ANABAPTIST THEOLOGY: METHODS AND PRACTICES CONFERENCE

PROGRAM (Long Form) AND ABSTRACTS

Sponsored by

Humanitas Anabaptist Mennonite Centre (Trinity Western University)

&

Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre

June 7-9, 2017

Trinity Western University
Alumni Hall and Board of Governors’ Room
Reimer Student Centre (2nd floor)
WEDNESDAY, JUNE 7

Registration (6:00 – 7:00 p.m.) (Alumni Hall)

Evening Plenary (7:00 – 9:00 p.m.)

**Presenter:** Paul Martens (Baylor University)
**Title:** “Opportunity and Challenge: Sketching the State of Anabaptist Theology Today”
**Abstract:** The presentation summarily sketches (a) the unique challenge Anabaptist theology faces following the public implosion of John Howard Yoder's theology, the apparent definitive rendering of Anabaptist theology for many Mennonites and most non-Mennonites and (b) the timely opportunity to elevate previously overshadowed trajectories in Anabaptist thought and to rediscover the truly dialogical nature of Anabaptist theology.

**Presenter:** Laura Schmidt Roberts (Fresno Pacific University)
**Title:** “Refiguring Tradition”
**Abstract:** Anabaptist theologizing finds itself beset by a challenge both old and new: an understanding of its tradition that adequately accounts for its pluriformity (historical and contemporary) as well as its recognizable identity across time. This presentation explores a hermeneutical model, theorizing tradition itself as a text requiring ongoing interpretation such that multiple, competing construals and their argumentation are constitutive of the tradition due to the pluriform, under-determined nature of historical traditions and their texts, and due to the perspectival locatedness of interpreters. Central to such a theory is that the “event” character of a living tradition makes essentialist definitions problematic.

THURSDAY, JUNE 8

Morning Plenary (9:00 – 10:15 a.m.)

**Presenter:** Phil Stoltzfus, University of St. Thomas, St. Paul
**Title:** “AnaPraxism’: Anabaptist Theological Method in a Liberationist Key”
**Abstract:** Anabaptist-Mennonite theology today requires a fuller and more serious engagement with the methodology of liberation theology. Leonardo Boff’s “circle of praxis” approach, for example, helps illuminate the interconnectedness of distinctive characteristics of 16th-century Anabaptism – “conscientization,” systemic critique, engagement with scripture, and commitment to a radical program of change. As contemporary Mennonites we find ourselves interrogating shifting and overlapping structural oppressions, and negotiating intersectional identities on a spectrum from victimization to complicity. Boff provides us with a blueprint for theological method as a type of faith-based “people power”—the continual action/reflection process of “AnaPraxism.”
Presenter: Melanie Kampen, Emmanuel College, University of Toronto  
Title: “Unsettling Mennonite Theological Methods”  
Abstract: Mennonite theology generally understands itself to be historically situated and geographically contextualized. The contextual approaches of Mennonite theologies are often seen as a source for liberating (i.e. nonviolent, peace) theologies and radical ethics/discipleship. However, a contextual methodology can still maintain oppressive regimes of truth. Indeed, the privileging of certain contexts for Mennonite theology has not/does not account, for example, for oppressive Mennonite relations with Indigenous Peoples in Canada and the U.S. It is my contention that Mennonite theology, while it is contextual and has avoided some harmful methodological approaches, has failed to situate itself in the context of its oppressive relations with Indigenous Peoples. I will propose some approaches that takes contextualization further by implementing decolonizing methodologies for doing Mennonite theology on Turtle Island today, in pursuit of more liberating theologies that attend to the harms of Mennonite history, theology, and ecclesiology.

Refreshment Break (10:15 – 10:45 a.m.)

Concurrent Session #1 (10:45 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.)

Presenter: Jessie Hyejung Yum, Emmanuel College, University of Toronto  
Title: “The Role of Experience as a Crucial Source in Anabaptist Theology”  
Abstract: This presentation discusses that Anabaptist theology needs to put more value on experiences from diverse contexts in its method in order to participate in a discernment process of the ever-forming Body of Christ in an ever-changing context. The truth held by Anabaptist theology should be tested and discerned continuously, especially when it faces diverse cultures and new circumstances. A variety of voices from diverse racial, cultural, gender and geographical contexts all play a pivotal role as a crucial source in Anabaptist theology to guide the active discernment process of how Jesus Christ should be witnessed visibly in its concrete context.

Presenter: Hyung Jin Kim Sun, Emmanuel College, University of Toronto  
Title: “Toward a more Global Anabaptist/Mennonite Theology”  
Abstract: While the Anabaptist/Mennonite church is becoming more intercultural, the theological education is still centred much in the Western perspective. In this paper, I engage the work of John Howard Yoder and argue that his theology is a Western-centric perspective as well. In order to expand Anabaptist theological discourse to become more intercultural, I offer four suggestions: actively practice communal hermeneutic, create more academic dialogue between the 16th century Anabaptist tradition and the context of the Global South, learn from local churches on how they are becoming more intercultural, and cultivate a self-critique of postcolonial perspective when using reason in theological discourse.
Concurrent Session #2 (10:45 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.)

Presenter: Carl Friesen, University of NotreDame
Title: “Imitatio Christi and the Natural Law: Theological and Methodological Considerations”
Abstract: Much recent Anabaptist-Mennonite theological discourse—theological ethics in particular—has proceeded from a presumed dichotomy between imitatio Christi and the natural law. In this view, the normative significance of Jesus Christ stands in opposition to the ‘givenness’ of the natural world. This essay challenges this dichotomy. I contend that there are good theological and methodological reasons to affirm a congruence between the new law as revealed in Christ and the natural law. I further suggest that in spite of their claims to the contrary, the work of John Howard Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas provide the theological framework for natural law.

Presenter: Maxwell Kennel, McMaster University
Title: “A Critique of Ontological Peace: Mennonite Theology and Metaphysics”
Abstract: This presentation begins with a brief retrospective survey of the relationship between Mennonite theology and philosophy from its early stages in the writings of Ralph C. Kauffman and Robert Friedmann, up to recent interpretations of Yoder’s work alongside philosophers. Following the establishment of this context, this paper critically addresses pacifist epistemology and ontological peace, focusing on the discursive indications in the anthology The Gift of Difference: Radical Orthodoxy, Radical Reformation, and concluding with suggestions regarding the future prospects of metaphysical reflection within Mennonite theology.

Lunch in Dining Hall, 1st floor (12:00 – 1:30 p.m.)

Panel (1:30 – 3:00 p.m.)

Panelists: Grace Kehler, McMaster University; Paul G. Doerksen, Canadian Mennonite University; Travis Kroeker, McMaster University.
Title: “Figural Theology: Mennonite Theology and Literature”
Abstract: Mennonite theology, oriented towards the ethical challenges of lived experience as well as Biblical figural expression, has traditionally sought to negotiate between them, even if in sometimes scandalous and indeed “heretical” ways. This, too, has been the impulse of much Mennonite literary writing, attuned to “figural freedom” and poetics that are so important also for the future of Mennonite theology. This panel will reflect on our experiences of teaching literature and theology in ways that mutually transform one another as one crucial way forward in theological method and substance and invite a wider discussion on these themes.

Refreshment Break (3:00 – 3:30 p.m.)
Afternoon Plenary (3:30 – 5:00 p.m.)

**Presenter:** Carol Penner, Conrad Grebel University College  
**Title:** “Mennonite Women Doing Theology: A Methodological Reflection on Twenty-Five Years of Conferences”  
**Abstract:** This paper surveys seven Mennonite “Women Doing Theology” conferences. These events were planned by different groups of women, with no institutional continuity between them. Is there a Mennonite feminist way of doing theology? Instead of looking at the content of the ideas the women presented, I am focussing on the structure of how we talk about theology. What does the format of our theologizing say about our theology?

**Presenter:** Nathanael Inglis, Bethany Theological Seminary  
**Title:** “The Theological Use of Tradition in a Detraditionalized Society”  
**Abstract:** Doing theology in detraditionalized societies, or societies in which authority has shifted from traditions to individuals, presents a particular challenge for theologians, who often use the authority of tradition as the basis for their claims. Gordon Kaufman’s theology offers insight into how Anabaptist theology can be intelligible in a detraditionalized society. As a historicist and a pragmatist, Kaufman relies on Christian traditions to shape but not regulate his theological claims. I will argue that these two philosophical commitments can also be read as theological reconstructions of noncreedalism and christomorphic praxis, two dispositions central to Anabaptist theological reflection.

Dinner in Dining Hall, 1st floor (5:00 – 7:00 p.m.)

Evening Plenary (7:00 – 9:00 p.m.)

**Presenter:** Jeremy M. Bergen, Conrad Grebel University College, University of Waterloo  
**Title:** “The Ecumenical Vocation of Anabaptist Theology”  
**Abstract:** In this presentation, I argue that the Anabaptist tradition ought to be understood as a reforming movement within the church catholic. This claim implies that Anabaptist identity has integrity to the extent that it is vigorously ecumenical in orientation. Thus, a key mandate of Anabaptist theology is to enable those are who are affiliated with this movement to hold this tradition both deeply and lightly in relation to the wider church. I also examine what this thesis means for Mennonite denominations and for the ongoing reality of church division.

**Presenter:** Karl Koop, Canadian Mennonite University  
**Title:** “Contours and Possibilities for an Anabaptist Theology”  
**Abstract:** In this presentation I add my voice to the discussion about what it might mean to proceed theologically in an Anabaptist key. I begin by addressing some of the problems that we encounter when we appeal to the Anabaptist tradition. I argue that while it is challenging to articulate what such a tradition might look like, I suggest that it
is possible, nevertheless, to identify family semblances that characterize the tradition which may serve to orient Anabaptist theologizing. Yet responsible theology is not about the repristination of a previous faith culture. Contemporary Anabaptist theologians should not blindly appropriate their tradition without taking seriously a hermeneutics of tradition that is also open to the reshaping of tradition. In the latter part of my presentation I turn to the question of norms in Anabaptist theology, sketching out very briefly a Trinitarian and Christological framework that takes into consideration the importance of scripture, tradition, and lived-experience that is viewed together in perichoretic relationship.

FRIDAY, JUNE 9

Morning Plenary (9:00 – 10:15 a.m.)

Presenter: **Paul Cumin**, Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary  
Title: “Roof-texting. An Anabaptist Critique of Evangelical Structures of Theological Authority”  
Abstract: Modern American evangelicalism has survived and thrived without a central source of theological authority by compensating for this lack with at least three unifying trends: biblicism, patriarchy and a colonialist missiology. These trends have gained momentum from social, political, economic and theological factors. This paper will argue the root of the theological factors lies in a modern epistemological bias within Evangelicalism’s basic understanding of divine revelation and will offer some contemporary existential-Christological suggestions for a way forward.

Presenter: **Iris Speckmann**, Mennonite Seminary, Free University, Amsterdam  
Title: “Comparing Commensality: A Case Study Using Ethnography for Systematic Theology”  
Abstract: The use of ethnographical is gaining popularity within theology. In this paper illustrates the theological relevance of an ethnographic comparison between the practice of Lord’s Supper in the Mennonite congregation of Amsterdam and a secular members-only club meal. It will show similarities between how these meals are experienced and how these meals are embodiments of what people value in life. It will show how the comparison can provide stepping stones for systematic Theologians to reflect on the Lords Supper in new creative ways. I will relate this research to theological discussions concerning the use of ethnographical methods in theology.

Refreshment Break (10:15 – 10:45 a.m.)

Concurrent Session #1 (10:45 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.)

Presenter: **Grant Poettcker**, Briercrest College and Seminary  
Title: “Assessing McClendon’s Narrative Theology”  
Abstract: Whither narrative theology? In seeking a way forward for Anabaptist
theology, this paper will evaluate the suitability of James McClendon’s narrative theological method. It will be argued that although McClendon appropriately attends to the social location of Christian speech and to an Anabaptist emphasis upon a theology that integrates with discipleship, his embrace of a second-order theory of religions is problematic. By comparison, Barth’s dogmatic approach, which grounds theology on the non-ground of revelation does not mark it (as McClendon claims) as modern; it rather appropriately resists the contemporary tendency to treat metaphysics and dogmatics hastily en route to ethics.

**Presenter:** Paul G. Doerksen, Canadian Mennonite University  
**Title:** “Restlessness as Theological Method”  
**Abstract:** My paper will argue that pursuit of Anabaptist-Mennonite theology done primarily in pursuit of identity formation distorts the nature of theology, suppressing the dynamism, even restlessness of the theological task, a pursuit which by its nature contains a refusal to be pressed into instrumental service to some initiative which may itself not be theologically and faithfully shaped. A theological method of restlessness acknowledges that theology by its nature contains a refusal to force conclusions or premature cohesion onto the theological task, and thus calls for reticence and even repentance as necessary elements of Anabaptist-Mennonite theological method.

**Concurrent Session #2 (10:45 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.)**

**Presenter:** David Warkentin, Columbia Bible College  
**Title:** “Anabaptists Engaging Traditions: A Way Beyond Inconsistency”  
**Abstract:** Anabaptists have a checkered history of engaging other theological traditions. Everything from outspoken rejection, intentional avoidance, and even times of uncritical embrace has led to unclear beliefs and practices for Anabaptist engagement with other Christian traditions. How can Anabaptists make sense of this inconsistent practice of theological engagement historically for the task of articulating a robust Anabaptist theology today? Recognizing this inconsistent history, this paper will propose a way forward engaging the work of Alasdair MacIntyre and the practice of discerning engagement within a tradition.

**Presenter:** Stephanie Chandler Burns, Conrad Grebel University College, University of Waterloo  
**Title:** “Anabaptist-Queer Theology: An Endeavour in Breaking Binaries”  
**Abstract:** Where queer theology focuses on doing theology from a particular context and social location, and attempts to break with binary understandings of the gender, the world, and theology, Anabaptist/Mennonite theology has long bridged binaries, notably through the simultaneous bridging and rejecting of both Protestant and Catholic tradition. This paper will explore the notion that Anabaptist/Mennonite theology can, in fact, be a form of queer theology, and explore the ways that such an Anabaptist-Queer Theology can be redemptive for queer-identified Mennonites, fulfilling a new and radical mandate of our traditionally peace-focused theology.

**Lunch in Dining Hall, 1st floor (12:00 – 1:30 p.m.)**
Afternoon Plenary #1 (1:30 – 3:00 p.m.)

Presenter: Brian Cooper, Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary
Title: “Jesus, Justice, and Jury Duty: 16th Century Anabaptist Engagement with the State”
Abstract: The earliest Anabaptists attempted to bridge a seemingly impassible divide between faithfulness to Christ and citizenship in a fallen civil order. Rejected as not only heretics and criminals, they appealed for religious toleration using arguments that bore a resemblance to those coming from the medieval natural law tradition. Using this epistemological framework, Anabaptist leaders such as Balthasar Hubmaier, Pilgram Marpeck, and Menno Simons were able to differentiate between the roles of church and state and make a case for limited participation by Christians in secular affairs.

Presenter: Dorothy M. Peters, Trinity Western University
Title: “Bible and Interpretation as Conversation: The Essenes of the Dead Sea Scrolls and 16th Century Anabaptists”
Abstract: The Essenes and the 16th c. Anabaptists valued community life, an intimate spirituality, and a righteous walk in the Way. Both were (primarily) peaceful minority movements protesting a violent religious majority. Within both, divine revelation could be communicated through dreams and visions, mystical reflection, contemporized biblical prophecy, and inspired teachers. However, they were most predominantly “biblicists” at a time when their scriptural “canon” was in flux. Biblical figures like Enoch, Noah, Abraham, David, and the Suffering Servant were re-formed into archetypes that reflected community ideals. This comparison between the hermeneutical practices of two movements offers timely and hopeful ways forward in biblical interpretation today.

Refreshment Break (3:00 – 3:30 p.m.)

Afternoon Plenary #2 (3:30 – 5:00 p.m.)

Presenter: R. Bruce Yoder, Mennonite Mission Network
Title: “Dialogue as Theological/Missiological Method: Mennonite Missionaries and West African Indigenous Churches”
Abstract: This paper mines the history of one Mennonite mission agency to provide historical context and precedent for an approach of theological discernment among streams of the worldwide Anabaptist movement. Over the twentieth century Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities came to value the construction of local theologies among its partner churches, raising the question of the relative importance of North American theological assumptions for other contexts. The mission developed an approach of “dialogue” to allow missionaries to affirm both their Believers Church convictions and the indigenous theology of their African partners. This paper outlines the emergence of this approach.
**Presenters:** Brad Sumner, Tyler Harper & David McFarland, Jericho Ridge Community Church  

**Title:** “Borrowed or Stolen: The Challenges That Uncritical Adoption of Contemporary Expressions of Neo-Reformed Theology Pose to Anabaptist-Mennonite Theological Identity in the Twenty-First Century”  

**Abstract:** Anabaptist-Mennonite theological methods and Reformed theology have a long history of interlocution. They also each have distinctive contours, some of which have not been seen as classically compatible. As historical and contemporary cross-pollination has increased, it has created incredibly rich and healthy interactions and learning. Where practiced uncritically, however, it can lead to an erosion in core identity and unique contributions. This paper explores both conscious and unconscious adoptions of current expressions of neo-Reformed theology and their impact and possible erosion of the core distinctives to an historic Mennonite-Anabaptist way of doing theology in the twenty-first century.