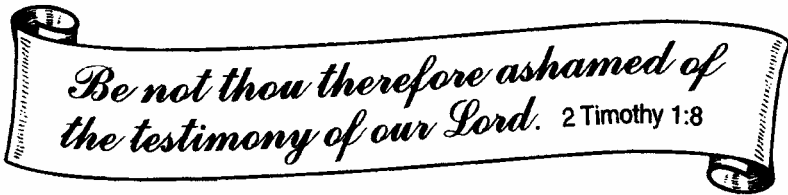


# THE EASTERN MENNONITE TESTIMONY

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OF  
THE EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA MENNONITE CHURCH  
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Gathering together for worship is a blessing to our Christian lives. "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD" (Psalm 122:1). The experience will be more inspiring and refreshing if common courtesies are exercised. "Finally.... be courteous" (1 Peter 3:8). Respectable manners are becoming for those who are "fitly framed together [as] an holy temple in the Lord" (Ephesians 2:21). A spirit of kindness should prevail.

Visitors should be met at the door with a warm smile and an extended hand. A friendly "Hello. Welcome to our service" can be very heartwarming. Kindly pointing out the location of the restrooms, nursery, and clothing rack is helpful. Visitors who would not be familiar with our forms of worship will be more at ease if our segregated seating, kneeling prayer, Sunday school class location, and other procedures are explained.

Proper hygiene is necessary to avoid residual odors related to farm chores that may be necessary before coming to the church service. A clean, dry face is becoming to the practice of the Holy Kiss. The Christian salutation is often not appropriate to use while in the restroom.

When meetinghouses become crowded, we should be conscious that we do not become an obstacle to those who may be attempting to reach the restroom, nursery, or clothing rack. At special events where the group is rather large, we need to be considerate of each other. Well-intended interactions may at times inconvenience others. When meeting the newly married couple at a wedding, we should wish them God's blessing with a few words and move on. This may require more effort when the parents are in the same line and we may be inclined to have an "old friends" interchange. But, remember, there are others waiting to be ushered out.

When attending a viewing, our words should be sincere but few. Our presence is meaningful in itself. What we have to share is not likely so exceptionally profound that it justifies delaying the many waiting in line while we have an extended interchange. A little math may help us to pace ourselves a bit. If five hundred people attend a viewing and each person talks one minute, the time will total over eight hours. Keeping remarks brief and sending a sympathy card with a personal note later will be of more benefit to them.

The physical and emotional drain that the family is going through should be taken into consideration. They are in a time of grief and possibly still in

shock. The viewing assembly should be kept reverent and quiet in consideration of the family and of the solemnity of the occasion.

Ordinations are another very important part of church life. The good support for these special worship services is a blessing. It is especially encouraging to those who are directly involved. The one chosen for this new responsibility will appreciate your interest and prayers. Although the interest in meeting the couple is good, this can also become long and tiring. We should be sincere but brief in our expressions of support.

Remember, how long does it take if five hundred people each talk a minute? Keeping the contact brief does not make it less meaningful.

It will likely be more positive. Many give up and go home because they feel they do not have time to wait to meet the couple. A letter or a visit in the home will be much more meaningful than a long line of well-wishers.

Our courtesy and consideration for each other should complement our profession. "Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together ... tarry one for another" (1 Corinthians 11:33). May those who observe the "sitting of [our] servants" glorify the Lord as did the Queen of Sheba.

*Brother Harlan.*



## The Threat of Fundamentalistic Patriotism

Since its beginning, the church has faced deceptive threats that have caused many to err. The apostle Paul warned the Galatians, "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from Him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ" (Galatians 1:6, 7). He also warned Timothy that "some shall depart from the faith," "having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away" (1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 3:5).

Fundamentalism is a movement within Protestantism that upholds basic teachings such as the accuracy of the Bible, the virgin birth of Jesus, and Christ's atonement for sins. Fundamentalist teachers withstand the influence of liberal theologians who, through human reasoning, question these basic doctrines of the Bible. However, although Fundamentalism upholds the literal interpretation of the Bible, it falls short in application and practice. This poses a deceptive threat.

Fundamentalism embraces the error of patriotism. This is defined as "love for, or devotion to one's country." While we appreciate the protection and freedom of our country, we must maintain our first love and loyalty to the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Our primary citizenship is in heaven.

A quotation from an editorial in the June 1992 Eastern Mennonite Testimony brings this into focus. "Many fundamentalist groups have arrived at the conclusion that the way to change the moral climate is to get better men into public office and to influence lawmakers, thereby bringing about laws for reform and improvement. They say that Christians are responsible to help make this happen."

Such a position clearly violates the doctrine of the separation of church and state. Jesus, in His response to Pilate, said, "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would in servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence" (John 18:36). This clearly establishes the principle of non-participation in politics that the followers of Christ should embrace. The heroes of faith (Hebrews 11:13-16) upheld this principle by confessing "that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" and by declaring that they sought and desired a better country.

In the past some Mennonites were swept into the political arena by the pressure to vote. The writer of an article in the October 1972 Eastern Mennonite Testimony recalls, "Some of us remember when E D. Roosevelt sought the presidency on a 'wet' ticket . . . against Herbert Hoover who was opposed to legalizing intoxicating drinks. There were some Mennonites who felt that this time the issue was too great, so they voted and urged others to do so. In spite of all the hard work by Mennonites, Roosevelt won the election by a landslide."

More recently the presidential election in 1960 involved a Catholic running for office. Again, some Mennonites felt compelled to vote, but their efforts were unfruitful. Our Rules and Discipline states that "our members shall not vote." This is in keeping with Biblical separation.

Local government activities bring the challenge of political involvement closer home. At times laws and actions infringe on our farming and business activities. We should not sign petitions which may be circulated to pressure authorities to respond to local concerns. While we may have sympathy for these concerns, our witness will become clouded if we become actively involved in exerting political pressure.

We desire to see honest and upright men in office, but we must remember that they are responsible to carry out civil duties which violate the

Scriptural teaching on nonresistance and the unequal yoke. "For he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil" (Romans 13:4).

We share responsibility for the actions of political leaders if we involve ourselves in voting or other activities that place them in office. The difficulty then increases if those supported for civil office would call us to become actively involved in carnal warfare. To maintain a clear testimony we must have a definite and consistent line of separation from the world.

As Christians we are admonished to keep an attitude of respect for civil leaders. Patriotic

Fundamentalists go to great lengths in exposing the failures and shortcomings of those in office. Reading too much of this type of literature will have a negative effect on us and may erode our respect for those in authority. Fear and anxiety may also replace trust and confidence in God, who rules over all. Humble submission, respect, and obedience where possible will enhance our testimony to the world.

"When the requirements of earthly authorities conflict with the requirements of Scriptures, we should unhesitatingly obey God" (Rules and Discipline, Article VI). The three Hebrews in Daniel 3 are an example of a godly response when these conflicts come to a head. They gave a decisive response to the king, "We will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou halt set up." Their miraculous deliverance by God was known throughout the kingdom of Babylon, thus leaving a clear testimony for the kingdom of God.

We conclude that a consistent, separated way of life, coupled with earnest prayer, will be more effective in relating to government conflicts than political involvement. As Christians we are called to honor those in authority. "Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king" (1 Peter 2:17).

*Brother Stanley.*



## PRAYER POINT

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

*Pray that we might each open our heart's door and let Christ come in  
and sup with us and we with Him  
(Revelation 3:20).*

*Pray for the revival services that are planned for this spring,  
and for the evangelists,  
that God's children may be inspired to walk closer to Him.*

*Pray that we would sincerely examine ourselves in anticipation of the  
counsel and Communion services so that we would not partake of the  
bread and drink of the cup unworthily.*

*Thank God for His Word, which  
"is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword"  
(Hebrews 4:12).*

*Pray for the various prison ministries.*



## *Respecting the Authority of the Conference Voice*

This is a reprint of an article by the late Isaac Sensenig in the April 1991 issue of the Eastern Mennonite Testimony

In 1876, John E Funk wrote an editorial in the Herald of Truth emphasizing the importance of conference voice. He promoted values of conference counsel such as comparing notes on points of doctrine and practice, examining ministers to see "whether they be in the faith," working toward unity, and trying to resolve difficulties.

He stated that "conferences are intended as counsel meetings, where the ministering brethren meet for the purpose of considering the interest of the church under their charge, and to employ ways and means through which the church may be sustained, preserved in its purity, fulfill its proper mission, and in every respect, and in every duty, become more efficient and better fitted to show forth the 'mystery of godliness.' "

For many years it was the custom to read the Rules and Discipline at each session of conference, and to ask the ordained men to stand in commitment to the church standards. In some cases, a deacon would walk along the pews and ask each ordained man to give his verbal commitment. This was followed by reports by the bishop brethren on each congregation in their districts. The main issues of the conference were then handled in an open spirit of wholesome conferring.

The practical aspects of the doctrine of nonconformity and separation from the world were among the issues regularly discussed. Nonconformity and separation represented the pattern of life espoused by the Mennonite Church as she rejected the sub-christian practices of the unregenerate society in general. This doctrine constitutes a total way of life for those who are born again. Separation touches every area of life: speech, business involvements, the literature we read, attire, hair arrangements, recreation, and conduct in general.

Believing that the ways of the world spell death to the ways of God (John 2:15-17) caused Mennonite conferences from their very beginning to take issue with current matters. In 1879, a conference action dealt with the fashion-related problem of beards and mustaches. Some young men who had returned from the Civil War with mustaches and beards continued to wear them after they had united with the church. A Lancaster Conference action stated that "fashionable beards and mustaches are forbidden and cannot be tolerated in the brotherhood." Another conference action of October 7, 1881, stated that "excursion parties and surprise parties are forbidden," and

that "playing of any kind of games is forbidden."

Numerous resolutions passed in the intervening years show similar expressions on various issues. Some people may be critical of some of these efforts to handle current matters, but the spirit of past faithful church leaders kept the issues of nonconformity and separation in focus. This enabled them to pass on Biblical convictions to succeeding generations.

In our day, faithful leaders must continue to meet together and help each other discern what the response of the church should be to the ways of the unregenerate society around us. In addition to conference actions, church leaders must also provide effective Bible teaching programs such as Sunday school, Bible conferences, Bible schools, and practical preaching, to teach the Bible and its application in a definite way.

As we consider the decisive actions of past faithful church leaders, we wonder why the church arrived at such passive attitudes toward the place of the conference voice. One very obvious cause during the past forty or more years was the lack of compliance with the ever-increasing number of conference resolutions and statements. This failure to carry out authoritative decisions produced a deceptive and blinding effect on the part of all concerned. Church leaders felt pacified in making declarations but increasingly lacked the moral fiber to administrate accordingly. The general constituency was conditioned not to take seriously the voice of God through the church. A church leader of the past revealed the mentality that developed, when he said, "We must take the Calvinist, pietist position on obedience or we are all lost." We all know that human positions do not change the Word of God.

The Jerusalem Conference (Acts 15) "delivered ... decrees for to keep" to the churches involved. The result was that the churches were established in the faith and increased in number daily (Acts 16:4, 5). The Scriptures are replete with warnings such as, "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (James 1:22).

In our past conference setting, there was no shortage of sound resolutions and statements issued to the brotherhood. These covered all areas of the traditional Mennonite understanding of Biblical discipleship, such as divorce and remarriage, separation of church and state, nonconformity, television, mission vision, and the Christian home. Articles on the subject of apostasy were reprinted in publications such as *Vigilance*. A special conference statement was acted upon and presented to the churches, entitled *Urgent Appeal*. While these approaches strengthened the faith of a remnant, they had a very negative effect on the many who felt good merely be-



cause the right things were said again.

Matthew 13:12-17 forcibly reminds us of the blinding effect of hearing and not doing. Our Lord's last message to the churches was, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (Revelation 3:22). Will we heed this message, or will we take the same deceptive course other groups have taken in the past? We must decide.

"Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it" (Luke 11:28). May God preserve us to this end.

—Isaac K. Sensenig



### **Hath God Cast Away His People?**

This question, raised by Paul in Romans 11:1 seems to be a logical conclusion to the previous discussion. However, a clear answer rang out: "God forbid." The question was important to the brethren at Rome and is still raised today. God's people have come to varied conclusions on the matter.

There are some hard-to-be-understood concepts about God and salvation in the previous chapters of Romans. His ways are higher than our ways, and He directs in human affairs from an infinite perspective.

Two groups of people are in focus, the nation Israel, as well as the saved people. Those who have stumbled are compared to those who are standing firmly. The elect are those who have received Jesus Christ as their Savior. The basis for election is grace. Any that depend on the works of the Law for their salvation are outside the grace of God and, therefore, not of the elect.

Israel's rejection of Jesus was quite general, but it was not everyone's choice (Hebrews 11:1-10). Paul quickly reminded them that he was an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham and of the tribe of Benjamin. That he was called of the Gospel was evidence that God was not finished with all the Jews. Because the Jews in general rejected Jesus as their Savior, the Gospel was preached to the Gentiles. Even though the Gospel messengers moved from the Jewish people as a nation to the Gentiles, the invitation continued to the Jews as individuals.

The Gentiles found great hope in Christ and healing for their sin-sick condition. As they viewed the development of the church, they wondered,

"Is God finished with the Jews because most of them rejected His Son"? Because of a limited perspective of God's total plan, it may also have seemed that the divine longsuffering toward Israel was totally exhausted.

Elijah struggled with what he thought was a hopeless situation: abandoned and hunted down by the God haters. He was assured that God had not forgotten him and that he was definitely not alone in his determination to obey God.

When men rebel, they set in motion the divine laws of sowing and reaping, which blind and harden the heart. All who die in this condition will be judged accordingly. Man's rejection of truth is his own decision, but great blindness from God follows. 'And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie' (2 Thessalonians 2:11).

A very clear warning is given to us as Gentiles (Hebrews 11:17-24). Since Israel was the channel by which the Gospel came to us, we should have a regard for them, even though their present, lost condition is sad. We are not to be high-minded but to fear.

The question that is raised in verse 11 asks, "Which came first"? Did Israel fall so that Gentiles would believe? No, rather the unbelief came first, and then the Gospel was offered to the Gentiles.

God desires to use the Gentile's acceptance of the Gospel to call the Jews to salvation (Hebrews 11:12-26). That will take place only through their faith in the One whom the fathers rejected and crucified. If the Jews' demise resulted in our salvation, we are asked to consider what benefits there will be to others when the Jews believe. It is very clearly implied that Israel's rejection of Christ is not permanent.

The Jews are likened to the natural branches of a tree. They were cut off because they were unproductive. They allowed unbelief to dominate their lives and profession. They rejected their only hope.

Paul clearly states that if they will change their attitude toward God's Son, they will also have the privilege of being grafted into the holy root. God is able to graft them in again, if and when they turn to the One over which they previously stumbled (Hebrews 11:23).

God will allow tremendous suffering, and many Jews will be killed. But some of the Jews will see their error, and come to God in repentance. 'And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, the LORD is my God' (Zechariah 13:9). 'And so all Israel shall be saved' (Hebrews 11:26). "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be

saved" (Romans 10:13).

The believing Gentiles, as wild branches, have been grafted into the root of the olive tree. In this relationship, we receive our life-giving nourishment from the roots and trunk. We find ourselves grafted in among the natural branches who were cut off and who will be grafted in again to the holy rootstock.

We are not self-sustained, and have absolutely nothing of ourselves to boast. "Thou bearest not the root, but the root thee" (Hebrews 11:18).

Our relationship to God is based on our faith in His Son. Although our connection is by grafting, it is a safe and satisfying relationship, available to all who believe on Jesus Christ. Presently, the unbelieving Jews are enemies to the believing Gentiles who have accepted the Messiah and preached in His Name.

God loved Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Jew has a special kinship with God. However, God will not overlook their sin because of their kinship, nor will He modify His requirements of salvation. God has concluded both Jew and Gentile in unbelief, and then offered His mercy to all who respond to His Son in faith.

God will deal with the Jews through hard times, and many will die in their rebellion, but a remnant will turn to God and live. 'And I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out. And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there will I plead with you face to face" (Ezekiel 20:34, 35).

"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee" (Psalm 122:6).

*Brother Earle*



### **Cultural Norms That Press God's People (Part 3)**

#### **Intrigued with Technology**

The individual screens on the seats in front of us went blank as the speaker cracked to life. "We have begun our descent into Minneapolis. We ask that at this time all electronic devices would be turned off." A flurry of activity arose as men scrolled down their touch screens to hit the shut-down button. Women pulled their ipod ear buds out and proceeded to untangle themselves from the wires. A series of beeps, chirps, and dying chords sounded as screens went blank.

Our society is surely addicted to the entertainment of electronic technology. Should God's people be different? Opinions vary concerning technology use, but our level of fascination with technology surely reveals something about us.

How fascinated should God's children be with man's accomplishments? Men are building their second Babel today. Technology has united our world once more, and men (judging by advertisements) are proud of how high they have built. We should marvel more at God's handiwork and less at man's inventions.

A hearing aid specialist recently asked an older brother if his cell phone was "blue tooth" compatible. "I never looked in its mouth," our brother answered with a smile. He was not ashamed to be ignorant about the world of gigabytes and satellites. He lived in the real world—God's world of warm garden soil and wind singing through pine trees. Something is wrong if a Christian thrills to the latest capabilities of a new cell phone yet rarely speaks in Sunday school.

Does technology affect our family life? The traditional family evening is pleasant to contemplate: father reading a book to himself or his children, mother knitting, and the children occupying themselves with various hobbies such as carving, drawing, or cross stitching. Must this be replaced with father in his office checking his e-mails, mother trying to program her sewing machine, and the children preoccupied with texting or playing electronic games? Surely, when technology repeatedly robs us of our focus on our children or our guests, it has gone too far!

It will be hard to convince our youth not to be fascinated with electronic gadgets if we fail to be reserved in business technology. We believe in a simple, conservative lifestyle—a pilgrim-and-stranger mentality. Do we consistently practice economic conservatism? How much money we borrow, how we advertise, how broad a market we try to reach, and how large we aim to become will make a difference in how dependent we will be on the Internet.

*Brother Stephen.*

"By faith he sojourned in the land of  
promise, as in a strange country, . . . for he  
looked for a city which hath foundations, whose  
builder and maker is God"  
(Hebrews 11: 9-10).