

# THE EASTERN MENNONITE TESTIMONY

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OF  
THE EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA MENNONITE CHURCH  
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Over the years, photography has become more commonplace among us. Several generations ago, photographs were limited primarily to formal poses, often associated with special occasions or to very unusual scenes. Today we may capture everyday events with a camera. In this way, we share and preserve the young child's development, the family picnic, or the construction of a building.

This expanded use of photography is not necessarily wrong. However, we do well to evaluate our practices. Are we honoring the principles of simplicity, stewardship, temperance, consistency, and modesty?

The advent of the digital camera brings some additional challenges relating to the prudent use of cameras. Unlike a film camera, in which each picture taken represents a cost of film, digital cameras take pictures without any cost. We may tend to take pictures at random, thinking that we can later choose and delete. But such a mentality does not tend toward sobriety and maturity. Whether we are visiting a point of interest, attending a family gathering, or observing children in the backyard at home, we will probably take fewer pictures if we give more thought before snapping the shutter.

We want to instill, develop, and maintain conviction against television, videos, moving picture shows, and drama. To do this, we must use our cameras only for taking still pictures. Digital cameras usually have the capability of taking video clips. The use of these features must be strictly avoided.

With some things such as the radio, we have protected ourselves against some temptations by disallowing the item. When we allow items such as cell phones and cameras with features capable of performing functions the church disallows, we need personal conviction to follow our standards.

Even though the products of technology become increasingly economical, we must apply the principles of stewardship to all our purchases. If we maintain a traditional mentality about our use of photography—that photo albums fill a limited place as keepsakes to preserve memories—we will avoid the more expensive accessories and equipage.

Engagements and weddings are important occasions. That which is captured on camera at these times should be governed by the same principles that apply to other occasions. If the picture on most of the engagement cards is a formal pose but the one sent to certain close friends is a casual

pose—is that consistent?

Will we maintain our wedding practices if the wedding album contains pictures that are in keeping with the church's guidelines for weddings but also contains pictures showing the bride and her attendants holding flowers? Are poses normally considered inappropriate acceptable for a newly married couple? If a couple on their wedding trip is pictured in clothing that does not meet our standards—is that consistent?

Pictures of this nature indicate more than a lack of camera caution. Our concern about consistency applies not only to that which is captured on camera but also to the whole of our lives! As children of God, we cannot afford to live casually or to crave worldly things in any area of life. The principles of separation and modesty must govern every occasion. Special events do not excuse inconsistent expressions.

The prudent use of cameras will keep us from taking too many pictures—even of acceptable things. But beyond that, some scenes are too sacred for photography. As stated in our directives for weddings—"there shall be no picture taking in the church auditorium at any time"—we do not take pictures of worship services, of the observance of the ordinances, of ordinations, or of funerals.

A camera must be used with reserve and caution. This responsibility certainly rests with the user. Fathers bear responsibility for its use by those of their family. The capabilities of these devices call for monitoring and accountability. Church leaders should give practical teaching and ready administration. Cameras are used with caution when Biblical principles pervade our mentality.

"Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).



### *A God-Honoring Christmas Observance*

Christmas Day, December 25, is an international religious holiday. In Christian circles, the birth of Jesus Christ is commemorated. Many non-Christians also recognize and observe this day as an important holiday. Some uncertainty surrounds the beginning of the observance of this day. Various cultures and peoples throughout the world have their own traditional customs and practices. Some supposedly carry religious significance, but most have developed from heathen customs and legends.

In 354 A.D. an early Roman bishop decreed December 25 as the date of Jesus' birth. No one really knows when He was born. But we do know that Christ the Savior is born and "where meek souls will receive Him still, / The dear Christ enters in." This event marked a new era foretold by the prophets. This new era ushered in the Christian church; we respond to honor His birth.

Some Christians choose not to observe this day as the birth of Christ. We respect their view. The date of His birth is unknown, and many customs surrounding this day do not honor Christ.

A God-honoring commemoration of this day, however, is an opportunity to counter the false and vain expressions all around us. We rejoice in this opportunity to witness that Jesus' coming to earth is foundational to the Gospel message of salvation for lost humanity.

We must respond properly to this day and the holiday season surrounding it. The false religious fervor in the world pursues earthly, carnal interests. From the day of His coming, the antichrist system was at work. "Where is he that is born king of the Jews?" Herod and all Jerusalem with him were troubled at the coming King and Savior of the world. But we represent the spiritual kingdom that Jesus Christ came to establish. As children of this King, we are still in conflict with the kingdom of this world. Therefore our observance of this day will reflect whom we serve. The world's observance reflects "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, [which] is not of the Father."

Lights, candles, decorated trees, wreaths, images, bells, stars, greens, and manger scenes are of the world. Some of these things may not be wrong in themselves, but what they represent and what they would identify us with is not of the Father. How we express ourselves in relation to this event in our everyday interacting with others identifies us with the Father or with the world.

Can sending cards and giving gifts be a God-honoring observance? Sending cards and giving gifts to the lonely, the needy, or those who have faced trying circumstances are valuable expressions of God's love. So that we are not identified with the spirit of the season, our gift giving is better done at other times. Benevolent giving and sharing are definite, year-round marks of the spiritual kingdom.

Our observance of Christ's birth is God honoring when we use this opportunity to teach our children God's ways. Children notice the eye-catching things surrounding Christmas. How are they to understand the decorations? Do they know why we do not become involved in these activ-

ities? We should provide good answers to their questions and explain some things they do not question. Many Mennonites, past and present, have become involved in these worldly observances. I remember my parents teaching us reasons why we did not do as the neighbors did. Parental conviction as to what represents the world and what represents the kingdom of God is necessary for our growing children to develop their own convictions regarding the way we observe Christmas.

God's Word reveals much about the miracle of the Incarnation that made salvation possible. For personal or family devotions, search the prophecies related to His coming. Study Matthew 1 and 2 and Luke 1 and 2. Read the story of that which preceded His coming—Joseph's dream, the angel's visit to Mary. Note the details. Our hymnals contain many songs of joyful acclaim about His birth.

Attending worship in the house of God is another God-honoring observation of Christmas. In the past, many Mennonite congregations held either morning or evening services on Christmas Day. Not all congregations have Christmas Day services. Take the opportunity to visit another congregation.

Another God-honoring way to observe Christmas is to visit family or friends. Your work schedule and the school break might allow your family a special visit to a distant state or province. Our fellowship in other homes is God-honoring when we are of mutual spiritual encouragement to each other.

We can also honor God by staying at home. Perhaps circumstances do not allow otherwise. Fathers who work away from home can have a special day with their families. If Christmas is not on the Lord's Day, you might spend time with the children, fixing a toy or working on a project together. If our congregations sing in rest homes, have cottage meetings, or make other contacts with shut-ins during this time of year, we should show the true joy that Christ brought and not become involved in anything that might contribute to the entertainment, folly, and fun of the season. In the midst of the festivity of the season, some individuals are lonely and forgotten. We should find them in private homes, rest homes, hospitals, and prisons and help them to know the true meaning of Christmas.

Many in the world around us enjoy the carols of Christmas, but relatively few know the true joy that Jesus Christ came to bring. In any Christmas caroling we do, our songs, our message, and our separation in appearance must represent the kingdom of Christ, who came to call men to Him and to change lives. Our practices should be consistent with our other outreach ef-

forts, such as cottage meetings or street meetings.

We must give direction to this avenue of witness. These activities can so easily degenerate into social events for youth. Other groups, both religious and nonreligious, become involved in Christmas caroling. We must not become involved in their entertainment and celebration. We need godly wisdom to give a genuine testimony for our Lord Jesus.

Might we have been too passive in our witness regarding the observance of this holiday that affects the whole world? We shun the decoration, the festivity, the shopping craze, and all else the world involves itself in; but perhaps we are too silent about the coming of the Messiah, the hope of Israel, the Light to the Gentiles, and the Savior of the world. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Our God-honoring observation of the birth of Christ should give witness to the world that the Christ of Bethlehem has become the Christ of the Cross. We believe and obey Him. Those who belong to His spiritual kingdom do not follow this world's practices. But with Christ living in their hearts, they experience the true joy that was proclaimed at His coming about two thousand years ago.

*Brother John*



### *Nonconformity Issues -- Dressing Our Children*

Children come from God innocent and pure. We are given the opportunity and responsibility to adorn these God-given jewels in a way that identifies them with God's people and that also guides them heavenward. We believe that "parents should dress their children according to Gospel simplicity and teach them the serious results of following worldly practices and vanities prevalent today." How can we dress them in a God-honoring way? Why do we dress our children the way we do? What principles should guide us? What dangers should we avoid?

#### ***Reasons***

We dress our children in a plain and simple way because how children are dressed both expresses and feeds the attitude of the parents. Parents may feel obligated to dress plainly themselves, but their attitude of heart is often revealed in how they attire their children. "Be clothed with humility" is a Bible directive that must be in the hearts of the parents and then expressed in their clothing and in their children's apparel. How a child is

dressed will feed either the spirit of pride or the spirit of humility in both the parent and the child. (However, a child's tendency to pride is not eliminated by being properly dressed.)

We dress our children in a plain and simple way so they develop a proper concept of who they are. This instills a life-long principle in their minds. It is right for them to think in terms such as, "We are Mennonites, and this is why we dress the way we do." (To use only the term Christian opens up too broad of a spectrum as to where they belong.) Children should be dressed in a style that complements the design of the adults' clothes and has no extra adornment. Children belong to the Lord and to their parents, not to the world.

We dress our children in a plain and simple way to take the emphasis off our clothing rather than to give attention to it. Have you ever heard a remark such as, "Doesn't he look cute in that suit?" Too much comment over variation in baby clothes is emphasizing the wrapping rather than the gift. We dress our children in a plain and simple way so that they develop the right tastes in clothing before they become older. How will a growing girl know what prints are acceptable if she wears loud colors and designs as a child? When is she to decide that the extra stitching's and trimmings really do not belong on a Christian? When is the young boy to learn that dark trousers are more fitting for Plain People, if he wears light-colored ones in his early boyhood years? It is good for a growing boy to be accustomed to the feel of a suit coat and tie shoes.

### ***Practices***

Modesty was in focus when God first gave clothing to man. This principle should permeate all other principles. We do not want to spoil the innocence and purity of children by abbreviated types of clothing. Do short pants on boys speak of modesty? Little girls' sleeves should be made long enough to completely cover the upper arm at all times. Young children should be dressed in daytime clothing soon after awaking in the morning, and nightclothes should be put on shortly before going to bed.

Simple clothing should characterize our families. The skill at the sewing machine should be developed in efficiency rather than in creativity. Puffs on the top of the sleeves and extra tucks and stitching's elsewhere on the clothing are vain display. Meekness and reserve cause one to choose the subdued colors and finer prints rather than shiny materials, contrasting colors, and bold designs in fabrics. Extra buttons and appliques are not in the simplicity package.

Separation from the world is also a required principle for God's people.

Shirts should be of a conventional cut and design and the trousers be dark colored. Boys should wear pants-style trousers and not jeans with their patch pockets, rivets, and exposed seams. Wide belts and designer buckles belong to the world's dress. Are pullover sweaters on boys, as a part of Sunday and formal dress, becoming to Plain People? Will we instill concepts of separation if multicolored shoes and coats are worn freely at home?

Uniformity should result when a group of God's people follow the aforementioned Bible principles, coupled with the established practices from the past. Unitedly, we can put forth effort to stem the pressures of alternative patterns developing. We should want our children in their appearance to blend in with the children of other parents who are dedicatedly seeking to follow acceptable practices.

Parents should guard against prolonging the baby and toddler stage. We might wear some things on little children that we do not wear on older children—white stockings on girls or pullover knit shirts on boys. Are we timely in making the transitions to dark stockings and buttoned shirts? The center part in girls' hair should be started early rather than waiting too long. Barrettes and hair fasteners should be simple and unnoticed, rather than color-coordinated with the dress. Boys should learn to comb their hair at a young age, rather than continuing a more low-maintenance haircut.

In dressing their children, parents should guard against the spirit of competition. Avoid trying to keep up with others in outfitting the family with the most recent trends. We should be satisfied to have our children outfitted in simple home-sewn clothing. If gifts are received that we feel are not acceptable, we can either kindly return them or pass them on to a resale shop.

We should be careful not to use past practices to justify current fads. White "baby" shoes were accepted in the past, and still might be, but that does not make white dress shoes acceptable. Neither should we justify the wearing of something questionable, just because it was cheap at a yard sale or a resale shop. We should rather be willing to pay extra money to maintain Scriptural principles.

We still benefit from the revival in the earlier days of our group regarding children's clothing. However, if we wear worldly, fashionable clothing on the next generation, we are paving the way for apostasy. Instead, we should seek to leave with them a consistent pattern for the generations to follow. *Brother Paul*

## Church Committee Report - The Publication Board

After Israel had defeated Amalek in Exodus 17, the Lord God commanded to write a record of this victory in a book (verse 14) so that it could be rehearsed at later times. The battle against the flesh and the forces of evil continues today. We have benefited much from what has been written before us. We trust that what is written and published today will not only be a help in maintaining the cause of truth presently but will also be valuable for future generations as the Lord carries.

The Publication Board consists of twelve members who meet monthly to give direction to the publishing interests of the church. The Board is divided into three departments: editorial, publishing, and marketing. Numerous committees function under Board direction, including the Curriculum Committee, Art Committee, Tract Committee, Sunday School Committee, Spanish Literature Committee, and committees that give direction to the periodicals.

Congregational offerings lifted for EMP are used to fund publications that are distributed free of charge. The Eastern Mennonite Testimony is the largest project in this category. Every month 6,400 copies are printed and distributed for a cost of \$4,600 an issue.

EMP now has all nine volumes of the Testimony in stock. The volumes are a valuable resource of material on a broad range of subjects, written and reviewed by our own brethren. An index was prepared to cover Volumes 1 through 7. Consideration is being given to update and expand the index to include all ten volumes with the possible completion of Volume 10 in 2019, the Lord willing.

The annual church directory is also distributed free of charge. This year the 2016-2017 school information was printed in a separate booklet and was available in September 2016. The change was made to allow more room for the church information in the church directory and also to release the school information in September, which makes it more current for most schools.

The Living Waters is the primary evangelistic publication. Currently 107,000 copies are printed monthly. Approximately 36,000 copies of this amount are being sent to prisons in the United States with the balance going to congregations for distribution in their local communities. Stephen (Vanderhoof) completes a five-year term as editor in December 2016. Matthew (Vanderhoof) has consented to undertake the editor position in January 2017. The Living Waters Committee, along with the reviewers and the

editor, plans for writers and articles and reviews the monthly issues.

The Home Horizons, first printed in July 2003, is in its fourteenth year of printing. Currently 5,800 copies are printed monthly. Subscriptions nearly cover the cost of production. The Home Horizons Committee meets quarterly to give direction to this work. Volunteer articles, stories, and poems may be submitted.

The Spanish Literature Committee continues to focus on the need for Spanish literature in the church. The Sendas Derechas, a counterpart to Home Horizons, is published bimonthly with 2,500 copies being printed. The committee also gives direction and oversight to the translation of several English books into Spanish.

The Sendas Derechas is distributed free of charge, and other Spanish materials are sold below cost. Contributions are needed and appreciated to fund this work. Funds may be sent to EMP and designated for Spanish literature.

The Publication Board continues to work with Rod and Staff in several areas. The production of Sunday school materials is one of these. Monthly meetings are held under the direction of the Sunday School Committee to discuss lesson outlines and prepare the writers for their work. Many brethren from across the church serve as writers.

The Curriculum Committee is involved in the production of school curriculum. EMP has some of its own projects, such as the lower level reading course (presently work is being done on Grade 3) and the handwriting course. EMP is also involved in assisting Rod and Staff on various levels with the production of their curriculum.

We are grateful for the faithful labors of the staff at the EMP office and bookstore. We also acknowledge the many hours that the committees, writers, editors, and artists invest.

May God continue to bless this work for His glory and the extension of His kingdom.

*Brother James:* For the Publication Board



## **Wholesome Marriage Relationships (Part 6)**

### **Approaching Life's Sunset**

The old barn caught my attention in the golden rays of the autumn evening. Against the darkening sky, it stood as it had for ten generations, its

stone foundation planted firmly in the earth and its well-built, white walls strong. I paused, savoring the sense of timelessness and stability that clung to its sturdy walls. It stood there, a shelter from a thousand storms, a shade from countless, summer suns, and a snug shelter from the biting cold of winter after winter.

A similar aura of timelessness and stability emanates from a godly marriage that has flourished through the storms, sun, and chill winds of life. Solomon said that "the hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness" (Proverbs 16:31). Even more glorious are two hoary heads, still walking in the way of righteousness, and still savoring the heavenly bond of an enduring, flourishing marriage. A godly couple can enjoy the autumn glow of marriage when they...

#### *Reflect Properly on the Past*

From their sunset perspective a godly couple can see how God has worked through their lives in the past. They can see how the challenges and pressures of life kept them close to Him and close to each other. But they can likely see imperfections and mistakes as well. A godly couple cultivates thankfulness for the blessings, contrition for their mistakes, and a healthy willingness to allow the past to rest where it belongs—in God's wise hands.

#### *Respond Properly to the Present*

Old age brings new challenges to a marriage. An older couple gradually moves from being caregivers to independence to needing help and care themselves. Along with this often comes increasingly failing health with its aches and pains. The temptation to turn one's focus inward becomes strong in old age. A godly spouse looks beyond personal problems and pains to his partner's needs. As a couple, they continue faithful to the vows that they made at the marriage altar—to cherish in sickness or in health.

Old age might also bring feelings of boredom or uselessness. The couple who yearned for a few moments of respite from the pressures of raising a family and earning a living may now be tempted to feel unneeded. A godly couple continues to minister to others as they are able, through faithful prayers, a cheerful submission to God's plan, and a vibrant testimony of God's goodness.

#### *Relate Properly to the Future*

As a godly couple faces the sunset together, they see the gathering shadows of death and parting. But rather than fear those shadows or deny the existence of such, they help each other to look beyond to the eternal sunrise of heaven. The hope of that golden day dispels the temptations of

darkness and despair. They thank God for the privilege of each day of being together and rest calmly in His wise goodness.

Those that be planted in the house of the LORD  
shall flourish in the courts of our God.  
They shall still bring forth fruit in old age;  
they shall be fat and flourishing;  
Psalm 92:13-14



### *PRAYER POINT*

*“The effectual fervent prayer  
of a righteous man availeth much”*

Pray for the Ashland and Numidia Bible Schools—for the teachers that they would be endowed with Spirit-directed wisdom and for the students that they would apply their hearts to diligent Bible study and would grow spiritually.

Pray for the regional winter Bible schools that they would again bless our constituency. Pray that this effort would strengthen our convictions as we face the current issues and make present-day applications to truth.

Pray for civil rulers—those in authority in national, state, provincial, and local government offices. Pray for peace in the United States during the transition of the presidency. Pray that we may continue to "lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty."

Thank God for the open doors and opportunities we have to take the Gospel to several foreign countries. Pray for the Mission Board that they may have the wisdom to give the needed direction. Also pray that God would send more to labor in the fields that are ready for harvest. Pray for those who are serving on the field.

