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Mennonites have historically encouraged a quality basic education. God has blessed us with the privilege to conduct our own schools according to our faith. We attempt to impart a foundation of essential knowledge on which each individual can further build his own knowledge and skills. So if we encourage education and we employ professional services, why do we "discourage our members from pursuing institutional higher education" (Rules and Discipline, art. III, no. 8)?

The curriculum of most colleges and universities is militantly opposed to Biblical faith. The majority of educational institutions do not accept the reality of God. The prevailing scientific establishment believes that what cannot be proved scientifically is not real. We believe that facts can be understood correctly only with a foundation of faith. "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse" (Romans 1:20). Evolution is religiously taught as a fact instead of a theory. Belief in the supernatural is openly ridiculed.

The atmosphere of secular educational institutions is humanistic. Pride in human achievement is flaunted. Humility with a fear of God is foreign. Few become more humble with how little they know as they learn. Youth are tempted to reject their spiritual education of Scriptural knowledge and wisdom and adopt faith in "science falsely so called," which conflicts with the Bible.

We are also opposed to higher education because of the effect that it has had historically on our faith. As education became more specialized in America, some Mennonite youth pursued college educations. The majority of them returned with contempt for their former faith. The Mennonite Church sought to curb this by starting its own colleges. Very soon its own colleges were invaded by the same secular thinking as other colleges. The pressure to be accredited by worldly institutions was a snare.

We have come to accept, possibly more by experience than by reasoning, that higher education discourages faith. But what may be some reasons? The pursuit of higher education takes youth away from God's faith-building institution of the home at a critical time in their lives. Godly parents love their children as no instructor can and are the best qualified to teach them the most important lessons of life. Youth need the continued

guidance and influence of the parental home to lay a solid foundation for life. In academy lifestyle, peer pressure becomes the most influential force in youth's lives at a time when they are the most vulnerable. The pressure to compromise and give in to sinful conduct is intense in the student dorm and nightlife of college. Even church institutions, such as Bible schools, need constant vigilance that negative peer pressure is not taking the lead rather than parental and church guidance.

Also, the professional lifestyle that follows a professional education can have a detrimental impact on the home. The emphasis of higher education discourages women from filling their God-ordained calling to bear children and guide the house. Fathers find it harder to work together with their growing children to teach them life lessons and character strengths.

The Bible is written in the context of an agricultural community with lessons from nature, which children can understand and apply. Agriculture, which has been a dominant livelihood and sideline family occupation among Plain People, is an excellent atmosphere for teaching children life lessons. Manual-labor occupations teach important life disciplines such as perseverance, suffering, and endurance that contribute to spirituality.

God has provided for our needs and more besides even though we have avoided the lucrative, professional occupations. But the temptation to worldliness and pride is not limited to jobs that require a degree. Artistic and creative skills are in high demand in a society that has overemphasized college degrees and neglected apprentice skills. Can we maintain a humble attitude toward ourselves and our trades? "And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 John 2:17).

May we ever seek the accreditation of our heavenly Father, "esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for [we have] respect unto the recompence of the reward" (Hebrews 11:26).

—BAS



EIGHT WOES

If we had been listening to Jesus speak and He pronounced woe upon us and upon our comrades, could we have accepted it graciously? Jesus addressed the scribes and Pharisees and pronounced eight woes upon them (Matthew 23). We know that man's nature and tendencies have not changed since Jesus walked on this earth, so what can we learn from these woes? We should personally address each of these weaknesses in ourselves so that we will not hear Him rebuke us for the same failures.

"But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in" (Matthew 23:13). We tend to think we will enter into the kingdom quite easily, and most certainly we would never hinder anyone else from entering or doing what is right. But if we fail to submit to God and to the church's application of the Word, we are not entering into the kingdom of heaven. Are we in any way a hypocrite that would be a stumbling block to any who follow us?

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer" (Matthew 23:14). The scribes and Pharisees were purportedly very shrewd and knew quite well how to "legally" take advantage of widows. To cover up their sin, they would pray long prayers up to three hours long and as many as three times per day to impress their fellows with how truehearted and religious they were. Are we considerate of those who are disadvantaged? Do we ever act spiritual to cover up other inconsistencies in our lives? Jesus was not condemning long prayers but rather a heart expression that does not match lip expression.

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him two-fold more the child of hell than yourselves" (Matthew 23:15). What are our reasons for witnessing to others? Is it for personal benefit, honor, and recognition? Or do we witness to win more souls to Christ before it is too late? If our motives for witnessing are wrong, those whom we influence will also receive a warped concept of the gospel.

"Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor!" (Matthew 23:16). Are we faithful to the promises that we make? Jesus condemned swearing. Do we make sure that when we make a promise it is as good as done? Or do we find excuses to not fulfill our commitments or to easily salve our conscience with "I forgot" or "I will try to remember next time" when we have failed to honor a promise?

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cum-min, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone" (Matthew 23:23). Do we carefully obey when we are seen or when it pleases us but avoid the cross of self-denial? Sincerely following the principles of the Word will help us to be consistent in practice. Are we selective as to which church regulations we want to obey? Do we view God's Word and the warnings of His church as optional but still covet His blessing?

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.... Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness" (Matthew 23:25, 27). These verses point out the need to be truly genuine. Jesus pointed out that if we are clean on the inside, the outside will line up. Do we live in fear that someone will find out that we are something other than what they think we are? If so, maybe we have work to do on the inside. What people think we are and what God knows we are must match before we can truly be useful in Christ's kingdom.

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets" (Matthew 23:29, 30). The Pharisees built memorials and fixed up the graves for the prophets that their fathers had slain. They professed to abhor such injustice, but at the same time they were persecuting and would eventually kill the very Son of God in their own day.

Do we admire our forefathers and church leaders of the past who faithfully held up the truth, reverence and honor them, wish they were still here, but at the same time look on the advice that the church leaders or our parents give with disdain or ill will?

May God grant us each the grace to look into our own lives. If we find any woe-bearing actions there, may He give us strength to overcome them so that Jesus' promise can be for us. "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne" (Revelation 3:21).

Brother Loren

Lessons From Mennonite History

Youth Organization

The older our church group becomes, the greater the challenge of integrating and unifying our rising generation into the existing church structure and program. The tendency of the young may be to feel that our church is the project of a previous generation. They may feel they would rather develop their own agenda or at least leave some kind of mark or change that distinguishes their contribution. This tendency fails to see that the church of Jesus Christ is a "building fitly framed together grow[ing] unto an holy temple in the Lord" that is not benefited by periodic changes in design or architecture.

This challenge is not new. In 1919, nearly forty Mennonite young men from the United States held a conference in France in which they discussed how young people could contribute to the work of the church and also aired their grievances with the church leadership of that time. They organized themselves on an intended permanent basis and called themselves the Mennonite Young People's Movement. They determined to hold Young People's Conferences in the United States to inspire young people to greater dedication and service to Christ and to also invite them to join them in working out a larger and more influential place for the mature young people in the work and leadership of the church. Eventually they also began a new church paper, *The Christian Exponent*, in which to promote their views.

How did such a conference come to pass—and in France? Did they carry out their plans? What were the effects?

During World War 1, Mennonite boys went to army camps when called for military service because no provision was made for COs. There they suffered abuse at the hands of officers and other trainees. Church leaders were not able to provide a regular system of visitation. The boys felt neglected. Most saw this as a trial of their faith, and their only goals were to remain faithful to their convictions and to return to normal life as soon as possible.

But some, especially those who had attended high school and college and had come under patriotic influences, felt a strong desire to serve humanity in some way that would not jeopardize their nonresistant position. Some of these signed on with the American Friends Service Committee (Quakers) to help with postwar reconstruction work in France. They were convinced that the Christian should not be satisfied with being "the quiet in the land"

and that, in this way, they could make a positive statement of willingness to serve their fellow men. This proactive mentality, coupled with a feeling that their church had failed them in their hour of need, caused them to be dissatisfied with the status quo. This is the background to the above-mentioned event known as the Clermont Conference.

Not surprisingly, they soon found themselves in conflict with the "elders" that were in control of Mennonite Church institutions such as the Mennonite Publishing House and Mennonite General Conference. For instance, Daniel Kauffman, editor of the Gospel Herald, at first ignored the Clermont Conference in France and only under persuasion printed an announcement of the first Young People's Conference (YPC) to be held in the United States in 1920. But in the same issue he wrote an editorial that questioned the motives of the movement. Prior to the 1922 conference, he wrote a lengthy editorial that was decidedly negative. He wrote, "Our observation has been that separate movements of special classes within the same church are invariably divisive." J. L. Stauffer from Virginia, prodded by George R. Brunk I, carried on a rather spirited confrontational correspondence with young Harold S. Bender, chairman of the committee for planning the conferences in the United States.

At the heart of the issue was the historic Biblical position of the Mennonite Church to rely on leaders who had been called by lot and ordination, who had proven their orthodoxy, and who had gained the trust of their people as opposed to this new emphasis on talent, education, and self-confidence.

The movement seemingly died out as some of the most progressive advocates moved out of the (Old) Mennonite Church following the closing of Goshen College for the 1923-24 school year. The demise of The Christian Exponent in 1928 also seemed to suggest that the movement had worn itself out. But the effects continued on.

The Mennonite General Conference appointed a standing committee in 1924 called the Young People Problems Committee to give direction to youth service opportunities. This committee promoted Christian Life Conferences that were usually held at the church colleges. Unfortunately, this gave the apostatizing schools an avenue to spread their leaven further. These conferences later developed an emphasis on retreats and recreation. In 1948 Mennonite General Conference approved the beginning of Mennonite Youth Fellowship (MYF). This organization was far more influential as it oversaw local youth organizations all across the Mennonite Church. These were intended to develop youth talents and deepen their

faith. Unfortunately, they served to further broaden the gap that already divided young people from the historic practices of their church.

Some of the more moderate proponents of the YPC movement, such as Harold S. Bender and Orie O. Miller, had not been in army camps or in France. They were content to work with the existing order until time brought them the opportunity to step into leadership roles such as in the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). In those roles they exercised great influence by the new, more ecumenical committees they organized, such as the Peace Problems Committee. Men such as Bender, who was eventually dean at Goshen College, greatly influenced the next generation of young men in ways that later surprised even themselves.

In 1952 seven young American Mennonites, missionaries, MCC personnel, and students, met in Amsterdam, Netherlands, for two weeks. All were protégés of Harold S. Bender. They discovered that they held certain ideas in common, which they later published in a series of "concern" pamphlets. Thus they came to be known as the "Concern Group." A group of MCC executives, including Bender and Miller, met with them to hear them out. They felt that too many decisions were imposed on them by church leaders in the United States—decisions they felt fully capable of making themselves.

The irony of the situation could not be ignored. The effects of the 1919 Clermont Conference had come full circle. In an effort to not repeat the "mistake" their elders had made in deliberately marginalizing the 1920s YPC movement, the MCC executives and church leaders engaged in a long-ranging dialogue with the Concern Group that lasted until the older generation passed on and the Mennonite Church entered the next phase of apostasy. The "Concern" pamphlets, which emphasized decentralization of authority, promoted first congregationalism and then house churches. Bender visited such a "church" in the vicinity of Goshen College and was distressed at their informalism but was not inclined to interfere as it was the fruit of his own sowing.

The issue at stake is not whether the highly efficient organizing abilities of the YPC "graduates" were better or whether the decentralizing, "every man doing that which was right in his own eyes," tendencies of the Concern Group was better. Rather, will we as a conservative group inspire the rising generation to respect traditional, Biblical patterns of leadership? Will we expect our called and ordained leaders to take their place and guide the church, or will we allow a cadre of talented, self-confident individuals to tailor the building of the church of Jesus Christ to their own tastes? "That

our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace" (Psalms 144:12).

Brother Elmer

Sources: 1. Keim, Albert M. Harold S Bender, 1897-1962 Scottdale PA. Herald Press, 1998

2. The Mennonite Encyclopedia 1955-1990



Church Committee Report – West Willow Rest Homes

The first resident came to the home forty years ago this month. Over these years we have had fifty-three residents. Some were just short term, and the longest stay was seventeen years. As a committee, we seek to maintain the original vision for the home. We do not want to rob children of the blessing of caring for their parents.

On December 19 we welcomed a new resident, from the Farmington congregation in New Mexico. Since moving into this area, she will relate to the White Oak congregation. Our other residents are.....(*names have been edited in line with our privacy policy-Editor annabaptistmennonites.org*) Over the years the home has given opportunity for sisters to be involved in voluntary service. When the home began, the sisters were expected to commit for a one-year term of service. When it became difficult to fill the need, that commitment was backed down to six months, then to three months, and now to one month. Sometimes some ask for two-week terms, which we do not accept. The changeover of help is difficult for the residents. Are we losing the service mentality that the Bible teaches and has been a part of our lifestyle? If any sisters have an interest in serving, please make it known to us.

Sister J continues to fill her place by overseeing the residents' medications, doctor visits, and so forth. She is also doing some craft projects with the residents. We greatly appreciate her contribution to the home.

Since most of our residents do not visit many of our churches, they look forward to meeting you at the weekly cottage meeting. They enjoy this time of fellowship.

It has been a blessing to see how God has provided for this work. This past year the septic system began to fail, and we knew we had to do something. We were able to hook up with public sewer, which was across the street. This was costly, but it seemed like the best long-term solution. We especially wish to thank the congregations that send offerings so we can continue this provision for our elderly without receiving money from the Mission Board account.

Please pray for the Rest Home Committee as we direct this work. We desire wisdom in planning for the future as our church group grows larger and has more needs. Let us each be faithful in our calling.

Brother F., For the Rest Homes Committee



The Abundant Life (Part 3)

Willing Service

What excitement as everyone climbs into the coach to head south for New Orleans! It will be so fulfilling to help those who have suffered from the hurricane. They will be very grateful for help. It certainly is not a hardship to sacrifice our time and travel these miles in this bus.

Some of us may have an opportunity to serve others and our Lord in such a way. But to wait for some exciting day to give ourselves and our time in service is not wise. The Lord wants us to go "about doing good" every day of the year. As we daily serve God and our fellow men, we will experience the fulfillment of the abundant life.

Jesus is the perfect example for us. He "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant" (Philippians 2:7). He came bending low, bearing ill repute, suffering false accusation, and enduring the shameful cross. "Not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42). In lowliness, we also joyfully and diligently fill a small role in our Master's kingdom. We humbly become His mouth, His feet, and His hands. The service is not for us or about us—only to fulfill our Master's will. The abundant life is enriched by pureness of motive.

Jesus shared a very heart-searching parable in Matthew 25:31-46. Those who give a drink to the thirsty, food to the hungry, clothes to the naked, cheer to the sick, and caring presence to those in prison will inherit the kingdom. Jesus wants those to be with Him in heaven who serve the least

persons, who unconsciously give and share in unnoticed ways, and who disregard their own needs for the welfare of others. The abundant life is enriched by action.

Willing service begins at home, faithfully fulfilling the wishes of Father and Mother, sharing in the household or outside duties of another, or taking time to help a neighbor. While on the job, we work with the purpose of being an asset to the employer, working as hard when the boss is absent as when he is present.

Joy is found in faithful service to our brethren and sisters in the Lord. Communicating and sharing with them make us aware of their burdens. Also, the activities of the church need willing servants. Taking part in the service or teaching a class will fulfill our desire to serve our Master. We can share the Good News of salvation with others: it will bring a glow to our abundant life.

Make willing service a way of life. Grasp the fleeting opportunities to share yourself and your resources. Each act of kindness is felt personally by Jesus: "I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink." These deposits are secure in the bank of heaven. "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34).

—*Brother Joel*



PRAYER POINT

*"The effectual fervent prayer
of a righteous man availeth much"*

Thank God that "the angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them" (Psalm 34:7).

Pray for the salvation of those who are blinded in unbelief.

Pray that young people might realize that God will bring them into judgment if they selfishly walk in the ways of their heart and in the sight of their eyes (Ecclesiastes 11:9).