



## The *Pulpit Exchange*

It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. (1 Corinthians 1:21)  
So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading. (Nehemiah 8:8) Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend. (Proverbs 27:17)

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Issue # 8

### **The Background of the “Garden City Confession of Faith”**

This is a history subject. We hope and trust our leaders have at least an interest in history. I feel rather seriously that every ordained person should have at least a working knowledge of history and have a number of books in their libraries which they can study, and for some, we might say, some recreational reading when the work gets heavy. It is interesting to go back

and read how others faced the issues. There is really not too much new that we face in church life that was not faced or preceded somewhere in church history.

In the subject of this nature, where would we go in our library for a reference in history. There is much related to this subject in books. I would like to suggest a few that I think should be in our

### **IN THIS ISSUE**

#### *History*

**The Background of the  
“Garden City Confession of Faith”** **149**

#### *Book Reprint*

**One Hundred Lessons In Bible Study** **169**

libraries. The Conference history books, for instance, provide glimpses into these subjects and eras of time. Every Conference history book has a few different details and perhaps a little different perspective. A number of those are still available and reprinted. These should be in our libraries. The biographies of past Mennonite leaders, such as *The Life and Times of Daniel Kauffman* by Alice Gingerich (that is a collector's item) and

*Faithfully, George R.* (which is still available). If that one is not in your library, it should be. Every one of these provides a little more detail. There is the first bound volume of *The Sword and Trumpet* perhaps those are not available, and perhaps again some would be here and there. These books broaden our perspective of the issues at hand.

It is not so much what we gain about historical knowledge that increases and helps us to know

Vol. 1 No. 8. The Pulpit Exchange is a compilation of written sermons without commentary, published as often as possible, in the interests of promoting sound preaching in our conservative Anabaptist churches. All sermons have been transcribed and printed with permission. Names are removed so that we can focus on the message and content rather than on a certain speaker or style. (Names will be published in the next issue).

Messages have been selected on the basis of topic rather than the speaker. Messages have been selected from congregations or speakers within the Berea Amish Mennonite Fellowship, Conservative Mennonite Church of Ontario, Conservative Mennonite Churches of York and Adams Counties, PA., Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church, Mennonite Christian Fellowship, Nationwide Fellowship Churches, Ohio Wisler Mennonite, Washington-Franklin Mennonite Conference, and certain selected unaffiliated Amish Mennonite congregations.

We welcome submission of recorded sermons, topics, school meetings, writer's meetings, and special conferences by ministry and laity (where recording is permitted) provided permission has been obtained by the speaker for the recording. Submissions must have a title, the name of the speaker and the congregation responsible for recording (date would be helpful).

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what happens, but as we relate it to the issues of today. I feel in my ministry I have gained a lot from reading, to broaden my perspective on things and issues we face today. As we study history, there is certainly a risk in this. There is some very sensitive ground. We are studying about people and churches of the past, which brings some positive and negative information to the surface. This is true with our subject today, *The Garden City Confession of Faith*.

Perhaps you expected me to come with a completely positive message. I will not do that. I want to stay as positive as possible. I appreciate the Garden City Confession that is included in our discipline booklets. Yet, there is some church history connected to this, and some repercussions, or results, in the following years that we are still seeing and living with and perhaps have separated ourselves from.

I have a few more thoughts in introduction. The Garden City Confession was formulated in 1921 at the Mennonite General Conference session, August 24–26. This conference was held at Garden City, Missouri. This is why it is called the Garden City Confession. If we look in our discipline books (at least in our particular church) most of the

later Mennonite groups do subscribe to this. The official name was *The Christian Fundamentals*. There is a certain reason and body of thought that gives it that name which we will touch on a bit later.

The Confession has eighteen articles of faith. The original work of this confession was done by a committee of the Virginia Conference. It was formulated by J. B. Smith primarily, and George R. Brunk and A. D. Wenger, and was adopted in October 1919 by the Virginia Conference under the title of *The Articles of Faith of the Virginia Conference*. Later it was presented and adopted by the Mennonite General Conference.

I suppose we know what that term means. We are not talking about *General Conference Mennonites*, which was the liberal branch of the Mennonite church that had separated in the mid 1800's. The Mennonite General Conference was an arrangement or organization of what we call the *Old Mennonite Conferences* including most of the Conferences. The Eastern Conferences of Lancaster, Franconia and Washington County Maryland, Franklin County Pennsylvania Conferences did not participate in this, but perhaps sent dele-

gates. However, the influence of that work did reach all the Eastern Conferences.

This Garden City Confession of Faith, was not intended to replace the older confessions which we know as *The Schleithem* (formulated in 1527) and *The Dortrecht* (formulated in 1632). It was rather an effort to unite the Church upon the Anabaptist base related to new issues and challenges. What we are looking at today is really a period of about 50 years of church history from 1880 to about 1930. We will remember this as the period that is called *The Great Awakening*. The repercussions of this and how it affected the Mennonite church came to a head, or a literary conclusion, in the confession of faith that we are looking at.

The issue at hand, in a nutshell, that produced this confession is what is called *The Fundamentalism/Modernism controversy* that had made its inroads into the Mennonite Church. It started in the broader Protestant level, and this confession of faith, was intended to purge the church of a blight, and reunite her in a common faith and practice. This goal, we will sadly note was never fully accomplished, as we read further in history. The primary causes of

this infection have never been fully corrected, but we do consider this confession a noble effort in working with the problem, but it was never fully corrected. As I mentioned, there were broader currents of thought that were moving the Mennonite Church in a different direction. These efforts finally did not completely turn those, and maybe even laid the ground work for future and widespread apostasy which finally mushroomed in the late 40's, 50's and 60's.

Most of us today are part of what we call the revival groups. In this, we want to express our appreciation for the Old Conference efforts in bringing the church through those years. We believe that today we benefit from what has been done in the past and we do not want to be critical about that. The so-called Great Awakening had ushered in a time of change, and in the process of being awakened the church had opened up channels of communication and influence with the Protestant world. This influence came primarily through the realms of mission and education.

The church was beginning to draw from men, and placing men into leadership positions who had been educated in the Protestant universities of the land, especial-

ly universities such as Princeton of New Jersey and Moody Bible Institute of Chicago. As we read history, most of the Prominent leaders of the Great Awakening had been educated there. That perhaps, could have been overcome in itself, but now they were faced with contending with this influence. We know that out of this concern and turmoil, grew the Old Order groups (that is not our subject but which we also have an appreciation for) as the answer or remedy they applied to this era of turmoil. This however, is getting a little ahead of our story.

*The Biblical precedent for confessions of faith.* We also want to look briefly at the historic foundation as it relates to some other confessions of faith. Then I want to look at the surrounding circumstances of the 1921 Garden City Confession. We believe that confessions of faith and statements of the church do have a precedent in the Scripture as found in Acts 15. The Anabaptist church was not credal as such. It did not specialize in statements and confessions. However, they did have a few that were formulated and applied especially to particular problems in uniting the church. This is interesting compared to what is happening today in the

Mennonite church at large, in the new confession of faith that is a joint effort between the General Conference Mennonites and the Mennonite Conferences. It is not really being formulated to correct issues and to unite the church on a Biblical basis, but it is being formed rather to catch up to the apostasy that has saturated it and overcome the Mennonite churches.

In Acts 15 there was a problem at hand and the Church looked at it and dealt with it. They delivered “decrees for to keep,” (Acts 16:4) which we believe does have the weight of a confession of faith or a church discipline as we are looking at it today. “And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. . . But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses. . . And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying,

Men and brethren, hearken unto me. . . But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. . . Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren: And they wrote letters by them after this manner. . . And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem. And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily.” (Acts 15:1, 2, 5, 13, 19, 20, 22; 16:4, 5)

These letters, or these writings that defined a position of the Church were helpful in establishing the Church, and in strengthening the stakes and lengthening the cords. Notice verse 2 especially. There was dissension and disputation. The matter was serious. These things will enter into the Church life. They are not always related to carnality, but because of new issues which arise. This was true in the 1921 Confession of Faith and the other confessions. There were pressing issues at hand and they rec-

ognized this as a problem and worked with it while there was yet hope of unity on the question.

In verse 6, the matter was brought to the ministerial counsel at Jerusalem. In all of our confessions, the Schleithem, the Dortrecht, the Garden City, there was a gathering of the ministry to consider these problems. We see that in verse 6, the apostles and elders gathered for this. In verse 22 it does extend that appoint to the whole Church, but in my understanding this was formulated and decided by the apostles and elders, and the whole church was satisfied with the decision. They brought it before the counsel. For instance, in Dortrecht, Holland there were fifty-one ministry who met to formulate and approve that confession of faith.

Notice in verse 22 and verse 31 the Church was satisfied and unified. It is important that in all of our ministerial work and decision that the church is satisfied. This does not say that we should compromise, but we do need to have a way to have the church satisfied and at peace. We believe that in the context of a spiritual church setting this can happen when the ministry has the cause of the church at their heart and the church wants what is right. This is a combination that

can send peace and satisfaction throughout the churches.

We believe these confessions have helped to do that as we have studied them in history. Then in Acts 16:4, the decision or decree was delivered to the church, and not only delivered, but “for to keep.” Again, in history, the most value that has come from these meetings and declarations was that when they went to the churches for to keep. It is relatively easy to draw up statements and confessions and even to preach how it should be, but the keeping part about it involves personal work, discipline and sometimes disassociations, related to individuals and churches. We read this in history as well.

For instance, after the Garden City Confession was adopted, there were a few churches that were dissociated from various Conferences because of their lack of interest and support for the Garden City Confession. We believe this, “for to keep,” is part of the unifying and the interest that we must have in this work. This gives a little background of what I would call the Biblical precedence for this.

*The historic foundation for confessions of faith.* This message is not one on confessions of faith, but we cannot study the Garden City Confession without

looking at the former ones, because the Garden City Confession was not intended to replace the Dortrecht or the Schleithem Confessions. In fact, it says this in our introduction to the Garden City Confession. “This statement we accept as our creed. We also have an appreciation for the Schleithem (1527) and Dortrecht (1632) Confessions of Faith.” There is a larger preamble to this which is not included here, but it specifically said, “It is not to replace, but it is rather to apply the principles of those confessions to the issues that are faced in that present day.”

I mentioned earlier that the Anabaptists were not known as a credal church. The Roman church was known as a church of creeds and statements, but the Anabaptists practiced what they believed rather than specializing in saying or writing what they believed. However, they produced some confessions of faith for particular reasons. When we compile the writings of the Anabaptists (the early Mennonites) there are quite a few. They are however, more related to holy living and practical obedience and applications to the Word, not so much on theological treatises of these subjects. That is one difference between

the Protestant and the Anabaptist view of the Scriptures.

The Schleithem Confession was formulated in 1527. It is interesting as we study the history of this that it was produced because of some differences that had already occurred which caused disturbances. They mention the presence of false brethren. That is only a year after the Anabaptist Church had begun. I quote from *The Doctrines of the Mennonites* by J. C. Wenger. This is not his writing, but is part of the preamble of the Schleithem Confession,

“A very great offense has been introduced by certain false brethren among us, so that some have turned aside from the faith, in the way they intend to practice and observe the freedom of the Spirit and of Christ. But such have missed the truth and to their condemnation are given over to lasciviousness and self-indulgence of the flesh. They think faith and love may do and permit anything and nothing will harm them nor condemn them since they are believers.”

There is more to this, but that is the background of the Schleithem Confession.

It continues at the end,

“Dear Brethren and sisters in the Lord! These are the articles of certain brethren who had

heretofore been in error and who had failed to agree in the true understanding so that many weak consciences were perplexed causing the name of God to be slandered. Therefore, there has been a great need for us to become of one mind in the Lord, which has come to pass. To God be praise and glory.”

Sometimes we think and say that persecution purges the churches (which it does) but in the midst of this centre, and the beginning of persecution, there were many false brethren. The church was faced with the duty of defining the faith and the practice of her people. The Schleithem Confession did this. Sattler of course compiled this and he wrote in his farewell letter before being martyred, “Remember our assembly and strictly follow that which was resolved there.” He wrote that to his people. The Schleithem Confession brought some rest and definition (we might say) of the faith to the early Anabaptist church.

I am simple enough to believe that the repercussions and effects of this Schleithem Confession reach us today. What if the church would not have defined and dealt with the false brethren at that point? Would there be a Mennonite Church today? Only God knows this, but those are

small steps that lead a movement one direction or another. I praise the Lord for the insights and discernments of brethren even at that early time, who were not concerned primarily about the safety of their own bodies but were concerned for the welfare of the Church, and the infant church we might say.

The Dortrecht Confession came from a gathering held at Dort, Holland in 1632. This is why it is called *The Dortrecht Confession*. This confession also was a climax of, and an effort to amend the differences the Flemish and the Frisian elements of the Dutch Mennonites. This had risen to a rather high level of conflict. The original signers were fifty-one ministers. The Reformed ministry of the land protested this extraordinary gathering of Anabaptists (as they called it). They knew that they were meeting and they protested it but the work went through. I want to quote something about this too. This confession was formulated for a reason. This is the postscript to the Dortrecht Confession.

“But finally, alas! There arose disunion amongst them about matters of faith, which so deeply grieved the peaceably disposed amongst them, that they not only thought about means to heal the

schism, and restore union, but did also take the matter in hand . . . [which led to these meetings] . . . Which was then accordingly drawn up, publicly adopted, confirmed, signed, the so much wished for peace obtained, and the light again put on the candlestick, to the honor of the non-resistant Christianity.”

The Dortrecht Confession was accepted in a joint session of the Lancaster and Franconia Conferences in 1725. This also, of course, affected what was happening, and beginning to happen in the Washington/Franklin Conference which was we might say, a child of the Lancaster Conference up to a point.

*The purpose and use of confessions of faith.* This would include the Garden City Confession. I have five reasons listed how they were used and the purpose for them. 1) *As a response to unScriptural influences upon the Church.* All of the confessions of faith before 1950 are related to some particular church issue. This changed of course after. In other words, the later confessions, even the 1963 [not the Hartville restatement] is a movement in another direction to try to accommodate more of the apostasy that was creeping into the church.

2) *It was used as instrumental*

*tools for the instruction of the youth.* Perhaps some of you older brethren would remember when the confession of faith was used as the main text for the instruction of the youth. This was a very helpful instrument.

3) *As a witness to the faith and society in general.* In colonial America, some of the German writings and the Dortrecht Confession were translated into English to give the use in the community so that the English-speaking people would know more about the Mennonite way of life. This was a very noble interest and effort.

4) *It was used as a means of defining the differences between church denominations and groups.* This is especially true in the one we are studying today. These confessions helped to maintain the line of separation between the Anabaptists and the Protestant churches at large. When that line is obliterated (or we might say becomes faint) there is a real danger that tends to move in and rend the Anabaptist groups.

5) *As an effort to unify the church in matters of faith and practice.* The other ones were especially given to practical applications.

I want to move into the next part of this message, especially

relating now to the 1921 confession of faith. The *Modernism/Fundamentalism Controversy*. This raged around the turn of the century and had moved into the Mennonite church. In the latter third of the 1800's there was the rise of evolutionary theory in the scientific world, and the rise of higher Biblical criticism in the religious world. We remember men like Darwin who were motivators, and we might say, "hatched" out the evolutionary theory in the late 1800's. The higher German thought was bearing on the universities and colleges of our land that had Biblical studies. It is called higher criticism. These new philosophies challenged the supernatural origin of the earth and the accuracy of the Bible, and were moving into the church. Those who favoured the adaptation of religious beliefs to this new modern thought were called "Modernists."

Sometimes we think of Modernists today as people who want to be modern. This term means more than that, and it relates to theological thought patterns. They were called "Modernists." Modernistic thought included (and still includes) the denial of the virgin birth of Christ, His miracles, His bodily resurrection and the shed-

ding of His blood on Calvary as a means of atonement. We might say it was a radical movement that was beginning — had its birth — in that era of time and it still has its repercussions and its disciples today.

This modernistic thought was affecting most denominations and in a measure was beginning to affect the Mennonite church. The dissemination of this philosophy was done primarily through the colleges and universities of the land. In fact, this is how the Mennonites were introduced to it. When we study, for instance, what we call the Goshen controversy (Goshen College was a child of the Mennonite church) and how it was closed in 1923 because of modernistic men and faculty. Those men were trained at the feet of these professors in these colleges and universities of the land.

I want to quote something that was taken out of the book called *The Mennonite Church and Current Issues* written by Daniel Kauffman [in 1923] to give us a little bit of an idea. He gives twelve points of the modernistic thought, then he says this,

“Me thinks, I hear someone say, ‘surely there are no Mennonites who reject the fundamentals of the Christian faith,’ put in this form the question

might be answered, ‘no.’ You would have to go a long way to find a communicant member of the Mennonite church who would openly reject the doctrine of the inspiration of the Scripture and so on. But you find then, an astonishing large percentage of those who within the past ten years have attended colleges, universities and seminaries of liberal leanings who are weak enough on the fundamentals of the Christian faith that they seldom, if ever, defend them except in a general way. We seem to have a greater relish for liberalistic literature than for the writings of those who are outspoken against modernism, who manifest a greater friendliness toward outspoken champions of modernism than toward those of their own brethren who discern the signs of the time and are warning our people [about the] dangers confronting us. Unless the Mennonite Church takes an effort and begins at once a vigorous policy of conservation of the old orthodox faith and of our young people for this faith, another decade will find us where many of the popular churches have gone.”

This gives us an idea of the thought patterns and the controversy that was within the Mennonite church. There was an

effort to try to stall this. We must remember that the Mennonite Church at this time (around the 20's — the early part of the Twentieth Century) was also in an acculturation process that was not related necessarily to this theological movement. In studying this, it seems to me that some of the blame of what was happening in the Mennonite church, was placed at the feet of Modernism when really it was merely catering toward worldliness that was not necessarily driven by theological movement. Perhaps this was confused a bit, to the damage of the Mennonite church in that evaluation process.

The trends of apostasy and worldliness were stirring up the conservative elements of the church. I mentioned Goshen College that was staffed with liberal modernistic men. By 1923, the problem had grown to a level where the college was closed for one year. This is the modernistic side of it.

The other part is what we call *Fundamentalism*. In studying history, I believe that the Fundamentalist influence was more critical to the church than the modernistic point. Fundamentalism was a defense against modernism and this was a Protestant movement. Today we still have Fundamentalism. It

still is a threat to the church. This was a Protestant movement that was interdenominational. It was an effort to strengthen the simple fundamental truths of the Gospel. In 1919 the World Christian Fundamentals Association was formed and began to have large campaigns and movements that went out across the nation to rally the support of the people against modernistic thought. We do not despise them in this, for what they did.

This emphasis appealed to the Mennonites for which we can understand. It was the emphasis on Biblical inerrancy and strict adherence to basic beliefs that correspond with what Mennonites believe. They began to absorb (we might say gobble it up) and support it. However, there was a group of discerning Mennonites who soon realized that they were not comfortable with the Fundamentalist thought. This was not so much in what they said and professed, but in what they omitted in their theology. I am thankful that there were discerning men of that time who did not identify with the fundamental movement that was combatting modernism.

Yes, the Mennonites were also concerned about the same things the Fundamentalists were, but,

the threat of Fundamentalism at this point, was therefore perhaps equally or more dangerous than the threat of modernism. This is true in our setting today. An example of this is the subject of Creationism today. We believe in Creation also, but we are not Creationists. We do not follow Creationism. I fear again the Fundamentalists are reaching into our circles through literature, and perhaps tapes, saying things that we like to hear, and that we believe. However, what they do not say is what is so damaging to our thought patterns. This was true in this setting as well.

There is an article in the bound *Sword and Trumpet* by J. L. Stauffer that was written in the early 30's. He identified the differences that were becoming more clear as time went along — their belief in Eternal Security, and especially their non adherence to the doctrine of nonconformity and Nonresistance. There was also the patriotism in World War I. While this controversy was raging, the Fundamentalists were ready to send their young men out and fight against the enemy. Secret Societies, infant baptism or immersion, are all subjects, or we might say beliefs, that bring the line of separation between

Protestantism and Anabaptism into sharp focus. The confession which we are looking at, we might say, established an Anabaptist/Mennonite position that brought into focus the threats of Modernism and the threats of Fundamentalism.

I want to mention a very sensitive one here related to this controversy and that is the prophetic issue [eschatology]. One of the beliefs and promotions of the Fundamentalists was what is called *Dispensationalism*, or the deferred, or postponed kingdom idea. This fit in with the broader Premillennial thought, but it was an extension, we might say, of this. Fundamentalism brought an increased interest in prophetic study. It is interesting how the Mennonite church at large related to this. There were a few Conferences which (at least I know that Franconia had for many years [and so does the Washington/Franklin County Conference]) ruled against that particular prophetic thought or position of Premillennialism. The larger Mennonite response was that they did not prohibit the prophetic interest or necessarily establish a prophetic position. Rather they strongly resisted the clearly unscriptural aspects of the movement, which was the postponement theory, that led to a

donning of the Scriptures — placing certain parts of the New Testament in a distant era — a prophetic era — the future. This definitely was unscriptural. And I am thankful at least that the Church dealt with this. They were able to get a hold of an unscriptural element of this prophetic issue and deal strongly with it (like the Mennonite position against the Scofield Bible). That was a universal application that crossed the prophetic views, and we are glad for that. We believe that we are still reaping in that. Also, the Fundamental creeds established or mandated the Premillennial view.

I appreciate what they did in the statement on The Second Coming in the Garden City Confession [Article XVI]. This was written in a time of very serious discussion and conflict on prophetic issues. This particular confession did not bring those conflicts into focus. However, it gave a general and direct teaching on this.

“We believe in the personal, imminent coming of our Lord as the blessed hope of the believer; that we who are alive and remain, together with the dead in Christ who will be raised, shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air and thus ever be with the Lord.”

Is that Amillennial or Premillennial? I think the church wisely came up with a statement that brought some rest to that. However, in the other writings, they strongly resisted the direct, unscriptural views that had come with this prophetic view.

Sometimes we hear comments that this or that view is wrong or right because of where it came from. Some of this did come from Moody Bible Institute and some of the renewed interest in prophetic study as the end time age crept in. However, I say this, we can be at least thankful in spite of what they did not do, or even in light of our prophetic view, that the Mennonite church dealt with the prophetic issue and stamped out the postponement theory and would not ally to the Scofield Bible. I would say that was looking at an issue at least in a measure that I am thankful for today.

The answer of the Mennonites was to formulate a confession of faith of their own that touched both of these questions. I want to point out especially a number of these articles that were dealing with the issues of the day. Article I, “The Word of God.” “We believe in the plenary and verbal inspiration of the Bible as the Word of God.” Was that addressing the Modernistic or the

Fundamentalistic threat — which was it? The Modernistic. Look at Article III. There is a reason why this is in because of the evolutionary theory. “We believe that the Genesis account of the Creation is a historic fact and literally true.” Article V, Of Jesus Christ, spells out, or mentions, His conception by the Holy Spirit and the virgin birth. All those were raging issues of the day. The church defined the Mennonite, Biblical position on that, but they did not stop there.

Here is where the Fundamental creeds would have stopped. Look at Article X, “Of Separation,” Article XI, “Of Discipline,” Article XII, “Of Ordinances,” Article XII, “Of Restrictions,” all those and Article XIV, “Of Apostasy.” Those articles were addressing the Fundamental threat that was also coming into the church. I appreciate that this confession looked at the total picture and targeted, we might say, their guns at the right place. Sometimes it is easier to shoot way out at the Modernists, more or less, but where they lived and touched, they also addressed this and spoke to it. This may be a lesson for us today. We need a well-rounded view of the picture and of the threats, then we need to speak to the issues at hand and

make them apply to where we live and where it hurts, we might say, and where it is needed in our own church group.

This confession represents a noble effort by the church in facing the challenges of that day. It was widely accepted and it helped direct the church. Today we still benefit from it. We should have a good acquaintance with the Dortrecht and Schleitheim Confessions and not use this, or think of this, as our only confession, because this is built on the former ones. We should have good working knowledge of those as well.

*A few “negative observations” which must be reckoned with at this point.* Because of this statement, the emphasis seemed to shift from the old Anabaptist concept of practical obedience to the Scriptures to more of a theological agreement to the inerrancy of the Scriptures. This first article, of the plenary and verbal expression we call this, is mentioned in history as a plenary and verbal formula. The earlier confessions did not mention this and it would presuppose that all professing members would believe in the Bible and accept its infallibility.

However, when we need to start defining an issue and making people verbally commit

themselves to it, there is always a danger that they may be doing it with their mouth but not with their heart. This is a little bit what happened here, as we read further in history, for instance after this. The questionnaires that were formulated by the missions boards which would have been the Mid Western, asked the missionaries to commit themselves to believing the plenary and verbal inspiration of the Bible. This was relatively easy to say. However, those questionnaires were weak in the practical applications. It may be that the same people that were dressed in more worldly clothing, but the test was whether they believed in the plenary and verbal inspiration of the Scriptures. It is right to say yes to that, but the emphasis seemed to be shifting. Eventually it became more of a theological question rather than a practical question. This of course, is a challenge for us today, that when we commit ourselves to say, "Yes, the Bible is true," we also mean that the Bible is practical and that we apply it to daily living. We see a little shift in that as this confession was used as a basis for testing, we might say, the church workers of that era.

*The apostasy within the Mennonite church, was not cured*

*by this confession.* The feed lines from the Modernists and the Fundamentalists had not been cut off. *It still existed in three areas,* 1) *Education.* They continued to attend the universities of the land. Also Mennonite Colleges were established that were still staffed with university trained men who did not have a deep undercurrent of support for the Mennonite position. Therefore, the educational institutions of the land, in particular the Mennonite ones, continued to contribute to the apostasy and the Protestantizing of the Mennonite church.

2) *In the area of publishing.* In spite of the good that *The Gospel Herald* did, I read a few times in my studies that in 1922, roughly half of the articles on Biblical subjects appearing in the *Herald* were drawn from non-Mennonite sources. That seems very strange to us today. If we would go to *The Contender* or our church paper and half of the articles would be written by non-Mennonite people, we would say something is wrong, and something was wrong. That influence continued to build up and to have its effect on the Mennonite church. We believe *The Gospel Herald* did much good and had many good articles, but it shows that there were some feed lines

established to these threats and dangers that were never completely cut off or cured by the noble effort of this confession.

3) *In the area of missions*, especially the work in India and Argentina, it was counter productive to Mennonite belief and practice in two areas. There were the contacts on the field with other fundamental groups and also the beliefs of those who were sent. Even though those who were sent subscribed to this confession and said “Yes, we believe in the plenary and verbal inspiration,” in heart they were Protestant, or had Protestant leanings. This helped to move the mission work in a different direction.

The lesson is that creeds and statements in themselves did not solve the problem in this era. Following this era, there were voices of concern and protests that continued to be sounded, but the course of the Mennonite church at large seemed continued in one direction. We appreciate the efforts of *The Sword and Trumpet* and various articles in *The Gospel Herald*, but it seemed like the course of the church, and the undercurrent had moved a different direction.

*Five lessons we should learn from this study and from our observation of this era of history.*

1) *We must seek to resolve issues within the church, while there is yet hope.* The Church faced threats from within and without. We noticed a determination and an effort to confront and resolve the issues at hand. It is important to see the issues. It is important to meet like they did in Acts 15, and at these conferences that produced these confessions, look at the issues, find a solution, and resolve the problem. These controversies and conflicts related to doctrine or practice cannot continue year after year after year in church groups and come out right. In one way or the other, they must be resolved. This must, of course, be done in the context of being clothed with the garment of humility. In this process there were some people who were not satisfied and left. For instance, the president of Goshen College, J. S. Hartzler, was not satisfied and joined the General Conference Mennonites. I suppose they wished they could have saved all the people, and that they would have all stayed with them, but in that process there was some sifting.

2) *We must continue to define the position of the church in writing for the benefit of the present and future generations.* Preaching and ministers’ meetings are good but writing sets our

convictions in a permanent form. In this way we are able to disseminate, spread, or circulate them to the Church. There is the possibility of a conviction level among the ministry that never filters down to the laity, or to the membership. We should be very concerned about that. In our minister's meetings we discuss many things and we grow in our conviction. The question is, "How can we communicate those burdens and convictions to our people?" It is through preaching. However, the power of the pen and the liberty — the freedom of the press — to write these things is very important. It also becomes a witness against people and church groups who choose to depart from the faith in future generations.

3) *We must continue to recognize the line of separation between Anabaptist and Fundamentalist perspectives.* We must interpret the issues of the day in the framework of Anabaptist distinctiveness including the separation of Church and State. In our day there are strong fundamental movements and they should not draw us into them. For instance the Home Schooling Movement across America is motivated by Fundamentalist powers. We are not saying it is a wrong move-

ment. It is good for America. It is good for the homes of our land, but it does not synchronize with the Anabaptist faith.

There are Creationism and Patriotism. Do we know that there is a lot of new interest in dinosaurs? Should we put those books in our school? My answer is "No," to that. There are books about "Noah's Ark" and "The Young Earth." Some of these may be all right. However, the distributors and promoters of these books are driven by the forces that move Fundamentalism. They also promote books like *George Washington, A Man of Prayer and Courage*. *Robert Lee a Gallant Christian Soldier*, *Abigail Adams: First Lady of Faith and Courage*. We may say, "We will simply take the Creationism and the dinosaurs." However, finally we cannot separate them. We must be very careful in this, especially the books we promote and what we listen to. The separation between Fundamentalism and Anabaptism must remain distinct if we want to maintain a Mennonite church in this our age, with the pressures that surround us.

With regard to our school curriculum, it is so easy to bring in the Fundamentalistic material

such as Bob Jones University or A Beka, Some say it is better. However, what do we do about the patriotic influence when they make George Washington a good Christian? Is that better or worse than a secular view of history? We will not answer that. Maybe there is not a good answer for that. Let us remember that we are Anabaptists. If the Mennonite church in 1921 would have looked at the issues like some of our people (when I say “our,” I refer to Conservative Mennonites) today are feeding into the Fundamentalist Publishers and so on, I do not think there would have been a statement like this. I give that as a challenge to us. We need to keep this clear so that when the issues come we remember that we are not Fundamentalists but Anabaptists.

Recently there was a vote on the school issue that stirred up the whole of America. The politicians said, “Do not call us anymore, we are flooded with calls.” Should we join that effort? Do we also call our legislators and tell them? No, we should not.

4) *We must maintain a balance between the promotion of theological accuracy and practical holiness and obedience.* Statements and creeds do not

provide a total solution to the church problems and issues. The tendency is that when we have a problem, we will discuss it and make a statement on it. There is a place for this but when a statement and a position is written to correct a problem it rarely does that. Statements serve the best after there is a discussion of a problem and a report on the findings of meeting and a group of people. This means that people adhere to, and support it. Statements rarely are effective in correcting trends of direction and undercurrents of thought. Let us be careful that we divide that. I am not saying we should not formulate statements and confessions, but it is not the total answer to the problem. I think there was a little bit of this thinking in the back of the Garden City Confession.

5) *We must staff our institutions and boards with brethren of conviction and loyalty.* This is especially true in two areas related to the historic perspective — those who are influencing our youth and those who are defining our doctrine. In those two areas, this brings all the ministry into focus. It brings certain ministry relating to boards and institutions but the entire ministry are helping and defining doctrine. We believe in the faith approach to

staffing our church. We do believe there is a place for gift, and we should covet earnestly the best gifts, but part of the downfall in this area and era was related to drawing on men who supposedly had the knowledge of the subject and were schooled in these particular areas. We are certainly in favour of learning and Bible study, but that must always be done in the framework of faith in God and loyalty to the cause and

the church that we have identified with.

May God give us the grace to be what we should be in this generation to see the issues, to scan the horizon, to give direction to the people and that if the Lord tarries and somebody studies what happened in 1994 that there would be some positive contribution that we could make to the help and the faithfulness of future generations.

**Scripture References**

**Acts**

|                   |          |
|-------------------|----------|
| 15                | 153      |
| 15:1, 2, 5        | 154      |
| 15:6              | 154      |
| 15:13, 19, 20, 22 | 154      |
| 15:31             | 154      |
| 16:4              | 153, 155 |
| 16:4, 5           | 154      |

**From the Previous Issue:**

**Keeping Peer Pressure Manageable**  
 From a message by A. Wayne Rudolph  
 Orchardville Mennonite Church  
 Wednesday, December 29, 2004

**Book Reprint (Continued)**  
**One Hundred Lessons In Bible Study**

**LESSON 7.**  
**Joseph.**

I. Sketch of his life.

1. Birth. — Genesis 30:23, 24.

2. His father's favorite. — Genesis 37:3.

3. The slave.

a. Sold to Ishmaelites, who carry him to Egypt and sell him to Potiphar. — Genesis 37:18–36.

b. Resists temptation. — Genesis 39:7–12:

NOTE. — To testify against yielding to temptation is noble. To resist temptation is nobler.

c. Is thrown into prison. — Genesis 39:13–20.

NOTE. — Happy is he, who for righteousness' sake, suffers persecution (Matthew 5:11).

d. Won the confidence of the jailer. — Genesis 39:21–23.

NOTE. — Sterling character in time becomes manifest under the most adverse circumstances. It is usually recognized, though not always rewarded.

e. Is released and made ruler over Egypt. — Genesis 41:9–43.

4. The interpreter of dreams.

a. The dreams which enraged his brethren. — Genesis 37:5–11.

b. The dreams of Pharaoh's chief butler and chief baker. — Genesis 40:5–19.

c. Pharaoh's dreams. — Genesis 41:1–36.

5. The statesman.

a. Called to be ruler over Egypt. — Genesis 41:37–45.

b. The seven years of plenty. — Genesis 41:46–49.

c. The seven years of famine.

i. Sells corn to the Egyptians and surrounding nations. — Genesis 41:53–57.

ii. Deals with his brethren. — Genesis 42–45.

iii. The wealth of Egypt passes into the hands of

Pharaoh. — Genesis 47:13–26.

6. Meeting with Jacob. — Genesis 46:28–30.

7. Takes care of his father and brethren. — Genesis 40:31–34; 47:1–12.

8. Death. — Genesis 50:26.

## II. Thoughts on his life.

1. The life of Joseph stands out without a blemish. His pure life in childhood won the admiration of his father. By resisting the advances of Pharaoh's wife, he showed that with him chastity was not a theory, but a reality. His exemplary life while in prison won the confidence of the jailor. As ruler over Egypt, his wisdom, prudence, and generosity strengthened the crown and won the hearts of the people. The generous treatment of his brethren showed him to be above the feeling of revenge. His meetings with his brethren and with his father revealed a lamb-like spirit in a lion's heart. Through all his trials, he remained uncrushed. Through all his triumphs he continued his allegiance to a humble people. Like a glistening diamond amid a mass of rubbish, shines his pure soul amidst the darkness of a sinful age.

2. Joseph was sold as a slave. His brethren meant it for evil; but God turned it for good. God often uses wicked men in carrying out His designs, and the most wicked deeds are sometimes utilized as instruments for the greatest good. It must not be understood, however, that God justifies the evil doer because his wicked deeds are turned to good account. "It must needs be that offenses come; but woe unto that man by whom the offense cometh!

3. From slavery to the governorship. Quite an advancement; yet this was nothing like the advancement made in the transfer from the power of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son. Then slaves to the enemy of human souls; now kings and priests to God. (1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6.)

4. The magicians of Egypt failed in their attempt to do what a poor slave easily accomplished. Worldly wisdom is of no avail in searching the deep things of God. (James 1:5.)

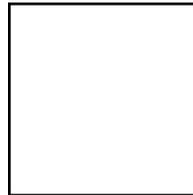
5. Reuben desired to save Joseph's life; but was afraid to assert himself. The result was just the same as if he had been among, the foremost conspirators. Speak out, ye friends of God, for in this way only may your friendship be of service to the cause.

1. Enumerate the discouragements which Joseph encountered during his career.
2. Show how the hand of God favored him all through his career.
3. Whom did Joseph marry ?
4. Describe the religion of the Egyptians.
5. Was the sin of Joseph's brethren lessened because good came from it?

## Recent Sermon Titles

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Maintaining Godly Music in Our Homes and Churches                                  | Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness" |
| Maintaining Spiritual and Scriptural Stability in the Midst of Religious Confusion | Shipwreck of Faith                                      |
| Maintaining the Integrity of the Christian Day School                              | Significance of Christ's Birth, The Sound Doctrine      |
| Ministry of Encouragement, The   | Sound Speech  |
| Mystery of the Incarnation in the Life of Christ, The                              | Speech  |
| Nonconformity  | Spiritual Brotherhood                                   |
| Nonresistance  | Spiritual Sacrifices                                    |
| One of These Little Ones   | Springs of Living Waters                                |
| Onward -- the Christian's Watchword  | Stewardship of the Gospel, The                          |
| Peace  | Strangers and Pilgrims                                  |
| Peace of God, The  | Strengthening the Marriage Bond                         |
| Personal Discipline  | Submission  |
| Place of and Purpose of Confession   | Sufficiency In Christ                                   |
| Plow, the  | Technological Convictions in a World of Technocracy     |
| Prayer   | Temptation  |
| Preparations for a Successful Year   | Testimony of Our Conscience, The                        |
| Pride  | That the World May Know                                 |
| Redeeming the Time   | The Church -- Beautiful for Situation                   |
| Remember Our Creator in the Days of Our Youth                                      | The Implications of Your Presence --                    |
| Remnant, The   | What does our presence imply in the places we go?       |
| Remorse and Reconciliation   | The Lord -- Our Rock of Defense                         |
| Respect  | Thought Patterns that Lead to God-Honoring Choices      |
| Scriptural Authority in the Church, Home and School                                | Three Crosses, The                                      |
| Second Coming of Christ, The   | Time  |
| See That Ye Fall Not Out By the Way  | Times and Seasons of Life, The                          |
| See that Ye Refuse Not Him That Speaketh -- Hebrews 12:25                          | Tongue, The   |
|  | Traits of a Good Conscience                             |
|  | True Discipleship                                       |
|  | Vessels of Mercy  |

# The Pulpit Exchange



## Recent Sermon Titles (continued)

Voice of the Blood, The

What is Grace?

Which Way Are You Leaning? --

Ecclesiastes 11:3

Whosoever Will May Come

Why I Need the Church

Wiles of the Devil, The

Wonders of God's Love, The

Ye Fathers" -- Ephesians 6:4

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