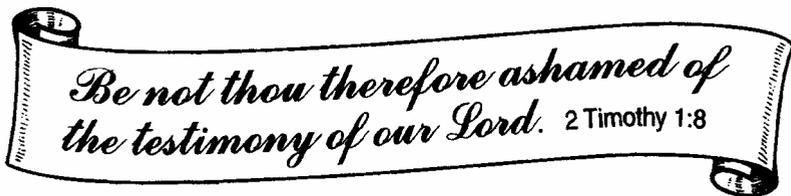


THE EASTERN MENNONITE TESTIMONY

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A plain suit as prescribed for the brethren of many plain groups should express a desire to avoid vanity and worldly fashion. But areas of life that are less regulated by the church may also reveal our sensitivity to Spirit regulation. Our suite (suet) may expose our convictions more accurately than our suit.

Could your living room or bedroom suite be called plain? A suite may also be defined as all the connected rooms that make up one's living quarters. So, is your house plain?

In some ways plain is relative. A house in North America that is "common in rank or station" may be considered a mansion in Guatemala. Relative to the rest of the world, we live in comfortable ease and even luxury. However, relative to our own community, our homes should be perceived as practical, economical, and plain—fitting for those who "declare plainly that they seek a country."

God has given much more specific direction to our clothing than to the dress of our houses—and rightfully so. God has dealt decisively with vanity by speaking directly to where it shows itself first—on our bodies. The church has also made more practical applications to simplicity in dress than to other areas of life. But spiritual sensitivity will perceive how vanity reveals itself in all areas of life.

God's call to humility is an absolute principle, but the application of simplicity is comparative. And so, we must avoid the temptation to reassure our own righteousness by comparing ourselves among ourselves. On one hand, we may be tempted to feel self-satisfied by comparing ourselves with others who are more fancy. On the other hand, we may pride ourselves in being more plain than our brethren. We understand what is plain as we apply other principles of Scripture.

A plain suite is practical. Just as a plain suit meets our needs without drawing attention to us, so our houses should basically meet our needs of shelter, privacy, and comfort. And our comfort will be pursued in moderation.

A plain suite also displays good stewardship. Just as a plain suit eliminates the extravagant changing suits of apparel, so contentment spares us from the expensive fads that come and go with home decor. Serviceable carpet, wallpaper, or home furnishings should not be wastefully discarded

to accommodate a new color scheme. Creating a comprehensive scheme of color or style is usually not frugal. Living room furniture does not need to be a matching suite although at times it is convenient to be so.

The outdoor world of landscaping should utilize the God-given beauties of nature without being a show of extravagance. Meticulously trimmed shrubbery; coordinated mulch colors; and a pampered, fertilized, weed-free, irrigated lawn indicate misplaced values. Most healthy persons can perform outdoor chores, profit from the physical exercise, and avoid the costly fees of a professional contractor.

A plain suite is modest. Since "the earth is the Lord's," a large sign announcing our estate detracts from God's glory and identifies us as worldly. "Their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names" (Psalm 49:11).

A plain suite will complement a profession of godliness. Scriptural wisdom and quotations should grace our walls, rather than the world's clichés such as, "Live well, laugh often, love much." Such shallow, worldly philosophy is an impoverished substitute for true wisdom: "Blessed are they that mourn," die to self, and "hunger and thirst after righteousness."

Our homes should be identified as nonconformed to the world by what is obviously missing: Christmas lights around the eaves, candles in the windows, a flag pole in the front yard, and a swimming pool in the back.

A plain suite is neat, tidy, and orderly. Simplicity is a discipline, not a lack of care for one's self or his property. To do one's best to make do with less requires talent and virtue. Especially blessed are those who do so in order to "have to give," "for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."

A consistent plain life results from a foundation of godly principles and a circumspect walk. Our standard of living should "declare plainly" a moderate, selfless, God-honoring mentality. Contentment and simplicity are encouraged among the brotherhood as we each live with less.

God is honored by a glorious Gospel carried by simple saints.

—BAS



"He ... Shall Come"

In a world of increasing darkness and sin, God's people cling to the bright hope that Christ will come. Scoffers all around say, "Where is the promise of his coming? ... all things continue as they were from the beginning" (2 Peter 3:4). Others disregard Scriptural teaching on the imminence of His return and set dates for His return. Even in the hearts of believers, Satan may plant small seeds of doubt: "Why, in all these years since the giving of the promise, has He not returned?" or "It won't be today or tonight."

But what does the Bible say? "He that shall come will come, and will not tarry" (Hebrews 10:37). God's Word answers scoffing, confused, or doubting hearts. What does it teach about Christ's coming?

"Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father" (Mark 13:32). Only God knows the timing of this glorious event. If we would know, we would certainly find it difficult to live righteous and holy lives. Praise God for veiling the future in this way!

However, Christ has given us signs for which to watch, such as "wars and rumours of wars," earthquakes, famines, troubles, and persecutions (Mark 13:7, 8). "And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (Matthew 24:12). Many are deceived today in a confusing mixture of truth and error. They claim the Lord's leading while failing to submit themselves to a Scriptural body of believers.

"But as the days of [Noah] were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matthew 24:37). Men live according to their own lusts, eating, drinking, marrying, and giving in marriage. But men's hearts are paralyzed with fear as a result of the distress and perplexity of nations (Luke 21:25, 26).

Just as a thief in the night comes without warning when least expected, so Christ's return will take men unawares (1 Thessalonians 5:2, 3; Matthew 24:43). Six times in the Book of Revelation, Christ speaks of coming quickly. "And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Revelation 22:12). While this strikes fear to the heart of the sinner, the child of God responds with joy, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20).

As the disciples stood on the Mount of Olives, their Lord ascended through the clouds into heaven. As they gazed heavenward, two men in

white apparel stood by them and, to their perplexed hearts, offered these words of comfort: "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

He shall also come with power and great glory. "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17).

What beautiful words of comfort for the Christian who is watching and ready! To him the coming of Christ will be glorious, but to those living for themselves it will bring a real sense of impending doom. "In the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be" (Ecclesiastes 11:3). When Christ returns will not be the time to settle accounts with Him. We will be either among His people or among sinners.

When Christ comes in judgment, all men will see and know Him. "And every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen" (Revelation 1:7). Christ warned of false prophets and false christs that would arise, deceiving men into believing that He has come. Jesus said, "Believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matthew 24:26, 27). All will recognize Him as the Lord Himself.

How ought we to live in light of Christ's imminent return? First, we remember that God does not count time as men do. "But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Peter 3:8). We may be tempted to think that He is waiting long, but it is not long to Him. He "is longsuffering . . . , not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9) "Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh" (James 5:8).

The daily question for God's people should be, "What manner of persons ought [we] to be in all holy conversation and godliness?" (2 Peter 3:11). We must be willing to bear reproaches, afflictions, and persecutions. We must patiently endure, with strong faith in the promises of God.

We must analyze our concept of values. Heavenly treasures are worth so much more than earthly ones. We are not of this world just as Christ is not of this world. We "run not with them to the same excess of riot" (1 Peter

4:4). We must avoid pleasure seeking, an obsession with technology, or any other excess that is unbecoming to Christian living.

We are to live as strangers and pilgrims who are but sojourners here. A simple lifestyle reduces peer pressure and avoids distraction from watching and waiting for Christ's return.

We also desire to spread the Good News of salvation. A missed opportunity to witness ought to grieve us. The time is short—too short to waste on our selfish interests. God needs servants who lose themselves in kingdom work. Parents must raise their families, but also warn the unruly, "comfort the feebleminded," and "support the weak." We need to "pray without ceasing," "rejoice evermore," "be patient toward all men," and "ever follow that which is good." (See 1 Thessalonians 5.)

"Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober" (1 Thessalonians 5:6). Now is not the time to relax. We are not yet home. Together we "press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

May our "whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:23) "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

Brother Ivan



Lessons From Mennonite Institutions Church Publishing

An institution of the church is an organization established to expedite a work. The church itself "is an institution divine in its origin, plan, and destiny." Organization has both positive and negative potential. The concentration of authority and control must be carefully guarded.

Institutions of the church are relatively safe under the administration of a spiritual, Biblical church. However, Mennonite institutions have often exerted an aggressive influence toward apostasy.

The period of time from 1895 to 1920 is known as the era of organization in the (Old) Mennonite Church. Centralized boards were established to control the publishing, mission, educational, and relief interests of the church. The original objectives of these organizations were generally above reproach.

The most significant institutional development was the formation of Mennonite General Conference in 1898. This organization was an association of district conferences of the (Old) Mennonite Church that laid the groundwork for broad fellowship and unity. The publishing, education, and mission boards were organized under this corporate head. The more conservative conferences of the East resisted this movement and did not join. This cushioned them for a number of decades from the liberal influences that were overtaking the conferences of the West.

The (Old) Mennonite Church began institutional publishing in 1908. Sentiments in favor of church ownership had been developing for years. An article appeared in the *Gospel Witness* in 1907, warning that "as long as the church has no voice in the matter, any group of dissatisfied persons can start up a new paper [and] force their views on the people.... As a result the unity of the church is endangered." In the same year, Daniel Kauffman wrote a lengthy article in favor of an institution "that would send out a full supply of good, solid, orthodox, interesting, helpful literature, having each department headed by a man 'full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom.'

A meeting was finally planned for May 7, 1907, where each district conference was invited to send a representative. Nine conferences responded, excluding the more conservative conferences of the East. At a later meeting, January 8, 1908, it was decided that a publishing work would be established under the control of a Mennonite Publishing Board. The publishing headquarters would be located at Scottdale, Pennsylvania, operating under the name Mennonite Publishing House. Three privately owned publishing businesses were merged into one church-owned institution.

The influence of the work under the leadership of men such as Daniel Kauffman and John Horsch was generally conservative. In the mid-1940s, the publishing work came under the control of a younger generation of men who did not share the conservative viewpoint. Their new ideas and programs resulted in a "programmed apostasy," leading the church in a path of drift toward the world.

The original publishing work was established "to provide literature for the church" with the Mennonite audience in sharp focus? By the middle of the century this focus had subtly changed. At an annual meeting in 1952, it was stated that "in the past books coming from the hands of Mennonite authors were largely apologetic or historical.... They were written for Mennonites.... We should continue a program which will seek out and encourage men of talent and convictions to contribute Christian books which will also be appreciated both within and without the church." The 1952 state-

ment of objectives of the Mennonite Publishing House included a separate point on providing and distributing literature outside of the Mennonite denomination.'

These cross-denominational marketing goals began to clearly influence the flavor of the publishing work. Any change in planning could not be made without regard to the other groups who were purchasing the materials. A "co-operative venture between the Mennonite Publishing Board (Mennonite Church) and the Board of Education and Publication (General Conference Mennonite Church) began in December, 1952." This organizational cooperation contributed to the liberal shift in the 1950s and 1960s.

The Lancaster Conference exerted strenuous efforts against these influences but could neither avoid nor overcome them. As early as 1950, the Lancaster Conference bishops drafted a letter to the editor of the Gospel Herald, noting that the periodical contained "strange voices of liberalism, modernism, and antagonism." This pattern of sharing concerns with the Publishing House resulted in little or no change of direction. In 1964, Lancaster Conference began publishing the Youth Messenger as an alternative to Scottdale's liberal Youth Christian Companion. This was a noble effort, but the periodical was discontinued after a few years.

Literature was a leading concern in the rise of the conservative revival movements of the 1950s and 1960s. The conservative publishing work was a step in faith by concerned brethren who projected a vision of meeting the literature needs of the Mennonite Church in a Scriptural way.

A meeting of thirty-five brethren was held at Amelia, Virginia, on October 18, 1958. A seven-member publishing board was appointed by the end of 1958. The work was soon moved to Crockett, Kentucky, and named Rod and Staff Publishers. When the Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church began in 1968, a Publication Board was appointed to help meet the literature needs of the church.

We now face the challenge of maintaining the conviction and vision for conservative Mennonite publishing. How can we utilize the lessons of history as a positive and protective force in the work today?

The church must remain Scriptural. The perpetuation of a Scriptural church and the production of Scriptural literature go hand in hand. One cannot exist long without the other. The boards, writers, and editors must represent the church's convictions. When the church apostatizes, her institutions become a driving force leading in the wrong direction.

Our literature must voice the position of the church. Church publications are not the place to test personal opinions or new ideas. Readers must be

confident that the writings represent what the church believes and upholds. For this to happen, the work must be controlled by sound, conservative brethren, and the literature processed by faithful reviewers and editors.

Literature must be produced for the conservative Mennonite market. The attraction of the broader market can be very enticing. Certainly we are grateful if other groups choose to use our literature, but we should not allow this interest to affect planning and publishing. Publishers should value the approval of the conservative Mennonites over those of the broader market.

The burden of the work must rest upon the church. The prayers, personnel, and finances of the church are imperative. The work will be counterproductive if it becomes largely dependent upon a centralized system. Writers and editors must be utilized from within the churchwide brotherhood.

The transfer of responsibility to the succeeding generation must be carefully planned. Time moves on and change is inevitable. We must include and train younger brethren who share the vision for conservative publishing. Policies alone will not protect a work. Brethren with firm conviction are needed, who will safeguard the work against the encroachments of apostasy.

Let us expend our energies in seeking the blessing of the Lord in publishing literature that will benefit the church in our day and in the future.

"Except the LORD build the [publishing] house, they labour in vain that build it" (Psalm 127:1).

Brother Eby



Separation in Business (Part 6) *End of Series*

"24/7" Service Involvements

"Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work." The Sabbath principle was established at Creation. And until recently, many in America have honored the Lord's Day by avoiding business and pleasure. American "Blue Laws" forbade businesses to be open on Sunday. Society's departure from God's way can subtly influence our thinking.

The primary activity of the Lord's Day should be to meet to worship our Lord. If work regularly interferes with worship, it has replaced Christ as our master. Jesus taught by word and example that worshipping God, show-

ing mercy to others, and resting from physical duties are commendable Sabbath Day activities. To care for the sick or elderly or help a stranded motorist without pay testifies that we honor the Lord's Day.

To advertise twenty-four-hour-a-day, seven day-a-week service encourages non-emergency work on the Lord's Day. Is it consistent to advertise "week-end rental," or to bill for Sunday rent? Plowing snow, repairing furnaces, restoring electrical or water service, and repairing vehicles can easily become more than removing the ox from the ditch. Delivery drivers should avoid finishing late or starting early on the Lord's Day. While caring for animals on the Lord's Day is Biblical, Christian farmers should avoid unnecessary work. In any business, extra preparation should be made to keep work minimal. Before entering into a business venture, we should consider the Lord's Day involvements.

To provide twenty-four-hour service has its dangers as well. As a rule, a father should aim to be at home with his family every night. The family needs the security of a father, and a father needs the security of the family. To neglect the family in favor of work indicates misplaced priorities. May we endeavor to put the Lord first in the week as well as first in our hearts.

Brother Joel



Vocal Vices (Part 4)

Railing

To rail is to revile, blaspheme, or speak evil. Railing is usually a spontaneous reaction rather than a premeditated response. But words are a window to the heart, and railing opens the window at unguarded moments and exposes one's attitudes. The reactionary tendency of the human nature must be crucified.

When unfavorable circumstances cause hardship and irritation, men tend to vent their frustration by railing on others. The children of Israel railed on Moses in reaction to the difficulties of their journey (Numbers 21:4-6). Even Moses, the meekest man, gave in to railing under the stress of leading a murmuring, rebellious people (Numbers 20:10). Nabal railed on David's servants when under the influence of wine (1 Samuel 25:14).

When pride is wounded, faults are exposed, or actions are reprovved, men are tempted to react in defense of themselves. Men rail on those who threaten their ego or those who exercise authority over them. These reac-

tions are to be expected from those who reject truth and "teach otherwise" (1 Timothy 6:3, 4). When one resorts to defending self rather than truth, the result is "questions and strifes of words" that lead to heated arguments. When feeling guilty, injured, or mistreated, human nature seeks company. And when disgruntled persons band together, the effect of railing is multiplied, and the possibility of appealing to reason is divided. They stop their ears and gnash with their teeth with the same spirit of the mob that stoned Stephen.

The effects of railing are disastrous. Bitterness and anger once uttered in words can never be recalled. In a moment, relationships are destroyed, characters are blighted, and reputations are marred. A reputation defended in anger may take months or even years to restore. Bitter regret and remorse are the ashes of the spark ignited. If bitterness is not confessed, a pattern of repeated railings develops.

Railing can never be excused as an uncontrollable reaction. Moses could not enter Canaan because, in a moment of uncontrolled emotion, he failed to sanctify the Lord. We who have graciously been given the Holy Spirit's presence within will be judged if we fail to sanctify God by controlled speech.

Spontaneous reactions can be controlled by dealing with the attitudes from which they spring. Crucify pride, your ego, and the drive for recognition and acceptance. Place your reputation in God's hands and seek only to be accepted by Him. Finally, look to Jesus, the One who endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, yet, as a sheep before the shearers, He opened not His mouth. "Finally, be ye all of one mind ... not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing" (1 Peter 3:8, 9).

—Brother Roland



Church Committee Report - Ashland/Numidia Bible Schools

"We have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him" (Matthew 2:2). The wise men from the East were serious about this search. They took time (probably more than three weeks) away from their normal duties to pursue the opportunity of a lifetime. To find the newborn King was their first priority. The people of Jerusalem could see that these men meant business, and they were troubled.

Wise men still seek Him. Six hundred thirteen brethren and sisters spent three weeks at Bible school from December through March. We believe that they came seeking for Jesus. They came to take advantage of an opportunity that may never return. This number of students is about one hundred less than last year's total, mostly because of the very strong interest in the two-week term for older students in 2011.

Wise men still come from the east. They come also from the west, from the north, and from the south. To Ashland and to Numidia they come from as far north as British Columbia to as far south as Argentina. They come because they "have seen his star."

Wise men still go home another way. For most of the six hundred thirteen students, Bible school has been another step on the upward way. The classes, the messages, the discussions, and the social interchange helped to equip them for the unknown future. These students go home as better sons and daughters, better citizens, and better church members.

Wise men still trouble the world. Satan, typified by Herod the king, is not happy at all with this development. We should not be surprised that something with such positive potential should attract Satan's strongest opposition. Music interests, nonconformity issues, and technology snares will destroy all but the most vigilant.

To place a dollar value on the church's investment in Bible school would be impossible. Students sacrifice three weeks of earning power. Parents pay tuition. Teachers spend hours in study and travel. Families donate food. Brethren spend hours on the phone trying to arrange for personnel. Besides all this is the cost of maintaining the two facilities. Is it worth it? Will it pay?

We conclude with this quotation from the December 1982 Eastern Mennonite Testimony: "The future of [Ashland] Numidia Bible School will be basically what those who are responsible allow it to be. Pray that they will have the vision and fortitude and dying sacrifice to guide the ship safely in the years to come." *Brother Clifford - For the Ashland/Numidia Board.*