



**CANADIAN CONFERENCE**  
of Mennonite Brethren Churches

ARTICLE 2 [MB Confession of Faith]

# Revelation of God

## PASTORAL APPLICATION

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We confess that God has revealed the truth about Himself to all people. God began by revealing Himself through creation. Just as we learn about an artist from her work, we learn about God through creation. If creation was all we had, we would not know about God's mighty acts of salvation: the incarnation, the cross, the resurrection, the ascension, Pentecost, the Parousia (Christ's second coming). If creation is a good but incomplete picture, the Scriptures guide us to a more complete knowledge of God and open to us a relationship with Jesus as the fullness of God's revelation.

Mennonite Brethren have long been known as people of the book. As a church our focus has not been on creedal statements but on the study of Scripture. We try to be people of the Word because we believe that in the Scriptures God has revealed His heart to us. The oft-repeated phrase, "What does the Bible say?" is understood to be the dynamic equivalent of the question, "What is God telling us about how to live?" Historically Mennonite Brethren at their best have lived with the passion of the early Anabaptist reformers, the passion that right understanding must be followed by obedience. Although Mennonite Brethren have not been unaware of more personal, subjective communication from God, these insights of illumination are characteristically checked with Scripture and with the community of believers. The written Word of God is accepted as inspired and as the authoritative guide for faith and practice.

### Public Scripture Reading

Getting to know God's heart through Scripture will help us become grounded in God and in faith. At the heart of God's revelation is an invitation to a special relationship with God. The Holy Spirit uses the Scriptures to build us up in faith and to expose things in our lives that need change.

The Lord Jesus made the reading and interpretation of Scripture the starting point of his ministry. As a boy in the temple, Jesus was disputing with the teachers of the law about its interpretation (Luke 2:46-49). As he opened his public ministry in the synagogue, Jesus interpreted his mission by reading Isaiah 61 (Luke 4:18-19). On that occasion Jesus was concerned not only with the reading of the text but with its dynamic fulfillment in his ministry. In his disputes with the Pharisees and priests, Jesus showed great facility with the Hebrew Scriptures. His ministry was capped by a day-long walk with two disciples in which Jesus used Moses and the prophets to interpret his life. Jesus modeled the centrality of Scripture in community life and worship.

The New Testament church made the reading and interpretation of Scripture a central component of its worship gathering. In the book of Acts the sermons of Peter, Stephen, and Paul are marked by Scriptural citations and interpretation. The believers at Berea received special commendation for their eager examination of the Hebrew Scriptures (Acts 17:11). In Romans 10:17 Paul reminds us that faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ. The emphasis is placed on hearing the message, a good reminder of the significance of audible expression. In 1 Corinthians 14:26 Paul instructed the Corinthians to be orderly in their worship, using among other liturgical elements "a word of instruction." Based on what we know from contemporary Jewish worship, it seems most likely that the early church depended on individuals to use Scripture readings in their informal liturgy. To the Ephesians Paul wrote that they should sing psalms (Eph 5:19), another creative use of the Bible in worship.

Traditionally Mennonite Brethren have used the liturgical element of Scripture reading to



encourage the broad use of gifts by church members. Often church leaders whose capacity for proclamation is limited have been asked to read the Scriptures and pray. Young persons with potential in biblical proclamation have been invited to make brief comments about the passage they are about to read. With proper instruction Scripture readers can develop gifts in proclaiming the gospel.

Worship planners are encouraged to make Scripture reading a key part of worship gatherings. Lectionary readings are one method being used to introduce the voice of God into congregational worship. The common lectionary, available in the Book of Common Worship, offers a planned three-year reading schedule. Each week readings from the Old Testament, the psalms, the epistles, and the gospels are suggested. Worship leaders may wish to develop their own systematic plan for reading the Scriptures in public worship. Public reading of the Bible is not to be neglected.

### **Personal Scripture Reading**

Personal Bible reading and study are also modeled by biblical figures. Philip the evangelist encountered the Ethiopian court official reading Isaiah and interpreted the text for him (Acts 8:26-40). Paul continued to be a student of the Scriptures, asking from prison for scrolls and parchments (2 Tim. 4:13). Scripture study, meditation, and memory characterized early believers.

Churches should foster the disciplines of Bible reading, study, and memorization. Club programs and Sunday school activities help motivate Bible study. Life-changing Scripture study involves prayerful preparation, careful observation, thoughtful meditation, personal application, and faithful obedience (Rumford 227–232). Daily reading in various parts of the canon, including the gospels, the epistles, the psalms, and so on, should characterize Christians.

### **Translations and Versions**

A proliferation of biblical translations and versions has come to characterize the North American Christian milieu. Confusing arguments about the superiority and “unique authority” of various versions can befuddle many Bible readers. Pastors and congregations help bring unity to their community by choosing to follow a single or primary version for public worship. Students of the Scriptures broaden their understanding by using a variety of versions.

How should one reply to those who insist that the King James Version has greater merit than others? Experience shows that logical argumentation alone may not be enough to counter the strong attachment some have to the King James. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the newer translations benefit from superior textual witnesses, more contemporary language, and greater accessibility for those who are new to Bible study.

The New International Version maintains great popularity among Mennonite Brethren because of its readability. Those who prefer to use inclusive language to refer to humans favor the New Revised Standard Version. The New American Standard Version gives the closest word-for-word translation from the original languages.

### **Words of Knowledge and Prophecy**

Dissatisfaction with the Enlightenment perspective seems to have rekindled interest in the paraphenomenal dimension. People want to know God’s will. They want to be able to anticipate the future. Uncertainty about personal life becomes increasingly unacceptable when science claims to control the public domain, and yet huge paradigm shifts destabilize society. Reliance on supernatural or magical insight increasingly tempts Christians as well.

Several words of caution are in order. First, all claims of prophetic illumination must be consistent with the biblical revelation. No prophetic word can be granted greater authority than the Bible itself (Deut. 13; 18:9-22). Second, the Old Testament prophets in their struggle with false prophets warned against accepting oracles of salvation when God had announced judgment. Similarly, words that promise prosperity and health should be tested with special scrutiny. Third, every word that claims special insight must be tested within the community, especially by local church leaders. Fourth, be aware of the increasing penchant for the magical. Exercise caution in following those who promise insights that avoid



community discernment in struggling to know God's direction.

### **Community Hermeneutics**

The commentary on this article of faith outlines the need for hermeneutical sophistication in understanding the various genres of biblical literature. One will pursue the study of poetry with different exegetical tools than are used with historical literature, for example.

The commentary also insists that interpretation of Scripture is the work of the Holy Spirit within the community of believers. God promises that the Holy Spirit will lead us into all truth. God's followers, guided by the Holy Spirit, enter into active dialogue with others in the Christian community and discover that God reveals the truth, giving people confidence to live in challenging, changing times.

There are several practical implications of this truth. First, teachers who have learned both to discern the will of God and to use exegetical tools that include facility with the original languages are to give leadership in biblical interpretation. Although they have no greater authority because of their academic preparation, the church does well to show them respect as they proclaim the Word of God. Second, when issues become too complex or divisive for a single congregation, we do well to consult with other congregations in our conference. The Acts 15 model is appropriate for us today. Third, mutual discernment may test our unity. In an increasingly diverse world, consensus will not always come quickly. Mutual trust will need to be nurtured especially in times of dissension. Fourth, discussion should be characterized by charity. Fifth, healthy conflict can actually build church health (1 Cor. 11:19).

### **Knowing God**

The Creator invites the created into relationship. As we meet God in the Scriptures we find ourselves—like the women and men whose stories are captured in the Scriptures—invited into an intimate relationship with God. As we get to know the heart of God through Scripture and as we serve God's purposes, we grow in a dynamic relationship with God. Getting to know God changes us. As we get to know God as revealed in the Bible, we develop convictions about the kind of people we ought to be. As we come to understand the Scriptures, we come to care deeply about a daily, moment-by-moment obedience to God. We learn to know God as revealed in creation, the Scriptures, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the Christian community.

### **Bibliography**

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