

Liturgy and the transformation of Creation and Community

Worship and celebrating the liturgy can be understood as a public transformational act with political and ecological connotations, a reconstruction of community and restoration of creation. Essential to such an understanding is a broadened view of symbolic representation, including body, remembrance and action. Starting from Alexander Schmemmann's view of the world as sacrament, the workshop will look at the manifold relations between the liturgy and the world in which it is celebrated as well as search for forms of liturgy that enhance such a transformational understanding of liturgy.

Introduction:

Before beginning:

Just look around you. Recognize who is gathered here. Need not say anything but look at each other. Imagine: what worlds come together with all of you present here? What do you see? Smell? Hear?

What is the end of worship? "What do we actually do when we gather for worship, and why do we do it?" a young man from our congregation asked me some months ago, as we were preparing an evening service. How would you answer the question? One indicator may be: when you gather as the Church in your country, culture, what is your first act of worship? [5 minutes of exchange, then hear some answers that were surprising]. Will come back to this later

End of Worship: A broad answer might be given: to spend a time dedicated to God and his relationship to us and the world: be remembered of who God is an express that in songs and prayers of praise. To be remembered who we are. Bring before God our gratitude and our laments and sorrows. Confess, receive forgiveness and being renewed to go out once more as his witnesses. Pray for the wellbeing of the world and of his church. Listen to what God is speaking through stories in the Bible and stories of our lives. Seek for a new orientation, counsel and comfort in the presence of His spirit, and the fellowship wrought by the Spirit of Christ. The end of worship than would be to be rooted again in the life of God, so that we can live as such a fellowship in the world as we go again into our activities.

I would not negate even one of these aspects. And I strongly believe that the end of worship is the end of worship: to be sent out into the world from which we came in. James K. A. Smith tells about the many strategies by which he as a child tried to shorten time, eagerly waiting for the end when he could rush downstairs and finally enjoying the cookies or a community meal. It was a time of waiting loaded with an inward eagerness for that which would come after. Only later he realized that he was not so wrong about it. The meeting-point of world within and world without at the end of worship might be indeed called the goal or end of worship.

But I also feel uneasy about some points: If we think about meeting God in the terms I mentioned, what does this do to the world at large? I hope anyone would agree that an encounter with God, community with God *does not only occur* during the gathering of God's

church for worship. Does it not foster a view of the Spiritual which downgrades the meaning of the material aspects of creation, and also of our work in and with that creation, a world shaped by our fellow human beings and many non-human creatures and forces if we think of encountering God outside of that? If we think of worship in Church as an intensified encounter with God, is then the world outside not less so a place of a God-encounter, or even a place of which we think that it draws us away from the presence of God? I hope no one here would go as far as to deny the presence of God in this world outside of his worshipping community. But if we celebrate our worship as mainly a happening between us gathered and God, this worship makes it difficult to believe in God's presence in really all of God's creation and foster tendencies that believe God present more in terms of feelings, thoughts, emotions. If that is so, it inevitably makes the rest of creation less important.

Alexander Schmemmann's vision of the world as sacrament counters this understanding, both of worship and of the reality of the Spiritual in the world. And I believe that we need to hear this call.

- In order to know our place in the world and before God, we do not only need to know ourselves but also the nature of the world. We often assume this as a given. If the world, also in its material aspects, is not considered as to matter to our worship, we might easily fail to recognize that we actually adopt a secular view of the world quite independent of any relation between God and his creation. That would lead in the end to the practical assumption that God did not really give his life for the life *of the world* but only of us humans.
- We only realize how fatal the destruction of our so called "environment" is, of air, forests, water and the riches of the earth, when we do not consider them only as resources for our human endeavors but actually as means of community, as meeting places with God. It not just care for what is entrusted to us. If we endanger it, we also endanger the means of community with God.
- Even the world as social constructions should not be exempt from that. It is not just about justice for all (I wish it seriously were that) but more: the places where we encounter Christ. We might extend Matthew 25,40: Encountering Christ in visiting those in prison means that also our systems of justice have a potential to being a place of God-encounter; meeting Him in the sick concerns our health systems; the naked our economical systems, the foreigners our states with their borders. It is not just individual encounters that have the potential for being a sacrament, a place and means of fellowship with God but also the systems in which these encounters are embedded.
- And finally it is most crucial to the Church being really in the world. If the dual of a world outside which we leave to worship and re-enter after worship – the outside world – and the world inside, the world of God-encounter, gathered church – if that inside-outside difference is one of secular world outside and a God-world inside, worship might do something to us, but not much to the world. And leaving and being sent might mean that we somehow have to translate that experience into a life in the secular world, be it with new morals or a changed attitude towards our fellow men and women in the world and maybe the world as such. But the church is called to a transformative existence in the whole world. So what I am looking for, and what Schmemmann portrays is a worship that transforms the world in all its aspects, including us. So that we go forth from the gathering of worship as transformed witnesses of the Kingdom of God, into a transformed world of which we have experienced that it is destined to be the presence of the Kingdom of God.

So what I would like to do in this workshop is 3 things:

- Explore a vision of the world as sacrament
- Explore a vision of worship that corresponds to such a world
- Find ways of how we concretely could make our worship a bit more like that

One more preliminary remark: Alexander Schmemmann: He was a theologian rooted in the Russian-Orthodox church. Born 1921 as his parents had to flee out of revolutionary Russia (his father had been in the services of the Tsar), he grew up in the Russian diaspora of Paris. During WWII he studied theology at the St-Sergius Institut and afterwards became one of his teachers. He emigrated to the US early 1950 to teach at the St Vladimirs Seminary in New York. He was the dean of this institute for more than 30 years. Growing up second generation immigrant, he started out with questions about the mission of orthodoxy in the western world and sought to find an expression of orthodoxy that was not bound to eastern cultures, and addressing the western world in such terms that it could understand its truth as concerning its culture. In this endeavor to give back the orthodox church its missional drive, one of his main features was to present orthodoxy as a challenge to any form of secularism. He always addressed the orthodox community as well as the world at large, was in conversation with many intellectuals and church leaders, in- and outside of orthodoxy. It was this missional intent that stood behind his efforts to lead the many orthodox administrations present in the USA and Canada – 2 Russian-Orthodox, Greek-Orthodox, Serbian, and many more – under one roof of the Orthodox Church in America. It is in the context of this missionally motivated battle against secularism that he developed his vision of the world as sacrament.

Now I am not orthodox, but I found the encounter with orthodoxy extremely enriching in challenging some dualistic assumptions in which I was caught up. I suspect that these assumptions are also alive in many mennonite churches and their understanding of worship. My intent is to use Schmemmann's vision for us to rethink and even re-live our worship in a different way.

A) World as Sacrament

1. The Kingdom of God: The renewal of creation, the future of this world, not another world

We agree: this world is not in the state in which God meant it to be God's creation. There are two ways of stating this:

- We could say: it is not anymore what is once was, it lost its ideal state. Or we can say: It is not yet what it is meant to be, waiting for its final completion.
- In the first case (not anymore), we then look at a state in the beginning, a pristine state of the world from which we have fallen. We then look at accounts of paradise. But then what about time? What about the ability of men and the world to evolve, to become something it was not already in the beginning? What about history? Is it all a mistake? Does this view really take in account the human capacities and the capacity of the world?
- Schmemmann's teacher Sergeij Bulgakov made a very bold statement countering such a view. He says that the world is God in becoming. There are at least two foundations to this claim:

- the notion of **theosis** that is central to orthodox soteriology. God's intent with man is that man is called to be deified: become the full bearer of the glory of God as Christ was one with God. To be Christ-like is not just a matter of living *in the same kind of attitude* as Christ. In Christ, not only the true character of God is revealed but also the destiny of man: He is not only truly human but the true human indeed. God became man in order to open the way to full unity with God. [Of course man remains distinct from God; but we can also say that God is not fully Whom God meant to be without man being in that unity which was fulfilled in Christ]. So God did not only become man to free the world from sin, but to give himself into creation, *to give his life as the life of the world*.
- The renewal of creation: it is not a mere restoration but also the end of history: It is not God destroying earth because of sin – God actually already made a covenant with Noah that he would not do that – nor is it creating an alternative earth and heaven. The renewal of creation is in fact also the goal and end of creation. A new earth and a new heaven, or doing away with heaven and earth as we find it in apocalyptic images *means a transformation of the world in which heaven and earth find to a new unity*. It is 1 Kor 15:28 and Ephesians 1:23 that are the leading images: the goal of creation is that **God is all in all**.
- For Bulgakov, it is the position of man, his role in creation that is mediating this unity with God: through men's unity with God and man's living in creation according to God's calling that God will be all in all.
- Schmemmann basically takes over this view of the world being God in becoming although he never uses these terms and also rejects Bulgakov's teaching of Sophia. But more important is another difference: In his later writings it becomes more and more clear that if we are to find the true nature of the world, we should not look at original creation but at its fulfillment. And that is what was revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Christ. In some ways we can say that the world in Christ became what it was meant to be. But in Schmemmann's understanding of time, this also means that it always was what it was to become: what something is, is not determined by its origin nor by its contemporary state but by its end, the fulfillment of time. We do not grow out of our past, like a field of wheat grows out of what is sown, as if what it will become was already contained and determined in the grain. If we look at the world at large, including the history and man's activity, shaping this world, our outlook changes: we are drawn by what we will become into that future. ***The eschatological future of the world determines what it is.*** This is a radical turn that takes the resurrection of Christ as the starting point. It reveals the true human but also the eschatological fulfillment of the world.

2. Christ the revealer and fulfillment of creation in its true nature

- Here now comes the central difference which is also one of the pillars of Schmemmann's theology: The eschatological transformation of the world happened in and through the life of Jesus Christ. And this is focused in Christ's words when he pointed to bread and wine and said: This is my body, this is my blood: my life, the life of God present in creation. He revealed the real nature of the world: filled with the presence of God, the Spirit Creator present in God's gift. As if beneath the life of creation, of water and earth, of air and plants and human life was pulsating a deeper life that would not die with death. In this act which we call the institution of the Lords Supper or Eucharist, Christ did not do something to the bread (changing its substance into his flesh) nor appoint it as a random pointer to something else (so that we might be reminded of his death on the cross.) *Schmemmann takes these words literally, pointing to the elements of bread and wine and showing them for what they are in their own being: as bread and wine, as creation given by God, harvested by man, backed into bread: as such, in what they are, they are filled with the life of God, the means of by which man can enter into communion with God. So Schmemmann gives the material world, the non-human creation a much higher value than his teacher Bulgakov: The creation in itself is the sacrament by which man can enter into communion with God.*
- To be sacrament, the means of communion with God, is then the real nature of the world. The true response to that for man is to be thankful. Thankfulness, giving thanks means recognizing the world for what it is in vision of what it will be. And that future of the world entered the world not only in the life of Jesus Christ but also in the resurrection of Christ. The risen Christ as He is present in the body of the worshipping Church, makes Himself present in this body of worshippers and brings with Him the world as it will be.
- Some precisions must be made: Schmemmann's vision of the world as sacrament is not a naive view of creation that sees it as an eternal beauty of sunset, wind in grass or snow-covered mountains. He recognizes that the world in its state today is not easily recognized as this presence of God's Kingdom. He recognizes that the world as a whole needs to be transformed. That this vision of the world where God is all in all is a vision of the future of the world that is not yet the state of this world.
- But he is emphasizing that on one hand, every way to live in the world that does not receive it as a sacrament, as a means of the presence of God giving God's life to the world – makes of the world something less than what it is. And this *less* is not just a little backslide from which we might easily recover. It turns loose all the powers of a world that seeks to affirm its own independence of God, becoming a God in itself, demonic powers of destruction that deform the world substantially in something against its own being and nature.
- Sin is nothing less than the denial of the world being God's sacrament, revealed fully in its nature *when it kills the one man and one God who revealed the true nature of the world.* The resurrection shows who was right in this battle: He Who said "This bread, this is my body; this wine, this is my blood, my life given for the life of the World."
- But the eschatological reality of the world revealed in Christ is not something we only wait for at the end of times when what was realized in Christ in His resurrection will be realized for the whole world. As it was lived and made real and present in the life of Christ, in his teaching, healing and liberating of those possessed by the unleashed powers of this world – so this life is made present by the body of Christ, His Church that enters in worship into that life.

- Worship then is this: Entering into a life and a World where the World is transformed into what it is fully: sacrament of God.

3. The Spiritual / The transcendent: Future of this World

- This vision of the world has consequences for the perception of the Spiritual and also the transcendence of God
- Of course God as the creator remains transcendent to his creation. It is not the world in itself that becomes God, even in its full reality when God will be all in all: It is still "only" means of community with him, experience of his life and presence. It is sacrament when it serves for the presenting of the creator but it does *not* take God's place.

But in terms of our relationship to God, it is the world that is given us as a means of prayer. It is not withdrawal from the world into some kind of inwardness or otherworldly-ness that thinks it can do without this world here in its broad and messy reality, and experience God as the totally Other that only appears when we get free of all outward appearances. When we withdraw into utter silence and empty pure presence of that which is not of this world. Of course we might drawn up in that reduced vision of the world that we need to step back, stop using the world in this sinful way (sinful now in the broad term as a reduction of its true nature). But it is only to receive the same world in a new way, to encounter God within it, not in the withdrawal. Here I come to the beginning: The worshiping Church withdraws from this world in order to be sent in a renewed world, itself being renewed as well.

- Schmemmann's vision of the World as Sacrament is *an answer to materialism*, be it in its reductionistic form that says that all reality is only material and perceiving the spirit only as a function of the material. But even more so against that more common form that divides the material realm from the spiritual world, each being something of its own. He agrees with reductionistic materialism in the fact that we cannot perceive spiritual reality without material existence. But he denies the approach that the world can be fully understood by itself, without perceiving it as gift of the creator by which God gives Godself into the world. But the spiritual should not be perceived as something opposed to the material, an existence that remains when the material world falls away. ***We can speak of the Spiritual only as that which will be fully present in the eschatic world***, the world of God to come, fully transformed into the Kingdom of God. If it is the Spirit of God that makes present among us the risen Christ, it is this world that she brings with her into the present. So it is not the natural against the supernatural, not the secular against the sacred, the profane against the holy. All these distinctions fall short if they do not carry with them the key element, that one is destined to be transformed into the other, and that this transformation is present where the Spirit of God is at work.
- What then about demonic realities? Spiritual forces that occupy, captivate, take hold of God's creation against God's will and often against the will of the creatures they captivate? We perceive these forces just as merely spiritual that are opposed to the material and appear as something foreign to the creature they occupy. It is one of the characteristics of the demonic that is irrational and therefore we should be very careful. It does not have its place in the order of creation and should therefore not be integrated into a consistent vision of the world. But in a preliminary, cautious way one might say that it is just that: ***a distortion of the Spiritual that does not appear in the essence of the creature, in what it is as such, but as something that dissociates itself from the nature of the being***. An example: The Spirit of God

reveals water for what it is: life-giving, cleansing, and strengthens it into its reality in the Kingdom of God where the life it gives is enduring, where the cleansing touches the whole of man. But water also destroys and in very brutal ways makes room for new things. Even this power may be transformed – as the transformation of this world into the Kingdom of God is *not only a rearrangement* of all there is, but involves also destruction of what is not brought into validity. But there are other ways in which water may carry destruction which are not of its own essence. Signs of it we may see in pollution. But more so as through our misuse it loses its salvific life-forms, becomes a reason for economic wars, expression of injustice as we in the West flush purest water down our toilets and water our lawns while others die because they have only access to polluted water. In extreme forms we might even perceive the spiritual destructive force as something by itself, which might be conceived as a personalized form of our destructive use of the means that were given us as the life-giving source of God's life.

B) Transformative Worship:

If the worshipping church is indeed the body which enters into the presence of the risen Christ, whose presence transforms it into the experience of the renewed world that came to its end in Christ – then worship carries an enormous promise with itself but also an enormous claim. It is a symbolic gathering: it does not turn the whole world into the Kingdom of God. But it is not only symbolic in a way that might say “not real” or something that can only be perceived by our minds, standing for something that it is not actually. If I speak of worship really being transformative as a symbolic gathering, I mean by symbolic in a more original sense: drawing together two or more realities. *Symballo*, throw things together into one. Bringing this world together with the world to come. It remains symbolic in a sense that not all of creation is transformed: it stands for something still to come, and yet is that which is still to come. And more: at the end stands our knowledge of the world to come, which enables us to see the world outside as well in the light of what it is to become.

So there are three aspects:

1. How is the world become present in our gathering?
2. What is to say about worship as a transformative process? What is its relation to time?
3. What do we have to say about the sending into the world?

1. Presence of the World in Worship: body, gift and memory: and the presence of Christ

- body:
 - What is the first act of worship? What did you mention? Entering the building? Music that indicates the beginning, maybe making a smooth transition? A votum: We celebrate this worship in the name of God the father, God the son and God the Holy Spirit? Entering of choir or clergy?
 - One answer that looks back to my childhood may be: Sunday worship began with the weekly bath. It was a weekly ritual that sometime on Saturday afternoon or evening, all of us six children had to take a bath. The smell of the soap-water filled the house, and of course you would take that bath only after work was done. It was a kind of a seal, a transition into the world of Sunday to come. You would *not* go outside to play and get dirty or sweaty after that. I was not aware of it then, but I think that this ritual has shaped my understanding of baptism much more than any teaching, both with its positive connotations – entering the Lord's Day to come, and its more problematic – remaining pure and separate ever afterwards. Later this ritual faded, as daily showers replaced the weekly bath, and going out on Saturday nights made it a bit more difficult. But I met something related when I lived with Russian-Orthodox friends. All-Night Vigil or a combination of Vespers and Matins, a service on Saturday evening that precedes the eucharistic Divine Liturgy of Sunday. The students would not take communion on Sunday if they had not participated in all-night vigil before, part of which was an opportunity for confession. And they would fast until the end of the Divine Liturgy. Of this our weekly bath may appear as a blurred pre-shadow, but I still knew what it felt like, beginning worship with a preparation after which you went to sleep and which you carried with you as you rose for worship next morning.
 - And then getting up and dressing: some dress differently for a Sunday service, others do not. But with whatever I put on, something is with me that points to

other realities in the world. Clothing may be an expression of status: unity of the church does not leave behind differences: *what matters, is what happens to those differences present in the gathering*. But with clothing I also take with me the work of many others: as God made clothing for Adam and Eve as they had to leave the Garden, so still people all around the world make clothing for me. Maybe you even know these people if the fabric has been made locally. But many of us don't: And of course, all the questions of just economics enter with it. The shirt I bought at an incredibly low price maybe sewn by some child in India is worshipping with me. And her work is present as well. Worship as giving thanks? It is not so easy as we might first have thought.

- And then: leaving the house, cycling to church. Getting up on that day is different and yet the same as every morning. It is different by what I get up for. So this is one way the world is present: our bodily presence. It makes a difference: we are not just present with others in thought, we actually stand and sit together: Through our bodies enters the world. We enter it with our roles: as Fathers, lawyers, teachers, sons, homeless, without regular income. But we do not come to exercise these roles: with them we become the body of Christ, and yet something is happening to the world in which we play these roles.
 - Worship then begins somewhere in the world, with our bodies, and leaving the common world of the week, ***yet taking it with us as well***.
 - Gift:
 - With our gathering in many forms we bring ourselves as a gift. We might say that we come to be there for God through giving ourselves to the others. This might not easily be perceived in today's forms of worship. In large gatherings I might not even know the ones standing or sitting next to me. I might certainly not do anything significant to them as we sing together, pray and listen together. If this is so that which happens through worship might well make us aware that even this individualistic standing next to each other needs transformation for us to become the body of Christ. For if we are to be that, we come as members of the one body with gifts to serve each other.
 - Coming to worship should actually always be like going to a pot-luck. Bringing something with us that serves the needs of the others. We have indications that very early in the church, in the Pauline churches and those upon which Luke looks back, the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion and the care for each other, the care for the needy were closely intertwined. The gifts for the poor was the stuff from which the bread and wine for communion was taken. It was not just a common meal, it was the care of those who had for those who needed. And everyone had something he could bring, and be it only water that was mixed with the wine.
 - Giving what you brought also means then: I am there in the gifts that are brought to the altar. The bread for which I paid too much or too little, those hors-sole tomatoes that never saw the earth and were harvested by underpaid workers. The wine as gift of joy of so many harvesting in celebration: I am there and with it all that were involved in the making, the circumstances that made them: When they lay there it becomes clear: God's word of creation: It is good! Is not just an indicative judgement. It is a creative act, *making* good of what is this world. But I am leaping forward: what I mean is that we gather the world with our gifts, making it present.
- The worship services I know, also the Orthodox, do not know much of this. Most

have a collection made, but it is hard to see in money the presence of all the weavings of creation. And even if it is placed on the altar: can it still be experienced, seen that the bread we share is part of this donation? That it is me present on that altar? I doubt it. I wish for forms of worship that would make this distribution of gifts more present, tangible again.

- Memory:
 - a last, not less important way we bring the world into the presence of worship gathering, is memory: memory of situations in the week for which I am thankful, of challenges, failures. Memory of people that should be here with us and are not: those who died, the sick, those in prison, those at work, those traveling, those who do not answer the call – the body of Christ as it gathers is never complete.
 - Memory is thus a critique to the world that hinders people from coming to worship. Remembering them is holding them present but in this world a memory is also a sign of absence: I may see them in front of me, I may imagine them very vividly as I may think about the past week: it is only a week presence, weekend by the fact that the past is not here with us in the presence, or only as memory. When we remember loved ones, this ambiguity of memory may be felt very strongly: We see them, almost hear them, and with that their absence is felt even stronger.
 - Nevertheless: The presence of the world through memory is important. The beginning of the liturgy in prayer for the world at large actually is such a gathering of memory, lamenting the absence but also making it present as a preparation for what is to come.

I would like to hear a bit from you about how this gathering happens in your culture. Exchange with someone from another setting. How does this happen? What memories do you usually bring to church? Where do the images come from you are presenting? Is there any form of gift you gather?

2. Liturgy as a transformative process into the future of the one world – time and worship

- This understanding of beginning of worship as the gathering of the world and equally as separation of this world, leaving the world and taking it with us in representing forms, probably does not represent major difficulties for most mennonite ecclesiologies or understandings of the world. It is what follows that will be more stretching. Probably we will have to find other ways to express it because we cannot fully share the assumptions lying beneath this understanding of worship. Still I think that it has a potential to challenge the way we think about the church.
- The Liturgy begins in this world. The gathering of the Church as the world is already part of liturgy, in prayer that remembers the past and the absent members of the body of Christ, both those the baptized and those who would not count themselves (yet) to be members of the body of Christ.
- But as it gathers, the Church enters a process that will lead it to become what it is: the presence of the Kingdom of God in this world. The present time will enter into the future of the world.
- That first asks the question: how do we think of time?
 - If we simply see it as a *line of dots* from past, presence and future, as linear time, then entering into the kingdom of God would mean to enter the future in such a way as to leave the presence and miraculously travel to another point in time.
 - If we think time as opposed to eternity, we might see time of this world as something that continuously changes while eternity is ever the same, a sphere above time under which the flow of time happens, The Kingdom of God, God's rule belongs to the sphere of eternity, it constitutes a viewpoint from which the total of time can be seen as one and therefore could break into this world at any moment in time. It looks at time as *chronos*, into which breaks at a certain point something as *kairos*, a moment when the conditions of the world are right for something to happen.
 - Eternity can also be seen as the fulfilling of time, a kind of pool into which the continuous flow of time is gathered. In entering into this eternity would mean, that the past is not anymore the absent. It would be a kind of healing of the brokenness of time where change and lost would not be restored into a whole where God's eternal love reaches over the gaps of death and lost and will gather all that belongs together. That need not be the end of time but a change of time into a healed time where the past is not necessarily the absent.
 - The ground for such a thinking is the notion in covenant thinking is that God's remembering love gives life to his covenant people, while his forgetting his covenant and his people means destruction and death. We could extend that: Gods remembering is true presence of the life remembered, restoration that is strong. Our remembering would only be a shadow of that, not really making present, while God's remembrance literally re-members time, gathers time and history together into God's presence.
 - We may read the prayer of the criminal on the cross in that way: "Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answer is: "Truly, today you will be with me in Paradise." Jesus' remembering is presenting the criminal, giving him a future that heals that broken life.

- Time and the future of the world is then not only a line of dots, it also describes the conditions of existence in the world. A bit as we say: "In times like these..." This is not just the difference between *kairos* and *chronos*, but a different angle: we may look at this world and see conditions for existence changing, calling it the changing of times. One era ends, another begins. The bible speaks of an even more fundamental change and calls it the change of aeons. The old aeon is taken up into the new.
- When we speak of liturgical time, we speak of both these aspects:
 - The gathering of time through the remembering of Christ: Christ remembering his body, God remembering in Christ the world and thus healing time
 - And through this entering into a new aeon, entering new conditions of existence.
- Now this sounds a bit like a science fiction tale. Is it not totally unrealistic to say that what happens in worship is our entering in the future aeon of this world? Has anyone experienced such a thing? We may say: this transformation happens in faith. Faith is the participation in Christ on that renewed world and time.
- But what is faith? We would say far too little if we think of faith as something we only imagine, that happens only in our minds. In faith but not really, we might say. If faith is really participation in the Kingdom come in Christ, it does something to the whole world we live in. Mind, body, my perception of the world and even the world itself. And yet here remains a tension. Of course there remains a difference in realities. Remembering my father who died in liturgy does not make him present in the same way as the fellow brothers and sisters that stand with me in this room. Even if we experience and believe Christ present among us, there remains a difference between symbolic presence and "natural" reality (in lack of a better term). We should not call the symbolic unreal because it is the participation of a reality that has entered the world in Christ, and he being among us brings with him that reality. Nor should we escape into calling imagination the real reality. Faith might be holding together these two ways of experience of two states of the world, and both knowing them for real.
- And yet we should not think of the experience of this symbolic reality as too little. It is the experience of the world to come that makes us the witnesses of this world. We see more, taste more and differently than we would without the knowledge of this world to come. I will go further into this in the next session, where we think about the bodily existence in the world, how we live in and perceive the world by being embodied in that reality. Here I can say that the liturgy is going through the parts of the real story of the world, becoming conscious of where we are going by participation in that end.
- So what are these moves?
 - All is carried by Christ *remembering*: Here we have already mentioned: The whole Liturgy is carried by God remembering us through Christ in the presence of the Spirit. This might be introduced by a *votum* or in the byzantine liturgies by the preparation of the gifts that precede the actual gathering.
 - This embrace by God has its counterpart that shows the nature of participation: it is God that enables us to re-enact this process or story, but we participate actively in it: *we do worship*, and this is not denying but building up on God's carrying our action. In the institution of the Lord's Supper, we are commanded: do this in remembrance of me. We remember Christ, we do it, and in our remembrance His presence is promised. Nevertheless: our remembering is built upon God's remembrance of us, lifting it and strengthening it to God's life-giving remembering God's creation.

- *Epiklesis* is the act that unites both aspects: The prayer that calls down of the Spirit of God both on gifts and community: There is much dispute going between Roman Catholics and Orthodox about the right place for Epiklesis and certainly about whether it is the words of institution, spoken by the priest, or the prayer of Epiklesis that brings about the transformation of the gifts. Schmemmann shows a different aspect. Epiklesis is the *culmination* of something that fills every moment of the process of the Liturgy, the fuel of it all that culminates in the actual prayer but builds up every step the church takes.
- *Representation*:
 - we have already talked about us being represented in what we bring to Church. Concentrated, not only Christ gives Himself in the bread and wine, but we too are present in the gifts as they are the world we have shaped, to the good and to destruction of creation. What we have received has gone through our hands, and as we bring it, we are also represented in the gifts. And as we speak of transformation of the world, it is, when we enter the reality of the new aeon, these gifts are filled with the presence of God's life. Here it is true: this is my body, this is my life given for you. It is us being transformed in the gifts – this reorients us in the world: what we achieve in the world has indeed to do with us, it permeates our presence in the world much longer than we are personally present. This at one hand heightens our responsibility: it is not just something you do, its you becoming present in systems, complicated connections. And it tells us: it will be transformed, redeemed: however good it is what you might do, whatever good it's consequences: it remains the basis for the new aeon, the Kingdom of God, and is not the Kingdom itself.
[This I regard as an immensely important distinction and message in the midst of all these totalitarian moves in lived religion today: nothing what we do can bring the rule of God into this world. But what we do might be dignified to become the means of His presence and being transformed into the new world.]
 - a second representation that eludes us often in the non-traditional forms of worship is the representation of Christ through the priest. We put much emphases on the fact that we are all priests and priestesses, we all represent Christ to each other in some way and thus build the body of Christ together. But that is only one half of the picture. Christ is also the one Who stands over against us, meets us as the One whom we are not yet, the reality of the new Kingdom that is for us still to come. In this way, the priest that stands in front of the Church can be seen as an eschatological prefiguration of the Church, or of Christ to come towards us. But in the same way, the priest is also the representation of the people in one person, just as Christ took up humanity and brought it fully in God's presence, united us in His one person to God. *And in fact, old liturgies enact that.* When a bishop is celebrating in a community, it is still seen, and the St. James Liturgy that reflects pre-byzantine forms, makes it better visible. At the beginning, the priest stands among the people gathered. He (at least the bishop is) is then clothed by the people, ordained by the people. He is first one among them before he is singled out to be both representative of people and Christ. [It is in fact more fitting to his role if he celebrates with his back towards the people, indicating that he stands with and for them, and not as Vatican II changed it, facing towards the people.]
In the Reformed tradition we have focused this double role in the preacher: He brings the Word of God to the community but is at the same time part of that

community. In the word, Christ Himself makes himself present, as Luther understands, and the preacher both carries and receives this word.

- *Entrance of the Word of God*: The world remembered and represented is here to be met by the word of God. Readings, stories, psalms and teachings: it is here centrally that the story of the world is retold. It is making the life of Christ present for this world gathered, and us being brought into his fellowship. Since this in most reformed traditions is most prominent part, I keep it short.
- *Giving Thanks and Repentance*
There might be different places for giving thanks and confession of guilt, repentance and word of renewal. It follows the gathering of the world, is part of remembrance, but it now happens in the light of the presence of the word of God, of meeting with Christ. Giving thanks might be seen as bringing the world remembered. But in order to be giving thanks for the right things in the right way, there already needs to be a transformation of that memory. We are to see the world in new ways. And therefore it might be adequate to have at least two parts. Certainly the Eucharistic prayer follows the Gospel: only after Christ revealing us the world as it is, we can follow Him in giving thanks. And also repentance: many liturgies have it in the beginning, seeing it as a precondition to entering into the new aeon. But to truly repent we need to see ourselves in the light of God, God's free grace. We need to experience the real story of the world in order to see where we have erred. So it might well be only after the Gospels or a sermon. On the other hand, the focus of confession is the word of forgiveness, and that stands at the beginning. Laying down what weights us down and receiving the promise that despite all our failures God is bringing God's story with the world to His end, this belongs to a starting point of service. Therefore: be aware of the focus and the context in the liturgy when you decide where to put it. Part of this, as well as being the Word of God entering, might be retelling our life-stories. Not just stating what I learned from the preaching or the encounter with the Gospel. But how do I actually see the world differently through it? How do I rearrange my story? How would I re-tell it towards a reset end?
- *The reconstruction of social unity of the body*:
 - We do not come to church to exercise our social roles, although we come with them. Gathering in the church is deconstructing these roles, taking apart the automatism of our systems shaping the world. We are stopping. We do not gather as members of our natural families. These ties are somewhat relativized or even broken down. Baptism is an act that criticizes the natural bonds, social bonds of family and economic, political social constructs. It is first of all an *other* body that is constructed here.
 - But in order to be concrete reshaping, our gatherings should also be a reconstruction on the social realm. I find this most difficult in common worship settings. There used to be the kiss of peace: kissing a stranger and declaring him brother or sister might be a strong sign. When the worship gathering also provided the help for the poor, when it was an actual sharing, this was much stronger visible. Maybe in other parts of the world this is still more present. I have heard of churches where the collection works both ways. First, all give. In a second round, you receive what you need.
 - Important is that this is done before the actual communion: The celebration of the eschatic meal takes place in the new community. Of course, it is built up by Christ. But the meal we share is already the enjoyment of this new world. In

Orthodox understanding, the last parts of the Liturgy take place in the New Aeon, we actually reach completion of the process. It emphasizes that the renewal of creation happens in the context of the renewal of our community, in the reconstruction of economic, political, ecological relations in the world. But again we must remember: these are not independent preconditions. The fulfillment reached in the communion of Eucharist flows “backwards” into the moments that precede it, thus being the moment that makes possible the one that precedes it.

- When we then think of Liturgy of Worship, we think on one hand of a *process* that moves forward step to step, each establishing its own reality that is constituted from the end it will reach. But it is at the same time also a weaving of a story that moves forward and backwards, stretching threads in between the many elements, reinterpreting continuously what was before and will come. While process is more of a line, story is more of a woven net.

3. Sending: transformed community in a transformed world – and yet waiting for the kingdom to come

- It will come as no surprise that the last aspect of worship is not limited to the last section of the time together. Missa, Mission, that is already present when we leave our homes to gather for worship. The leaving is for the good of the world we live in, not its rejection or downgrading. We leave to recognize again how much it matters, how important and of what importance and weight our daily life is. It is the reason, the end of the gathering: maybe even starting with the fellowship, coffee and cookies afterwards where the retelling of our lives might continue. It is certainly part of the sermon, seeking for an incarnation, making flesh the Word in this culture, this place, this neighborhood.
- Schmemmann means that we will not only see the world in a different light because we have seen it in the light of Christ. He is convinced that we will see the same light in the world shining through its appearances. The reign of God, also in this time and aeon, is not limited to the church and its gathering. But it is not fully visible in the world at large nor has the transformation of the world come to its end. But Christ is risen into this world and its realities! He remains in His Spirit present as the life of life itself.
- So the mission of the Church is on one hand telling about the experience of liturgical fulfillment of the world. Yes, it is pointing out that transformation is needed, that we are not there yet. This is a strong witness against any movement that claims to have found the final solution, the absolute expression of truth, the normative way of life that cannot be disputed anymore. As much as a culture might have grown out of the life of the church in its midst, as much as it has been shaped by the positive witness of the world to come – that world of the Kingdom is still to come and never fully present in this world until the end of time has been reached.
- But is more: It is also pointing to the light and life of God present in this world. It is recognizing movements towards the reconstruction of the world we just have celebrated. It is making way for them, favoring their ways over other alternatives
- One very moving example of this I find in the celebration of Epiphany by the Russian-Orthodox: It is the feast of the baptism of Christ. The salvation of the world entered water. There are many interpretations of this but one I like is that he restored water to its true destiny: Life-Giver, cleanser – and also lifted it up to be this in a full way of giving life lasting, rendering purity to the whole human, not merely outwardly. Of

course this is not happening without the unity with faith. But it is not faith doing the real thing while water is a merely an outward sign. It is itself part of salvation and saving.

- That certainly will lead us to a different way of looking at “Water-Resources”. In the ritual of Epiphany, this is visible: the priest immerses a cross into open water, both blessing the water and declaring it blessed. People jump in afterwards, quite spectacular in the beginning of January somewhere in Siberia. But the same ritual is happening in large cities, the cross is immersed into polluted water, carrying heavy ships with goods from all over the world. Salvific water? Jumping in to get rid of your sin? It suddenly becomes a question mark and a prophecy that calls to change. It highlights that caring for water is not only a social matter, caring for the environment because our live depends on it. It shows: our live depends on it in a much more comprehensive way, as we need it to be the means of our salvation, the means to celebrate our giving thanks to God, the means of community with God.

C) Mennonite worship: Sacramental transformation?

- Where do your forms of worship resonate with the presented vision?
- Where do you see obstacles to adopt such a view?
- Presence of the Spirit in the world as the life of life – in all aspects of world: agreements and obstacles?
- What images would you use to speak about the presence of the Spirit in this world, that would help us to overcome our disembodied, de-materialized conceptions of the Spiritual?

Jürg Bräker, 07/24/2015