

November 2015, *Equipping* #161



Willard Metzger  
Executive Director  
Mennonite Church Canada

## The Abandoning God

I have been having some disturbing thoughts lately: thoughts that have made me feel uncomfortable. I have been struggling with the notion that maybe God has abandoned the church. Let me explain.

During the Christendom era the church saw itself as invincible. Entire families attended weekly service together. Our congregations thrived. Our institutions grew. Our influence was obvious. We even had the luxury of competing against ourselves. When looked to for the place of moral authority within society, the church began to consider their activity as the sum of God's activity.

But success has its price. Influence deadens the hearing so that the still quiet voices are no longer distinguishable. Power decreases sensitivity so that the frail and disadvantaged are unintentionally overlooked. When that happens the church subtly loses the character of God.

The current thinking of the church represents a posture of unnecessary fear. In our effort to understand and engage the Post Christendom context we still consider the activity of the church as the primary activity of God. When society rejects the influence of the church our faith is shaken because we feel then that God is vulnerable and fragile.

We feel plagued with guilt for letting God down. But if we have inappropriately taken the role of God, we have self-imposed expectations perhaps never ordained by God.

To be sure, God longs to bring people into the community of the church. However to limit our understanding of God to the context of the church is to constrain God to human thought and ability. It might just be that God is needing to shed the constraints of the church in order to more fully be expressed. This would be disconcerting for the church, but it need not paralyze it with fear. In fact when we acknowledge that God's activity is beyond us, beyond our ability to fully understand; our concept of God is enlarged and our faith becomes enriched. If we need to be able to understand what God is doing than it limits God to what we are able to understand, comprehend, and accept.

It is not easy to admit that we don't have the answer. It is not easy to acknowledge that we do not understand what God is up to.

But maybe if we let go of our demand to understand God, we might begin to see the overwhelming evidence of God at work.

If that is so, then God has not abandoned the church to reject it. God has abandoned the constraints of the church so that we can find God all over again.

My, what a merciful God we serve!!