and to others differently, through love, reconciliation and mutuality, a vision that is often distinct from other social relationships. Yoder argues, “the church is herself a society. Her very existence, the fraternal relations of her members, their ways of dealing with their differences and their needs are, or rather should be, a demonstration of what love means in social relations.”\textsuperscript{76} As a local church “we have been, despite ourselves, by virtue of grace, made one with people with whom we were not one.”\textsuperscript{77} A diversity of people comprises each individual church, but they share a common commitment to God and, as such, ideally relate in a different manner not only towards each other but also towards their neighbors and their enemies.

When the diverse members of a church relate to one another, their neighbours, and their enemies through demonstrations of love, the church is the living embodiment of the gospel. For Yoder the gospel is “the Good News that my enemy and I are united, through no merit or work of our own, in a new humanity that forbids henceforth my ever taking his or her life in my hands.”\textsuperscript{78} The gospel does not just mean refraining from killing an enemy, but the creation of a community where all people join equally together. He writes, “this new


\textsuperscript{76} Yoder, \textit{Christian Witness}, 17.

\textsuperscript{77} Yoder, \textit{The Royal Priesthood}, 292.

\textsuperscript{78} Yoder, \textit{The Politics of Jesus}, 226.
Christian community in which the walls are broken down not by human idealism or democratic legalism but by the work of Christ is not only a vehicle of the gospel or only a fruit of the gospel; it is the good news.” The good news of a new community of relationships is a message of liberation, a message of change and a message that transforms our relationships into ones of love. The local church is the living embodiment of these transformed relationships.

b. Discernment

The church does not live together in love because of a series of indelible ethical rules and commands. Instead, the church discerns together God’s direction in each situation. Yoder considers proclamation contextual, similar to Schüssler Fiorenza’s hermeneutics of evaluation. He writes, “theology should…minister to a community-at-large, living through history as if it had not been lived through or thought of before.”

what was really wrong with what called itself “situational ethics” a generation ago was not that it expected some moral guidance in the situation. Nor was it the expectation that, in the process of situational guidance, inherited principles would be helpful but would not in themselves dictate all the details of the available answers. What was wrong was the assumption that the way the situation works to provide decision is located individually, usually in a temporally punctual decision made all at once, and


80. I agree with Yoder that living together in love does not come about through a series of rules and commands, but I want to note that the Mennonite church does have a long history of stringent rules and commands. Neufeld Harder notes that baptism has been used to promote conformity, such as expecting that women experience faith and God in the same manner as males. Neufeld Harder, *Obedience*, 51. In addition, although Mennonite churches are encouraged to be a minority voice in the world, the Mennonite church may not promote minority voices in the midst of the church, instead insisting “on conformity by all members to a static community norm…” [and] encouraged a rigid interpretation of roles within the community.” Ibid., 52. In other words, at times, the church has enforced rigid rules and roles in order to create a conformed community. I return to this dynamic between community life and conformity through rules in the next chapter.

that the assurance behind it was a quality more of intuition than of explanation and
dialogue.82

He advocates for a “weak occasionalism” where the “ongoing discernment of the church
must be seen as God’s own work and not simply our replicating or transposing what God did
before.”83 The local church must navigate between the aspects of faith that remain constant
and those that are interpreted anew for each new context.

Doing reconciliation entails forming unique communities founded in mutuality and
love. These communities are not based on rules and regulations, but bring together a
plethora of voices to discern together God’s calling for the present and future. I delve deeper
into this process of community discernment, specifically within a Mennonite ecclesiological
context, in the next chapter.

V. Implications for Preaching

a. A Diversity of Experiences

Preaching that does justice, peace, and reconciliation includes a diversity of voices and
experiences in preaching even if these voices may sometimes contradict one another.

Arguing for the Rule of Paul, which provides an opportunity for everyone to speak, Yoder
contends that when we want others to listen to us, we have to listen to them with mutual
regard and respect. In recent homiletical theory, a number of approaches for including a
diversity of congregational voices have emerged, such as Lucy Atkinson Rose’s Sharing the

82. Ibid., 122.
83. Ibid.
Word, or John McClure’s Round Table Pulpit.⁸⁴ Rebecca Chopp’s The Power to Speak also provides a theological, biblical and rhetorical foundation for embracing a diversity of voices and experiences.⁸⁵ I turn to these homileticians in chapter four. Preaching that does justice, peace, and reconciliation seeks to espouse these approaches and perhaps even develop its own method for listening to and incorporating a diversity of experiences.

b. Speak Truth to Power

The local church seeks to be an alternative community that demonstrates life free of the oppression caused by the principalities and powers. Preaching that seeks to do justice, peace, and reconciliation names suffering and exposes the principalities and powers. Unmasking the systems of domination in the world may result in suffering and even death. Nevertheless, preaching seeks to speak the truth of God’s power and God’s purposes, not those of the principalities and powers. In chapter four, I explore how preaching, as demonstrated in the homiletical theory of Charles Campbell, unmasks the principalities and powers and leads the congregation in identifying and resisting the temptations of the principalities and powers.⁸⁶

c. Ecclesiology

As evidenced throughout this chapter, the local church is the foundation for the move towards transformation. The local church is the living embodiment of the gospel, the good news of freedom from the principalities and powers, and the promise of relationships of justice, peace, and reconciliation between people. Essentially, the local church is a unique

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collective of people who demonstrate the possible future promised by God. Not only does this unique body provide a living example, it also provides the strength, encouragement, and possibly even financial support to allow individuals to critique the principalities and powers. Individuals can only face the principalities and powers and accept the possible risks associated with critique because members know that the local church supports them and their families.

Critique of the principalities and powers, and hope for the future through imagination and remembrance, however, are not solely individual ventures. The members of the church critique, imagine, remember, and discern together, thereby becoming a living example of God’s future peace and reconciliation in the present. As a result, preaching should not only nurture and empower individual members of the congregation, but also should address and strengthen the collective local church community. The local church is not perfect, but through the gift of the Holy Spirit, the church is different from the world because the church has responded to and accepted God’s invitation to love. As a result of following Christ, the local church strives for changed relationships within its own community and with the world, but the local church can only be God’s presence in the world when church members support one another. A church member will be willing to face suffering and possible death for the sake of others when they are confident that the church will support and provide for their loved ones if they were to die. Preaching that does justice, peace, and reconciliation includes building relationships, encouraging support and care for one another, and shaping a community that acts as the foundation for other steps of transformation.
VI. Conclusion

Preaching that *does* justice, peace, and reconciliation includes both critique and hope. Preaching critiques when it unmask and challenges systems of oppression operative in the world, and our collaboration with them, including the temptations offered by the principalities and powers. Preaching provides hope for the present and for the future by remembering God’s actions within the struggles of the past, and by creatively imagining an alternative present and future according to God’s designs. Transformation, however, requires the local church community, which provides the emotional, financial and spiritual support to sustain both the critique of and resistance to the principalities and powers. The church community also remembers and then imagines God’s actions in the past, present and future. As a result, preaching that *does* justice, peace, and reconciliation focuses on empowering individual church members as well as the church as a collective community to participate in transformation.
Chapter Three

A Mennonite Context for Preaching: History, Theology, and Bible

I. Introduction

Chapter one outlined Schüssler Fiorenza’s method and then placed her approach in the specific context of Philemon. Chapter two utilized Schüssler Fiorenza’s hermeneutics to explore Mennonite theology through the writings of John Howard Yoder; most notably, his emphasis on the church as central to the work of transformation. Given the importance of the church to transformation in a Mennonite context, this chapter delves deeper into the specific nuances of Mennonite ecclesiology and their implications for preaching that does justice, peace, and reconciliation. In particular, this chapter explores the significance of both the individual and the community for preaching in a Mennonite context.¹

For the purposes of this dissertation, I define church as a local, imperfect gathering of individuals who form an eschatological, reconciled, supportive community in the presence of God to confess their faith and discern God’s mission with the help of the Holy Spirit.² This

¹ I rely here on the work done in chapter one on Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s hermeneutics as the basis for valuing the individual voice. Schüssler Fiorenza’s work articulated the need to hear the suffering and oppression experienced by individuals. Yoder’s work in chapter two articulated the importance of community. The community provides the foundation for transformation.

² This definition developed out of several sources, most notably: Miroslav Volf, After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998); Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective; Sheila Klassen-Wiebe, “The One and the Many,” in New Perspectives in Believers Church Ecclesiology, ed. Abe Dueck; Helmut Harder; Karl Koop, (Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2010). This is not an exhaustive definition of church, but a brief definition of church for the purposes of this thesis, which reflects aspects of Mennonite ecclesiology. It does not address all aspects of ecclesiology such as the definition of church on a national, and global scale, the relationship between the church and state, or the shape of the church’s mission. The areas central to this thesis, such as the Trinity, the importance of the both the individual and the community, the opportunity for congregants to confess and speak their faith, and the work of the Holy Spirit will be discussed in more detail throughout the chapter.
definition emphasizes the relational community, rather than preaching or sacraments. As Thomas Finger writes,

teology cannot identify preaching as the center of worship, nor as the central task of the church. If the church be primarily a “herald,” the actuality and visibility of what it heralds – the kingdom of God- will be insufficiently expressed. To announce the kerygma effectively, the church must be seriously seeking to be what it proclaims: that fellowship which opens people for new kinds of communion and interaction with others and with God.\(^3\)

My definition of church focuses on the totality of the church’s life rather than the sermonic event as the primary reality constituting church. This active, gathered community is the context for sermons that do justice, peace, and reconciliation.

Historically, Mennonite ecclesiology has had a Christological focus. Churches were the body of Christ, church members followed the example of Christ, and Christ was the head of the church. John Howard Yoder’s exploration of the church in Body Politics repeatedly connects the church to the example and teachings of Christ.\(^4\) Harold Bender’s Anabaptist Vision articulates key characteristics of Mennonite churches. He argues that churches are comprised of members who can make a voluntary adult commitment, “pledging their lives to Christ,” in order to practice and conform to “Christ’s way.”\(^5\) Indicative of the emphasis on Christ in Mennonite ecclesiology, the article concerning church in the Confession of Faith in

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3. Thomas N. Finger, Christian Theology : An Eschatological Approach, 2 vols. (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1989), 331. Finger seems to be speaking of all theology, but he basis his argument on a laconic overview of scriptural sources and Reformation history. I would agree with Finger’s statement, but qualify that Mennonite theology cannot identify preaching as the center of worship.

4. For example, Yoder discusses Jesus’ teachings on binding and loosing in Matthew 18:15, Jesus’ table fellowship and the act of Eucharist, baptism as the celebration of “being in Christ,” and the diversity of gifts granted to the church as the “fullness of Christ” for building up Christ’s body. Yoder, Body Politics, 1, 20, 45, 47.

a Mennonite Perspective is titled “The Church of Jesus Christ.”⁶ Although the article mentions God and the Holy Spirit, Jesus is the primary focus of the article.

This Christological focus in Mennonite ecclesiology emphasizes conformity, as well as obedience to the commitment Christians make to Christ. Particular standards of living set the boundaries of the church community. Mennonite churches value order, discipline, purity, and authority over an individual’s actions.⁷ Discipline “implies a certain doctrine of the church, namely (1) that the body of the church has authority over individual members, and (2) that the church needs clearly defined ideas of faith and conduct, which must be applied. Thus the church is not only a worshiping fellowship of believers or saints, but a body with a certain order as an essential part of its life.”⁸ Failure to conform to the standards has resulted in excommunication or being “banned” from the church community.⁹ Only those who were obedient to their commitment to Christ form the church community.

An emphasis on commitment and obedience to Christ and community, and the use of the ban or excommunication to maintain those standards, is evidence that the community is valued over the individual. Lydia Neufeld Harder articulates the problem with emphasizing community above the individual. She writes, “often our [Mennonite] theology has polarized the individual and the community, giving priority to the community. This meant that undue power was given to community leaders and that dominance of more marginal people could

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⁶ Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective, 39.
be justified by appealing to community needs.”

The Mennonite focus on community creates an ecclesiology that focuses on obedience to the group to the point of silencing any individual voice that dissent from the group.

An over emphasis on the community makes seeking justice difficult because there is little opportunity for individuals to share their experiences of injustice and critique the systems that cause those injustices. For example, prioritizing the community makes a hermeneutics of experience problematic because there is little space for individuals to share their experiences when they diverge from the norm of the community. Furthermore, a hermeneutics of suspicion and domination are difficult because individuals are not allowed to speak against the established structures of the community.

Recent scholarship in Mennonite ecclesiology shifts the focus from the community as obedient disciples, to a community formed by the Trinity. This Trinitarian shift is critical for enriching Mennonite ecclesiology. Free church theologian Miroslav Volf influenced Mennonite thinking with respect to a Perichoretic view of the Trinity and ecclesiology. His approach has three elements. First, the persons of the Trinity “interpenetrate each other” while remaining distinct. Volf explains that “in every divine person as a subject, the other persons also indwell; all mutually permeate one another, though in so doing they do not


11. The term “Free Church” is used to designate a diverse group of denominations, such as Mennonites, that share common historical roots in the Radical Reformation. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical & Global Perspectives* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 8.

cease to be distinct persons.”

Second, all three persons are distinct while also being equal. Third, the relationships of the Trinity are rooted in love. In an article written with Maurice Lee, Volf describes this love as “an interchange between self and other in which the giving of the self coalesces with the receiving of the other and in which, paradoxically, each gives first and at the same time gives because she has received.” Each member of the Trinity is a separate and unique individual, but each individual person also relates to the other persons. The three persons of the Trinity are in community with each other “without the persons suspending their personhood.” This approach escapes a “dichotomy between universalization and pluralization” because “God is the ground of both unity and multiplicity.” Essentially God is one, but God is also a “communion of divine persons.”

Living in community is therefore an essential component of churches that seek to emulate the Trinity. When the church is understood as analogous to the Trinity, the church

15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
18. Ibid., 193.
19. Ibid., 193. Mennonite theologian, A. James Reimer critiques Volf’s approach arguing that Volf presumes to know more about the interior relationships of the Trinity than is possible for humanity. A. James Reimer, Mennonites and Classical Theology: Dogmatic Foundations for Christian Ethics (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2001), 539. Reimer offers an important word of suspicion in order to prevent Volf’s approach from being too idealized. Nevertheless, I value Volf’s work because it can be viewed as an act of eschatological imagination using the Trinity to envision human relationships in the present and future.
becomes a “communion of persons.” The church is a communion in that they share a common call from God. Volf and Lee write,

emerging from the baptismal waters, the members of the church enter the ecclesial space where the eschatological communion of the triune God and God’s glorified people is lived out in a proleptic way. From this vantage point, the gathering of catholic communities, the equality of their members, and the mutuality of their love all emerge as ways in which a church images in a broken but nonetheless real fashion the triune divine life.

Thomas Finger asserts that the Trinity provides the “strongest possible theological foundation for the Anabaptist emphasis on community” because God is relational. As understood through the Trinity, “God is essentially an intertwining of relationships.” Individuals within the church are in a relationship with God and with others because God is in a relationship with others.

Nevertheless, congregants remain individual, unique persons. Although each person shares a common call from God, each call is also unique. The community gathers together in response to God’s call, but each individual voluntarily makes the decision to accept the call and commit to the community. Through the Holy Spirit, Christ lives in each person,

21. Ibid., 182.
24. Ibid.
26. Ibid., 175.
and everyone receives a charisma from the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{27} Each charisma, however, is unique to the individual.\textsuperscript{28} Volf writes,

> even though Christians are bound into this complex network of relationships, they still remain subjects; indeed, their being subjects is inconceivable without these relationships (see Gal. 2:20). This is why one must also conceive the “one” who Christians are in Christ (Gal. 3:28; see Eph. 2:14-16) not as a “unified person” who “has transcended all differentiation,” but rather precisely as a differentiated unity, as a communion, of those who live in Christ.\textsuperscript{29}

The gathered community is united in Christ, but each person remains a valued, and unique individual.

As demonstrated by the Trinity, individuals and the church community are intertwined. When ecclesiology is rooted in Trinity, “independence and interdependence, identity and communication can be grasped in a complimentary nature.”\textsuperscript{30} Echoing Volf, Mennonite Fernando Enns writes, “personhood apart from relationship is thus unthinkable; and vice versa, no relationship is possible without maintaining personhood, for they are complementary.”\textsuperscript{31} In this approach, the individual and the community are intimately connected.

This Trinitarian approach to ecclesiology provides an important corrective to Mennonite ecclesiology. In particular, it roots Mennonite community in the Trinity instead of in a pattern of obedience and exclusion. Ecclesiology based on the Trinity is then able to

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 225-226.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 226.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 145.


\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
value both the individual and the community. In terms of preaching, it is my contention that Mennonite churches can benefit from an increased emphasis on the individual. At the same time, the overall field of homiletics can benefit from an emphasis on the church as a relational community. I am not seeking a perfect equal balance between the individual and the community, but suggest that the community and the individual should be viewed as dance partners. As mentioned in chapter one, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza approaches her hermeneutics as a continually spiraling dance that turns, loops, twists, and spins. The community and individual can be viewed as dance partners in continual movement. At times, the individual may lead while the community follows and at other times, the community may shape the direction and movement of the dance. By viewing the community and individual in partnership with one another, it becomes possible to discern when a particular context would benefit from either the community or the individual taking a turn leading the dance.

In the next section, I explore central tenants of Mennonite ecclesiology, describing how the dance between the individual and the community can shape a Mennonite homiletic. I also draw out implications of this interplay between the individual and the community in order to enrich homiletical theory and practice beyond a Mennonite context.

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32. In this illustration, I perceive God to be the disc jockey who provides the rhythm and beat regardless of who leads, the Holy Spirit as the music who assists God’s work and fills the room with the inspiration to dance, and Christ as the dance instructor who teaches and guides the steps. This is, of course, an incomplete image since Christ also requires a salvific element that extends beyond teaching.
II. Unique Theological Aspects: The Priesthood of All Believers and Zeugnis

Both the concept of “priesthood of all believers” and Zeugnis relate to the rejection of hierarchical leadership in the history of Mennonite churches. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen identifies two areas of a Free church approach to the priesthood of all believers. First, a priesthood of all believers approach argues that the Holy Spirit gifts all members of the congregation. As a result, all members of the congregation are partners in leadership and ministry. Second, a priesthood of all believers approach refers to the Anabaptist belief that all church members have unmediated, free access to God. Mennonites do not have a system of bishops and priests to serve as a mediator between people and God. Albeit sometimes more in theory than in practice, all members of the church are equally ministers.

This communal approach to God leads to a unique approach to worship. In what today would be referred to as a hermeneutical community, early Anabaptists gathered as a community and shared participation in worship. During worship, several congregants

33. Many elements of the Mennonite church have both historical and theological elements. For example, adult baptism is rooted in the radical reformation, and has theological significance. I place the Priesthood of All Believers and Zeugnis in the historical section because they are rooted in the Radical Reformation but their practices have manifested in different ways throughout history. Baptism and the Holy Spirit are in the theological section because overall, although they are rooted in the Radical Reformation, the practices have remained consistent throughout history, but the theological interpretations have been debated and refined overtime.


35. Bender, “Priesthood”.


Due to the congregational polity of Anabaptism and Free Church traditions, there is not a single, definitive practice or voice in the Mennonite church. As a result, it should be noted that the Schleitheim Confession, an early document expressing seven Anabaptist articles of faith, notes the need for a designated
would read the Bible, share their interpretation, and discuss scripture together.\textsuperscript{37} This practice came to be named, \textit{Zeugnis}. \textit{Zeugnis} is the German term for “bearing witness” or “testimony.”\textsuperscript{38} David Greiser notes that because of the history of \textit{Zeugnis}, “a great deal of preaching in Mennonite churches can be said to be done in a \textit{communal voice}.”\textsuperscript{39} Mennonite June Alliman Yoder suggests that the line between preacher and listener becomes “blurred.”\textsuperscript{40} Today, Mennonite churches continue this practice by discussing the sermon after the worship service, or by encouraging congregants to comment on the sermon during a sharing time within the worship service.

Scholars use both the priesthood of all believers and \textit{Zeugnis} as constructs for the communal and equalitarian nature of Mennonite churches and Free Church worship practices. James McClendon, Jr. argues for the priesthood of believers as a basis of the

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item 37. Greiser, “What Exactly,” 19. Leo Hartshorn, “An (Ana)Baptist Homiletic of Community: Preaching as a Communal and Dialogical Practice” (DMin diss., Lancaster Theological Seminary, 2002), 30-35. The Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective states that the “insights and understandings which we bring to interpretation of the Scripture are to be tested in the faith community.” \{, 1995 #15@22\} The Confession of Faith, however, does not detail if our “insights and understandings” are given by the Holy Spirit or are human ideas, thoughts, and notions. I would argue that the Holy Spirit can influence our “insights and understandings” but it is often tempting to equate our own ideas with the leadings of the Holy Spirit. As a result, the Holy Spirit may influence our interpretations and thoughts but the community discerns the presence of the Holy Spirit and the will of God from amongst the various individual perspectives.
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“corporate nature of believing priesthood.” He argues that the church is a “company of equals, equally gifted by God’s Spirit, equally responsible for the community-building whose accomplishment is the fullness of Christ.” Similarly, Kärkkäinen argues that the priesthood of all believers marks the church as a “ministry of equal partners” and all participate in ministry. Zeugnis is the practical application of a theology of equal partners because the various members of the community participate together in leading worship.

By emphasizing that anyone can speak, the church may overlook or silence individual voices. Anabaptists often underemphasize the individual in the expression of the priesthood of all believers and Zeugnis. Silencing individuals while lauding the communal aspect of Mennonite churches has manifested itself in several ways. During the 19th century, Zeugnis involved other ordained clergy or bishops by having them comment after the sermon, rather than opening the responses to the entire congregation. During the last century and continuing until today, Mennonite churches have emphasized community and equal leadership while excluding particular groups of members, such as women, from the pulpit. Moreover, even when churches include members of the congregation in preaching, few churches have intentionally and systematically sought to include a diversity of individuals. An emphasis on commitment, obedience, and the good of the community, along with the


42. Ibid., 369.


44. Although Anabaptists have not emphasized the individual in the process of the priesthood of all believers and Zeugnis, critics of this approach cite the individual as a fault in a Free Church approach to ecclesiology. In Miroslav Volf’s exploration of Catholic and Orthodoxy ecclesiology, for example, he notes that one of the Catholic critiques of Free Church ecclesiology is the inherent individualism in the Free Church. Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 30.

possibility of discipline and excommunication potentially silences individual voices that may question, challenge, and voice a hermeneutics of suspicion. Excluding particular voices from preaching means that communities are not always *doing* justice. Furthermore, reconciliation requires hearing diverse voices, and is thus truncated when a particular voice, for example a male voice, is the only voice given authority to speak.

When a church values a diversity of individual voices, these voices can share their experiences of oppression, suffering, and suspicion from any aspect of their life, including their experiences of the principalities and powers both inside and outside of the church community. These voices do not need to be disciplined or censured when they diverge from the church community. Instead, they are valid and valued voices of the community because the community is rooted in Trinitarian diversity rather than uniformity and obedience. When individual voices are held in community individuals are able to openly and honestly share their experiences of suffering and oppression. By rooting Mennonite ecclesiology in the Trinity, Mennonites honour the history of churches being a community of many ministers while hearing the diverse and discordant voices of individual members. Mennonite preaching can then seek to *do* justice by hearing those previously considered to be in opposition to the majority voice within the congregation. Mennonites can *do* peace by listening and showing love to those with different perspectives. Churches can *do* reconciliation by continuing to live together in community despite discordant voices.

By empowering a diversity of voices, the church forms an active theological community. As Volf writes, “in a Free Church fashion...the acting priest is not simply replaced by the acting congregation; rather, the mediation of the exclusive salvific activity of
Christ is now enjoined in all believers."\textsuperscript{46} He argues that excluding the laity from preaching is a "theological factor contributing to lay passivity."\textsuperscript{47} When laity are constituted into a church by taking the sacraments and/or by hearing the proclaimed word, then active participation in the mediation of faith is something external to their ecclesial being; they are church in their passivity, and their activity is something added to their being as church, or perhaps also not added. If by contrast the church is constituted by the confession of all its members, then the mediation of faith is a dimension of their ecclesial being; they are church in their activity of faith mediation.\textsuperscript{48}

Including a diversity of voices fosters a community that actively engages in faith together.

Both Zeugnis and the priesthood of all believers are individual and communal acts that shape the distinctive character of Mennonite churches. When the community is rooted in a Perichoretic Trinitarian ecclesiology, individuals can share their experiences and critique the church without fear of censure, discipline, or excommunication. By doing so, individuals live out a hermeneutics of experience when they share their stories with others and a hermeneutics of domination and suspicion when they openly critique the principalities and powers operative both in the world and in the church. The church community hears these individual voices and uses them as an "invitation for deeper consideration, discernment, revision and re-imagining of our theological texts and contexts."\textsuperscript{49} I will return to this invitation to discernment and discussion later in this chapter.

\textsuperscript{46} Volf, \textit{After Our Likeness}, 227.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 227-228.
\textsuperscript{49} Neufeld Harder, "Postmodern," 278.
III. Unique Historical Aspects: Baptism and the Holy Spirit

Adult baptism is a hallmark of Mennonites and other churches with roots in the Radical Reformation. As I previously argued, Mennonite churches were formed by those united by a shared commitment to obedience as disciples of Christ. Adult baptism is the individual’s first public act of committing to obedience to Christ and the lifestyle and ethics of the community. Adult baptism is an individual’s “pledge” to the local church community and to participating in God’s work in the world. Baptism “signified a willingness to suffer all for Christ and the brother and sister. Baptism meant moving from ‘the world’ to ‘the Body of Christ,’ the church.”

Living according to this commitment distinguished Christians and members of the church from those outside of the church.

Baptism signifies each individual’s decision to follow Christ and join the church. Gareth Brandt argues that the very nature of adult baptism recognizes the individual. Individuals choose to be “baptized upon confession of faith rather than being baptized merely because one was born into a particular community.” Honouring the individual’s choice preserves the “dignity of the individual” and also maintains the individual’s right to make decisions and faith commitments. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen’s exploration of Free Church ecclesiology echoes Brandt. Kärkkäinen identifies the individual choice of baptism

51. Snyder, Anabaptist, 156.
52. Gareth Brandt, “How Anabaptist Theology and the Emergent Church Address the Problem of Individualism in the Believers Church,” in New Perspectives in Believers Church Ecclesiology, ed. Abe Dueck; Helmut Harder; Karl Koop, (Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2010), 272.
53. Ibid.
as the means by which Free churches can “accent the dignity and voice of each member in the church.”

Adult baptism means that each person makes the individual decision to join, or not join, the congregation.

Aspects of Mennonite pneumatology also highlight the individual. As discussed earlier, each individual voluntarily commits to living in obedience to Christ and to the church. The Holy Spirit equips the individual to fulfill this covenant. A. James Reimer notes that the early Anabaptists emphasized the Holy Spirit as the enabling source and power that equipped them to lead a transformed life following Christ. In the most extreme examples, this empowering by the Holy Spirit provided individual Anabaptists with the ability to face persecution and death. Those facing persecution often cited the Holy Spirit as the source of their “unbelievable confidence” and the strength, courage, and ability to continue in their worship, despite the risk of martyrdom. The Holy Spirit is a gift to every individual believer that transforms the believer and creates a new birth. It is the power of the Holy Spirit, granted to each individual, that provides the individual with the strength and courage to remain obedient to their baptismal commitments to follow Christ, even in suffering and death.

Excessive individualism is a possible consequence of honouring each individual’s decision to join the church and recognizing the Holy Spirit’s work equipping a diversity of

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individuals. For Brandt, excessive individualism risks creating faith that is “privatized personal relationships with God.” Such individual faith further neglects the importance of others. Brandt’s critique may go too far, demonstrating the consequences of overemphasizing the community. For example, Brandt states that “Jesus came to fulfill God’s agenda for universal shalom, not individuals’ personal needs.” He continues, “The gospel, the good news, is about restored relationships where the individual does not lose his or her individuality but the ‘we’ becomes primary over the ‘I.’” Nevertheless, Brandt, notes the dangers of individualism and, rightfully, notes that the individual must to be rooted in community.

Although baptism is an individual decision, at its most basic level baptism is also a communal act that roots the individual in community, and thus avoids the dangers Brandt articulates. Mennonites do not have a strict polity of who may or may not administer baptism. The commentary following the article on baptism, in the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective states that baptism “should always be done by the church and its representatives, if possible in the presence of the congregation.” The commentary notes do not clarify whether or not the representative is ordained. It also does not state whether the representative is from the local congregation or the denominational level of church. Nevertheless, baptism requires, at a minimum, two people; one to request baptism and one to

58. Ibid.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid., 288.
61. Ibid.
perform the baptism. Baptism in many Mennonite churches also includes elders, a sponsor who knows the person requesting baptism, and a litany that the worshipping church reads together, which speaks words of covenant with the new member.

Apart from the physical logistics of baptism, the individual choice of baptism is also rooted in community because baptism is connected to membership in the local church. Curtis Freeman writes, “Baptism and the [Lord’s] Supper are not simply acts of obedience. They are the means whereby Christians are joined into the body of Christ through the Spirit.” Referring to church membership and baptism, Volf articulates that “Christ’s presence through the Holy Spirit makes a person into a Christian and simultaneously leads that person into ecclesial communion, constituting the church thus in a twofold fashion: first, by adding a person to the church and, second, by mediating faith to others through that person.” Through baptism, an individual chooses to enter into relationship with the church community.

The communal aspect of the Holy Spirit is twofold. First, the Holy Spirit brings individuals into community. Enns notes that Pentecost marks the outpouring of the Holy Spirit onto individuals, as well as the birth of the church. The Holy Spirit builds the body of Christ and “unites members with one another as a community of believers. Only in this way does the church become a communion of saints.” Second, although the Holy Spirit


64. Volf, After Our Likeness, 175.


may equip various individuals to contribute their own insights and understandings in worship, the community subsequently identifies the leadings of the Holy Spirit in what is shared. The Holy Spirit equips individuals, but also acts with the purpose of shaping the church. The Holy Spirit leads, governs, and ideally brings consensus to the church so that “what concerns one concerns all, and all together do the will of God under the direction of the Holy Spirit.”

Leo Hartshorn writes,

> The Spirit is the unseen power at work within and through the complex and collective interaction within the practice of preaching that goes beyond the oral event of the sermon. As a socially established cooperative human/divine activity preaching involves the interaction of the preacher, the biblical text, the Christian community, its tradition and practices, and the divine Spirit in a communal dialogue.

Individuals have gifts, leadership, and words to share with the church, but the community discerns the direction of the Holy Spirit arising out of those individual contributions.

A sermon that *does* justice, peace and reconciliation fosters this community. Although individuals may speak their experiences and engage in suspicion and critique, those words are then given to the community for discernment. Individuals may also practice a hermeneutics of remembrance and imagination sharing stories of God’s actions in the past and imagining the future, but the community discerns the guidance of the Holy Spirit and decides together how transformation will transpire from the individual’s words. By focusing on the community as the locus of the individual, preaching that *does* justice, peace, and reconciliation brings the church into the process of transformation and reflects John Howard Yoder’s emphasis on the community in Mennonite theology and practice.


68. Hartshorn, “(Ana)Baptist Homiletic”, 172.
IV. Unique Biblical Aspects: Scriptural Discernment and the Rule of Paul

The Holy Spirit’s two purposes, equipping the individual and working for the purposes of the church community, is particularly evident in the Mennonite approach to scriptural interpretation. Anabaptist reformers argued that the Holy Spirit played a critical role in reading scripture.69 For Anabaptists, the Holy Spirit illuminated the individual’s soul so that he or she could understand scripture.70

Through the Holy Spirit’s illumination, anyone in the congregation can participate in the interpretation of the Bible, regardless of education, gender, or office. Hartshorn refers to the Holy Spirit as the “divine exegete of Scripture.”71 Arnold Snyder writes, “scriptural questions were not to be decided automatically by the scholar-theologian-preacher in the employ of a prince or city council. It meant that scriptural questions would not be decided by a definitive reference to Hebrew and Greek texts, available only to a humanist elite.”72 Neufeld Harder adds, “for Anabaptists and Mennonites, the lines of who is able to interpret scripture correctly are not drawn between scholar and the common person, between leadership and laity, or charismatic and ordinary Christian, but rather between disciple and non-disciple.”73 The Holy Spirit enables all disciples, including women and those unable to


70. Snyder, Anabaptist, 150.


72. Snyder, Anabaptist, 85. Although the benefit of this approach is the equality of people and inviting a diversity of voices into biblical interpretation, it also creates suspicion of those with education or authority. Neufeld Harder also notes that Anabaptists were also suspicious of those who claimed the Holy Spirit too enthusiastically without submitting to community discernment. Lydia Neufeld Harder, “Hermeneutic Community : A Study of the Contemporary Relevance of an Anabaptist-Mennonite Approach to Biblical Interpretation” (Thesis (M Th )-Newman Theological College, 1984, Newman Theological College, 1984), 26.

read, to participate in the interpretation of scripture.\textsuperscript{74} The assistance of the Holy Spirit and the recognition of the equality of all people took precedence over any authority gained through education, or political or religious appointment.\textsuperscript{75} Each individual, regardless of gender, education, or church office, may have an interpretation of scripture.

This approach to biblical interpretation certainly risks emphasizing the individual. As with baptism, there is the potential for individuals to become focused on their own interpretations of scripture. Anabaptists noted this concern by implementing provisions that limit the authority of individual interpretations. Adolf Ens explains that the early Anabaptists “tested” the interpretations.\textsuperscript{76} The community was the location for such testing and discernment of scripture and the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{77} As Neufeld Harder argues, “personal interpretations of Scripture must be done within a community context, in which validation comes in both action as well as reflection.”\textsuperscript{78} This individual interpretation within community will “stress mutual accountability and dialogical relationships.”\textsuperscript{79} In other words, the Holy Spirit may equip individuals with the ability to interpret scripture, but each individual then entrusts those ideas to the community for discernment. The church community gathers together the various, and possibly diverse, individual interpretations and then discerns them as a community.

\textsuperscript{74} Snyder, \textit{Anabaptist}, 50; John Howard Yoder, “Hermeneutics of the Anabaptists,” \textit{Mennonite Quarterly Review} 41, no. 4 (1967): 301.

\textsuperscript{75} Snyder, \textit{Anabaptist}, 84.

\textsuperscript{76} Ens, “Theology,” 75-76.


\textsuperscript{78} Neufeld Harder, “Hermeneutic Community”, 150.

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.
When the community is called to discern the Holy Spirit amongst the various voices and interpretations of individuals, the church requires a time when congregants can bring their interpretations to the community.\textsuperscript{80} For Mennonites, this sharing occurs in worship and results in a diversity of voices participating in worship. During worship, individuals bring their interpretations to the church in the form of litanies, prayers, sharing times, and preaching. Worship becomes the locus for sharing individual interpretations of scripture with the broader community.

The Rule of Paul provides a biblical foundation for individual interpretation that is then given to the community for discernment. The previous chapter examined Yoder’s interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:29-31, which he refers to as the Rule of Paul. Other Mennonite scholars similarly emphasize 1 Corinthians 14:29-31 when articulating the importance of hearing multiple voices in worship. During the Reformation, Heinrich Bullinger published Der Widertoeufferen Ursprung refuting the legitimacy of Anabaptists. In this work he published the full-text of an Anabaptist tract detailing the reasons why Anabaptists rejected the traditional forms of Christian worship, including worship services conducted by Luther or Zwingli. The first reason listed is that other worship services do not observe the pattern for worship found in 1 Corinthians 14 allowing multiple voices to speak during worship.\textsuperscript{81} Worship that focuses on a single voice denies other individuals the opportunity to share their interpretations with the congregation.\textsuperscript{82} The unknown author of the

\textsuperscript{80} It is important to note that although not educated, through reading the Bible, attending worship and Sunday school, and participating in discernment, Anabaptist adults were well versed in the Bible. Ens, “Theology,” 87; Finger, Christian, 239.


\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 11.
tract inquires, “when some one comes to church and constantly hears only one person speaking, and all the listeners are silent, neither speaking nor prophesying, who can or will regard or confess the same to be a spiritual congregation or confess according to I Cor. 14 that God is dwelling and operating in them through his Holy Spirit...?”

Eleanor Kreider, referring to the aforementioned tract, argues that the current church context again needs to focus on worship shaped by 1 Corinthians 14. She writes,

Following Paul’s example with the Corinthian church, leaders in our churches will continually seek out, train, enable, and make space for the Spirit gifts to emerge in worship. Mature leaders can take their own place in worship leading and at the same time train up others to assist...Congregations can make clear to their leaders that they expect this approach. If the same voice dominates week after week, the congregation is either renouncing its responsibility or its gifts are being stifled.

Creating spaces for multiple voices does not mean that everyone possesses equal gifts in speaking and preaching. Various individuals may convey their interpretations through several methods, both inside and outside of worship, and the church is called to assist in the discernment of each individual’s gifts. When leaders in the church seek out those with gifts of preaching and provide them with the support and encouragement to preach, preaching does justice, peace, and reconciliation by empowering a diversity of individual voices, even discordant voices, while living in community with one another.

Although the Holy Spirit may equip each member with individual gifts, interpretations, and visions for transformation, individuals present these contributions to the entire church community for further discernment. For Mennonites, this transfer occurs during worship, resulting in a diversity of voices being invited to speak and share. When congregations do

83. Ibid.

not provide opportunities for a diversity of voices in worship, they risk emphasizing the individuality of each congregant without locating the individual within the broader community. For example, each individual congregant may read scripture to determine their own personal interpretation and message from the Holy Spirit without valuing the role of the community in testing and enriching that interpretation. This means that doing justice, peace, and reconciliation is truncated because there is a lesser emphasis on the community as a group of people speaking, listening, discerning, and working together. Without the community individuals may have interpretations and imaginings of God’s future, but they toil to bring those images into reality on their own.

In a Trinitarian approach to Mennonite ecclesiology, as well as in Schüssler Fiorenza’s hermeneutics and Yoder’s work, both the individual and the community are central to doing justice, peace, and reconciliation. According to the Perichoretic Trinity, the three persons of God are in community with one another, while also maintaining their individuality. Building on Schüssler Fiorenza’s hermeneutics, individuals share words of critique, suspicion, imagination, and remembrance, but the community discerns the Holy Spirit amongst these words and then works together to bring justice to the areas critiqued, and to work toward the peace depicted in the imagined future. Yoder argues that individuals share their experiences, make a personal adult choice for baptism, and potentially risk their life for others, but the reconciled church community forms the foundation and support for each of these individual actions.
V. Implications of Mennonite Ecclesiology for Preaching

a. The Gap between Pulpit and Congregation

Preaching in the context of a Mennonite, Trinitarian ecclesiology redefines the traditional “gap” between the pulpit and the pew. Lucy Atkinson Rose explains that traditional theories of preaching create a gap between the preacher and the congregation, but she seeks to abolish this gap.\(^{85}\) Preaching that does justice, peace, and reconciliation acknowledges the existence of the gap between pulpit and pew, and seeks to employ the gap to empower others.

In a Mennonite, Trinitarian preaching context, congregants participate in preaching by regularly preparing and delivering sermons. This preaching dances between the individual and the community. For the approximant twenty minutes of the sermon, an individual person has considerable authority to address the congregation. When that time is over, the preacher again joins the congregation. Even when two or three people deliver the sermon together, they have authority to speak only for the duration of the sermon, at which time they rejoin the church community. During worship, Mennonite preachers often do not sit at the front of the church facing the congregation. Instead, the designated preacher sits in the midst of the congregation until it is time for the sermon. At that time, the preacher rises, comes to the front, preaches, and then returns to the congregation. This image depicts the relationship between the pulpit and the pew, and the individual and the community, in a Mennonite context. The preacher comes from the congregation, addresses the church body as an individual, but then returns to the community. There is a gap between the pulpit and the pew for the duration of the sermon but that gap dissolves when the sermon ends and the preacher

\(^{85}\) Rose, Sharing the Word, 21, 49, 78.
again becomes one congregant amidst others in the pew. The individual speaks and shares his or her interpretations and ideas, but then that message becomes a gift to the congregation and the individual again joins the community.

b. Biblical Interpretation

It is important for Mennonite preachers to be a part of the congregational community because the congregation is the locus for scriptural discernment. Although the Holy Spirit equips the individual with the ability to interpret the Bible, the congregation hears, interprets, and discerns the direction of the Holy Spirit from within the diversity of individual perspectives.

Many current homiletical theories approach biblical interpretation and the current context as two cliffs connected by a bridge. The Bible is on a far cliff located in the past while the congregation is on another cliff in the present. Homileticians argue for crossing the bridge between each cliff one or more times in the process of shaping a sermon. The preacher is responsible for crossing the bridge and bringing exegetical treasures from the Bible to the church. Preaching for a Mennonite context challenges the separation of biblical interpretation and the local church. In Mennonite churches, scriptures are interpreted and understood from within the dialogue and diversity of voices found within the local church.

86. Paul Scott Wilson details the variety of approaches in Paul Scott Wilson, *The Practice of Preaching: Revised Edition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 134-135. Wilson names David Buttrick’s approach as an example that “crosses the bridge” once per move. Ibid., 134. I understand Buttrick’s approach as bringing together experience and scripture in relationship so that each is interpreting the other rather than traveling across the hermeneutical bridge to bring the past into the present. I will address Buttrick’s work in more detail later in this chapter.

87. This does not mean that there is a perfect parallel between the historical context of the scriptures and today’s context. Lydia Neufeld Harder argues that biblical studies, and specifically historical-criticism, recognizes a gap between the Bible and the current context. Neufeld Harder, “Hermeneutic Community”, 55. For Mennonites, however, it is not the individual person but the life, work, calling, ethics, ministry, spirituality etc. of the church congregation that is compared and contrasted to the Bible’s message. Ibid., 56-57. The Holy Spirit assists in discerning the similarities and dissimilarities through congregational discernment and dialogue.
Although many individuals interpret the Bible and bring those insights to the congregation, these words are not a final statement. Rather, each interpretation only begins the process of discernment that occurs within the congregation.

This process of interpretation can be seen in a current project, entitled “Being a Faithful Church,” launched by Mennonite Church Canada. Over several years, Mennonite Church Canada is endeavoring to “strengthen our overall capacity to discern” by engaging Mennonites across Canada in dialogue on particular topics or questions facing the church.  

This year’s focus is on sexuality. Congregations are given material to assist in their discernment process, which is often held during adult Sunday school. Congregations provide feedback to the larger church and then summaries and reports are circulated back to local churches for further discernment and approval. Discernment on the topic of sexuality begins in March 2014 and the final recommendations, after travelling between the local and broader church, are anticipated in July 2016. This extended and shared process of discernment within the congregation does not have an equivalent in Mennonite homiletical theory.


90. Many churches do have a weekly study hour connected to the worship in which issues are discussed and discerned. These are occasionally connected with the sermon and may provide a potential space for discernment either before or after the sermon.
c. The Word of God

Mennonite theology locates the Word of God within the congregation, rather than in the voice of the preacher. The ordained preacher is not the sole proprietor of God’s message “for the community is called to give birth to the word of God hidden in their midst while the preacher serves as midwife.”\(^1\) When the Holy Spirit equips a diversity of people to preach, they may contradict one another. It is the role of the congregation to discern which messages reflect the Word of God. Since the Word of God is discerned through listening to multiple voices and multiple sermons, it is important to hear the diversity of voices in the community. Moreover, since the sermon preached by an individual is only the beginning of the process of discerning the Word of God, and the discernment of the community follows, the Word of God is essentially located amongst the congregation.

Preaching that locates the Word of God within the community, rather than within the individual preacher, relates to the understanding of event in homiletical theory. In homiletical theory, preaching that *does* has been closely connected to preaching as an event, particularly an event that brings God’s Word and God’s presence to the congregation. In a Mennonite context, however, the active *doing* nature of preaching is distinct from the Word of God. Thus, preaching is an event because it *does* something, but it may do something other than the Word of God, because the Word of God is located and discerned within the congregation rather than the pulpit. This is a significant shift from many previous homiletical theologies, and has implications for who preaches and what is preached. *First,* when the Word of God is decentralized from the pulpit, there is less constraint on who can

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\(^1\) Mary Catherine Hilkert, *Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination* (New York: Continuum, 1997), 183.
preach. A Buddhist, for example, can preach in a Christian congregation without theological confusion regarding if and how a Buddhist speaks the Word of God. This is because the responsibility for discerning the Word of God lies with the gathered community. Second, there are fewer restrictions on what is preached. A sermon with a theological position that conflicts with the general beliefs of Mennonite churches, such as a sermon about Mennonite service in the Armed Forces, can be preached because the sermon is only one aspect of the conversation and discernment rather than the final Word of God. In the next chapter I explore preaching as event in more detail.

VI. Preaching that does Justice, Peace, and Reconciliation in a Mennonite Context: David Buttrick’s Moves

This chapter predominantly focuses on the theology shaping the Mennonite preaching context. However, the new homiletic understands that theology and form influence one another. As a result, I will end this chapter by discussing how the aforementioned Mennonite historical and theological roots and Mennonite approaches to biblical interpretation and the Word of God relate to homiletical form. This piece develops out of the previous implications as an example of how doing justice, peace, and reconciliation influence homiletical form. It also acts as a bridge to the next chapter, which delves more fully into the homiletical options for doing justice, peace, and reconciliation.

Mennonite homiletic literature is limited. There is even less scholarship about the forms of preaching appropriate for Mennonite ecclesiology and theology. One exception to

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this lacuna is Lynn Jost’s article *Preaching for a Hearing – The Sermon in Human Consciousness: Buttrick and Anabaptists*. Jost explores David Buttrick’s homiletical moves as an appropriate form for preaching in a Mennonite context. *First*, Jost notes that this method is appropriate for a Mennonite context because it emphasizes the congregation rather than individuals, a Mennonite perspective articulated earlier in this chapter. *Second*, this homiletical method focuses on Christ’s message of the coming kingdom of God and the need to live into the kingdom now. *Third*, Anabaptists emphasize “orthopraxy over orthodoxy,” which Buttrick demonstrates in his focus on shaping sermons that do what the biblical text does. Chapter four of this dissertation will discuss sermons as doing in more detail. Jost then articulates how this approach shapes the consciousness of the congregation. Although Jost’s work brings together Buttrick and Anabaptists, there are deeper connections that make Buttrick’s work particularly valuable for preaching in a Mennonite context focused on a Trinitarian ecclesiology.

**a. Moves**

David Buttrick’s form uses a series of “moves” to compose a sermon. A move is a single “module of language” that develops a “single conceptual idea.” Each move develops

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94. Ibid.

95. Ibid., 148.

the single idea through scripture, theology, and an example or illustration that connects the theological statement of the move to the life of the congregation.\(^\text{97}\) In terms of preaching that does justice, peace, and reconciliation for a Mennonite context, Buttrick’s holding together of theology, scripture, and life experience parallels the Mennonite concern for holding these three areas in tandem. In Mennonite churches, for example, the Holy Spirit is a theological concept with a biblical basis, but the Holy Spirit can only be understood through the lives of congregants. The Holy Spirit works in the lives of people in order to empower members to stand in dissonance to the principalities and powers, accept personal suffering for the sake of others, and form a community that supports and ministers to one another. Moreover, the Holy Spirit acts in the lives of congregants by illuminating scripture and equipping individuals to interpret scripture. Buttrick’s fluid movement between scripture and experience reflects a Mennonite approach of locating theology and scriptural interpretation within individual experience and congregational discernment, rather than isolating scripture to one side of the a cliff while the congregation stands on the other side.

Although each move brings together scripture, theology, and experience, the sequence and logic of the moves can also contribute to a sermon doing justice, peace, and reconciliation. Buttrick provides three means for linking moves together throughout the sermon in order to recognize God in our midst. These three modes are immediacy, reflection, and praxis. Preaching in the mode of immediacy seeks to replicate the movement of the scriptures in the sermon so that the sermon does what the scriptures do in the text.\(^\text{98}\) The reflective mode seeks to replicate the thought sequence and logical flow of the scriptures in the sermon. Preaching in this mode “intends a theological field of meaning and intends

\(^{\text{97}}\) Ibid., 346, 370.

\(^{\text{98}}\) Ibid., 362.
toward a particular consciousness.” The mode of praxis explores a particular situation through a series of moves grouped together to become “sets.” In this approach, a series may introduce a particular question and then look at that topic from various viewpoints.

Each of these structures provides possibilities for doing justice, peace, and reconciliation. The mode of immediacy emphasizes the doing aspect of justice, peace, and reconciliation in the text, in the sermon, and in the congregation. The mode of reflection promotes theological reflection and shapes the consciousness of the congregation. The mode of praxis provides a means for incorporating a diversity of viewpoints, particularly when preaching on a challenging or contentious topic.

By drawing attention to the logic and sequence between moves, Buttrick’s approach provides additional theological depth to the movement of the sermon. Buttrick’s focus is naming God’s presence in our midst. He argues that the logic and sequence of sermons can “move hearers deeper into life in Christ.” Sermons foster “experiential knowledge of God” and so it is the “preacher’s job to shape language to promote such knowledge.”

Sermons can name God’s interaction with humanity and God’s engagement with lived human experience when they bring theology, scripture, and experience together and in doing so...

99. Ibid., 389.

100 Ibid., 433.

101. Teresa Lockhart Stricklen, "Moves," in The New Interpreter’s Handbook of Preaching, ed. Paul Scott Wilson, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 199. Also see: Paul Scott Wilson, Preaching and Homiletical Theory, Preaching and Its Partners (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004), 16. In the next chapter, I provide more detail on how moves work together to form a developing narrative. This interaction between individual moves and a collective narrative lends itself to individuals preparing parts of a sermon that are then compiled into a complete sermon.

102. Ibid.
so shape the congregation’s view of God’s present action amongst us. As a result of bringing together these various elements, preachers use “Scripture to amplify God’s eternal Word” while also calling on humanity to participate in God’s work. Buttrick’s emphasis on naming God echoes Schussler Fiorenza’s concern for naming God in the midst of suffering and oppression, which contributes to doing justice. His approach does peace when it highlights God’s action and presence in the past, present, and future and it does reconciliation when it creates space for a diversity of viewpoints in the mode of praxis.

b. Language Constructs

As mentioned above, Buttrick argues that preaching addresses the congregation as a community rather than as individuals. He explains that we are “never out of relationship, for even when we are alone, our nature has been shaped by interrelating.” As a result, sermons need to speak to the “interhuman” instead of the individual. This approach focuses on preaching to the community as a whole rather than preaching to a series of individuals.

Moves address the congregation as a community by using various language constructs, such as metaphors and contrapuntals. Metaphors compare two items so that one is like another. Metaphor is “the stuff of preaching” because it facilitates using a known item in order to “reach into the mysteries of meaning” that are unknown, such as God. Buttrick

103. Wilson, Preaching, 16.
106. Ibid.
states that “because figurative language does draw on images of lived experience it is ‘incarnational’ and, therefore, natural to a gospel of God-with-us.”

Seeking to address the congregation as a community rather than a collection of individuals also influences which metaphors a preacher includes in a sermon. Ministers often draw on their own experiences, but “the images and metaphors we create may be hugely meaningful to us but somewhat oblique to a congregation.” Instead, when preachers speak to the community, they will repeatedly “weigh [their] meanings within the context of social meaning.” This use of metaphors is important because it recognizes that the language and images meaningful to a particular preacher may not hold the same meaning for the community. When preachers consider the community, their sermons speak to the broader church instead of remaining focused on their own personally meaningful constructs.

Using metaphors in preaching is also important to preaching that does justice, peace, and reconciliation because metaphors can speak to the congregation while leaving space for the individual. For example, metaphors compare how one object is like another. God is like a mother who provides, listens, teaches, guides, comforts and cares for her children. Nevertheless, there are also ways in which the objects are not like each other. God is not like a mother who abuses, abandons, neglects, or harms her children. Acknowledging the is

108. Ibid., 119.

109. Ibid., 194-195.

110. Ibid.

not in metaphors recognizes the limits of language and leaves space for individual experiences while addressing the church as a community.

Buttrick also employs contrapuntals as a means for creating space for conflicting opinions. Contrapuntals are the elements of language within a move that address possible questions or areas of dissent raised by members of the congregation.\(^\text{112}\) Although contrapuntals can become combative, essentially when they are used to try to quell objections before they happen, contrapuntals can leave space for both the community and the individual. Preachers can use tentative language around a contrapuntal and acknowledge that a contrapuntal marks an area of discussion for the congregation. Moreover, they can be used as another means for recognizing diversity. In other words, preachers can draw examples from the community, while acknowledging that the community is not a homogeneous group. In a Mennonite context, contrapuntals enable the preacher to speak of nonviolent resistance, for example, while acknowledging those who have served with the armed forces. It can also create the space to discuss Mennonite identity and community without silencing those voices that do not come from Europe or eat traditional Mennonite foods.

c. Image Grid

Language shapes consciousness across the breadth of images used in an entire sermon and across the multiple sermons preached over the course of a month, year, and lifetime of a congregation. Buttrick names this macro view of how images work across a sermon an “image grid” of “interacting images, examples, and illustrations.”\(^\text{113}\)


\(^{113}\) Ibid., 153.
The overall sermon should contain several metaphors and examples reflecting a diversity of experiences. When there is a lack of variety in a sermon, the gospel is potentially truncated and limited. For example, “if all illustrations in a sermon were drawn from sporting events, inadvertently we would proclaim the gospel as a ‘game.’” Moreover, sermons throughout history have featured male “heroes” while describing the “helplessness” of women. When preachers are aware that “sermons build a world, a faith-world, in consciousness, made from images, metaphors, illustrations, and examples” they can examine their own preaching and speak to the diversity of the congregation, the world, and God’s actions.

David Buttrick’s “moves” provide a homiletical form that relates well to preaching that does justice, peace, and reconciliation. Preaching using moves brings together theology, biblical interpretation, and everyday experiences. Such preaching utilizes language constructs that speak to the community while leaving room for the individual, and includes a diversity of metaphors, images, and stories in preaching. Buttrick’s approach honours a diversity of experiences and critically evaluates the images used throughout a sermon.

Nevertheless, there are two areas of his approach that are incomplete for doing justice, peace, and reconciliation in a Mennonite preaching context: community discernment and the inclusion of a diversity of voices in preaching. First, Buttrick is critical of preaching as the

114. Ibid., 135.
115. Ibid., 168.
116. Ibid.
117. Ibid., 169.
unequivocal Word of God. He argues, preaching “is a word of God only if it serves God’s redemptive purposes. Preaching announces good news of the gospel and, in so doing, sets people free for God’s new humanity.” This approach echoes the contextual approach of both Schüssler Fiorenza and Yoder. However, Buttrick’s perspective is not fully applicable to a Mennonite context in this area because he does not articulate who and how one decides what is redemptive, liberating good news. As a result, while his approach provides some insights for understanding the Word of God in a Mennonite context, his method would benefit from further explication before being applied to Mennonite preaching.

Second, Buttrick privileges a single voice. Although his sermons contain a diversity of moves, experiences, and metaphors, these various parts are exegeted, written, and delivered by a single person. In a Mennonite understanding, a sermon cannot fully do justice, peace and reconciliation if individuals do not have a means to share their interpretations and insights with the community for discernment. While there is much to commend in this method, the next chapter undertakes a wider review of homiletical models to seek additional resources for preaching that does justice, peace, and reconciliation in a Mennonite context.

VII. Conclusion

Schüssler Fiorenza’s hermeneutics explored the importance of sharing experiences of God in the midst of oppression and suffering in order to critique the systems that cause the
injustices. When injustices are named, the hermeneutics of imagination and transformation can then envision alternatives and work towards those possibilities. In chapter two, I described Yoder’s recognition of the church as a central component of this process. Chapter three further articulated the importance of the church community, as well as the value of individuals. In Mennonite churches, the Holy Spirit equips individuals to interpret scripture, preach, and critique the principalities and powers, as they exist both inside and outside of the church. The community listens to the experiences of individuals and, with the help of the Holy Spirit, discerns God’s will. When the church is a central participant, and the preacher is one part of a larger process, sermons are not merely about justice, peace, and reconciliation, they do justice, peace, and reconciliation. In other words, in a Mennonite context, the church congregation, the individual preacher, and the sermon are all components of the larger work of transformation. The sermon thus becomes an active participant in the doing of justice, peace, and reconciliation.

The Holy Spirit equips a diversity of individuals and the church discerns the Holy Spirit and the Word of God from amongst these various voices. Such work does justice by empowering the individual voices of others and listening to their diversity of experiences. Preaching does peace by listening and engaging with discordant voices. It does reconciliation by forming discerning, supportive, heterogeneous communities.

David Buttrick’s method provides the first steps in shaping a homiletical form for preaching that does justice, peace, and reconciliation in a Mennonite context. Homiletical moves bring together scripture, theology, and everyday experiences in a similar way to how Mennonites discern scripture and theology through their individual lives. Metaphors and contrapuntals shape the community consciousness while leaving space for individual
experiences, which might disagree with the experiences conveyed in the sermon. Buttrick’s method, however, continues to privilege the voice of a single minister preparing and delivering the sermon. As a result, the next chapter seeks additional homiletical resources for doing justice, peace, and reconciliation through preaching.
Chapter Four

The Homiletical Canon: Current Homiletical Resources for a Homiletic of Justice, Peace, and Reconciliation.

I. Introduction

Chapter one introduced Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s hermeneutical method, and placed her theory into the specific context of Philemon. Chapters two and three followed a similar pattern. Chapter two provided theology from a Mennonite perspective and chapter three placed that theory into the specific context of a Trinitarian approach to Mennonite ecclesiology and its implications for preaching and sermon form. In a similar fashion, chapters four and five comprise a unit. The current chapter examines the homiletical theories for doing justice, peace, and reconciliation. In this chapter, I analyze the treatment of justice, peace, and reconciliation in the broader field of homiletics according to the language of event and, most notably, how the sermon moves from being about something to doing something. The next chapter places those homiletical theories into the practical context of Mennonite preaching by presenting a sermon sample and a series of lessons designed to engage a Mennonite congregation in reflection and dialogue about preaching that does justice, peace, and reconciliation. My hope is that by reviewing the approaches to doing justice, peace, and reconciliation in the broader field of homiletics, I can begin to articulate a homiletic for doing justice, peace, and reconciliation that is effective for the Mennonite context.
II. Homiletical Background and Analytical Framework

Preaching as doing stems from the New Hermeneutic and New Homiletic. Relying on Martin Heidegger’s work, Rudolf Bultmann argues that historical acts of God do not change humanity. Instead, “saving events,” such as the cross and resurrection, need to be “appropriated into man’s [sic] life” in order to be transformative. Bultmann writes, “the salvation–occurrence is not preparatory instruction which precedes the actual demand for faith, but is, in itself, the call for faith or the challenge to give up one’s previous understanding.” This call for faith occurs when “God’s word in Christ confronts man [sic] with an event,” which challenges humanity to question their previous understandings, values, and view of the past and future. As Bultmann writes, “an event that God causes to occur…thrusts [humanity] into genuine decision.” In short, “Christ is encountered…and life is changed.”

Gerhard Ebeling, and Ernst Fuchs also build on Heidegger’s work. For Ebeling and Fuchs, language is no longer understood as something that “merely describes or reflects

2. Ibid.
‘reality’” but “actually names and therefore creates it.”

As Ebeling writes, “we do not get at the nature of words by asking what they contain but by asking what they effect, what they set going, what future they disclose.”

In other words, “this event…is not mere speech. But it sets something in motion.”

Although the New Hermeneutic and the New Homiletic focus on how language sets in motion an encounter between God and humanity, language also “sets in motion” actions, attitudes, and discussions within the local church. As noted in the previous chapter, preaching in a Mennonite context does not assume that the sermon itself creates an encounter between the Word of God and humanity. Rather, the encounter is understood to occur within the congregation in its discernment of the Word of God after an individual shares his or her interpretations and ideas with the congregation. Nevertheless, preaching is an event in a Mennonite context because sermonic language does something when it shapes the church in its discernment.

In my approach, I seek to shape sermons that do justice, peace, and reconciliation. This chapter evaluates how the field of homiletics approaches justice, peace, and reconciliation, paying particular attention to those approaches that are doing justice, peace, and reconciliation rather than speaking about justice, peace, and reconciliation as topics. I utilize Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s and John Howard Yoder’s work in combination with a Trinitarian, Mennonite ecclesiology as my criterion for determining whether homiletical theories do justice, peace, and reconciliation.


10. Ibid., 183-184.
III. Justice in Homiletics from 1950 to the Present

Preaching that begins to *do* justice involves listening to the suffering and oppression of others and critiquing the principalities and powers that cause suffering. Since the principalities and powers include many everyday systems such as economic, political, and military structures, critiquing the principalities and powers often entails speaking against aspects of society. In the Western world the fear of communism or of being labeled and imprisoned as a communist created a culture of conformity in the early 1950s that largely silenced this type of critique.

This desire for conformity also resulted in designating separate spheres for each gender and race. The suburbs became the sphere of White middle and upper class women as they left their factory jobs after World War II and entered the private sphere of the kitchen. Men travelled from the suburbs to the public sphere of the office. Meanwhile, Black men and women were segregated to their own spheres in diners, washrooms, and neighborhoods. However, in 1954, the United States Supreme Court, in Brown vs. Board of Education, declared racially segregated schools unconstitutional and the first Black students in the southern United States attended a formerly all-White school in 1957. Similarly, women fought to enter the work place and receive equal pay in the 1960s.

In North American pulpits, similar changes slowly began in the 1950s and 1960s as women entered the sphere of the pulpit and the academy in greater numbers and Black male preachers entered White academia. In 1955, for example, James H. Robinson was the first African American to deliver the Yale Beecher Lectures, and in 1956 the Methodists accepted
female ministers. Despite these early steps, both Blacks and women basically remained in their own spheres. The next Black man to address the Beecher Lectures was Henry Mitchell in 1974, nineteen years after Robinson. Similarly, the Lutheran church ordained women in 1970 and the Episcopal Church in 1976, twenty years after the ordination of women in the Methodist church. In academia, the first woman to deliver the Beecher Lectures was Helen Kenyon in 1950. There was then a thirty-one year gap until Phyllis Trible gave the lectures in 1981. This space between the initial inroads towards equality and the next appearance of both women and Black men is reflected in homiletic literature. The majority of homiletic approaches addressing topics of equality and justice were published after the late 1970s. Paul Wilson notes this trend, stating that “it could be argued that social justice was never a major part of the New Homiletic…in general it remains an area needing much attention.”

Despite the unfortunate gaps in scholarship, especially during the 1950s and 1960s, there are four areas of preaching justice relevant to my own project: the relationship between individual, personal spirituality and social justice; the relationship between human and divine agency in creating change; the relationship between doing justice and the importance of voice; and the relationships between congregants in community, including how congregants relate to the world.

First, the traditional view in mainstream denominations has been that personal spirituality is largely unrelated to social justice. Just as the 1950s created separate spheres of

13. Wilson, Setting Words on Fire, 36.
14. Ibid.
home and work that were challenged in the 1960s, so too the church was for the most part separated from the arena of social justice and viewed primarily as the realm of individual spirituality and personal faith.\(^\text{15}\) Recently, some homileticians have challenged this separation, arguing that practices of personal spirituality are the foundations for social justice.\(^\text{16}\) Acts of justice are themselves a part of spirituality because they are acts of worship.\(^\text{17}\) This approach is particularly helpful in recognizing that sermons that do justice are not separate messages apart from other areas of church life, and a sermon can do justice while simultaneously focusing on spirituality.

Second, in the homiletical literature, there is a complicated relationship between the role of human and divine agency in relation to justice. Preaching that does justice, peace, and reconciliation balances God and human agency. Too great a focus on God tends to unite human voices with God’s voice, thereby limiting room for individual voices of suspicion and critique. Furthermore, too strong an emphasis on God’s agency disenfranchises humanity leaving little need for a supportive community to work together for transformation. On the other hand, placing too much emphasis on human agency neglects the need to discern God’s will. This approach also deemphasizes humanity’s reliance on God, including the


indispensable work of the Holy Spirit to equip individuals and guide the churches’ discernment. Preaching that does justice, peace, and reconciliation in a Mennonite context seeks to balance human and divine agency in order to hold together the individual, the community, and the Holy Spirit.

Various homileticians seek to balance the agency of humanity and God. Leonora Tubbs Tisdale and André Resner view preaching as speaking for God as well as speaking on behalf of others who are experiencing injustice.18 Dawn Ottoni-Wilhelm specifically focuses on prophetic preaching, similarly arguing that preaching should bring together “God’s Word as it addresses the needs and struggles of the world,” a recognition of humanity’s attempts to live towards God’s kingdom, and the churches’ call to service.19 Teresa Fry Brown argues that preaching conveys the Word of God as a message of transformation, but it is also humanity’s “duty to ‘do justice.’”20 Doing justice is the shared work of God and humanity and includes challenging oppression, listening to the experiences of others, and possibly suffering for the sake of others.

The Roman Catholic approach to justice and gospel is an apt example of bringing together the agency of God and humanity. The Catholic Church’s 1971 Synod states, “action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as

18. Tisdale, Prophetic Preaching, 6; André Resner, Just Preaching : Prophetic Voices for Economic Justice (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2003), xx.


a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church’s mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.”21 As Charles M. Murphy writes, this single sentence, particularity the word “‘constitutive’…forces the Christian to ask the vital question whether working for justice is at the heart of the Christian mission and of the gospel itself, that is, part of the very definition of Christianity, or whether working for justice is more on the level of an ethical deduction from the central truths of the Christian message.”22 Preaching in a Mennonite context understands the gospel as a liberating message, proclaiming the end of injustice, violence, and broken relationships. Both God and humanity bring about this work.

Third, as noted in chapter three, in a Mennonite context the individual is essential to preaching that does justice, peace, and reconciliation. As a result, the value of individual voices, including a diversity of individual voices, becomes a central criterion of whether or not sermons do justice. Charles Campbell and Johan Cilliers relate embodiment to the foolishness of God and the Gospel. Although they do not use the term justice, their overall focus is creating new possibilities and transformation by bringing foolishness into preaching. Campbell and Cilliers argue,

certain bodies are not permitted to preach because they are the wrong shape or gender or color or sexual orientation. Preaching fools will challenge these taboos and transgress these boundaries. After all…the crucifixion at the heart of Paul’s foolish preaching was itself a taboo topic not to be discussed in polite society. Respectable church folks would certainly been offended. So like tricksters and holy fools – and like


Jesus himself—preaching fools will at times break taboos and transgress boundaries within the pulpit itself.\textsuperscript{23}

When churches restrict who may preach and who is considered taboo in the pulpit, questions of voice and empowerment become central to doing justice.

For women, the journey to enter the pulpit demonstrates this emphasis on transgressing boundaries and finding value in their voices. Some feminist homileticians argued for ordination, including the opportunity to preach from the sphere of the pulpit, because it was an injustice to silence women’s voices and restrict preaching to the male voice. As Charles Campbell, notes “‘silence is death.’ When people are silenced…they not only are the victims of violence but also often become the breeding ground of further violence, as their pent-up oppression goes unexpressed and finally explodes.”\textsuperscript{24} As Walter Brueggemann so elegantly states, speech “breaks the silence of violence and the violence of silence.”\textsuperscript{25} Women sought justice by demonstrating the value of their individual voice in the pulpit.

After ordination, these women sought recognition for the unique cadences of their voices, because they were sometimes distinct from male voices.\textsuperscript{26} As Teresa Fry Brown observes, “despite the negative implications of the status of African American women preachers, we continue to preach. Our presence in the pulpit alone is a visual for justice.”\textsuperscript{27}

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\textsuperscript{24} Campbell, \textit{The Word before the Powers}, 75.  
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Although African American males had access to the pulpit, Black preaching also sought justice by valuing the uniqueness of preaching in the Black language. Preaching that does justice not only includes a diversity of voices, it values the uniqueness of each voice.

A diversity of voices for doing justice in preaching not only includes the pulpit, but also the sermon preparation. After all, no single preacher can “represent all the silent, muted voices in the congregation.” Justo O. González and Catherine G. González in The Liberating Pulpit argue for the end of “lone-ranger” biblical interpretation where a pastor is solely responsible for performing biblical interpretation. Instead, preaching locates interpretation within the community. Similarly, Rebecca Chopp, Lucy Atkinson Rose, and Mary Donovan Turner and Mary Lin Hudson argue for including a diversity of voices in scriptural interpretation. Mary Catherine Hilkert calls for preaching that locates the “good news not in the text but in the community in dialogue with the text.”

John McClure’s RoundTable Pulpit encourages listening to the experiences congregants have with a scriptural text in preparation for the sermon. He writes, “justice is expressed as members of the congregation discover that they are equally children of God


31. Ibid., 51, 59-60.

32. Chopp, The Power to Speak, 84-98; Rose, Sharing the Word, 130-131; Hudson and Turner, Saved, 55.

33. Hilkert, Naming Grace, 81.
who have important insights in the interpretation of the Bible and of spiritual experience.”

However, the benefits of McClure’s approach are limited for a Mennonite context because he continues to privilege the ordained leader’s voice in preaching. Doing justice includes valuing the individual, but also including the diversity of voices from the community within preaching.

*Fourth,* the community is central to preaching that *does* justice. Homileticians emphasize the need for a committed church community in order to address injustice, echoing John Howard Yoder’s emphasis on the church community. In order for a church to seek justice, Justo L. González argues that Hispanic preaching “refer to the injustices that take place among ourselves, and that are often eclipsed by the injustice perpetrated on us.” He argues that preachers should “relate every aspect of the gospel, every doctrine, every act of worship, every act of preaching, to the yearning for justice that already exists within our people.” The church focuses on the internal instances of injustices because injustice in the church is often overlooked.

Other homileticians argue that it is the church community’s responsibility to bring justice, including God’s love and God’s justice, to the world. Scott Bader-Saye writes, “the unity of justice, then, lies in its overarching pattern of reconciliation. Such justice cannot be

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35. Ibid., 60-62.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
dispensed at a distance, but must be embodied in communities that bear the message of reconciliation and thereby ‘become the justice of God.’” Likewise, Walter J. Burghardt describes justice as a “whole web of relationships,” including a call to “father the fatherless and feed the sojourner, the stranger, not because the orphan and the outsider deserve it, but because this is the way God has acted with them.” In a similar sentiment, Stanley P. Saunders and Charles L. Campbell in their discussion of space, homelessness, and hospitality understand that in relationships between strangers “we are brought close both to the stranger and to God. In hospitality the dividing walls of hostility fall down…and a new creation comes into being.” Through God’s justice, we are affirmed that God loves us and that God loves the world, and so we seek justice for the world. In this perspective, God first loved us so we as the church extend God’s love and affirmation to all. The church is responsible for the common good of all and tasked with speaking “prophetically for social justice.”

Stanley P. Saunders and Charles L. Campbell add an important caveat. They argue that despite the Christian churches’ concern for doing justice in the world, such as transforming poverty and homelessness, the churches’ actual record of actively seeking justice in the


41. Burghardt, Preaching, 124.


world “is at best spotty.”\textsuperscript{46} This combination of idealism and reality demonstrates John Howard Yoder’s hope in the church as the Kingdom of God and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s call for ongoing critique, even of the church.

Dale P. Andrews connects justice in the church and justice in the world. According to Andrews, the church is a covenant and reconciled community that provides a space to uplift and empower those people who are oppressed by society.\textsuperscript{47} The liberation of the faith community, however, also includes “ministerial praxis beyond the faith community.”\textsuperscript{48} The community is focused on reform, and insists on “social justice, whether it be cultural, political, or economic.”\textsuperscript{49} In order to do justice, the church, including its preaching, actively seeks transformation and justice both inside and outside of the church.

\textit{Analysis and Additional Considerations:} Homiletics does justice, rather than solely talking about justice, by giving voice to those individuals silenced in the past, by valuing individual’s diverse experiences as worthy of being included within a sermon, by recognizing both God’s and humanity’s role in transformation, and by naming the importance of community. Justice, however, can create divisions and lead to a critique of others. In some of the approaches mentioned above, for example, preaching justice often includes sermons that seek justice for those outside of the church while giving the impression that the church is void of injustices.

In order to address injustices both within and outside of the church while demonstrating love for all, preaching justice benefits from a greater focus on the

\textsuperscript{46} Saunders and Campbell, \textit{The Word on the Street}, 161.


\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 91.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
principalities and powers. I previously examined the principalities and powers in chapter two, but turn now to the work of Charles Campbell who specifically brings together critiquing the principalities and powers and preaching. Campbell’s *The Word Before the Powers*, based on the work of Walter Wink and William Stringfellow, critiques systems of oppression without participating in the condemnation of the people who succumb to the temptations of the principalities and powers. Campbell writes, “on most Sunday mornings preachers do not face people who actively seek to do evil, but rather people who are complicit with the powers of death that hold them captive.” Rather than viewing congregants as “evil,” or acting out of “malevolence,” church members are more often “deeply frustrated by their complicity with the powers because they know the way they are following is not the way of life.” Campbell’s approach allows individuals to speak of their experiences and frustrations as oppressed and oppressors without accusing or blaming other people. His approach, thereby, does justice as individuals critique while also doing peace by demonstrating love for others. Moreover, it does reconciliation with the broader church by holding differences in community. By focusing on the principalities and powers, sermons can name individual injustices without dividing the congregation. Individuals and the community can then work together to do justice, peace, reconciliation, and transformation.


IV. Peace in Homiletics from 1950 to the Present

Amidst the climate of conformity, fear, and suspicion generated by Communism and McCarthyism during the 1950s, preaching focused primarily on pastoral concerns and individual salvation rather than participating in outspoken critiques of the government, including calls for peace and nonviolent resistance. Peace, as it is defined here, involves nonviolently seeking the transformation of oppression and violence. Nonviolent alternatives are dreams of the eschatological imagination that begin in the past and the present. Although peace is a historical tenant of several churches, the nuclear threat broadened the interest in transforming violence. The increasing nuclear threat posed by the arms race between the United States and Russia, in combination with the Vietnam War, substantially changed the tenor of the times and created a reason and a space for the critique of the government’s nuclear policies and participation in warfare. In his 1969 article “Preaching on Issues of War and Peace 1915-1965,” Jess Yoder argues that attitudes towards war did not substantially shift until the threat of nuclear war, when “nuclear pacifism” became more common. In the 1982 preface to their collection of sermons on peace, Ronald J. Sider and Darrel J. Brubaker also cite the nuclear threat as the motivation for encouraging preachers to preach peace. William Coffin Sloan’s *A Passion for the Possible* echoes these same anti-nuclear sentiments. Sloan denounces the economic and spiritual “price tag” of the cold war and the movement away from “love your enemy” and towards “hate all Communists.” Three areas of the critique of violence and the corresponding calls for peace in homiletic literature


appears to fit into three categories: preaching peace on an interpersonal level, either by looking at relationships within the congregation or relationships in local neighbourhoods; preaching peace by focusing on governmental policy; or seeking peace in the eschatological future.

The first approach to peace includes seeking peace in interpersonal relationships despite the possibility of facing your own suffering. Martin Luther King, Jr. argued that self-suffering might occur in order to bring about peace, for example when faced with the violence perpetrated by police during boycotts. From an Anabaptist perspective, Dawn Ottoni-Wilhelm echoes the possibility of willingly suffering for the sake of others as a key aspect of preaching God’s love and compassion for others. These approaches by King and Ottoni-Wilhelm resonate with Yoder’s approach to suffering for the sake of others noted in chapter two.

King also spoke of peacemaking in interpersonal relationships in the larger community beyond the church, such as in gang situations. King states in “Why I am Against the War in Vietnam,” that local ghetto neighborhoods should utilize non-violence instead of “Molotov cocktails and rifles.” More recently, Barbara Patterson and M. Shawn Copeland critique the use of violence in local communities. Copeland cites some rap music as a particularly prominent source of violence. She utilizes the imagination as a means for envisioning peaceful alternatives to violent situations, such as re-envisioning women differently from the


Patterson desires preaching that calls for the “cessation of violence against women...[and] witnesses about Christ’s active presence in our own day.” Whether addressing the violence perpetrated in rap music, ghetto conflicts, against women, or in international warfare, homileticians approach preaching as a means for calling for nonviolence on an interpersonal level.

In a similar manner, other homileticians preach peace on an interpersonal level by placing the topic of peace within congregational life and discussion. Stanley Hauerwas and Alyce M. McKenzie espouse this approach. Hauerwas’ “Preaching Repentance in a Time of War” addresses how to preach peace while navigating the congregations’ emphasis on showing “unwavering support of our soldiers” during wartime. Although Hauerwas primarily focuses on how church communities, including both church-going soldiers and civilians, need to repent for their participation and support of war, he notes that the American mainline churches “do not believe that the church is an alternative to war...because they have never heard sermons that suggest that the church is an alternative to war.” In this approach to preaching peace, peace and war become a topic for discussion and debate within the congregation.

Alyce M. McKenzie addresses preaching during war by using the Bible’s wisdom literature as her foundation. Similar to Hauerwas, McKenzie argues that the church needs to


62. Ibid., 17.
address peace and war because “difficult subjects…are not matters we reflect on alone, but in the context of a communal dialogue whose goal is shalom.”\footnote{63} She argues that during times of war it is too easy to assume that we are right, that others are enemies, and that the national agenda is synonymous with the will of God.\footnote{64} Instead, preaching needs to acknowledge the complexity of war and place conflict within the “context of the Christian gospel.”\footnote{65} Preaching can “guide listeners in picturing alternative outcomes that come from allowing differing proverbs to guide us in time of war and challenge them to evaluate the kind of future they want and how their beliefs and actions are contributing to or detracting from it.”\footnote{66}

In other words, preaching can depict alternatives to war and call the church to dialogue about such possibilities.

In a second approach, preachers look towards the government in matters of war and peace, either critiquing or supporting the government’s position. King’s “Why I am Against the War in Vietnam” names the government’s role in war and peace and critiques the government’s involvement in the Vietnam War. He states, “I knew that I could never again raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos without first having spoken clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today: my own government.”\footnote{67} In a similar manner, Henry Fosdick, after personal experiences as a chaplain

\footnote{64}{Ibid., 24.}
\footnote{65}{Ibid., 25.}
\footnote{66}{Ibid., 26-27.}
\footnote{67}{King, Jr., “Why I Am Opposed to the War in Vietnam”}
during World War II, preached pacifism throughout the rest of his ministry. Preaching several decades before King, Harry Emerson Fosdick’s sermon “The Unknown Soldier” makes a similar plea for churches and the United States to “stay out of war.”

More recently, preaching after the events of September 11, 2001 also focused on the government’s role in peace and war. Mark A. Gring analyzed 204 sermons preached in the two months following September 11, 2001. He notes that sermons preached during this period advocated a message of “wait for the United States government to respond appropriately, justly, and biblically.” Although the message of patience and support for the government is not a message particularly in line with my own approach, I do want to note, as Gring does, the message of patience and appropriate response meant that preachers were avoiding judgment and condemnation of Muslims. These sermons connect war and peace to national policy but without the church as the locus for discerning God’s will. These sermons largely understood the government as responsible for peace, instead of the church community discerning God’s will and then working towards transformation.

72. Gring, “We Have Nothing”.

Gring uses a disproportionate number of evangelical sermons and sermons preached by men in comparison to mainstream protestant and Catholic sermon samples and sermons preached by women. Further work would need to extend his sample to a greater diversity of denominations. In Gring’s sample, men preached 92.65% of the sermons. Sermons from Baptist denominations comprised 25.89% of the sample sermons. Only 8.33% of the sermons came from Presbyterians, 4.5% from Lutherans, and 2% from Catholics. Gring, “We Have Nothing”.

72. Gring, “We Have Nothing”.
In a *third* approach, preachers connect peace and the eschatological imagination. Mark A. Jumper demonstrates this approach, arguing that preaching that occurs after war shares similarities with preaching during advent. Both occasions for preaching focus on the hope of what may occur in the future, but has “not yet” happened. In terms of peace, this hope of what has “not yet” happened takes the shape of peacemaking and transforming former enemies into friends.\(^{73}\)

In order for peacemaking to occur, certain structures must be destroyed or transformed. Although the removal or alteration of these structures leads to peace, people may still lament the loss of familiar frameworks. Walter Brueggemann argues that the imagination laments the loss of the systems that we find comforting and familiar, while envisioning alternative worlds shaped by the hope, covenant, and power of God. He connects this to peace by naming the United States’ penchant for justifying “macho violence” and “American exceptionalism” as systems which provide people comfort, but which began to be destroyed on September 11, 2001.\(^{74}\) Instead, imagination can depict a future of diversity and relationships that seems impossible, but is possible with God.\(^{75}\) Paul Wilson writes, “the prophetic ministry is also the dreaming ministry. Prophets provided dreams of what human society could conceivably be, redemptive dreams that point us in new directions away from the nightmares of the past.”\(^{76}\) In other words, the use of the imagination and dreams in


\(^{75}\) Ibid., 141-142.

preaching can envision God’s future, including a vision of peace, despite the current violence.

*Analysis and Additional Considerations:* Those homiletical methods that recognize the connection between eschatology and peace begin the movement away from simply naming peace to *doing* peace. As evidenced by the violence in the past and present, peace is difficult for humanity; however, peace is a part of a vision for the future. Both Schüssler Fiorenza and Yoder identify the importance of using the imagination in order to envision alternative, transformed futures. By envisioning peace, sermons participate in shaping actions, attitudes, and non-violent responses to violence in the present and in the future. O. Benjamin Sparks, states that “we may have reached an end point, or in the deepest sense, a crisis. For if we imitate with peace what we have often done with important human causes in recent years, treating them as passing topics which are soon forgotten, we may not have long left to preach about anything else.”

In order to prevent peace from becoming a passing sermon topic, preaching requires the eschatological imagination.

Preaching peace cannot, however, become a solely futuristic vision. Elizabeth Achtemeier notes that what little eschatology is currently present in mainstream churches is heavily orientated towards the future. Charles Campbell and Stanley P. Saunders observe, “churches...will always want to push the resurrection into the next life, into another time or place where it does not intrude upon our tidy, idolatrous ways of perceiving and organizing

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life.” Eschatology solely focused on the future is problematic because, as David Buttrick and others warn, “too much heaven can cause a careless neglect of earthly affairs, for example, matters of bread and ethics.”

David Buttrick names the act of balancing the present with the future, “social dreaming,” or, adding “present mystery” to a sermon. Sermons should speak of God in the present tense since God is currently “working to fulfill future promises now.” In an analysis of Jesus’ language, Buttrick writes,

while Jesus anticipates a future new order of God, at the same time he seems to view the new order as a mysterious, present-tense “happening” in which we live. Therefore, Jesus’ words reflect two understandings: a future orientation typical of apocalyptic and at the same time discernment of a hidden unfolding new order as found in the wisdom tradition. No wonder that Jesus invites followers to step into the new order ahead of time.

It is the challenge of the Christian church and sermonic language to exist in the mystery between the violence of the present and the hope of the future: between Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

In addition to the present and the future, preaching that does peace also remembers the past. Remembrance recalls the work of God in the past, including God’s solidarity with

people who are silenced and forgotten. Remembrance does peace because it speaks the subversive stories of those who resisted the dominant narrative; this includes seeking peace instead of violence, and working for creative alternatives to creating change instead of using power, oppression, and violence.

Charles Campbell argues that the principalities and powers cause amnesia, so that we forget the suffering and oppression caused in the past. As a result, we either “do not know or have managed to deny the history of suffering that the powers have produced” in the past. 84 Similarly, Christine Smith writes, the act of ‘‘re-membering’’ those whom the world would like to forget is a very radical act - a very faithful, redemptive act” because it makes the preacher and the congregation “aware of all parts of the ‘body of God,’ and the ‘body of the community’ that have been forgotten and rendered invisible, disposable, severed, unnamed, disappeared, and annihilated.” 85 By remembering and naming those who suffer, a sermon can do justice by standing in solidarity with those experiencing pain and oppression, while at the same time creating possibilities for liberation, transformation, and alternative visions for both the present and the future. 86

As John Howard Yoder demonstrated, remembering is not a solitary act but must be done in community. Alan Kreider, Eleanor Kreider, and Paulus Widjaja argue that remembrance is critical to Mennonite worship because the stories local churches tell shape


86. Campbell, The Word before the Powers, 111-112. Leonora Tubbs Tisdale and Mary Catherine Hilkert do remembrance in their work. Tisdale and Hilkert, however, do not specifically name stories of God standing in solidarity with those who are suffering, oppressed, and absent from the official records as the material that the church remembers. As a result, they practice remembrance but do not discuss how the church should also engage in remembrance. Tisdale, Prophetic Preaching, 51. Hilkert, Naming Grace, 187-188.
their identity and behaviour. Renée Sauder’s article “Let Me Tell You a Story” also connects remembrance to the church community and identity. She writes that the church and its preaching, should “remember and tell the stories of our biblical faith.” Churches that remember will take time to look back at the lives we have lived, to remember the happiness we have seen, to ponder the precious moments and people who have graced our lives. We must remember too our hurts, our sadness, the mistakes and crippling losses. We must remember intentionally to search through our past so we can discover where our journeys have brought us, who we are, and who we are becoming.

Sauder is careful to note that remembrance is not merely triumphal, we also remember struggles and failures. Her words and her use of the first person plural indicate the communal nature of remembrance and the importance of remembering together in community.

I suspect that the power of “celebration” in Black preaching comes from the interaction between the present reality, remembrance, and the imagination. Timothy Sensing, discussing the preaching of Martin Luther King, Jr., provides an apt example. Sensing states, “King’s voice of liberation announced the future of God for America and then added the prophetic word ‘Now!’” King also included remembrance of past events by quoting spirituals,


89. Ibid.

90. Ibid.

recounting events from earlier years in the civil rights movement, and using images from the Bible.  

Paul Wilson, referring to celebration in the Black church, similarly writes, “celebration extols what is now possible with the help of the Spirit.” Both Luke A. Powery and James H. Harris also bring together suffering and celebration in Black preaching, but neither Powery, nor Harris particularly emphasize balancing the present and the future. Dale P. Andrews, writing about prophetic ministry, may shed light on Powery’s and Harris’ approaches. He states, “Black eschatology does not separate ‘otherworldly’ and ‘this-worldly hope’” because future promises “translate into this-worldly hope and ways of being.” Preaching that does peace demonstrates that peace is possible by recounting God’s and humanity’s actions of overcoming violence in the past. Preaching that does peace also uses those historical stories to imagine God’s peace-filled work continuing into the present and eschatological future.

V. Reconciliation in Homiletics from 1950 to the Present

Preaching that does reconciliation in a Mennonite context gathers together many distinct individuals into a united, although not homogenous, church community. As John

92. Martin Luther King, Jr., “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop”, Martin Luther King, Jr., Research & Education Institute http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/documentsentry/ive Been_to_the_Mountaintop/ (accessed March 3 2014). This sermon includes several biblical images as well as a series doing remembrance when King lists the civil rights events from earlier in the 1960s.

93. Wilson, Setting Words on Fire, 211.


95. Andrews, Practical Theology, 47.
Howard Yoder argues, this reconciled community is critical to transformation and *doing* justice and peace. Reconciliation in homiletical literature has shifted away from the one-on-one relationship between the pastor and a congregant toward discussions surrounding congregational diversity and living in church communities of right-relationships despite differences. This significant shift can be marked through three developments in homiletical literature: reconciliation as relationships with the pastor, reconciliation as relationships between congregants, and reconciliation as forming community in the midst of diversity.

*First,* reconciliation in homiletical literature has roots in pastoral approaches to preaching with a focus on the relationship between the pastor and an individual congregant. Harry Emerson Fosdick, the father of pastoral preaching, shaped sermons concerned with an individual congregant’s problems and concerns, addressing those areas that “parishioners might like to discuss privately with their pastor.”

Reconciliation in homiletical theory, however, extends beyond conversations in the preacher’s study, and emphasizes that the relationships between congregants are a central aspect. Edgar N. Jackson, writing early in the pastoral preaching movement, argues that preaching can either develop and form the congregation into a whole or the congregation can be “broken up into individuals.” Both approaches have their use in preaching as long as the preacher is aware of his decision. He further notes that the individual problem of loneliness, for example, is best resolved by focusing on relationships within the congregation. Charles F. Kemp develops the importance of the church congregation in

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98. Ibid., 97.

99. Ibid., 61, 87.
solving problems one step further. He connects the group therapy approaches of psychological counseling to the group already assembled within a congregation. He notes, “psychologists and social workers…go to great efforts to create groups,” but the pastor already, ideally, has an “understanding and accepting group.” More recently, Donald Capps echoes Jackson’s and Kemp’s work, listing “shared human experience” as one means of answering individual problems. Capps suggests connecting a particular private problem to the “human experience, that we share with others.”

This expansion of pastoral care to include several congregants foreshadows G. Lee Ramsey, Jr.’s work in forming relationships between congregants, which is the second area of reconciliation in the homiletical material. Ramsey’s Care-full Preaching includes the congregation in pastoral care but views group building as the work of the entire congregation instead of solely the responsibility of the minister. He writes,

> Among the people of God we would expect to find a caring fellowship, since God through Christ and the Holy Spirit binds the body (the people) together in mutual love and affection. Members care for one another not because it is natural or easy but because Christ stands at the center of the fellowship and makes pastoral care possible. When we attend to one another’s concerns within the Christian fellowship, we are attending to the very body of Christ, in which each member needs the other (1 Cor. 12).

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102. G. Lee Ramsey, Jr., *Care-Full Preaching: From Sermon to Caring Community* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 123.
In other words, the entire congregation acts as Christ to one another. When a church listens to the sermon together they share an experience together. The individuals become linked together in the same “life-space” and “common cause.”\textsuperscript{103}

Although individuals within the congregation are formed together into a community, recent homiletical material emphasizes that community and reconciliation should not seek conformity. Instead, reconciliation entails dialoguing and understanding others, as well as valuing diversity. This is the third area of reconciliation in the homiletical material. Richard Lischer emphasizes that “sermons may not always be about forgiveness and reconciliation” in order to be reconciling.\textsuperscript{104} Rather than focusing on a particular topic, reconciling sermons “patiently seek to understand the position of the Other…and leave the door ajar to a future that no one…can fully comprehend.”\textsuperscript{105}

Eunjoo Mary Kim makes a similar observation. She writes, “the most effective instrument for forming a shared identity is dialogue, for a shared identity is created when differences are mutually understood with respect. A constructive dialogue can make possible a recognition of differences, a reciprocity of understanding, and eventual reconciliation among different people.”\textsuperscript{106}

Although Rebecca Chopp does not use the term reconciliation, she echoes Kim’s desire for community and dialogue. She argues that churches frequently form communities that try to appease individual differences, promoting, at most, a common belief or common perspective held by all individuals. This places a tremendous burden on the

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\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{106} Kim, \textit{Preaching in an Age}, 56.
congregation…to be pleasing to all people, to mold itself into a homogenous whole, to find its fellowship in a group of people that, at least on the surface, are similar, and value each other for their shared opinions, beliefs, and interests.\footnote{Chopp, \textit{The Power to Speak}, 81.}

Chopp instead argues that when the church understands the Word to be a perfectly open sign, then a diversity of new pictures, images, sounds, metaphors, songs and visions can come together to form a community that welcomes diversity rather than suppressing different perspectives.\footnote{Ibid., 84-85.} Glen Marshall expounds on this idea. He writes, “if we do manage to embrace a wider range of voices when we worship, we can also bid farewell to any guarantee of harmony. There is bound to be dissonance, but that is good. Dissonance is musical spice...too much harmony is not good for us.”\footnote{Glen Marshall, “Multivoiced Worship: Let All Speak,” in \textit{Forming Christian Habits in Post-Christendom: The Legacy of Alan and Eleanor Kreider}, ed. James R. Krabill and Stuart Murrary, (Harrisonburg: Herald Press, 2011), 190-191.}

Conversational preaching demonstrates the diversity sought in reconciliation. Conversational preaching considers preaching a central act, bringing together and forming the congregational group. O. Wesley Allen writes, “we should seek neither forced intellectual consensus nor \textit{koinonia} that is in reality forced conformity. The wind blows where it will, and to try futilely to control it is to stifle the manifestation of the Spirit...”\footnote{O. Wesley Allen, \textit{The Homiletic of All Believers : A Conversational Approach to Proclamation and Preaching} (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 31.}

Lucy Atkinson Rose also espouses a conversational approach. She argues that the goal of preaching is to “gather the community of faith around the Word in order to foster and refocus its central conversations.”\footnote{Rose, \textit{Sharing the Word}, 98.} Through this gathering the community is “encouraged”,

\footnote{Chopp, \textit{The Power to Speak}, 81.}

\footnote{Ibid., 84-85.}


\footnote{O. Wesley Allen, \textit{The Homiletic of All Believers : A Conversational Approach to Proclamation and Preaching} (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 31.}

\footnote{Rose, \textit{Sharing the Word}, 98.}
“edified”, and “upbuilt.” For Rose, preaching is one aspect of the church’s larger, ongoing conversation.

Jeffrey Bullock uses Hans-Georg Gadamer to present a similar yet distinct approach to that of Rose. He argues that preaching in Rose’s approach provides several equal proposals where truth is revealed only in the eschatological future. Alternatively, his approach to preaching presents a position. That position is “always on the way to become, always already on the way to being worked out in community life.” In this approach, the sermon develops through listening to the life of the community, and emerges from ministry. It is not, however, the “final word” because it “leaves an open door for genuine listening, questioning and answering, and to-and-fro” of discussion. The preacher “announces and shares his or her experience of the wor(l)d, but one who, nevertheless, realizes that the ‘free space’ that surrounds his or her understanding aptly characterizes the necessity for further reflection and conversation.” Roses’ and Bullock’s approaches echo several elements of a Mennonite approach to preaching including the emphasis on the ongoing process of conversation that happens within the community after the sermon.

Collaborative approaches to preaching also embody diversity, which is viewed as essential for a reconciled community and for preaching that does reconciliation. Jean-

112. Ibid.


114. Ibid.

115. Ibid.

116. Ibid., 146.

117. Ibid.

118. Ibid., 149.
Jacques von Allmen, Michael Schmaus, William L. Malcomson, Reuel L. Howe, and D. Stephenson Bond describe ways to include diverse voices within preaching. In von Allmen’s approach, congregants choose four or five representatives from within the congregation who gather together to discuss the scriptures and sermon for the week.\textsuperscript{119} Michael Schmaus’ method is similar to von Allmen’s approach but it excludes women from the process claiming that they are not full members of the congregation.\textsuperscript{120} Malcomson argues that although not everyone in the congregation will preach, God gifts more than just the minister with the ability.\textsuperscript{121} Howe and D. S. Bond provide the most radical approach to including multiple voices in the sermonic event. D. S. Bond recommends that preachers can pause throughout the sermon in order to ask the congregation questions and Howe suggests that a preacher could even bring a blackboard into the sermon in order to record and “diagram” the conversation.\textsuperscript{122}

Edward van Merrienboer, the Bishops’ Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry, John S. McClure, and Mennonite June Alliman Yoder argue for lay participation through discussion groups. Van Merrienboer argues that when pluralism exists, a meeting should be held after the sermon so that others can voice their dissenting opinions.\textsuperscript{123} Furthermore,


\textsuperscript{120} Michael Schmaus, \textit{Preaching as a Saving Encounter} (Staten Island: Alba House, 1966), 67, 76, 84.


when a social issue emerges in the world or church, the church should gather for a “community discussion” in order to discuss the issue and decide on an appropriate action.\textsuperscript{124} The Bishops’ Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry provides a more detailed approach, suggesting that the minister meet with four or five people “that they trust” for an hour a week in order to read scripture, exegete, identify both the good news and challenges of the text, “explore the consequences” of the text, and finally, give thanks and praise.\textsuperscript{125}

John McClure provides a more detailed approach for including diverse voices in preaching and invites a diversity of people into conversation instead of only those ‘trusted’ by the minister. He approaches the process of sermon preparation as an opportunity for discussion between the congregants of the church. Community members from outside of the congregation are also invited to speak.\textsuperscript{126} Sermons formed according to McClure’s method retain the conversation and the perspectives of various voices raised during the preparation.\textsuperscript{127} From a Mennonite perspective, June Alliman Yoder similarly argues for the participation of congregants in sermon preparation and references both Lucy Rose and John McClure to support her argument and in order to provide practical approaches for lay involvement.\textsuperscript{128}

\textit{Analysis and Additional Considerations}: Homiletical scholarship has rightly identified the need for reconciliation, through community and diversity, within the church.

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{126} McClure, \textit{The Roundtable Pulpit}, 60-63.

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 73-74.

Furthermore, although pastoral preaching is largely identified with individual problems, pastoral preaching has identified the important connection between the individual and the community. Scholarship also talks about reconciliation and embodies reconciliation. G. Lee Ramsey does reconciliation when he builds up community. Similarly, Rebecca Chopp’s, O. Wesley Allen’s, and John McClure’s approaches, in keeping with Schüssler Fiorenza’s and Yoder’s methods, provide possibilities for sermons that do reconciliation.

This diversity, however, could be further embodied in preaching by developing homiletical methods that not only include a diversity of experiences, but also a diversity of voices. Although the pulpit has become increasingly open to those previously excluded, such as women, the pulpit largely remains closed to those without ordination. Even those approaches that value diversity, such as John McClure’s Round Table Pulpit, maintain the place of the ordained minister as the sole speaking voice. When preaching does reconciliation, homiletical theories develop approaches to preaching that encourage the actual voices, cadences, experiences, and stories of the diversity of individuals that form the community.

Lucy Atkinson Rose calls for a similar inclusion of a diversity of congregants within the pulpit, but she does not provide resources or training for those voices. Including a diversity of individual voices is a first step in doing justice, peace, and reconciliation, but training those voices provides confidence to those who do not have natural predilections towards public speaking, and equips many voices to intentionally form their sermons to do justice, peace, and reconciliation. There is an imbalanced relationship between the space behind the pulpit, which is traditionally deemed accessible only to a few, and the space in the pews, which is designated for the rest of the church community. Preaching that includes a

129. Rose, Sharing the Word, 123.
diversity of individual voices assists in reconciling the people in the pew with the power of the pulpit by equipping all to speak.

VI. Implications

a. Preaching that does Justice, Peace, and Reconciliation empowers a diversity of voices to speak.

Feminist, conversational, and collaborative approaches to preaching provide valuable inroads to creating dialogue and listening to the voices and experiences of congregants. Nevertheless, these approaches often continue to privilege the voice of the minister by reserving the pulpit space for a select few voices. Preaching that seeks to do justice, peace, and reconciliation needs to open the pulpit to a diversity of voices by inviting a multiplicity of individuals into the pulpit. While some will argue that sermons preached by congregants will be restricted to personal testimony or sharing a life story, congregants can be invited to engage with the resources available for researching, preparing, and delivering sermons. An open pulpit enables congregants to hear an actual diversity of voices, experience various approaches to scripture, convey multiple experiences of God to one another, and share insights and revelations with one another. This proposal does not exclude or replace those who have traditionally preached, but adds other voices from within the congregation itself.

The clergy and other congregational leaders continue to play a pivotal role by empowering the voices of the congregation. This is not simply a matter of asking for volunteer preachers, which may not accomplish preaching that does justice, peace, and reconciliation. Church leaders play a crucial role in empowering the voices of the congregation through leading, guiding, teaching, encouraging, and equipping the members of
the church for such work. The voices that have been silenced may not respond to an open call for preachers, but might respond to preaching classes, one-on-one support, ongoing encouragement, and personal invitations to preach.

As noted in the previous chapter, incorporating a diversity of voices relates to the theological underpinning of preaching, most notably, understanding the Word of God as located within the church community. Recent homileticians, such as Rebecca Chopp, provide resources for a Mennonite approach to preaching that does justice, peace, and reconciliation by questioning the concept of the Word of God in the sermon. Don M. Wardlaw, for example, describes a variety of churches practicing a method that places the Word of God at the convergence of scripture, preacher, and congregation. Mary Donovan Turner and Mary Lin Hudson challenge the preacher’s voice as the sole voice of God. They argue for the beauty of the preacher’s voice but not the authority of God within that voice. Instead, the Word of God “needs different ears to listen to it [and] different voices to express it.”

The Holy Spirit may equip a diversity of individuals with the ability to interpret scripture and the courage and confidence to speak, but the Holy Spirit is also active within the entire congregation when they discern God’s voice amongst the diversity of individual voices. When the voice of God is located amongst a diversity of people regardless of gender, education, wealth, power, or leadership, the gospel cannot be fully expressed through the voice of a single preacher. Mary Catherine Hilkert writes, “if we believe that the word of


132. Ibid., 56.
God has been entrusted to the entire Christian community, then wherever voices are silenced or not welcomed, the community has lost some aspect of the good news of the mystery of God in its midst.”

Doing reconciliation provides the space for individuals to speak their unique experiences of God and interpretations of theology and the Bible, while the community discerns the leadings of the Holy Spirit.

b. The Past, Present and Future are Interconnected when Preaching does Justice, Peace, and Reconciliation

Charles Campbell and Johan Cilliers argue that the church and the Holy Spirit work in a space of liminality. Liminality is the time and space between two poles. It is an “ambiguous phase between two situations or statuses” that is filled with the potential for change and new possibilities. Fragmentation characterizes the Christian life in liminal space. Individuals within community have “fragments from the past” and “fragments from the future” that denote “unfinished business.” These fragments produce feelings of incompleteness, unrest, ongoing change, transformation, and hope. Preaching that does justice, peace, and reconciliation arises out of this liminal space, by bringing together remembrance of the past, eschatological imaginings from the future, and the hope and work of transformation in the present.

133. Hilkert, Naming Grace, 180.

134. Campbell and Cilliers, Preaching Fools, 41. Campbell and Cilliers depict liminal space as the time and space between when a trapeze artist leaves one platform to fly through the air before being caught on the other side. Ibid.

135. Ibid.

136. Ibid., 48.

137. Ibid., 46, 48.

138. Ibid., 48.
The work of both Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and John Howard Yoder emphasize the interconnected nature of the past, present, and future when doing justice, peace, and reconciliation. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s hermeneutics are a spiraling dance rather than a linear set of steps. Each hermeneutics may loop back to an earlier hermeneutics. John Howard Yoder connects doing justice, peace, and reconciliation by emphasizing certain components that are shared by all three, and critical to all three. For example, chapter two of this dissertation highlighted the role of the church in all three areas. Yoder also includes listening to the voices of others in justice, peace, and reconciliation. When justice, peace, and reconciliation are kept together, struggles, oppressions, successes and failures from the past are remembered in the present in order to spark the imagination for how God may work in the eschatological future pointing to what can be done in the present.

Lucy Lind Hogan in “Alpha, Omega, and Everything in Between” makes a similar argument. She encourages preachers “to keep a balance in their preaching among recalling God’s mighty deeds in the past, caring for our neighbors in the present, and keeping ever before us the knowledge that our lives and future are in God’s powerful and loving hands.”139 David Buttrick similarly argues that preachers should speak of Jesus in the past tense because the church remembers the life and acts of Christ.140 Preaching, however, also needs to speak of Jesus in the present and future tense because Christians anticipate Christ’s future and begin living into that future in the present.141 Hogan, Buttrick, and Wilson name the


141. Ibid., 82-83.
Eucharist as a particular moment when the past, present, and future collide. Preaching that does justice, peace and reconciliation facilitates a similar meeting of past, present, and future within the preaching moment. Although a single sermon may emphasize peace over justice and reconciliation, for example, a single sermon should do all three areas.

The relationship between violence and the imagination provides an example of the necessity of holding together the past, present, and future when doing justice, peace, and reconciliation. M. Shawn Copeland, in her article “The Wounds of Jesus, the Wounds of My People,” argues that the imagination has been corrupted by violence. When violence dominates the imagination, we can neither be shocked by violence, nor imagine an alternative to violence. Richard Lischer makes a similar observation, asking, “does the proclamation of [Jesus Christ’s] peace have a chance amidst the clamorous language of violence?” Lischer states that the “true prophets will be those who overcome ‘the rhetoric of the barricades’…and speak the word of God’s peace.” Copeland echoes Lischer’s call for new language, explaining that preachers need to redescribe, reenvision, use new language, and have new conversations in order to reclaim the imagination. Preaching can “heal distortions and nourish imagination” by naming the experiences of all congregant members. When violence controls the imagination, people assume that there can be no alternatives to violence: war becomes the only option, women are subhuman, children have no value, and violence is unavoidable.


143. Lischer, The End of Words, viii.

144. Ibid., ix.

I would argue that violence controls the imagination when the imagination does not incorporate the past, present and future. When the eschatological imagination neglects the present it becomes an idealistic device to maintain the status quo. When the eschatological imagination fails to include the past, it can fail to hear the subversive stories, which challenge the official record written by the “winners,” and it can fail to hear the suffering of others in order to know which systems are in need of transformation. Finally, when the eschatological imagination does not imagine the future, it truncates the endless potential of the Holy Spirit. The eschatological imagination, when bringing together the past, present, and future, can form sermons that challenge the seemingly inevitable violence of the world.

VII. A Return to David Buttrick

In chapter three I detailed several theological and practical foundations that shape Mennonite preaching. I then identified David Buttrick’s approach to preaching as a suitable starting point to think about preaching in a Mennonite context. Although Buttrick’s approach provides a diversity of experiences and critically evaluates the images used throughout a sermon, his method in its original form is insufficient to fully develop a method for a Mennonite preaching context. This is because it does not provide a means for a community to share its interpretations and insights for discernment. According to Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s work, described in chapter one, and a Trinitarian approach to Mennonite ecclesiology, detailed in chapter three, God struggles alongside a diversity of individuals and equips a variety of people to read scripture and share their interpretations. As a result, it is important to hear from multiple voices in preaching in order to provide an
opportunity for congregants to share their experiences and interpretations with the church community for discernment. Furthermore, in order to avoid excessive individualism, it is critical to provide a space for individuals to share their thoughts with others so that the community can discern the leadings of the Holy Spirit amongst the diversity of individual ideas.

This chapter has explored alternative possibilities for doing justice, peace, and reconciliation in preaching. Several methods provide resources for a Mennonite homiletic that does justice, peace, and reconciliation. Liberation and feminist homileticians, along with collaborative and conversational approaches, do justice by seeking a greater diversity of individual voices in preaching. Charles Campbell addresses the principalities and powers in his preaching so that preachers share their experiences of oppression and speak words of critique while refraining from demeaning and accusing others. Martin Luther King, Jr., along with voices from Black preaching and feminist preaching, does peace by providing resources for remembering the past, imagining the future, and seeking transformation in the present. Ramsey develops an approach to preaching that fosters community formation. The curriculum presented in the next chapter incorporates many of these approaches as the foundations for preaching that does justice, peace, and reconciliation.

Although these various homileticians provides valuable resources for developing particular aspects of preaching that does justice, peace, and reconciliation for a Mennonite context, David Buttrick’s moves remain the form that best holds together the various aspects important to a Mennonite context in a comprehensive whole. His approach unites theology, scripture, and experience in each move. His method also speaks to the congregation while leaving space for individuals to express diverse experiences. The compilation of various
moves comprise a sermon that allows for some moves to focus on remembrance while others focus on imagining the future or seeking transformation in the present.

There remain shortfalls of Buttrick’s method that must be addressed here. His method does not include the community in discerning the Word of God, and maintains a single voice in the preparation and delivery of sermons. As a result, I suggest a modified version of David Buttrick’s moves, which includes both the community and a diversity of individual voices in sermon preparation and delivery, in order to develop a form for preaching that does justice, peace, and reconciliation in a Mennonite context.

I outline below a modified approach to Buttrick’s method, which would be true to a Mennonite theology and preaching context. A group of three to five members of the congregation could together outline, plan, and preach a sermon. Ideally, members would collaboratively conduct the biblical exegesis for the scriptural passage. Engaging in exegesis together as a group aligns with the Mennonite practice of discerning scripture in community. However, if time does not allow, members may perform their exegesis before gathering, and then discuss their findings. Members of the group may be assigned particular commentaries to explore, or read, pray, and research wherever the Holy Spirit leads. This conversation brings the community into the discernment process before the sermon. This process continues after the sermon through Sunday school, committee discussion, casual

146. I am not suggesting that this should be the means for preaching every week. First, it could be difficult to find three to five people who are willing to preach every week of the year. Second, listening to many voices during a single sermon may be tiring for the congregation each week. Third, I believe that there is still a place for the primary minister to preach several sermons a year since she or he has training, time to prepare the sermon since this is the preacher’s paid vocation, and often intimately knows the congregation from attending meetings and ministering to individual congregants. Rather, given the centrality of the community to a Mennonite ecclesiology, community preaching should play a part in the rhythm of the church year.
conversation and the various other ways that Mennonite churches formally and informally engage in discernment together.

After conducting exegesis, the group would gather together to outline the moves for the sermon. As I articulated earlier, Buttrick’s method uses a series of moves in order to form a sermon. The moves in a sermon, however, also interact and relate to one another. Together the moves form a “sequence of ideas” or a narrative. Often the first sentence of each move can be brought together to form a shortened narrative of the entire sermon. Buttrick gives the example of one sermon whose moves included:

1. Be honest: We are all Sinners,
2. But, good news, in Jesus Christ we are all forgiven,
3. So, guess what, we can live in a new way.
4. Well, don’t you want to tell your neighbours?
5. By the spreading of the gospel, God redeems the world.

Working together, the group can detail the first sentence of each move in order to create an outline similar to Buttrick’s example above. After outlining the approximate opening sentence for each move, the group may also detail the theological focus and the range of scripture verses addressed in each move. At this gathering, the group should also decide which move would contain the central illustration, which is developed in the greatest detail. Choosing the central move as a group allows everyone to discern together where to place the greatest theological emphasis in the sermon.

The group would not write the content of each move, but provide basic ideas and guidelines for the focus of each move. The preachers would then divide the moves between the various members so that each person would develop and write one or two moves. Each


148. Ibid., 75.
person has the opportunity to develop the metaphors and examples in their move from their own life experiences. The group may choose to meet again before preaching the sermon in order to be sure that the moves maintain flow and coherence. They may also choose to use e-mail or online collaboration tools to share each individual move with one another. By collaborating on the initial moves but distributing the writing of the moves between different members, a diversity of individual voices can preach, while maintaining coherence between the individual pieces. Finally, Buttrick notes that pauses should come between moves in order for the congregation to process and reflect on what they hear. Alternating the preachers creates this moment of silence between moves as the preachers exchange places in the pulpit.

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149. Anabaptists Leo Hartshorn and Jeremy Thomson similarly advocate for a diversity of voices in preaching. Hartshorn, “(Ana)Baptist Homiletic”, 190; Jeremy Thomson, “Interactive Preaching,” Anabaptism Today Spring, no. 20 (1999). They argue, however, for conversation and dialogue within the sermon. Although I appreciate the historical and biblical reasons for modeling preaching in a Mennonite context using this method, I espouse Buttrick’s method because it provides a space for sermon preparation, including biblical exegesis, as well as a means for mentoring those who would need encouragement and guidance before they would have the courage to speak.

150. Buttrick, Homiletic, 37.

151. In the Mennonite church, the preacher often sits in the congregation. The preachers may all want to move to the front of the congregation at the beginning of the sermon so that there are not extensive breaks between preachers, thereby disrupting the flow of the sermon.

This approach requires three areas of caution. First, each preacher has to be disciplined in the length of time that they preach. According to Buttrick, a move should be no more than four to five minutes in length and so a sermon with a variety of preachers needs to resist the urge to preach an entire sermon, instead focusing on their individual move. Moreover, there is often a tendency for new preachers or those who do not preach regularly to want to include every idea, thought, exegetical insight, and life experience that they can into their moment with the microphone. A move, however, should develop a single idea and so each preacher needs to demonstrate great restraint to be sure that a move contains only one thought.

Second, preachers, or perhaps worship committees or preaching committees, should reflect on the examples, metaphors, and, most importantly, illustrations that they utilize across several sermons. David Buttrick notes that preachers should take care of which illustration in a sermon is described in the most detail and given the greatest amount of time in the sermon since illustrations have impact and are memorable. Ibid., 137. As a result of an illustration’s lingering reverberation in the minds of hearers, preachers should attend to the diversity of illustrations used over a series of weeks. If week after week the strongest illustration describes an extraordinary event or person, for example, then sermons are not putting God and gospel within the lives of everyday ordinary people. Likewise, if the central illustrations are always from family life then sermons are neglecting the experiences and voices of those who are single, do not have children, or cannot have children.

Third, applying Buttrick’s method to a Mennonite context may occasionally include separating the various components of a move. In Buttrick’s approach, each move explores scripture, theology, and human
VIII. Conclusion

The New Homiletic shifted the focus of preaching from being about the dissemination of knowledge to embodying, performing, or doing a particular task. Preaching in a Mennonite context seeks to do justice, peace, and reconciliation. Doing justice means providing the opportunity for individuals to critique and name oppressive systems and the principalities and powers in order to transform them. Doing peace envisions a future without violence and strives for that possibility by remembering the past and working to transform the present. Individuals remember and dream visions for the future, and the community discerns together the will of God and then works towards those imaginings. Doing reconciliation seeks mutuality and diversity so that individuals retain their unique voice while living as members of the church community.

In terms of homiletics, my contribution to sermons that do justice, peace, and reconciliation is to provide suggestions for how churches can value the diversity expressed when individual voices speak while recognizing the importance of the community amidst the diversity. To that end, the next chapter seeks to empower individual voices while rooting those voices within community. Mennonite churches have several resources for fostering community discernment in the broader life of the church, including the “Being a Faithful Church” process mentioned previously. As a result, I focus on how churches can foster experience. This approach resembles the Mennonite approach to placing scriptural discernment within the community. Nevertheless, at times, particular sermons may divide these areas in order to develop the theological, scriptural, or experiential piece in greater depth than is possible when working with all three in a single move. A sermon may open, for example, by sharing experiences as a means to move into scripture and theology.

152. Suderman, “Testing the Spirits”. 
individual voices while preaching sermons that shape and build church community and *do* justice, peace, and reconciliation.

To accomplish this, chapter five provides a sermon sample demonstrating the various components detailed throughout the dissertation. It is preached by three voices, shares the experiences of two individuals, and addresses questions of congregational identity and discipline. This chapter then deconstructs these components into lessons. The lessons comprise a curriculum focusing on equipping individual voices amidst community. Through this sermon and the various lessons, I hope to provide practical resources for both individuals and church communities to *do* justice, peace, and reconciliation through their preaching.
Chapter Five

A Homiletic that Does Justice, Peace, and Reconciliation: A Curriculum

I. Introduction

This chapter is a summative work bringing together Schüssler Fiorenza’s hermeneutics, Yoder’s emphasis on the church, a Trinitarian approach to Mennonite ecclesiology, homiletical materials on doing justice, peace, and reconciliation, and David Buttrick’s moves, adapted for a Mennonite preaching context. These various pieces come together in a sermon on Matthew 18:15-17 entitled “Being Church.”¹ This sermon accomplishes several tasks: it demonstrates one possibility for including a diversity of voices in preaching, remembers the pain of excommunication in Mennonite history, critiques the church’s response to physical abuse, and imagines the Holy Spirit amongst a church community beginning to heal. A series of footnotes highlight how the sermon incorporates these various elements.

This chapter then parses the sermon throughout a series of nine lessons designed for Mennonite churches. These lessons provide a more comprehensive analysis of the sermon than is possible through footnotes. They also provide additional sermon samples from a diversity of preachers, styles, and scriptural sources to illustrate alternative ways of doing justice, peace, and reconciliation in preaching.

¹ I preached this sermon at Erb Street Mennonite Church in Waterloo, Ontario on July 22, 2012.
II. Comprehensive Sermon Sample

a. Preamble

The following is a sermon on Matthew 18:15-17. Matthew 18 reads,

If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax-collector. (NRSV)

This scripture has a long history in Mennonite churches as the biblical basis for excommunicating or “shunning” individual members from the community. Moreover, John Howard Yoder explores this passage as a central tenet of the Mennonite community. As I mentioned previously, however, Yoder’s work is currently under suspicion as the Mennonite church discerns how to be a peace church that is strongly influenced by Yoder, even though he abused women.

The sample sermon demonstrates one possibility for preaching a scripture that is influential in the Mennonite church while also acknowledging the pain surrounding the use of this scripture. This sermon does justice by utilizing a hermeneutics of experience to share the pain caused by Matthew 18:15-17. This sermon begins with two stories that demonstrate how experiences can be named in preaching. One story speaks of excommunication while the second story focuses on abuse and assault, experiences not often voiced from the pulpit. These stories represent a diversity of experiences, not only because their content differs, but also because one of these stories comes from my own family history and the other is a fictional version of the events surrounding Yoder’s indiscretions. These two stories demonstrate a hermeneutics of experience.

These two stories also demonstrate a hermeneutics of suspicion. The pain shared by telling these stories embodies a hermeneutics of suspicion, by raising key questions about Matthew 18:15-17. Questions about this scripture include the power and authority of church leaders, the church’s response to abuse, and the community’s role in causing harm or aiding healing. The sermon does justice by naming this pain and interpreting scripture in light of the harm caused by previous interpretations.

This sermon also does justice by incorporating a diversity of voices and experiences. In its original form, I preached this sermon without including a diversity of voices. It would have been more suitable for two people to begin the sermon by sharing their own stories, before proceeding to the rest of the sermon. I have adapted it here to demonstrate a possible means for including a diversity of voices in a sermon. The sermon did spark congregants to share similar stories with me after the sermon.

Doing peace includes remembering the past, working for transformation in the present, and imagining God’s eschatological future. This sermon demonstrates the use of remembrance in preaching through storytelling. The opening stories stem from historical Mennonite events, and the scripture from Matthew is placed into the historical life of the church. This sermon, however, does not approach remembrance as nostalgic idealism, but names the failures and pain in Mennonite history. By naming the failures, this sermon also approaches Matthew 18 with a hermeneutics of suspicion questioning any easy approaches to both the scripture passage and conflict within the congregation. The examples of remembrance and a hermeneutics of suspicion are then used to lead into a conversation of

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3. This was largely by necessity because I was a guest preacher doing pulpit supply for a single Sunday over the summer holidays and so I did not know the congregation or have the ability to collaborate with congregants.
how Matthew 18 may be approached today in a different manner than in the past. By
seeking an alternative interpretation for the future, this sermon does peace.

Although remembrance is central to this sermon, a hermeneutics of imagination is
intentionally subtle in this example for two reasons. First, preaching that does justice, peace,
and reconciliation is a long-term approach to preaching. The Mennonite scriptural
discernment process, mentioned in chapter three, takes place over several years. In a similar
way, preaching does justice, peace, and reconciliation over many weeks, months, and years
as it slowly forms the congregation. Although the various elements of doing justice, peace,
and reconciliation are important and interact with one another in each particular sermon,
particular aspects may be highlighted more or less in any particular sermon.

Second, in this particular sermon, a hermeneutics of imagination is subordinate to other
elements because the sermon seeks to name the harm caused before quickly moving towards
answers and interpretations. Although imagination is important to transformation and
envisioning God’s eschatological future, to move too quickly toward a transformed future in
this sermon would detract from doing justice to the individual voices of pain.

Deemphasizing a hermeneutics of imagination risks leaving the congregation captive to
pain and suffering without moving towards the eschatological presence of God. In order to
travel through the pain and into transformation, this sermon emphasizes a transformed
community, which contrasts with the community described in the stories earlier in the
sermon. Emphasizing the community highlights the movement toward transformation and
the eschatological future without moving into overly easy, idealized, eschatological
solutions.
This sermon *does* reconciliation by emphasizing the formation of the church community. Chapter three noted the importance of both the individual and the community in preaching for a Mennonite context. The sermon begins with the experiences of individuals through sharing specific stories. The sermon, however, moves from individuals to the community. The community provides the place for asking questions, engaging in discernment, and progressing towards healing. This move to the community demonstrates the critical role of the church in Yoder’s work and in a Trinitarian approach to Mennonite ecclesiology.

The sermon ends by claiming that the sermon is only the beginning of the discussion. This type of ending highlights the need for further discernment, discussion, and actions in the future. Rather than naming answers, the sermon draws the congregation into transformation and imagines the eschatological future. The unresolved ending also invites more voices to join the conversation and engage in discussion with the individual voice of the preacher. By inviting a diversity of voices, the sermon values the individual voice while inviting community discernment. This sermon *does* justice by seeking the silenced voices of others and inviting a diversity of voices to preach; it *does* peace by remembering the failures of the past and seeking a community that together listens to one another and imagines God’s eschatological future; it *does* reconciliation by forming a community that lives as the body of Christ working towards transformation.

b. Sermon on Matthew 18:15-17 “Being Church”

Preacher 1

You almost expect the words of Matthew 18 to come from a book by Paul instead of a teaching from Jesus. A series of clear steps. Almost legalist in sound. More like the statements of Paul, than the stories and parables of Jesus. In fact, the most reliable copies of the early scriptures don’t include this passage. But, Matthew 18 is a part of Mennonite
history, the biblical basis for shunning, the ban, and excommunication. And so we are left to wrestle with our past, struggle with the scriptures. And seek to understand what exactly we should do when the church faces conflict.

Preacher 2

In 1940 the land surrounding KW was farm land. Rolling acres of oats and hay. Family gardens filled with carrots and lettuce growing alongside the flowers. And in the area near Milbank, Ontario, there was a family with four small children who raise cows and pigs for market.

Every Friday the farmer and his neighbour pack up the meat, put it on ice and collect the vegetables that their wives harvested from the garden just that afternoon. They hitch their horses and head to Stratford market, where they will spend the night. The next morning they rise with the sun and set up their stall. All morning they sell their meat and vegetables to the various customers passing by. Around 2:30 they begin to cleanup whatever food hasn’t sold and again climb into their buggies for the travel home. Rain or snow. Hot and cold. Travel continues.

After perhaps weeks - or perhaps months - of this weekly routine – the father - of now five children – comes to the decision to buy a car. He asks around. He checks the wanted ads in town. Finally, he trades $600 for a slightly used car from a man in the next town over. After driving the car for two weeks, the church minister stops by the house. After the typical pleasantries, including an offer of tea and pie and polite conversation about the family, the minister states, “You bought a car. This is against the church doctrines. You will need to sell it.” The minister continues…”We are Christians. We have to be careful what we say. What we wear. What we do. So that everything is to the glory of God. We must be examples for those who are not yet followers of God. Our church can only be the body of Christ if all of the members live as followers of God.”

There is no further conversation. No arguments or reasoning. The minister is respected and is the representative of the church.

A month later, however, the minister returns. This time two elders come with him. After the pleasantries and chitchat, one of the elders makes the same comments as the
minister made on the last visit. The elder adds, “If transportation is a problem, members of the church will gladly help. The community is here to help however it can.”

Finally six months after the first visit, the minister announces the excommunication of the farmer after the Sunday service. He further adds that he hopes that this is only a temporary action and that he will soon welcome the farmer back into the community. The next week, the farmer stands before the church and says, “If I have sinned, I repent, and ask your forgiveness.” The church welcomes the farmer into the congregation with open arms. This farmer was touched by Matthew 18.

Preacher 3

Twenty years later, a group of women unrelated and with no connection to the farmer, come together in a living room. These women are also about to be affected by Matthew 18. As each woman enters, some introduce themselves - clearly meeting each other for the first time. Others hug and greet each other like old friends. Whether strangers or long acquaintances, these women gather together for the same purpose. They gather together to discuss the abuse and hurt they received from one particular pastor over the last few years. They spend time sharing their stories. Crying. Hugging. It is painful. A time full of lament and anguish. But laughter also rings out as these women learn that they aren’t alone.

That they have support. That there are others like them. After meeting in a similar way for a series of months, the women decide that they are strong enough to act. To tell others of their abuse. To seek justice. Together they approach a minister from a different congregation and share their stories. The minister asks them not to share their story with anyone else. It would disrupt the church too much. Next the group of women go to the local conference representative. The conference person does not believe their story and claims that they are acting out of hatred and revenge. Finally, the women meet with the leaders of Mennonite Church Canada. These church leaders decide to take action and speak to the minister in question.

8. By including the compassion of the elders, this section does justice to the elders rather than vilifying them.

9. Using two stories also contributes to a hermeneutics of domination by including both men and women as those with experiences of suffering and having their voices silenced by the more prominent history of the Mennonite church.

10. The gathering of these women together demonstrates the importance of the community for support, empowerment, and discernment of next steps.

11. This type of story is not often told from a pulpit. This remembrance speaks the struggles of many women facing abuse within churches, families and academia. A hermeneutics of experience names experiences while doing justice to silenced voices. These stories also do justice and engage in a hermeneutics of suspicion by naming their stories of suffering caused by scripture. Both stories demonstrate how the principalities and powers influence the actions of the church by naming that the principalities and powers operate both in and outside of the church.


13. A hermeneutics of transformation begins when the church community represented by the conference supports the women rather than further victimizing them.
The minister refuses to discuss the allegations, any appropriate discipline, or avenues for seeking help. He knows his Bible and the traditions of the Mennonite church. Matthew 18 should be the guide. He thinks that these women are out of line involving other people from the conference or the wider church so soon. First, they should have met with him, one-on-one to discuss the problem. Until Matthew 18 is followed, he refuses to cooperate. The women refuse to be alone with their abuser. They have been harmed enough. The people from conference agree and take over the process from then on.

Preacher 1

Neither of these stories is completely true….neither is completely false. Each is a compilation of events in Mennonite history. Pieces of stories, first changed, and then brought together to make fiction. Both illustrate the incredibly complicated relationship between the Mennonite church in the past and the process of conflict resolution outlined in Matthew 18.

Resolving conflict seems simple enough. Three steps, and viola! The conflict is done. But as we probably know, conflict is usually much more complicated.

The process in Matthew 18 starts by meeting one-on-one, face-to-face, stating the problem, naming the dispute. All too often in our lives, our communities, and in our churches, problems go unnamed. People brood and problems fester. Certain problems and issues – like domestic assault, extramarital affairs, or excessive greed – are especially at risk for never being named. It is thought that domestic abuse and assault couldn’t possibly happen in the church and so there is no reason to talk about it. Extramarital affairs are something that happen only in the world out there….and so adultery isn’t a topic needing discussion. Matthew’s approach resists the urge to assume that conflict, pain, and hurt is a worldly problem and instead names the troubles within our own community. There is good reason for this approach. It avoids passive-aggressive relationships, and hurt and pain continuing year after year without resolve. But there is also something terrifying about this approach. After all, do we really want to hear about the problems in our own church body? Do we really want to find out how we hurt other people? Ignorance has its moments of bliss, after all. And even if we get over our fear, bringing people together can sometimes be dangerous. Victims and offenders should not always be asked to meet together alone. Abuse victims should not be left alone with an offender. Children should not be expected to confront an adult. And those with little power – either because of their race, gender, age, sexual orientation, or education – cannot be expected and required to meet alone with someone who has the power to further demean, fail, fire, or hurt them. The words of Matthew are meant to restore community, to welcome and forgive offenders. To surround victims and provide healing. To name problems so that they can be changed. To strengthen

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14. Remembrance needs to respect the people who struggled in the stories. This may mean changing details to keep confidences while still naming the pain and suffering.

15. A hermeneutics of suspicion names the temptation for easy answers and forced reconciliation that further abuses people.

16. This section asks questions, names counterpoints, and explores why naming experiences can be difficult. It is also naming the difficulties and the importance of being community.
the community. It is no easy task to be church together. But it starts by carefully speaking, naming, and voicing hurt in order to seek healing.  

But conflict cannot just be a personal thing. It must include the community, the church. Matthew recommends two or three people come together as witnesses. These witnesses can help speak for the victim. They can hold the parties accountable. And hopefully, in the best of circumstances, they are mediators and facilitators. Often, it is tempting to think that conflict is a personal issue. It is something between two people, not involving the group. A private issue, dealt with quickly and quietly. But the church is a body together. A people of Christ. Christ’s body. Witnessing or accountability shouldn’t look like gossip, or joining sides in an argument. There should not be a posse going to “fix” the incorrect person. In the opening story, the minister returned to speak to the farmer with a group of elders. I am not completely convinced that this is the best use of witnesses. In the second story, however, the women were accompanied and supported by members of the larger church. A community formed around those involved in the dispute. Not in order to form a majority, or to bring greater strength in numbers, but to walk together, as a church. As the body of Christ.

Finally, Matthew 18 recommends removing the sinful party from the community. In the Mennonite church this has been named shunning, the ban, or excommunication. Like the two previous steps, aspects of this make sense. Practicing the ban, or shunning, makes a clear statement about who and what the church is. It says that members of the church are different from those outside of the church. That following Christ means a different way of living. It makes baptism mean something, both theologically and ethically. That being a member of Christ is a commitment. It takes being a member of the church very, very seriously. And it does so, at least at the best of times, out of love and forgiveness. Those who have been excommunicated, at least according to scripture if not always in practice, are always welcomed back into the church when they repent. The community is waiting, hoping, praying, and extending open arms to those outside of the community. Matthew says to treat those who are shunned as tax collectors and Gentiles. And yet the Christian church, and Jesus himself, ate with tax collectors. There is love and welcome, forgiveness and joy when anyone – Jew or Gentile – slave or free – male or female – join the community.

And yet, in many ways, this practice does not work. We only have to look at our current prison systems to see an example of how removing someone from support systems.
often leads to more problems rather than more repentance.\textsuperscript{22} After all, the Mennonite church has a history of working with programs like Circles of Support and Victim-Offender Reconciliation Programs because mentoring and relationship building, far more than prison sentences, prevent repeat offenses, while also demonstrating God’s love and community.

Further, the church often seems to arbitrarily decide which sins to focus on. For example, one person was excommunicated for painting portraits because it was judged to relate to the Bible’s commandments about idols. And yet, I have never heard of anyone being excommunicated for acts of greed.\textsuperscript{23} Rather than excommunication, how might other boundaries or space be used to heal a conflict? I once heard of a church that was wrestling with a particularly difficult theological problem. The minister of this church – many years later - reflected on the situation. He noted that a lot of people left the congregation at the time. People may have left because of the debates, the tension, or the theological decisions that were made. And yet – when everything was over, the majority of the people – as well as many new members – returned to the church. No one was excommunicated – as far as I know – even though some people voluntarily felt the need to leave. Space and time were needed to heal. We often fear losing members, and decreasing congregations – and rightfully so – but there may be times – just maybe - when a bit of space leads to a more vibrant community.\textsuperscript{24}

So where does that leave us? Matthew 18 is certainly not the last word in conflict resolution. It is simply too simple. But it provides helpful hints. A place to start. Possibilities for forming a much healthier community.\textsuperscript{25} And perhaps focusing so narrowly on these few verses creates complications. This is the usual group of verses that Mennonites focus on when we talk about excommunication and the ban. But these verses are in the middle of a much larger chapter. Earlier in the chapter we have a debate about power, authority, and who will be the greatest person in heaven. Before these verses is also the parable of the Lost Sheep. Where even one sheep, one person, lost from the group leads to worry, concern, and searching until they are found. And, after the passage, there is a conversation and a parable about forgiveness and Jesus’ words to forgive seventy-seven times, or even seventy times seven times. Could these other stories shape how we read the verses about excommunication? Could forgiving each other seventy-seven times change how we live as a community? Could remembering that sometimes we all strive for power remind us to be more like the children, who are the greatest in heaven? Or could the lost sheep reshape how we think about removing people from the congregation?

I am a guest in this congregation. I do not know what problems or disagreements you face. I do not know what pain and hurts remain silent and are never named. I do not know

\textsuperscript{22} A hermeneutics of domination critiques culturally (or historically) assigned categories that manipulate individuals. “Criminal” or “prisoner” are examples of such categories.

\textsuperscript{23} Remembrance can help name times when our own human purposes and motivations have been too closely named as God’s actions.

\textsuperscript{24} This section is doing justice to those who need time and space before reconciliation may become possible.

\textsuperscript{25} The sermon is doing justice to the complicated history (and the pain and suffering in that history) by being suspicion of easy answers and simple interpretations.
how many people in this congregation have their own experiences with Matthew 18.\textsuperscript{26} But I do know that every church, every community, every family faces conflict. And I do know that naming the problem, seeking support from the community, and sometimes seeking a bit of space can help a community heal.\textsuperscript{27} I do know that we are very imperfect humans called together to be the perfect body of Christ on earth. And I do know that the Holy Spirit is in our midst.

- Crying with the wounded.
- Praying with the silent.
- Holding the offenders.
- Providing wisdom to the mediators and witnesses.
- And smiling and laughing when the healing begins.\textsuperscript{28}

c. Conclusion

A single sermon cannot fully demonstrate particular techniques, or how particular methods can be adapted to different scriptures and illustrations. A single sample also risks providing an example without explaining how to replicate the techniques in other sermons. In an effort to circumvent these pitfalls, the next section provides a nine-week curriculum designed to examine the previous sermon in smaller parts, and provide suggestions for teaching congregants how to recreate the techniques in their own preaching style. The curriculum also provides additional examples to demonstrate how a variety of other homileticians incorporate doing justice, peace, and reconciliation in their preaching.

\textsuperscript{26} I am using language to name the limitations of a single preaching voice and open the space for others to share their experiences in order to encourage a diversity of voices.

\textsuperscript{27} The sermon does reconciliation by naming the community as critical to hearing and discerning the experiences of individual voices.

\textsuperscript{28} The final section demonstrates a hermeneutics of imagination and does peace. These lines imagine a world without pain, suffering, abuse, and violence.
III. Curriculum

a. Preamble

The following are lesson outlines, including sermon excerpts, for a nine-week curriculum designed to empower the church community to preach sermons that do justice, peace, and reconciliation. The nine lessons seek to foster individual voices while nurturing the church as a community. The curriculum is specifically written for a series of church workshops or Sunday school classes, rather than an academic setting, in order to make the lessons available to a broad range of congregants.

Empowering individual voices while rooting those voices in community shapes the way churches offer this curriculum. First, the lessons should be open to the entire congregation. Although some congregations may have natural gifts for speaking or leadership, only the Holy Spirit knows who receives the gift of preaching. Some congregants may be surprised how the Holy Spirit leads them to preach throughout the weeks of the curriculum.

Second, the class leader should intentionally seek out those individuals who have not frequently been invited to preach. Certain individuals may be empowered to speak when supported and encouraged by the community. As Mirslav Volf writes, “the task of leaders is first to animate all the members of the church to engage their pluriform charismatic activities, and then to coordinate these activities.”

Third, people who may not want to preach can also attend. Those who may not preach could have particular gifts for mentoring and drawing out the preaching skills of others. Furthermore, those who may not preach can assist in discerning “every manifestation of the

Discerning the Holy Spirit includes identifying those within the congregation that the Holy Spirit calls to preach, critiquing the experiences included in sermons, discussing theological areas shaping preaching, and exploring the interpretation of scriptures, all which may occur throughout the series of lessons.

Fourth, although open to the entire congregation, individual empowerment and community discernment flourish when people form relationships with each another. As a result, participants should strive for regular attendance.

Fifth, it is unlikely that a single person has background in every area of this curriculum. As a result, a different individual can prepare and lead each week. This sharing of teaching and leadership demonstrates the empowerment of many individuals to speak to the community in a forum outside of the sermon.

Each week begins with a section entitled “Theoretical Underpinnings Arising from this Dissertation.” This section connects the lesson to the previous chapters of this dissertation. It draws out the theory influencing each week of the curriculum, including material from each chapter for doing justice, peace, and reconciliation. If chapter five were expanded to become a stand-alone curriculum, this section becomes the background material and discussion points laying the foundation for each lesson.

A focus statement follows the theory. The focus statement specifically draws attention to how each lesson does justice, peace, and reconciliation. The early lessons teach doing justice. Lessons six and seven convey how preachers can do peace and the final two lessons focus on doing reconciliation. The individual lessons also return to the sermon that opened this chapter and share additional homiletical examples illustrating each technique.

30. Ibid.
This chapter provides the sermon samples and an overview of the curriculum. In a Mennonite context, preaching is central to worship and so a worship piece would also be important at the end of each lesson. The closing worship is especially important given my emphasis on the individual in the midst of community. I have suggested worship resources in appendix one.

b. Lessons

Week One: Empowering Individual Voices and Speaking so that the Audience may Hear

*Theoretical Underpinnings Arising from this Dissertation:* This lesson seeks to embody a hermeneutics of experience by empowering individual voices. The Holy Spirit equips a diversity of people and each individual’s interpretations, thoughts, and insights are shared with the congregation for discernment. By encouraging and supporting individual voices, the congregation participates in a hermeneutics of experience and *does* justice to the diversity of voices created by God. The church embodies a hermeneutics of imagination and transformation when it provides a space for all people to speak because it imagines a different community where even dissenting voices can listen and speak to one another. When churches engage multiple voices, including the dissenting voices of their enemies, it *does* peace. The church is a glimpse of the reconciled community to come in the eschatological future of God.

Certain speech habits, however, can distract the audience and prevent individuals from being heard by the community. This lesson provides tips for improving a diversity of speech habits. It is an act of justice to equip individuals with positive speech habits so that every voice can share their experiences of God and interpretations of the Bible in an effective manner.
Focus Statement: Preaching that does justice empowers a diversity of voices by providing the training, encouragement, support, and mentorship for individuals to preach to the best of their ability.

Lesson Objectives and Sermon Samples: The primary goal of this lesson is to focus on the individual as a preacher. Although some people are naturally comfortable speaking to large groups and are gifted speakers, other people benefit from tips and training in order to make their voice more effective. We all may have experienced speakers who have important words to share, but they have voice habits, such as speaking in a monotone, which prevent us from hearing their contribution. This is especially important as church congregations age. When individuals are not trained to use microphones effectively, those with hearing difficulties often cannot hear, or strain to hear, the sermon. When congregants cannot hear the sermon, they are excluded from hearing the individual interpretations shared with the congregation for discernment.

In order to accomplish this goal, the class would listen to a sermon, such as the Matthew 18 sermon above, in order to note elements of speech that help or hinder hearing. Individuals would then read a short passage to the class and receive feedback in order to practice speaking and preaching to one another.

The secondary goal of this lesson is to lay foundations for the next lessons. As chapter three discussed, the Holy Spirit equips a diversity of people to speak and those words are given to the community. The community then discerns God’s voice amongst the diversity of individual voices. As a result, both individuals and the community are essential to preaching in a Mennonite context. This lesson would practice community discernment by giving both positive and negative feedback. The class practices this discernment by listening to others
read their passage to the class and providing both positive and negative feedback to each other. This combination of positive and negative feedback lays the foundations for ongoing conversation and collaboration throughout the lessons.

Week Two: Sermon Form as a Means for Bringing Together Experience, Scripture, and Theology

Theoretical Underpinnings Arising from this Dissertation: This lesson explores preaching as a series of sermonic moves. Each move brings together biblical interpretation, theological reflection, and everyday experience. By bringing together these elements, this lesson demonstrates a hermeneutics of experience where God is found in everyday struggles. This is only a beginning point for biblical exegesis. The following week delves further into how biblical exegesis for preaching may also include Bible commentaries, discussion, and remembrance.

This lesson also provides a technique for groups to prepare and write sermons together. Preparing a sermon as a group not only adds multiple voices to a sermon, it also values both the individual and the community in the discernment that happens during preaching preparation. In other words, a collaborative approach connects the individual voice speaking each move within the sermon to the communal discernment of Mennonite churches.

Focus Statement: Preaching that does justice understands God, theology, and biblical interpretation as influencing, and being influenced by a diversity of everyday experiences.

Lesson Objectives and Sermon Samples: Buttrick’s moves are important for Mennonite preaching because they bring together theology, scripture, and everyday experience into a
single unit. This lesson aims to assist class members to name and identify how they can hold these three areas together throughout their sermon.

The sample sermon at the beginning of this chapter used a modified version of David Buttrick’s sermonic moves. The move about conflict and community, for example, contains the scriptural exploration of two or three people coming together to bear witness. This move also reflects theologically on the church as the body of Christ. Scripture and theology connect to the life of the church by encouraging mediation and community.

In order to illustrate sermonic moves, the class is taught two concepts. First, the class explores the general form of a move. Watching a television show and noting the frequent changes in scene and plot demonstrates the idea of moves and developing an idea before moving to the next.

Second, this lesson focuses on understanding a particular scripture from a biblical, theological, and scriptural perspective. Students are encouraged to take a single scripture and explore that passage from these three perspectives. They analyze Buttrick’s “A Letter to Exiles” as a particularly well-crafted example.31 This sermon identifies each move’s opening statement, biblical and theological material, central image, and closure statements. This sample would help the class identify the key statements of the sermon, as well as the sermon’s examples, metaphors, and illustrations.

By teaching moves to the class, this lesson also demonstrates a means for bringing together multiple voices in sermon preparation and delivery. Each individual class member is invited to create a single move for a particular scripture, and then groups of students bring their moves together in order to form a sermon. This lesson demonstrates that a group of

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people can gather together to exegete a passage and develop move statements before
delegating individual moves to members of the group. This approach allows people new to
preaching to focus on only a small part of a sermon and it also creates a way to hear many
voices and experiences within a single sermon.

Week Three: Individual Experience Rooted in Biblical Exegesis and Community

Discernment

_Theoretical Underpinnings Arising from this Dissertation:_ Preaching that _does_ justice,
peace, and reconciliation seeks a diversity of voices, including a variety of perspectives on
scripture. The Holy Spirit illuminates scripture so that both scholars and non-scholars can
interpret scripture. These interpretations are brought into discussion with a diversity of other
people’s interpretations so that the church can discern the Holy Spirit amongst the various
perspectives. Various tools can help shape individual interpretations, such as Bible
commentaries and discussion with others. These resources can also begin the process of
testing and discerning our own interpretations in conversation with other congregants and the
broader community of Christians.

Seeking to _do_ justice, peace, and reconciliation in preaching influences how a preacher
approaches scripture. Scriptures provide material for remembrance and imagination by
narrating the ongoing story of God that continues into the present and the eschatological
future. Scripture also provides examples of how Jesus confronts and defeats the
principalities and powers. The Bible offers a glimpse of how the church can be a reconciled
community in its worship and life.
Focus Statement: Sermons that do justice bring a diversity of voices, including a diversity of scholarship, into conversation with the church.

Lesson Objectives and Sermon Samples: This lesson introduces the class to biblical exegesis. It particularly focuses on exegesis that fosters doing justice, peace, and reconciliation. Lectio Divina is an approach to scripture which the class will utilize to become familiar with how people, including scholars, can read and hear scriptures differently. Lectio Divina demonstrates how individual people hear different areas emphasized in scripture. Class members can then practice sharing what they hear in scripture with the class.

The remainder of the class time will accomplish three goals. First, class members are introduced to tools for biblical exegesis including Bible commentaries, theological books, and other worship resources. It is particularly important for the class to understand the diversity of voices available to them through biblical exegesis when they consciously choose a diversity of commentaries.

Second, this lesson explores why discussion is an important part of biblical exegesis for preaching. Discussion around a particular scripture as a part of sermon preparation enables the preacher to hear experiences within the scriptural text that are different from her or his own perspective.

Third, exploring biblical commentaries and exegesis can highlight the silenced voices in the scriptures. This is an act of remembrance when biblical exegesis and preaching re-reads and re-stories marginalized voices. Class members are encouraged to note the characters in their scripture texts that are in the background of the passage.

The sample sermon on Matthew earlier in this chapter combined two approaches to exegesis. It utilized traditional commentary research, and also relied on Yoder’s Body
Politics. Yoder’s approach to this passage from the Gospel of Matthew shapes the Mennonite reading of this scripture and so it is important to engage this interpretation.32 Nevertheless, the sermon did not simply accept the research, but questioned it, challenged it, and sought to bring the congregation into further discussion and discernment about the Matthew passage. The sermon, for example, names both theological and practical reasons why Matthew is a beneficial model for church structure, and also names the possible negative interpretations of the scripture.

Barbara Brown Taylor’s sermon entitled “The Right Answer” demonstrates how biblical exegesis can open the familiar scripture of the Good Samaritan to a new hearing. Taylor preaches that anyone who loves this story probably misunderstands it.33 The Samaritan was not “one of us” because “he was the enemy.”34 Referencing a New Testament scholar, she preaches that in order to understand this story we should make the Samaritan anyone who we would have trouble calling “good.”35 This lesson uses Taylor’s sermon as a

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32. Yoder, *Body Politics*, 1-13. Referencing Jesus’ language, Yoder refers to this passage as “binding and loosing” within the church. Ibid., 2. He argues that the passage is not punitive but for the “offender’s own well-being” in order to correct the individual and then restore the person to the community. Ibid., 3. The passage also indicates that the “community’s action is God’s action.” Ibid.

I affirm the history of this passage in the Mennonite church by detailing in the sermon how it could be a positive action to confront problems rather than using passive aggression or avoidance. I also affirm the scripture and Yoder’s argument that this is a positive scripture by noting how space and distance may heal suffering.

I challenge this interpretation by articulating experiences of excommunication or coerced attempts at reconciliation, modeled on Matthew 18 that did not help restore individuals. I also question the close association between the actions of the church and the actions of God, in order to include a hermeneutics of suspicion.

33. Barbara Brown Taylor, “The Right Answer”, Riverside Church https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wds3OxzHNAI (accessed February 20 2014). This sermon is also an example of reordering systems of domination and the absurdity of the Gospel, which are explored in upcoming lessons.

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid.
means to illustrate how biblical exegesis can refresh a familiar passage and provide preaching resources that are different from one’s own perspective.

**Week Four: Using and Reflecting Critically on Everyday Experiences**

*Theoretical Underpinnings Arising from this Dissertation:* Preaching that includes a diversity of experiences reflects the diversity of the church as the body of Christ and the diversity of God’s actions in the world. Including a diversity of experiences in preaching is important to a hermeneutics of experience and bringing silenced voices to speech is an act of justice.

Nevertheless, not every experience is equally valuable to preaching. A hermeneutics of experience argues that experiences named in sermons should share God’s presence amidst struggle. Our experiences are also not normative and require examination. A hermeneutics of suspicion critiques our assumptions that our experiences are normative. A hermeneutics of domination questions how our experiences may demonstrate our participation in the oppression of others. This lesson seeks to understand how experiences can be incorporated into preaching, while also providing techniques for critically reflecting on those experiences. Although communities engage in discernment, this lesson encourages individual preachers to engage in a process of examining and critically reflecting on which experiences are included in preaching and how those experiences are utilized in particular sermons.

*Focus Statement:* Preaching that *does* justice includes a diversity of experiences, and both individuals and the community have a responsibility for critically reflecting on which experiences are included in sermon as well as on how a sermon utilizes experiences.
Lesson Objectives and Sermon Samples: This lesson seeks to help aspiring or seasoned preachers include a diversity of voices and experiences in their preaching: in particular the voices of those who are often absent from the pulpit. The Matthew 18 “Being Church” sermon did this by naming the stories of the farmer and the women at the beginning of the sermon. The story of the women is particularly important because abuse is often not named and addressed from the pulpit. These stories provided a means for acknowledging the experiences of pain some people associate with Matthew 18.

The experiences of Christians with Matthew 18, however, represent a small fraction of the experiences available to preachers. This lesson encourages preachers to include a greater diversity of people and experiences within their preaching. Class members explore their congregation, their neighbourhood, and the world in order to recognize the diversity of people and the diversity of experiences of God. This lesson utilizes movies, television shows, the Internet, books, magazines, and interviews with people to demonstrate the breadth of experiences in the congregation and in the world. Exposure to new perspectives does justice to others when we listen and learn from them, but it also does peace and reconciliation by building relationships with others different from ourselves.

The “Being Church” sermon included two approaches to Matthew 18 at the beginning of the sermon, and included shorter examples throughout the sermon as each move connected to everyday life. Nevertheless, the diversity of experiences available to a preacher extends far beyond what can be demonstrated in a single sermon. Recent homiletical publications offer a wealth of examples. Joan E. Hemenway “Beyond Belief,” for example, includes experiences of disability. She preaches,

God takes on our twistedness to meet us where we are. I like this image. It means God spends most of God’s time being broken and battered and bleeding and writhing and
swollen and amputated”...So it is that we are born again and live out of places of hope where God twists Her lips to kiss our own contorted faces - in a remarkable demonstration of risking spirit in substantiation.36

Heather Walton’s sermon “Hebrew Women/Egyptian Women” brings experiences of infertility into the pulpit. Her sermon describes how,

God does not always grant life, fertility and growth - or at least, if we are to look at what experience teaches us, whilst growth luxuriates in some areas others are barren and bleak. Perhaps it would be best to picture God working with two hands. Whatever one touches burgeons into bud, blossom and fruit. Where the fingers of the other fall sap stops flowing, stems wither and harvests fail.37

Environmental concerns are becoming increasingly prevalent in many aspects of life.

Sharon V. Betcher’s “Resurrecting Mortal Life” brings these experiences into her sermon on environmental destruction. She preaches, “Today we stand in the midst of God’s wounded body, the earth. It does not take any stretch of the imagination to touch the wounds. The fact of our power over the ecosystem is Good Friday horror; we can kill the spirit of life.”38

Finally, Jimmy R. Allen’s sermon “Why All This Strife About Peace?” is particularly relevant to the Mennonite context. He brings experiences of war and peace into the sermon, writing, “Feelings run deep when we talk of war and peace. The yearning for peace has deep emotional roots. Yet the efforts for peace spark a conflagration of anxiety, anger, and accusation that makes peacemaking a perilous pursuit.”39


These experiences represent only a fraction of human experiences. They can serve as examples to inspire preachers to walk with others, listen to a multiplicity of stories, and bring a diversity of voices into their preaching.

This lesson has one final learning goal: reflecting critically on experiences. It can be tempting to include diversity for the sake of creativity or adding fresh material to sermons. Experiences, however, require critical reflection. Although my sample sermon begins with the experiences of the farmer and the women, the sermon does not end with these experiences. The remainder of the sermon challenges the scripture, seeks alternative interpretations, calls the community into discernment, and imagines a different future. While biblical exegesis and theological reflection need to connect to everyday experiences, everyday experiences are not the final authority and require critical reflection and discernment by the community according to scriptural and theological foundations.

**Week Five: Critique and the Principalities and Powers**

*Theoretical Underpinnings Arising from this Dissertation:* This lesson explores how sermons *do* justice, peace, and reconciliation by naming oppression and loving others. Sermons that *do* justice name and critique sources of oppression. Seeking justice also challenges the systems that cause injustice. As preachers, it is important to critique and name injustices and oppression experienced by individuals within the congregation. A hermeneutics of domination demonstrates critique by questioning our own power and participation in systems of injustice. A hermeneutics of suspicion critiques by questioning traditionally accepted assumptions. These assumptions may include both biblical interpretations and “common sense” notions in society.
Although critique is important, preaching that *does* critique in combination with love and reconciliation honours the relational aspects of the community demonstrated through the Trinity. In order to critique with love, John Howard Yoder and Charles Campbell direct our critique towards the principalities and powers rather than individual persons inside or outside of the congregation. Critique that focuses on the principalities and powers refrains from blaming and attacking the actions of others in a destructive manner. Critique recognizes that both individuals and communities succumb to the temptations of the principalities and powers.

*Focus Statement:* Preaching that *does* justice names suffering and oppression, but critiques with love because preaching that *does* justice, peace, and reconciliation loves others.

*Lesson Objectives and Sermon Samples:* This lesson explores how to include critique in preaching without denigrating other people. A key aspect of this lesson is to engage the class in identifying and naming some of the principalities and powers. The term “principalities and powers” might be familiar to some, but its meaning might be vague. The class names examples of the principalities and powers, such as banks, the government, hiring policies, cycles of abuse, greed, fame, and the court system. The class articulates systems that operate in the church and may succumb to the principalities and powers, such as operating budgets, fear of change or the constant need for “progress,” and the quest for higher attendance.

In the Matthew 18 sermon, the principalities and powers fracture relationships, cause fear and silence, and are at the root of abuse and suffering. By naming abuses, including the failures of the church to respond to the suffering of others, this sermon reveals the
principalities and powers and begins to do transformation. The principalities and powers are further exposed when the sermon critiques the exclusion caused by the prison system, as well as the arbitrary choices made by the church concerning who to ban, shun, or excommunicate from Mennonite churches.

Charles Campbell’s “An Unsettling Debut” demonstrates critique and the upheaval of the principalities and powers.40 Campbell’s sermon explores how Jesus’ ministry is unsettling, public, and disruptive. He preaches that the “old ways” or “categories” are deadly and need to be unsettled and disrupted.41 These old ways are akin to the principalities and powers and the systems of oppression. Matthew 2 unsettles time by announcing the end of “Herod’s time” and inaugurating a “new time” of Jesus.42 Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem upsets geographical space by placing this momentous occasion in Bethlehem instead of in the centre of power in Jerusalem.43 The magi disrupt the principalities and powers by refusing to honour Herod.44 Campbell relates this to our own choice to worship God instead of worshiping Kings, Queens, or economic systems.45 He also shares a story about spending a night with homeless people and the unsettling that happens when roles are reversed and those with authority learn and receive an unconventional communion from those who are typically dismissed.46

41. Ibid.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid.
In another example, Philip Wogaman’s sermon “Truth Heals” does not explicitly name the principalities and powers, but demonstrates how a sermon can critique while demonstrating love.\(^\text{47}\) He preached “Truth Heals” the week after his predecessor sent a letter to the congregation acknowledging sexual improprieties with parishioners. The previous minister had retired only a few months earlier after twenty-seven years of ministry in the congregation. The sermon deserves to be read in its entirety, but several samples demonstrate how Wogaman provides critiques without rebuking others. Wogaman begins by questioning John 8:32, which reads “you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (NRSV). He asks several questions that challenge both John’s words and the definition of “truth.”\(^\text{48}\) He includes a substantial passage directly discussing the identity of the congregation and its self-understanding as a people who “do not hide anything,” in order to explore how the church should address these confessions when speaking to others outside the congregation. He advocates for openly speaking in order to begin healing.\(^\text{49}\) The sermon then names several “truths” according to the earlier discussion. The truths include recognizing that we are all God’s children and that although we all have parts of our lives we would like to hide from others, God fully knows us.\(^\text{50}\) He strongly calls for prayer and healing for the women involved, and an end to violence. Finally, Wogaman names God into the congregation. He names God as “brooding over this church” and “setting us in

\(^{47}\) Wogaman, *Speaking the Truth in Love*, 103-110.

\(^{48}\) Wogaman, *Speaking the Truth in Love*, 104.

\(^{49}\) Ibid., 106.

\(^{50}\) Ibid., 107.
mission.” Although this sermon might benefit from a more substantial critique of sexual improprieties, an imaginative envisioning of the end of violence, and an opportunity for the inclusion of the voices of the women involved if they wanted to speak, the sermon demonstrates how critique can be named with love and care for both the oppressed and oppressors.

After exploring the principalities and powers as a means for critique in sermons, this lesson introduces the class to humor or foolishness. Humor or foolishness is a key tool in overcoming the principalities and powers. Congregations may be hesitant to laugh during a sermon, or sometimes humor misses the mark. However, foolishness or absurdity is subtle and critiques without pretending to be an ideal joke. “The Woman Who Just Said No,” based on Esther 1:1--2:4, by Anna Carter Florence, is an ideal example. Rather than direct humor, this sermon uses absurdity to challenge the principalities and powers’ approach to marriage, body image, and sexuality. She preaches,

Here comes the dangerous part of the story. Even though the atmosphere is as charged with testosterone as any you will ever find, Queen Vashti does not do as any obedient subject of the king ought to do, when given a direct order. She does not shuck her clothes, swallow her pride, and pretend she is Demi Moore trapped in a strip tease joint for the good of her family. Queen Vashti is probably the first woman on record to just say no. No, I will not come out and make a display of myself for your benefit. No, I will not degrade myself so that you can save face in front of your friends. No, I will not do whatever you tell me to do. And I most emphatically will not do it when you have been drunk for one hundred and eighty-seven days.

The king’s reaction is predictable. He is enraged and humiliated. Not only that, he is enraged and humiliated in front of all the men of the kingdom. The story spreads. Women in Persia and Media hear of it; women in Ethiopia and India learn of how

51. Ibid., 109.

52. Humor can be an effective tool against the principalities and powers, but it can also lead to abuse when it is used at the expense of others. As a result, humor needs to be used with great care. Although there are several means of resisting the principalities and powers, I chose to focus on humor or foolishness because the Mennonite church has an extensive history with several other means for resisting the principalities and powers (such as building community, fighting injustices, tithing etc.) but humor or foolishness have not been a central characteristic of the Mennonite church.
Queen Vashti just said no to the king. They decide to give it a try. Soon, men who may have been snickering at the king in the throne room are no longer snickering. They find that Queen Vashti’s example has let loose a tidal wave of rebellion among the women of the empire. Noble ladies everywhere are discovering great potential in just saying no. The order of the entire kingdom is disrupted. What to do?

The king, the officials, and sages put their heads together. They ask: According to the law, what is to be done to Queen Vashti because she has not performed the command of the King? They decide: Let her rot. Away with Vashti and away with any woman who fails to do as her husband commands. Let another queen be chosen to take Vashti’s place, and please, please God, may her memory die with her.

On one level, the men are successful. Vashti disappears; there is a cattle call for young virgins to come and compete for the queen’s title; and eventually one of them is able to distract the king from the memory of his exiled wife: Esther is crowned queen, and as far as the church is concerned, we can get onto the real story of the book. On one level, the church concurs with the king and his sages: It has let the memory of Vashti rot.

On another level, however, the story of Vashti cannot be erased. There are echoes of her great NO reverberating all through the Bible. Vashti may be nothing but a prologue to the book of Esther in the church’s eyes, for all that we hear about her, but in the Bible she lives on in the minds of her people, the king and, most importantly, Queen Esther herself.

This lesson employs this example as a means to demonstrate how preachers can use the scriptures themselves to note absurdity, critique particular practices, and draw attention to systems of domination.

Week Six: Imagining God’s Future and Working Toward that Vision, Today

Theoretical Underpinnings Arising from this Dissertation: A hermeneutics of imagination dreams of God’s peace-filled eschatological future and then works towards that vision today. The Holy Spirit equips individuals with the courage to critique the present situation and envision an alternative future. The community can then discern God’s mission

from amongst the various individual voices and work for transformation. Such endeavors are acts of peace, envisioning a future free of violence and suffering.

When the community works together for God’s eschatological future, a hermeneutics of imagination leads to a hermeneutics of transformation. A hermeneutics of transformation names the importance of the community working together for change. Yoder articulates how the church community supports, encourages, and struggles together to do justice, peace, and reconciliation.

This lesson seeks to inspire preachers’ imaginations and then name those visions of peace in preaching so that the community can struggle together for transformation. Naming these visions is an act of proclamation. By imagining an alternative future, preaching participates in a hermeneutics of proclamation by announcing the presence, work, and Good News of God. The sermon proclaims that God has and God will overcome the principalities and powers, end suffering, and inaugurate peace.

*Focus Statement:* Although small churches and small denominations often do not have access to typical areas of power (such as political influence or great wealth) small groups create change and do peace through creativity and imagining God’s peace-filled eschatological future.

*Lesson Objectives and Sermon Samples:* This lesson develops each preacher’s eschatological imagination. This lesson includes seemingly childish tasks, such as colouring, modelling clay, or painting in order to foster the imagination. Class members are invited to create images of the future Kingdom of God and then explore ways that these images can be included in sermons. The class discusses how God and the church can begin realizing these images today.
As mentioned in the opening analysis of the Matthew 18 sermon, this sermon includes only short and subtle examples of the imagination and eschatology in order to honour the struggle and pain associated with the scripture text. Imagination is in evidence when the women gather together to form a healing community that seeks transformation, as well as when the larger Mennonite conference supports the women. Many abuse victims feel alone, and so a supportive community is an act of hope and the imagination. The sermon also includes imagination in the final lines as it names the Holy Spirit amongst the congregation, and the congregation as a healing community. By naming the Holy Spirit crying, praying, comforting, providing wisdom, and smiling, the sermon ends by depicting a God that walks with the wounded in order to imagine healing in the future that begins in the present.

Since the “Being Church” sermon does not include an abundance of imagination, this lesson draws on the preaching of Martin Luther King, Jr. to demonstrate the power of the eschatological imagination. Martin Luther King, Jr. was a master of using eschatology, including God’s actions and human actions working in the present and in the future. The most memorable parts of his sermons are often his eschatological images and phrases.

King’s sermon “Our God is Marching!” uses the eschatological imagination to envision the future. He repeats the phrase “Let us march on” to envision the civil rights movement continuing into the future despite ongoing racism, the burning of churches, and murders. The sermon also imagines the end of ghettos, unsanitary housing, segregated neighbourhoods, unequal education, and poverty. He preaches,

Let us march on poverty (Let us march) until no American parent has to skip a meal so that their children may eat. (Yes, sir) March on poverty (Let us march) until no starved man walks the streets of our cities and towns (Yes, sir) in search of jobs that do not exist. (Yes, sir) Let us march on poverty (Let us march) until wrinkled stomachs in Mississippi are filled, (That’s right) and the idle industries of Appalachia are realized and revitalized, and broken lives in sweltering ghettos are mended and remolded.
Let us march on ballot boxes, *Let’s march* march on ballot boxes until race-baiters disappear from the political arena.

Let us march on ballot boxes until the salient misdeeds of bloodthirsty mobs (*Yes, sir*) will be transformed into the calculated good deeds of orderly citizens. (*Speak, Doctor*)

Let us march on ballot boxes (*Let us march*) until the Wallaces of our nation tremble away in silence.

Let us march on ballot boxes (*Let us march*) until we send to our city councils (*Yes, sir*), state legislatures, (*Yes, sir*) and the United States Congress, (*Yes, sir*) men who will not fear to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God.

Let us march on ballot boxes (*Let us march. March*) until brotherhood becomes more than a meaningless word in an opening prayer, but the order of the day on every legislative agenda.

Let us march on ballot boxes (*Yes*) until all over Alabama God’s children will be able to walk the earth in decency and honor.54

Martin Luther King Jr.,’s most famous speech, “I have a Dream,” is another powerful example of the eschatological imagination. The repetition increases the power of his message, but it is the imagination, the dreams, and the hope of the speech that creates the lasting impact of King’s words. This example is particularly poignant because King brings together his dreams for the future with the repeated “today.” King preaches,

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: “We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal.”

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification; one day right there in Alabama, little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.

This is our hope. This is the faith that I go back to the South with. With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

This will be the day when all of God’s children will be able to sing with a new meaning, “My country, ‘tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my fathers died, land of the pilgrim’s pride, from every mountainside, let freedom ring.”

And if America is to be a great nation this must become true. So let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire. Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York. Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania!

Let freedom ring from the snowcapped Rockies of Colorado!

Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California!

But not only that; let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia!
Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee!

Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi. From every mountainside, let freedom ring.

And when this happens, when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God’s children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles,
Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, “Free at last! free at last! thank God Almighty, we are free at last!”

The imagination employed in the Matthew 18 sermon and the examples from Martin Luther King, Jr. are markedly different. These differences are intentional in order to demonstrate to the class that the eschatological imagination can be used in a manner more characteristic of Black preaching but also in more subtle ways in other styles of preaching. The key to this lesson will be assisting the class to integrate the eschatological imagination into their own preaching voice.

Week Seven: Remembering the Stories of the Past as Evidence of God’s Presence in the Midst of Life

Theoretical Underpinnings Arising from this Dissertation: A hermeneutics of remembrance provides valuable stories of struggle, oppression, and successes that can inspire, teach, and demonstrate how congregants fit into the continuing story of faith. Sermons that engage in remembrance do justice to those who struggled in the past by voicing their stories. Remembrance also does justice by speaking narratives that run counter to the dominant narratives constructed by majority voices. Remembrance does peace by re-storying those that have been silenced in the past. It also tells the stories of how God acted in the past for justice, peace, and reconciliation and how those actions reverberate into the present and future.

A hermeneutics of remembrance cannot be an idealized vision of the past. Hermeneutics of suspicion and domination name those times in the past that were

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characterized by failures, mistakes, and sins. Sermons that remember share not only the successful struggles, but also the difficulties, mistakes, and failures of seeking transformation.

Remembrance is an important part of community formation. Although the Holy Spirit inspires individuals, the community discerns together. Stories of remembrance can demonstrate how the community discerned the movement of the Holy Spirit in the past. Remembrance of church life and discernment shapes the community into a church that can engage in similar actions of peacemaking today and in the future.

A hermeneutics of remembrance also identifies God’s actions in the past in order to place our own struggles for transformation into the ongoing story of God’s work. Remembrance, paired with community formation, places God within the life of the community. It is an act of peace when dissenting and enemy voices listen to one another and form a reconciled people of God.

*Focus Statement:* Preaching that *does* peace remembers God’s transformative work in the past, including God’s work for peace through subversive groups that history prefers to silence and forget.

*Lesson Objectives and Sermon Samples:* This lesson has four purposes. *First,* it teaches that a preacher does not have to experience for themselves all of the stories of remembrance included in a sermon. As a result, this lesson assists class members in exploring the resources available for including remembrance. Techniques for gathering remembrance include speaking with other members of the community, particularly older members of the congregation. It may also include reading congregational, denominational, or local histories. This class benefits from having a guest speaker share a specific story from
the history of the church that demonstrates how the church struggled (and perhaps even failed) to do justice, peace, and reconciliation. This provides concrete examples of engaging in remembrance demonstrated for the class.

Second, the lesson demonstrates how to utilize remembrance in preaching. “The Providence of God” by Henry Mitchell is an excellent example. Mitchell uses Black history to remember how God operates in every situation. He preaches,

God works in everything and God guarantees that we are protected. This is no new idea, not only in the Bible, but in Black culture and in some other cultures. I marvel when I look at what happened with slaves who were being oppressed beyond our imaginations. The “Roots” saga on television did not dare tell it like it really was because even as it was, a lot of people got sick. In the midst of all of that, here are folks singing from the bottoms of their souls, “He’s got the whole world in his hands.” Utter spiritual genius to know that in the midst of this absurd injustice God has the whole world in his hand and this can only be because in African culture the Providence of God and the omnipotence of God were old hat. We didn’t learn that from a man with a whip in one hand and a pistol in the other. We learned that from our African ancestors and it was so deeply embedded in our culture that it gave us the momentum to carry us through centuries of torture and bring us out singing, “He’s got the whole world in his hands.” I well remember back about 1939 when Marian Anderson was scheduled to sing a concert in the hall of the Daughters of the American Revolution and then it was determined because of her ethnic identity that this should be cancelled and one of the great moments of my life was to look on the Movietone News and watch her singing, “He’s got the whole world in his hands.” She wasn’t singing in the auditorium to those few thousand, she was singing to many, many more thousands outside under God’s heaven. And singing with a triumphant lilt to her voice, God has the whole world in his hands. And God is working in all for good, even if you lock me out. But look at how many more people I’m singing to now. Now, of course, this could sound to some very thoughtful folk like wishful thinking. It could appear that, well, this is the sort of thing you hold on to just to keep from going crazy but, I mean, it’s just a dream. And I would readily consent that it is possible that some people do it like that. I would never suggest that nobody can prove that it is wrong. Slave ancestors would have told anybody who had challenged them that you just haven’t watched it long enough; in the last last analysis it will work for good.56

This sermon does remembrance by recalling slavery as well as an act of discrimination from 1939. It also does justice to Black history by sharing the suffering and spiritual strength of

those in the past and it does peace by naming God’s actions through history and into the present.

A third example demonstrates how sermons can remember events from recent history. The following excerpt remembers striving to speak about pornography at a Mennonite church conference that happened only a few years prior to the sermon. Andrew Kreider preaches,

Mennonites have said little about pornography. One exception is a new (2008) pamphlet from Faith and Life Resources: “Close to Home: Dealing with Pornography.” In addition I have heard about two occasions when Mennonites have talked about the subject, at the last two big Mennonite conventions in the U.S., at Charlotte (2005) and San Jose (2007). In Charlotte, the organization called Mennonite Women called on the denomination to wake up and look at this issue. Two years later at San Jose, Mennonite Women met with Mennonite Men in a joint session in which they talked about pornography. Then they had breakout sessions. The men and the women went to separate spaces to gather things they wanted to say to each other about pornography.

Then they came back together. The women said to the men: We are devastated by our partners’ use of porn and its damaging effect on our relationships. Women portrayed in porn are our sisters and we care about them. They are someone’s wife, daughter, mother, sister. The men said: We want women to know how powerful and important sex is for us and how strong the sex drive can be. Male sexuality has become muted in our society. Sexual energy, even the positive kind, has come to be seen as bad or wrong. We want women to know that we want to reclaim our sexuality as a gift from God.

I am especially grateful for two things that happened at the 2007 gathering. First, Mennonites were willing to talk to each other about sexuality. They were willing to look at the questions raised by pornography and name them. And second, the conversation didn’t end with finger pointing and condemnation; it pushed ahead to a call for a positive framework for talking about sex in the church. We need to have a way of naming what is reality for men and for women. Instead of just talking about what’s bad and wrong, we need to find positive ways of celebrating each other as male and female, of rejoicing in the gift of sexuality we’ve been given. If naming the issue of pornography can be one of the ways we are drawn into a healthy conversation about sex in the church, then what is a scourge in our society could end up being a gift.

This sermon demonstrates remembrance in a shorter section remembering a conference within a larger sermon on pornography, and uses that remembrance as a means to move into

further transformation in the present and future.

Remembering failures is the fourth purpose of this lesson. The sermon on Matthew 18 includes failures by naming the pain of excommunication and abuse. It also includes failures by naming how the women were silenced by the first pastor they approached for help. This lesson teaches that it is important to name failures in a way that voices the pain of others and the imperfect character of the church. At the same time, those failures become the impetus for doing justice, peace, reconciliation, and transformation.

Week Eight: Reveling in Diversity

Theoretical Underpinnings Arising from this Dissertation: John Howard Yoder articulates the importance of the church community in transformation. The church is a glimpse of God’s eschatological future in the present because it acts in unique ways that demonstrate love and support. Listening to the voices of others, including dissenting voices and the voice of the enemy, characterizes the uniqueness of the community. The church seeks a diversity of voices not to unify the voices, but to honour the diversity of ways the Holy Spirit inspires individuals. This lesson considers practical ways to include different opinions within the preaching moment. Even a single voice can leave space for other voices by utilizing tentative language, acknowledging contrapuntals, asking questions instead of providing answers, and including both the “like” and the “is not like” of metaphors.

Preaching does justice by leaving space for other voices. It does peace by seeking a community that can listen and engage with conflicting voices, even enemy voices. It does reconciliation by holding together different voices in a supportive koinonia community.
**Focus Statement:** Preaching that *does* reconciliation values the individual by forming a community that earnestly listens to all voices, including dissenting voices.

**Lesson Objectives and Sermon Samples:** Lesson two introduced the possibility of including multiple voices in preaching through David Buttrick’s moves. This lesson continues this work by exploring various means for including a diversity of voices within the preparation and delivery of the sermon. This lesson explores three different approaches to including diversity in preaching. Although I would prefer that all churches immediately begin to include many people in preaching, I am one individual sharing my thoughts with Mennonite churches and each church needs to do its own discernment. As a result, I include various approaches for leaving space for diverse ideas in preaching in order to recognize that a church has to discern its own approach to preaching.

Class members explore how language constructs can leave space in the sermon for contradictory experiences, opinions or voices. David Buttrick’s “Quid Pro Quo: Our Sins for Christ’s Righteousness” and Barbara Brown Taylor’s “The Silence of God” provide two apt examples to guide class members. Buttrick’s example explores the diversity of Christian denominations, and God’s forgiveness for a diversity of people and situations. He preaches,

For Christianity is good news of God’s mercy. Christianity is forgiveness. Oh, yes, it’s a personal salvation; God knows we need to be forgiven sins that stare from the dark shadows of our lives, what Harry Emerson Fosdick called, “The harm I done by being me.” But Christianity is much more than personal. Forgiveness is as big as the whole wide world. We fought a Gulf War two years ago and, in a ‘turkey shoot,’ killed off around 170,000 Iraqis to our 150 dead. Well, in the midst of divine tears, God has forgiven us. We’ve been playing competitive religion in North America as of late. So Methodists bumper-sticker their cars with “Catch the Spirit,” and Presbyterians are busy boosting something they call “The Reformed Tradition,” and Baptists are trying to revise a slogan, “A million more in ‘94.” In the name of competitive Christianity we gleefully dismember Jesus Christ. Choking back divine
sadness, God forgives us. No wonder St. Paul can shout, “Be reconciled to God.” For God has forgiven us all. Now is the day of salvation.  

Taylor’s example uses questions in order to provide space for a diversity of answers and further discernment by the community. She preaches,

God’s silence is stunning, especially for those of us who talk a lot. We think, perhaps, that we can solve the problem by making more noise ourselves, but it is only when we stop, and hush, that the silence can teach us anything; namely, that our disillusionment is not a bad thing. Take the word apart and you can begin to hear what it really means. Dis-illusion-ment. The loss of illusion. The end of make-believe. Is that a bad thing? Or a good thing? To learn that God’s presence is not something we can demand, that God’s job is not to reward our devotion, that God’s agenda may in fact be quite different from our own. Is that a bad thing or a good thing to know?

The sermon on Matthew 18 that began this chapter demonstrates these same techniques by asking questions, using tentative language, and naming the limits of the preacher as a single voice. The sermon ends by stating, “I am quite obviously a guest to this congregation. I do not know what problems or disagreements you face. I do not know what pain and hurts remain silent and are never named. I do not know how many people in this congregation have their own experiences with Matthew 18.” These confessions provide space for others to share their stories, and for the congregation to enter into a time of discernment and sharing after the sermon.

In a second approach to including diversity in the pulpit, this lesson explores John McClure’s technique for engaging in a diversity of voices in sermon preparation, while a single voice preaches the sermon. The class replicates the method detailed in McClure’s


RoundTable Pulpit in order to practice this approach.\textsuperscript{60} The following example conveys the diverse opinions shared during a conversation that occurred before the final sermon delivery. This is a compilation of several parts of McClure’s sermon “Power in Weakness.” He preaches,

Some of you, while at our sermon roundtable for today’s sermon, told me that you had a hard time with Christians who boast all of the time about what they believe. Most of us here today probably know what I’m talking about…But is Paul’s boasting all bad? After all, Paul boasts in weakness and suffering…But as some of you have been quick to point out, there can be problems with boasting in one’s suffering and weakness…Several of you who have experienced great suffering and hardship have reminded me of something that we haven’t yet considered: that Paul has his eye on Christ when he places such a high value on suffering and weakness.\textsuperscript{61}

Although a single voice preaches the sermon, the sermon conveys multiple voices recorded during the conversation that occurred prior to the delivery of the sermon. This method is particularly appropriate for church contexts that may be beginning to experiment with including a diversity of voices in preaching.

Although the previous techniques are important, especially since congregations may not be ready to hear multiple people preach on a Sunday morning, a third technique resembles the sermons imagined by this dissertation. This approach includes two to five people preparing and preaching a sermon together. Individuals may prepare the sermon together, or they may prepare particular aspects of the sermon, such as a move, individually and then combine their specific contributions together to form a single sermon. Three different voices could have preached the Matthew 18 sermon. The first two voices share stories of remembrance while the third then explores the implications of those experiences according to scripture and theology throughout the rest of the sermon.

\textsuperscript{60} McClure, \textit{The Roundtable Pulpit}, 68-69.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 101-104.
Eunjoo Mary Kim’s sermon, “Remembering the Gift of God,” excerpted below, includes two voices that alternate speaking to resemble a conversation within the sermon.

The sermon reads,

Preacher 1. Isn’t it hard to live with people who are different ethnically, culturally, and religiously? What kind of strategies could be used for diversity?

Preacher 2. The Letter to the Ephesians reveals that churches in Asia Minor adopted a policy of discrimination: Jewish Christians were insiders, and Gentile Christians were outsiders. Jewish Christians were real members of the church, and Gentile Christians were strangers. Eventually this policy of discrimination replaced the joyful sounds of the church with the disturbing noises of hammering and sawing, for the church began to build walls to divide the two groups, Jews and Gentiles, citizens and aliens, members of the church and strangers.

Preacher 1. Well, I think that we should not blame the churches of Asia Minor for their policy of discrimination, because even for us, diversity is not an easy topic. Like the early Christians in Asia Minor, we easily feel uncomfortable by those who have different color of skin, or a different sexuality, or a different accent in English, or by those who speak a different language or live a different lifestyle. Naturally, we humans seem to have hostile biases toward people we consider “different,” and try to build walls, consciously or unconsciously,
to separate ourselves from them, to protect our vested interests and privileges, rather than share them with “different” people. In fact, we hear similar noises of hammering and sawing as we build dividing walls even in our churches and schools. Have you ever heard these kinds of sounds?  

Although this third approach best exemplifies the preaching I have envisioned throughout this dissertation, the previous examples can guide churches not yet ready for multi-person preaching in ways of leaving space for multiple experiences even in a single-voiced sermon.

Week Nine: Fostering Relationships

Theoretical Underpinnings Arising from this Dissertation: John Howard Yoder articulated the central role of the church in doing justice, peace, and reconciliation. The church is a group of voluntarily covenanted individuals who use their voice to work towards doing justice, peace, and reconciliation. When the Trinity enriches ecclesiology, preaching values both the uniqueness of an individual’s voice, as well as the support of the community.

The previous lesson focused on the diversity of individual voices. This lesson focuses on the unity of the community. Many diverse individuals come together to form one body, one people, and one church. Sermons can build and foster a reconciled community that cares for each other by knowing, referencing, and naming God into the life of the church community.

Focus Statement: Preaching that does reconciliation fosters a supportive community that pastorally cares for one another because pastoral care is the work of the entire congregation.

Lesson Objectives and Sermon Samples: The broader theme of this dissertation is the conversation between individuals and the community. The previous lesson began encouraging a diversity of voices within preaching by mentoring individual voices. This lesson seeks to shape the church into a supportive community that participates in discernment together. This lesson particularly focuses on how preaching can draw on the life of the church as a source for preaching. It is important to encourage class members to physically explore the church building. While moving throughout the church, the class is able to reflect on the various activities of the church and how they shape the community.

This lesson explores how to build church community according to two approaches. First, the Matthew 18 sermon directly names the community and speaks about community. This sermon explores how baptism signifies entrance into the community and how living in community entails certain ethical and theological commitments, such as a willingness to engage in communal discernment. This sermon also explores the complicated nature of community, including the pain of members leaving the community, whether voluntarily or through excommunication.

Rudy Edwin Baergen’s sermon “United in Christ: a sermon on John 17” similarly explores community in relation to communion.63 The sermon considers the disunity of the church and how God brings unity to the church. Communion recognizes God’s power in forming community. Baergen preaches,

The Lord’s Supper has a vertical and a horizontal dimension. Communion does not create unity among us; it recognizes that God through Christ has already made us one. All our grounds for enmity have been eliminated, even if we don’t acknowledge that fact. The horizontal dimension of communion has to do first of all with our acknowledging to one another that we are one before Christ, even when we disagree and are in conflict. Furthermore, the horizontal dimension involves an inner and outer declaration that we will hang in there with one another, no matter how difficult the journey, because Jesus has asked us to do that. Jesus wants us to be one even as he and the Father are one.64

The Matthew 18 sermon and Baergen’s sermon address characteristics of the church and how the church in its imperfection comes together through God to be a community. In order to encourage the class to move around the church, the Matthew 18 sermon could be placed somewhere in the church that signifies the exclusion of certain groups of people. For example, stairwells exclude those with disabilities. The sermon on John could be located at the communion table. Class members could move around the church stopping at various places to read the sermons.

This means of forming community by directly addressing the church community as a topic of the sermon may not work in sermons on other topics. As a result, the second purpose of this lesson is to explore how preachers can form the community through their sermons on other topics. The following series of sermon excerpts could also be spread around the church in order to encourage class members to reflect on their own church life and how they can include the life of the church in preaching. These excerpts preach about the life of the church community without making community formation the central topic of the sermon.

64. Ibid., 8.
Michele Rizoli’s “Take, Bless, Break: a sermon on Luke 9:10-17” on hospitality can be placed near the church entrance to assist class members in reflecting on how the church welcomes those who are not usually a part of the community. Rizoli preaches,

Maybe we could start to be a more welcoming church by just being more welcoming people in general. The opportunities are everywhere: to slip over so someone can sit beside me on the bench, to make room at the cafeteria table for someone who always sits alone, just to say hi to someone I don’t know yet, to try to sense and respond to the needs of those around me.

Maybe we also need to lower our high standards and let God do a little bit of the work too. A few years ago, Florence joined our congregation in Toronto. She had come from Uganda, and we planned a party for her, to welcome her. I distinctly remember being embarrassed about how few people showed up, like we were doing so little. But it turned out that Florence had never had a party that was just for her. She was overjoyed. She told us that she felt totally loved and welcomed, and she was. God used a party that had struck me as less than perfect to embrace Florence and make her feel she belonged in our community.

At its heart, as modeled by Jesus, hospitality is not about a well-made plan. It’s not about inviting friends over for a dinner party. It’s not about what we see on the Home and Garden channel or at a nice hotel. Hospitality is about welcoming the stranger, taking even a little bit of our friendship, our food, our listening ears, our helping hands, and entrusting them to God to multiply exponentially. It is about building a wider community. Take, bless, break. Hospitality is taking what we have, no matter how little, and blessing it by presenting it to God, and breaking it to share. It is part of our identity, our nature, as followers of Jesus.65

G. Lee Ramsey, Jr.’s sermon excerpt from “God Hears” explores generosity, tithing, and the sharing of our resources in the church. This excerpt may be placed near the offering plates in the church in order to encourage the class to consider how God and our church provide for others. The sermon reads,

We need not worry that God’s water will run dry. Like last week at the cancer walk, Relay for Life. Have you ever seen so many people having so much fun? Here we are, Bethlehem Church, in our booth selling ice cream right between the Baptists with barbecue and the Harley Riders for Health. Everybody is talking, laughing, raising money for the same purpose – to remember those who have died from cancer and raise funds for research to prevent cancer in the future. Well, in case you’ve forgotten, it’s about a hundred and twenty degrees out there at ten o’clock in the morning. So what’s the most popular booth at the entire event? It’s the water station. The kids and adults are going in and out of that misting tent like it’s a backyard

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sprinkler. And those ice-cold bottles of crystal clear water, they taste as cool and fresh as a Smoky Mountain spring in April. People stand there in line to get a bottle of that water and then just circle back and around and get in line again for another one. And the best part about the water is that it’s free. FREE. Free water for all who pass by – the sick, the healthy, cancer survivors, supporters of those with cancer, the bereaved, Baptists, Methodists, motorcycle riders, old, young – it doesn’t matter; the water is free. That’s what God provides for all of God’s children – free, living water. God offers water without price.66

The following sermon excerpt from James A. Forbes, Jr.’s “Whatever Happened to the Golden Rule” focuses on a man dying of AIDS and a recent violent attack on a local jogger. It could be placed in a church pew or on a table where church meals occur. Gathering in the pews or around tables for a meal signifies the church gathering together in community. Forbes’ sermon reads,

Riversiders, this is for us! Namely, we are a congregation where we do not simply take care. We do our charitable bit, but we are also people who as we take care, find a way to engage the system in taking care. In the moving beyond charity to the analysis that leads toward system change, not only are we taking care, we are creating a take-care system that will allow us once again to live, to walk freely in our streets, to enjoy jogging in our parks…The purpose of the church in this time is to create a group of people who understand that this God created us out of the same batch of divine creativity, that we’ve all been there. And when you recognize in my sister and brother that we have all been there together, it will become increasingly impossible for us to engage in various forms of assault against each other.

My prayer is that we in this congregation, slowly maybe, sometimes kicking and screaming and debating and shouting about it, will become a congregation where, when we look at one another and see into the eyes of a brother or sister, we will understand their suffering and pain; we will be able to say, I’ve been there, so let me do unto this person even as I would have him or her do unto me. Amen.67

Finally, Barbara Lundblad’s “God’s Homecoming” would be read by the class members while in the church kitchen. It encourages class members to consider who is invited into the community for meals, and who is outside of the community. This sermon is

66. Ramsey, Jr., Care-Full Preaching, 193-194.

a unique example of including the congregation in preaching because it includes the children of the church. Lundblad recounts,

There is a man in my neighborhood who is known by his first name to almost everybody. His name is Emmett...Several fifth-graders of our parish had come to church to bake communion bread as part of first communion preparation. When our session was over, the talking and the baking, they got ready to leave for home. But Emmett was fast asleep on their jackets. They had thrown them on the bench, forgetting it was his bed! No one said, “Oh, yuck!” (Although they might have thought it, for Emmett looked very scraggly that day. His face, always raw and red in the cold, was bleeding because he had tried to shave.) Instead, the fifth-graders wanted to make Emmett something to eat. So we went to my kitchen...they found some canned corn beef and some cheese to make sandwiches on two English muffins. A few chips and two Granny Smith apples...Gently, one of them said his name, “Emmett.” He woke with a start that made them jump back. Then, they handed him the brown bag. He took it with thanks...When their parents asked them what they learned about communion, it was Emmett’s lunch they talked about. It is not a bad understanding of holy communion, of Christ’s real presence. God making a home with us in the breaking of bread, in the sharing of lunch.68

Preaching that develops out of the life of the congregation names God into the daily realities of the church and forms the congregation into a reconciled community discerning God’s will together.

c. Preaching in the Weeks Following the Series of Lessons

Over the next weeks, each class participant, either individually or in groups, should have the opportunity to preach before the congregation, if he or she wishes. The participants should not be required to preach since some may still not feel ready to preach to the congregation. As much as possible, provide only positive feedback after each sermon. Since this may be the first time a class participant has preached or even spoken in public, it is important to reinforce the positive gifts that each person brings to the pulpit. Too much negative critique can dissuade a person from preaching again. When the principalities and

powers have silenced a person, it can be extremely frightening, yet liberating, to find her or his voice, but negative feedback can quickly make the person retreat back into silence.

Nevertheless, community discernment of the sermon’s message is appropriate. Discernment interacts with a sermon, while critique focuses on the negative responses to the sermon. Discernment wrestles with questions, asks more questions, adds experience and integrates a sermon into the life of the church. Discernment brings multiple voices into dialogue and seeks the presence and direction of the Holy Spirit amongst the diversity.

IV. Conclusion

Preaching that does justice, peace, and reconciliation in a Mennonite context emphasizes individual voices as well as the church community. Individual voices share experiences of God amidst injustices and suffering, critique the principalities and powers, and imagine God’s peace-filled eschatological future. The community forms a reconciled community that brings together a diversity of voices in order to discern God’s will together. In a Mennonite context, this duel emphasis on both the individual and the community leads to already existing initiatives in community discernment such as the “Being a Faithful Church” project mentioned in Chapter Three and offering adult Sunday school classes that discuss sermons and church life. Moreover, recognizing the importance of the individual voice may also inspire churches to provide workshops that identify preaching gifts in individuals and then foster, encourage, and support those voices.

Although inviting members of the congregation to preach adds diversity to the pulpit, these voices benefit from training. Workshops help hesitant congregants to find their preaching voice. A sermon form, such as David Buttrick’s moves, enable people to preach
together so that individual voices are held in community. This chapter began with a sermon demonstrating the summation of this dissertation. It is my hope that this curriculum inspires and encourages other voices, both long-time preachers and those who have never preached, to preach their own sermons demonstrating the possibilities for preaching to do justice, peace, and reconciliation.
Conclusion

By integrating Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s rhetorical-emancipatory paradigm and John Howard Yoder’s peace theology, and then placing them within a Trinitarian ecclesiology, this dissertation develops an approach to Mennonite preaching that does justice, peace, and reconciliation. Doing justice creates a space in the pulpit for those individual voices previously silenced. Doing peace imagines the future Kingdom of God and begins living into that future in the present. Doing peace also remembers God’s actions amidst the struggles of the past in order to recognize God’s presence today in similar struggles. Doing reconciliation builds the local church by discerning scripture and God’s words together in community.

This approach to preaching necessitates viewing justice, peace, and reconciliation not as topics for occasional preaching but as theological approaches regardless of the particular scripture or sermon topic preached. Dancing has influenced my approach to preaching throughout this dissertation. Schüssler Fiorenza’s work introduced dancing as a means for articulating how her method continually circles and loops back to previous elements. Dancing also illustrates the relationship between the individual and the community as they move together, taking turns leading and following, all while being lead by God as the disc jockey, Jesus as the dance instructor, and the Holy Spirit as the music. In this illustration perhaps justice, peace, and reconciliation are the style of dance; in particular, a square dance. A square dance is a folk dance where eight or more people dance together while a caller calls out the sequence of steps to follow. It is also one of the few dances traditionally accepted by Mennonites who were otherwise opposed to dancing. In a square dance, partners dance with
each other, but they can also change partners or dance as a single group. Although the music, partners, and moves change throughout the dance, the style remains a square dance. In a similar manner, justice, peace, and reconciliation are not just topics, but theological approaches that shape the nature of preaching even when the scripture, topic, or preacher changes.

Both Mennonite churches and scholars in homiletics face this challenge of integrating justice, peace, and reconciliation into the dance of the church. Preaching that approaches justice, peace, and reconciliation as topics only occasionally address these areas when the lectionary presents an appropriate scripture, when a particularly violent event occurs, or on Sundays around Remembrance Day or Advent. Preaching that does justice, peace, and reconciliation, week-by-week, month-by-month, and year-by-year, shapes the individual and the communal consciousness of congregants towards nonviolence and the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God into the present.

Preaching that does justice, peace, and reconciliation challenges contemporary homiletical theory. Traditionally, ordained preachers have been the local churches’ authority on biblical interpretation. Preaching that develops out of a Mennonite context challenges contemporary homiletical theory to shift the authority and discernment of scriptures and the privilege of entering the pulpit from an individual preacher to the church community. Moreover, the Word of God is located within and discerned by the congregation, rather than within a single individual. The local church, through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit and the discernment of the community, is the locus of wisdom.

Preaching that does justice, peace, and reconciliation also challenges Mennonite pulpits to critically evaluate Mennonite preaching practices. The scholarship on Mennonite
preaching is sparse, but growing. Mennonite preachers and scholars need ongoing examinations of whether or not Mennonite preaching reflects and embodies Mennonite ecclesiological, theological, and biblical interpretative practices. Mennonite preaching values both the individual and the community. The Holy Spirit equips individuals to interpret scripture and to share their interpretations, as well as their experiences of God, with the church community for further discernment. Nevertheless, including a plethora of voices in the pulpit without intentionality is simply a cacophony of noise liable to inadvertently condone violence. This dissertation encourages Mennonite churches to intentionally foster communal discernment, and seek initiatives for fostering the preaching talents of a diversity of individuals. When churches provide mentorship, encouragement, and training to individuals interested in preaching, preaching can begin to do justice, peace, and reconciliation.

It is my hope that this project will spark discussion both within and outside Mennonite churches, because in many ways this project marks the beginning rather than the end of a journey. Outside of the Mennonite church, I hope that preachers can evaluate which experiences, stories, remembrances and imaginings they include or exclude from their sermons. I also hope, or perhaps dream, that preachers and denominations will discuss possibilities for including a greater diversity of voices within preaching.

It is my hope that Mennonite scholarship will use the methodology I have presented to critically examine the actual sermons preached in Mennonite pulpits. Although I can hypothesize that Mennonite preaching would benefit from more remembrance and imagination, a more complete study is necessary to determine the areas in which Mennonite preaching excels or is deficient. For Mennonite churches, the next practical steps arising
from this project include implementing the preaching curriculum in churches or conference gatherings. This dissertation, in its most basic sense, is a proposal for a greater examination of what is currently happening in Mennonite pulpits.

Christians live between the violence of Good Friday and the glory of Easter Sunday. Preaching can name the pain and violence of death and injustices, while also proclaiming the grace, glory, and peace promised in God’s Kingdom. Preaching that *does* justice, peace, and reconciliation participates in transforming death into the new life of Christ in the past, present, and future.
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Appendix One

Worship Resources

Each lesson should end with a time of worship. Worship is important to Mennonite preaching, and it gathers the community together to sing, listen, and share with one another. At the end of each lesson, ask if there are final comments or questions before ending in a brief moment of worship and prayer. It is important to provide this time to transition from exploring new ideas and testing techniques, to gathering together as a community in worship.

Creating a space that can be used as a display each week can help this transition by physically moving the class participants to a new area in the room. Each lesson adds a different object to the display. There is a suggested object each week, but feel free to add an object that is more readily available or has a particular connection to the congregation. At the end of each class, spend time adding the object to the table, singing, and closing with prayer. Each lesson suggests a possible closing song and prayer. If the class is small, unfamiliar with the Mennonite hymnal, or not particularly inclined to singing, the class may choose one hymn to repeat each week. *Sing the Journey* #27 “God of the Bible” has several verses and a chorus. ¹ The chorus could be taught during the first week and a verse added each additional week.

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Week One: Empowering Individual Voices and Speaking so the Audience can Hear

Possible Object: microphone

Possible Hymn: *Hymnal: A Worship Book* #395 “Here I am, Lord”

Possible Prayer: God of voice. You speak to us in whispers. You speak to us in storms. You speak in the smallest child and in the oldest woman. You speak to us so that we can speak to others. You empower us and inspire us to preach. Be with us in the weeks ahead as we explore, question, share, and challenge ourselves to prepare and speak to your congregation. Amen.

Week Two: Sermon Form as a Means for Bringing Together Experience, Scripture, and Theology

Possible Object: A few objects from everyday life. Perhaps a pen, dish cloth, diaper, book, cell phone, small garden spade, etc.

Possible Hymn: *Hymnal: A Worship Book* #594 “Lord, you sometimes speak”

Possible Prayer: God, we know you through the Bible and through our theological statements, but you are also a God who walks alongside us. We can know you through the most ordinary experiences of our lives. Be with us as we seek to name you into the world through our preaching. Amen.

Week Three: Individual Experience Rooted in Biblical Exegesis and Community

Possible Object: Bible

Possible Hymn: *Sing the Journey* #27 “God of the Bible”
Possible Prayer: Mysterious God. You have blessed us with your Word. With the stories, teachings, failures, laments, joys, and celebrations of those who have followed you over the centuries. But sometimes stories are lost. Some voices are silenced. Some pains and some laughs are not recorded. Open us to seeing and hearing your presence throughout the words of the scripture and in the lives around us. Amen.

Week Four: Using, but also Critiquing, Everyday Experiences

Possible Object: church directory

Possible Hymn: Sing and Rejoice! #31 “God’s Family”

Possible Prayer: God, we come before you as individuals. We each have our own experiences. Our own pain and sorrow; joys and celebrations; trials and tribulations. None of us have the exact same experiences in life and of you. And yet you are God to all. Bringing us together to be your church. Forming us into one body. Guide us as we seek to voice the diversity of your family. Amen.

Week Five: Critique and the Principalities and Powers

Possible Object: A symbol of money. This could be an offering plate, or a few dollars. If your congregation collects the children’s offering in a special bank, you could use this bank as the object. The innocence of children bringing forward money without hesitation or concern is a great symbol of defeating the principalities and powers’ focus on greed.

Possible Hymn: Hymnal: A Worship Book #164 “When Israel was in Egypt’s Land”

Possible Prayer: Almighty God, you know that the principles and powers surround us. They try to isolate us, tempt us, and distract us from you. Give us courage to challenge their
power. Strength to reveal their illusions. The words to speak truth. For we know that you are the strength we need. The courage we seek. The source of truth. Amen.

Week Six: Imagining God’s Future and Working Toward that Vision, Today

Possible Object: The class uses their creativity and imagination to create images that represent their hope for God’s eschatological future Kingdom. Use these creations as the display objects for this week.

Possible Hymn: *Hymnal: A Worship Book* #299 “New earth, heavens new”

Possible Prayer: Unknowable God, you are beyond our imagination. Your power is unlike anything we know. Your love is deeper than any love we experience. Your wisdom is beyond measure. Your forgiveness is inexhaustible. Although we see stumbling blocks and walls in our path, again and again your surprise us with a clear way through the chaos. You have a plan and you know the future. Bless us with your Holy Spirit and inspire our imagination. Amen.

Week Seven: Remembering the Stories of the Past as Evidence of God’s Presence in the Midst of Life

Possible Object: A cross or symbol of communion are often common symbols of remembrance. Alternatively you may have a particular banner, painting, photo, plaque, or object that is important to your congregation as a symbol of remembrance.

Possible Hymn: *Sing the Journey* #107 “God Remembers”

Possible Prayer: God of all history. You are the alpha and the omega. The beginning and the end. You have guided this church through the years. Through our struggles and through our
successes. You have shaped this congregation. We know you today because of what you have done in the past. Help us to use our history as a gift. An inspiration and resource for today. You are the God of all history and all time. In our past, our present, and your future. Amen.

Week Eight: Reveling in Diversity

Possible Object: Place a lectern beside the table holding the objects. This symbolizes the class participants finding their voice and being empowered to stand behind the lectern and preach.

Possible Hymn: *Hymnal: A Worship Book* #304 “There are many gifts”

Possible Prayer: God of great diversity, you created the sun and the moon, the sea and the earth, the smallest ant and the largest elephant. The diversity of your creation continues to amaze us. You also created each of us and blessed us with diversity. We have our own thoughts, experiences, opinions, and voice. At times we disagree. Give us the wisdom to speak as one church, while respecting the many individuals. Give us grace to be one people, while listening and hearing each individual voice. Give us your Holy Spirit so that we can be your body, made up of many parts. Amen.

Alternative Prayer: If the class has formed a close bond and trusts one another, the class may choose to close this session with a “babble prayer.” In this prayer, all of the participants pray together, out loud, at once. Rather than a discernable single voice, the prayer becomes an indiscernible babble of prayer. Assure participants that those sitting beside them will not hear their prayer since they will also be praying out loud at the same time. When the babble becomes quieter, the leader should close with an “Amen.”
**Week Nine: Fostering Relationships**

Possible Object: prayer shawl or casserole dish

Possible Hymn: *Sing the Journey* #64 “Somos el cuerpo de Cristo (We are the body of Christ)”

Possible Prayer: God amongst us. Here in this place, we are your church. We have travelled through the past and will face the future together. Although we are individuals, together we are the church. As a people, we come before God. As a people, we are inspired by the Holy Spirit. And as a people, we follow Christ. We know that when one or two are gathered in your name, you are in our midst. Forming us together as your people, your body, and your church. Amen.