



The *Pulpit Exchange*

It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. (1 Corinthians 1:21)

So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading. (Nehemiah 8:8) Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend. (Proverbs 27:17)

Volume 6, No. 12

Issue # 612

The Leaven of Anti-Mennonitism

In 1 Samuel 16:7 the Bible says, “The LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.” I have heard that Scripture interpreted and used on a number of occasions and not always did I understand the interpretation that was given. However, there have been time when I have heard that interpreted in such a way that it seemed to discredit man — that

he looks on the outward appearance. My dear people, I would like to ask you frankly and sincerely, “How else can you know?” Do you think for a moment that God has entrusted you with the ability to see the heart like He does? I do not think we have that ability. Therefore, in this service I recognize that I can only see you as a man seeth, because I see you on the outward. I see your outward appearance. I

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see your outward expressions. Do not forget folks that does tell us something.

I appreciate that God has limited us, praise His name, that we cannot see the hearts of man. If I could see the hearts of men and women it may be a tremendous discouragement to me, or it may be contrariwise. I would say this first. On the grounds this week, I have witnessed some definite outward evidences that are not of the Spirit of God. However, in

case you feel I am feeling arrogant about it, I would simply say that in our own home congregation I witness some such evidences, traits, characteristics or expressions that definitely are not of the Spirit of God.

Now, my dear people, I would hasten to say that I do not see as God sees. I cannot see the heart, so I am not sure what all these evidences are telling me because I do not know which way you are going. This is something we all

Vol. 6 No. 12, Issue # 612. The Pulpit Exchange is a compilation of written sermons without commentary, published as often as possible, in the interests of promoting sound preaching in our conservative Anabaptist churches. All sermons have been transcribed and printed with permission. Names are removed so that we can focus on the message and content rather than on a certain speaker or style. (Names will be published in the next issue).

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

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Published by Door of Peace Publications/Les Éditions «Porte-de-Paix» a conservative Amish Mennonite/Anabaptist publisher
c/o Keith G. White, P.O. Box 104, Blyth, Ontario Canada N0M 1H0

Cost per Issue \$4.95 + \$2.50 p& h Canada/ \$3.50 p& h USA

ought to be concerned about — the direction we are going. My dear people, I come to you in the name of the Lord Jesus with a deep concern about the direction you are going. Perhaps your expression here does not yet tell it all. Perhaps out the way, God will use you in a marvellous way to demonstrate the great call of Jesus Christ in separation from a sinful world. There is a sense in which this message is a sequel to the one last night on the Biblical basis of separation. I will not be spending a lot of time on those Scriptures but I will be using some of them.

I would like to begin with the conflict that is in focus when we are thinking of the subject of “The Leaven of Anti-Mennonitism.” You see friends, simply, as our brother brought out in the devotional, I cannot see the congregation this morning like God sees it. I can see the outward expression but I cannot see the inward heart — the inner experience. Therefore, I am not quite sure where everyone is. Somehow I could wish I knew how many in this congregation, in this building and out here, are thoroughly convinced and persuaded that being a part of the Anabaptist Mennonite stream of faith is the way to go. I cannot see that. I do not know how

many of you feel that way about it.

I tell you folks it is kind of an uneasy feeling if you are in a church group or in a fellowship where you are not quite sure whether they are in the Bible way. That is a terrible feeling. I like to have the confirmation in my heart from God that those of you who are assembled here are fully persuaded that you are in the stream of faith that you believe is the way that Jesus has outlined for us in the New Testament, and who feel that they are living out that clear expression of the Bible faith. Of course, there are immaturities and different stages of growth. Nevertheless, basically you are part of a fellowship that is committed to this important concept of Christianity.

1) *Let us consider the conflict that is facing us.* The conflict, as I see it, my dear people, is the matter of living out the clear, visible, distinction between the Church and the world. The Bible says that we are to “work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:2). I believe that Scripture means that every principle of God that is put to work in the life has an outward expression. Every principle of God’s holy Book will be expressed. Therefore, it does

matter what you believe my dear people, because what you believe is what you are. What you are is what you are expressing by living out the clear, visible distinction between the Church and the world. The Bible teaches it but the conflict is how to live that out.

This concept and ideal is so clearly taught in the New Testament. Friends, I do not see how anyone could miss it, do you? It is so clearly taught in the New Testament but alas so vaguely accomplished by the many churches around the world. It remains then, for those sincere and fervent believers who are committed to true Biblical discipleship, and who recognize that there is a definite, decided separation between the Church and the world to live it out. I would simply ask you, "Are you among that number, whether your name is Mennonite or otherwise?" My concern is not the name tag you carry but the life you are living, and the commitment you have to Jesus Christ and the holy principles of this book. That is my concern for you.

In fact, there is so much variation among the churches today. It has come to the point where the principles are being lost. I would like to remind us that every principle in the Word must

have visible expression. My friends, if we do not express it visibly then we will lose it and that is precisely what is happening. The problem in the churches today is not that they are not interpreting this Book, but they are interpreting the principles away. It is not that they are not in some cases making application, but in many cases they are explaining away the application to where there is no application at all to the principle. This puts the Church in a sad state of affairs. This is serious.

Jesus in Matthew 28, in His final commission to His followers said that they are to go out, make disciples of all nations, "Teaching them to observe all things" (Matthew 28:20). My friends that means get it into practice. That means show them how to live it out. That is so vital to our mission in the world. This conflict brings frustration and finally defeat to many people. They face up to this fact that there is a conflict between the Church and the world and not everybody comes out at the same place in understanding the Bible. Alas, how do we go from here? Many of them simply succumb. Some of them are doing it on the mission front. I had one young man tell me that when he got out on the mission front that is where

he saw it entirely differently.

Listen friends, I believe it is a real test on the mission front of our day, but I am prepared to say this ought to be one of the tests that is put before every mission worker that goes on the field. “Are you prepared to defend the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the teachings of this Book, the distinctive teachings of this Book — the teachings that make our church a distinctive church because we practice them? Are you prepared to defend them?” Any mission worker on the mission front who is not prepared to defend them makes a poor contribution to the mission cause of the Church today. It is highly important that we are fully persuaded when we go on the field friends. That is one of the reasons why our mission fronts, in many parts of the world have failed, because they have simply finished with the common denominator of the religious denominations. They are no longer holding forth the Word of life which is able to not only save men’s souls but to keep them in the way of salvation right now on through to eternity.

Some have lost out in higher education. I know one girl who lost it in her experience in higher education. Some folks will say, “We solved that problem by simply having nothing to do with

education.” Oh, no you don’t. I am here to tell you, my dear people, this is a conflict that everyone will face some time or other in their encounter with the world and other religious circles. Some face it in contact with other religious denominations and they do not know how to handle it. They get out here and somehow they meet up with folks who are of a different persuasion religiously and they do not come out at the same place in some things that had been taught to these dear folks and they feel are so important from the Scriptures. They hear these other folks telling them “After all, it is not quite like you see it my friend,” and some of them fall on that point. All of us, sooner or later, will face the conflict that is before us.

I believe and am fully persuaded, my dear parents, that our greatest opportunity lies in the home to prepare our children for the social crises that are ahead. God help us. The Bible says that we ought to be bringing our children “up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). Part of that involves questions that will be poised right at you parents at a very early age. “Is that man a Christian, or is he not? Does that woman love God or does she not? I see a ring on her finger.

That man is puffing on a cigarette, does he belong to Jesus or does he not?" What do you tell them? My friends, it is at that crucial time of life that it is up to you to have an answer that will reinforce their simple childlike trust and that you will lead them in a way that one day will help them to face social crises realistically head on and victoriously. They are not Christians at this point but they are laying a foundation that will be very necessary to them when they come to make a commitment to Jesus Christ. Many parents are giving wishy-washy answers to their children.

I want to tell you dear people. We ought to remind our children that we do not know for sure in some of these cases whether those folks belong to God, whether they belong to Jesus or not. However, one thing we know and that is that we cannot be wearing that ring. We cannot be puffing on a cigarette. We have the light of God's Word that will not permit us to be involved in such practices. We leave it with God as to where they stand right now. Perhaps in some cases some of these dear ones have confessed faith in Christ and they are waiting on someone to lead them on from where they are to where they ought to be. My friends, here is one of the greatest

challenges that lays before the Anabaptist stream of people today. Is your church, my friends, what you consider to be the clearest expression of the New Testament ideal at this present time? It is up to you.

II) *The genius of the Anabaptist/Mennonite movement was not the succession of persons but of doctrine.* Now as much as I appreciate our Mennonite leaders, my dear people I must confess that the thing that has brought our faith to us today was not our succession of leaders, but a succession of doctrine. It is a succession of teaching, and a succession of propagating this teaching from one generation to another. I say that simply because Church history reveals to us that there have been times when the primitive Church came to a fairly low ebb. In fact, there are sections of history where it is quite difficult to trace it through. Nonetheless, God saw to it that the faith came on through. Our boasting has no place in our succession of leadership my dear friends or some family trait. Rather, our boasting and joy is that we have access to the true faith and principles of God's Word. We have the light of God's Word that helps us to live the separated life in our day.

Somehow we need to get our

balance here, because there is, on the other hand, a sense in which a church is largely dependent on her leadership. I would like to caution us on this point. We ought to be developing a real appreciation for our leaders, but not veneration. We love them, we support them wherein they follow Christ, but we do, in no way look up to them as taking the place of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, or taking the place of His Word.

III) *We want to identify the subtle problem that is deteriorating the Mennonite Church and to in some measure urge active steps toward recovery.* 1) *I would like to look into the New Testament Scriptures to notice the reason for the conflict.* In John 15:19 Jesus says, “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own.” That is it friends. “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.” There is a tension existing, my dear people, between the world — society — and the true Church of Jesus Christ. There always has been and there always will be. Do not expect it to be eliminated. However, today what is happening is the line is being obliterated

and that is the step that is leading us toward elimination. Let us remember that Jesus has promised us there will be a continuing tension between the world and the Church.

Romans 12:2 says, “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” 2 Corinthians 6:14 says “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?” No specific answer is given there but the implied answer is definitely in the negative. There is none. Herein, dear ones, we are facing a threat as a Church today, as the Church is moving closer and closer to the world in organization and in social ties. This is one of the problems that is giving rise to this whole matter.

Galatians 1:4, speaking of Jesus Christ says, “Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world,” or more literally “out of this present evil world.” This is not geographic, but in spiritual experience. We are delivered out of it. Praise His name! Ephesians 6:12 says, “For we

wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” May I say there is an inner tension. My dear people, that tension will find outer expression. There is tension in our lives as a result of our high calling. We cannot expect that to be taken away as long as we are in the world.

Titus 2:11, 12 says, “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts,” My dear people, denying — there is a point of conflict. To deny, means “to discount worldly desires, worldly customs, worldly ways.” “We should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.” James 1:27 says, “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.” My friends, that is why there is a conflict, because we do not want to be touched by it. We do not want to be polluted by it. We do not want to be contaminated by it. Therein is a conflict. That is the reason why we have the conflict.

James 4:4 says, “Ye adulterers

and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.” My friends, there is all the difference in the world. There are some who today are travelling in an approved relationship with the world. Those, my dear people are not in an approved relationship with Jesus Christ. That is what this means. Immediately, upon our conversion experience, we come into an approved relationship with God, but the old relationship is broken. We no longer have an approved relation with the world. James says “if that is the case” — if you have an approved relation with the world — “you are the enemy of God.

1 John 2:15–17 says, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.” Listen, my dear people, I hear folks at times say this whole thing of separation is not a matter of things it is a matter of heart experience. I challenge you. Many times in the New Testament it speaks of “evil things.” In this passage of God’s Word He clearly tells us, “Do not love the world, neither the things that are in the world.” The world can refer to the people, the spirit of the age, and the things of the age. I should say the world refers to the spirit of

this age, and the things refers to those things which are visible and tangible in the world. Love them not, because he says, “these things are “not of the Father, [they are] . . . of the world.” That is why. It is so clear. Therefore he says, “all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. . . . If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”

The Anabaptist/Mennonite movement believed these principles, my dear people. I think most of you would say that you believe them also. *Again, my friends, the evidence of your belief in these principles is your expression.* You cannot believe in something you do not express. There is a close connection between what you believe and what you do. We cannot break that. That is a spiritual law. Anabaptist Mennonites believed them and lived them out. They worked them out. They expressed them in their daily living. They believed in a visible Church — a church that could be seen visibly — a church wherein you could see the principles of God’s Word in practice. You could see it being done in the lives of the people. They would read their Bible and then they

would observe this group of people and would say, “Ah, yes I see the connection.” Today, my dear people, I am fearful that some times people are observing our lives — the outer expression — and are looking in this book and saying, “Where is the connection?” How about it? Where is the connection?

They lived in a visible way. They believed in a voluntary Church. No dissenter was permitted in their ranks. Herein lies another problem today: the Church is sheltering too many that are not thoroughly persuaded in the separation of the Church and the world and that dissent is fermenting throughout the Church. It is sad friends, because the Early Church was very careful not to permit dissenters among them. In fact, they had an advantage over us. Anyone who identified with them, their life was in danger. That made a difference. Should it not also be true in our circles that if a person is dissenting, opinionated and set against the ways of the Gospel, dear ones, that we owe them something? We have a responsibility to them in a disciplinary way. It is those who agreed and “gladly received [the] word” (Acts 2:41). They believed in a disciplined Church. They expected a maximum of spiritu-

ality among them, not only the minimum requirement, not only getting “under the wire” of church regulation. They expected a maximum of spirituality in their group. Further, they believed in Biblicism. They believed “If you show it to me in this Book, that is good enough for me. If I can see in the Book then that settles it for me.” That is Biblicism.

The rise of the problem. There are several things that are contributing to this problem rising up in our midst. 1) *The test of historical interpretation.* I would like to ask you who do you believe when it comes to reading history? You know it is an acid test for an historian to write a piece of history without involving his own bias. That is an acid test for any historian. I find that the more we read of history, the more we need to know who we are reading and whom we are following, because I will tell you folks, there are folks who are interpreting our history, our own church history, who are not doing it right. I will tell you that. I know that in the Bible, I have an inspired history. I know it is told like it was and like it should have been, but I do not always know that when I read a history book. So we are reading some Mennonite historians who are not

safe to follow.

It is difficult to find an unbiased interpretation of history. Therefore, I would like to ask you, “Who do you believe? What are you doing about the historical interpretation?” We are told by some that there was no distinction in the time of the Early Church. Or, that there was no distinction between the Church and the World particularly, and that there in the early days of the Reformation, at the time of the birth of the Anabaptist movement, I have had folks tell me they really were not so distinguished. Are you sure? I ask you, my friends, how do you know? Can you document what you are saying? What about the historian who is giving you this information? Can he document it? Let us pause on one point alone, my dear friends. It was considered a symbol of the free citizen if he wore the sword, but not so with the Anabaptist people of the day, especially the nonresistant ones.

Friends, we might as well get it straight, there were some in the Anabaptist movement who were not nonresistant. Likewise we have some Mennonites today who are pacifistic — they are not nonresistant, and there is a difference. They were wearing the sword those *Schwertler's* were,

but the Anabaptists said, “It is more fitting to our faith that we carry a staff. We are only pilgrims here. We are moving on to a better country.” As a result there were times when it cost them their life because of their distinctiveness at that time. I tell you those folks were not afraid to be counted. Do not tell me friends that there was no difference.

There is another thing that enters in and that is on another point I would like to make clear right now. I have heard folks say, “You do not read a thing in Church confessions about women, Christian women, sisters in the faith, being veiled until more recent years in history. Which tells us that we cannot really know whether some of them back there were veiled or not.” I challenge that dear ones. I would like to say that the mode of the general society at that point was more near to the Bible ideal than what it is today. There were women of that age, my friends, who were wearing the veiling that were not Anabaptists. I will tell you about folks in Russia today where you can see it. There are women who, out of godly conviction, are wearing the veiling that have not had contact with the Mennonites. Where did they get it? Friends, they got it

from this Book. They found a principle in this book and they are simply expressing it that is why. Would to God everyone here today had that kind of an experience with God.

2) *The test of external opposition.* My friends, when we decide we will follow the Lord, and if you will be part of any group that is a part of the Anabaptist stream of faith, or any similar related group, you will face the test of external opposition. I realize that in our particular part geographical location we are not facing the test of the sword so much as we are facing the test dear ones of breaking with the sensual culture. Following the Lord in today’s world does mean that there is a radical break with the world that arouses some high eyebrows, some criticism and some scoffing because of the stand you take.

3) *There is the test of cultural acceptance.* Friends, that is affecting our church in a vast way today. There was a time when the Mennonite church was known as a sect. That is it. It was simply a small group, kind of emerging on the fringe. They were not known very far and wide, nor very far around. They began as a little radical religious sect. However, today they moved to become a respectable denomi-

nation and that is part of our problem. We are attempting to have the respect of the society about us (and there is a sense in which we want the respect of the people) but, my dear friends, the respect is costing us too dearly today.

We are interested in having a respectable denomination. We are moving from social unpopularity to where we are culturally acceptable. That is part of our problem. That is why we have some of the expression we do in church today. It is thinking that we would rather have some kind of “in between grounds” where we do not look like such a misfit in today’s society. We would like something a little more conventional. That is part of our problem.

4) *The test of numerical strength.* My dear people, one of the things that is facing us, the reason that has given this problem rise, is the fact that we are looking too often to the subtle fear of losing church members. If we really, as a church, take the position we ought to take in having a pure body of believers who are committed to a radical break with the world’s society, her culture and with her customs and ways, then we say, “I am sure we will lose members. If we take that step, it will cost us some of

our own families.” My dear people, I tell you something, it will cost you your family anyway. My friends, I would rather see it cost me my family now, as a stern reminder to them that they must get into the Bible way than I would to have it cost my family over there, when they face the Judge of all the earth in that final separation.

5) *The test of personal conviction.* Friends, I am convinced, and persuaded that is one reason we have the rise of this problem, in our society, and in our church right now. It is the test of personal conviction. Ask the average church member why they are doing what they are doing, or why they are practicing what they are and they may come back with something like this, “Well, I do not know exactly. We always did it this way.” I am sorry, church members are not the only ones. We have church leaders who are giving similar response to people who are asking the reason why. My friends, that is a flimsy foundation for building a Scriptural Church. “We always did it this way.” I tell you the cry of a heart that is seeking the separated life today is “Why? Why do we do it this way? Show me in the book then I will believe it. Then, I will have a foundation to stand on when other people come

around and say, 'Friend, I would like to know why you are doing what you are.'" Listen friends, our young people deserve to know why they are doing what they are doing. They deserve to have a basis that when other people come and quiz them and torment them, scoff at them or whatever, that they can point them to the place in the Bible and not simply come back with that glib answer, "Well, we always did it that way." My dear people that is one of the signs of decay and it is contributing to the rise of the problem.

6) *The test of tolerance.* Today (particularly here in North America) we live in a civilization that is very tolerant. Sometimes I wonder if it is not too tolerant. Some folks are shaking in their boots about the prospect of what the re-enactment of conscription may mean in our country for our young fellows. I tell you friends if it means a stronger screening of our young men I say, "Lord, bring it on." I tell you our young men need to know why they stand where they do. Too many of them did not know and that is why they failed right out there on the front lines and brought disgrace on themselves and on the church. It is the test of tolerance. Tolerance is a special privilege granted by our government.

Minority groups are kind of popular today so if you have something going you are a minority. "We want to give you special attention." We thank God for the privileges we are enjoying under our government, but may I say it has its hazards also.

I would like to look at the spread of resentment. Friends, it is real to me because I hear these things wherever I go. It is not only here on this grounds, but wherever I go, I hear these things being said. I observe what is happening and stirs my heart because I realize there is the spirit of anti-Mennonitism at work. 1) *Contempt and derision for conservative expressions of our faith is spreading resentment throughout our churches and it is deteriorating us from the inside out.* I am sorry about these friends, but it is too true. I do not care what group of Mennonites or Amish or plain folk you may belong to. It is very important that you respect the expressions of other groups who are rigorously, enthusiastically, and conscientiously attempting to put the principles of the Bible into practice. Every time I hear some parents or preachers bringing off some sly joke about the buggies, the broad falls, and the broad brim hats, friends it pains my heart. This is not because I am about ready to

stir up a revolution to return to buggy days, but because I have a concern for contempt against those expressions of our people who are wrestling with the problem. I say praise God for those churches who are wrestling with it. I say if you are part of the group you had better be in there and supporting it.

I would say this further. You may think you are getting by and are sort of comfortable in the fact that you see the inconsistencies of some of those other conservative groups out here around you. You see their inconsistencies and talk about them in front of your families. You play them up and make fun of them and all this. My friends do not expect your children to be building any solid conviction for separation of the Church and the world. You can expect only one thing and that is one day they will turn around and laugh at you.

2) *We are too apologetic about our distinctive practices.* Listen, my dear people, the fact that our church practices some things that today are unpopular in religious circles around the world is the only thing that makes them distinctive. I hear folks sometimes refer to our distinctive Mennonite doctrines. I know what they mean. Bless their hearts, but the fact that they are distinctive is no

fault of God's my dear people. The fact that they are distinctive is a result that many have left them. That is why. Therefore, it not so much that they are blessed by coming under the name Mennonite, rather it is important that we are transmitting that concept to the next generation.

Some are very apologetic about our distinctive practices. One of them is kneeling prayer. I have heard folks commenting about this. What do people think when they come into our services and all at once it is announced that we will kneel for prayer. Listen friends, we recently had visitors in our congregation back home, that were not to the same religious persuasion we are. When they left there, they wrote us a letter and in that letter they specifically mentioned we appreciated the kneeling posture for prayer. Listen friends, it ought to stir our hearts with appreciation to God that there are reasons why we are doing these things that will stand.

I would say this on that point. When we realize there are folks in the audience who are not accustomed to the practice of kneeling prayer, I think we would do well to tell them in advance what we are planning to do. I think that would be perfectly in order. "We are planning to

kneel for prayer as we come to prayer.” Some of these folks are suddenly bewildered when they observe that everyone is getting up and turning around because they are not accustomed to that. We would do well to consider this. Nevertheless, do not apologize about your practices that simply run counter to practices out there of other religious groups. If it is Biblical friend, practice it.

3) *Destructive criticism of our own valid expressions.* Now friends, I make a difference here. You know with me that there are criticisms and counsels that we welcome in the church. We appreciate them tremendously. My dear people, my burden and concern is the destructive criticism that is fermenting in our congregations. Listen friends, I would like to caution us, if you get a minister into your pulpits whether he is an evangelist, an out of state preacher, or whoever he is and he is the kind of person who deals in this kind of shady propagation, I would challenge you to talk to him about it before he leaves your grounds. Unless he has a correct attitude on it when he leaves there, do not invite him back.

We have preachers who get up and they think it is kind of “cute” to talk about these fellows who

when they want to pull a shady business deal they put on a plain suit so that they can do it so much better. What is that doing to your young people? That is telling them that the plain suit is simply a “bunch of coverup.” That is all it is. You can expect them in the next generation to be ready to lay aside any trace of separation in personal appearance. It can happen that fast. One generation. Friends, sometimes I am seeing it happen in less than one generation. My friends, it is happening while they are young you see. It only finds it expression after they are fully grown.

Or, you will hear someone say, “You know it simply is not consistent. There goes those nice plain people out there in that great big sporty automobile. It does not fit.” Well, friends I tell you it does not fit. Let me tell you something else, what usually goes when there is a change made? Well, the plain people are not plain anymore. They try to bring up their practice to match the car. My dear friends it is time for revival among us when we see we ought to put away the world culture, the world’s customs and hold on to that which is Scriptural.

4) *Rejecting the traditions of the Church.* I want to tell you my dear people I believe on the

authority of God's Word. There are some practices. The Bible says we are to "work out [our] own salvation" (Philippians 2:12). We are to express it, and put it out in practice. There are some practices of our church that if we will carry them on from your generation to mine, and from mine to the next one and from that one until Jesus comes, it will become a traditional thing in the church. You know what I mean. Tradition is simply something that goes from one generation to another. It is carried from one generation to another. That is nothing to be embarrassed about my friends. I appreciate that we have a nonresistant tradition friends. I am not ready to bow out of it because it is a tradition. I appreciate that we have the tradition of kneeling prayer. I am not ready to bow out of it because it is a tradition.

There are a lot more things we are doing which we have never called into question because it is tradition. The thing that eats at my heart, dear ones today, and gives me a burden for our plain churches — for those that are in the Anabaptist stream of faith today, is that they are having problems with the traditions of the church. These are traditions that are based on the Word of God. At the same time they turn

right around and accept the traditions of a godless world. My friends, that is tragic.

We see it happening in educational patterns. We see it happening in funeral standards. We see it happening in wedding standards. I will tell you friends there is no limit to what folks can carry in as some novel idea for a wedding. You know that. Friends, as long as we will go along with it and say, "Well, it is kind of a new idea," then we simply go from one thing to the other. Listen, there is no problem there you see. However, when you begin talking about something that has been practiced by the Church for a number of years, "Aha, that is simply tradition." My friends, God help us that we get on the firing line for God and realize that we can stand up and be counted against the traditions of this age and for the Biblical tradition that will help us through in our Christian expression.

5) *I want to think about the preservation.* It seems my people, that some folks today are more concerned about preserving a culture than they are to preserve the faith. That concerns me. Sometime ago I was here in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, I got behind a truck on one of your back roads and on that truck was a big picture of a plain man.

What were they doing — selling Gospel tracts? No, they were selling bologna. Well, what in the world do they have a plain man on the truck for? I tell you friends it is all over this country. It is in the theatre world. It is everywhere. It is “Dutch” this and “Dutch” that. What does that mean to the world? It is a cultural thing. Some of our dear people are getting swallowed up in the same gamut. They think that simply because we kind of go along with things because it is a Mennonite culture. I see that some folks are more interested in preserving culture than they are the preservation of their faith. God help us.

It concerns me about the “mod” Mennonite emphasis today on Mennonite life, simply to give us cultural status in our society. I tell you friends that pains me. There is lot going on in the movie world and also what is written — literature that is being passed out across our country, simply to give Mennonites a respectable status in a cultural way. Oh, God help us! We are here to preserve the faith, the genius of our movement is not the carrying on of our family, but the carrying on of our faith. Of course, we want our family to go with us, but we will not have them with us unless we

are presenting the faith worth dying for.

6) *I see the trends toward an invisible Church.* Friends, it is openly advertized by many Mennonites today, they are trying to get away from Mennonitism. They are doing their best to get away from being visibly Mennonite. They do not mind having it on the record when they pass away to have it in the obituary that they were a member of the Mennonite church, but when it gets out here facing the world society, they want nothing to do with it. That is sad. That is anti-Mennonitism. It is a kind of inner response that is not wholesome for the Church.

Therefore, it is not surprising for me that we are finding in the Mennonite circles today more enthusiasm for the ball field than we are for the mission field. When I see the interest in sports and entertainment my dear people, and the cultural arts it gives me real concern, because I realize we are not propagating what God wants us to propagate in our families. It is a cultural thing. Then, I see dear ones also, sure we take a stand as a separate people of God, and we say, “Sure, we are plain people. We require the plain suit for the fellows and the cape dress for the girls. That is our standard.”

Oh my dear people, whatever is happening to our church today? Do you know something? I believe the world is wondering, when they look at our application of that principle, and they are saying, “What? So that is the way you do it?” It does not quite tally with what is in the Bible. I will tell you folks there is such a modification, such trimming and ornamenting of plain attire today it is shameful. It is a disgrace to our profession. I will tell you friends, if we claim that we will represent the Bible principle where we are not doing things for show, or ornamentation, we need to get busy in our churches, right now. Right now, brethren and sisters, not tomorrow, but today, because we are seeing it happening. Some of you dear parents are allowing it to happen on your little children and then wondering why they do not want to cooperate with the church when they come into the fellowship of the saints. I will tell you why. You trained them otherwise. That is why.

I see across our church today a wholesale adopting of casual attire in lieu of plain attire. Friends it hurts. I have heard folks fighting the idea — anti-Mennonitistic — across the years that plain attire costs too much. It takes so much material to make

a dress. It costs so much to get a suit made plain and on and on and on. In contrast friends you do not hear a word when they turn to buy a casual sports suit. It costs as much as any other. You do not hear a thing. It does not make sense friends. It is purely anti-Mennonitism in its purest and rankest form. I see folks climbing up the ladder of their prestigious countrymen. They like to kind of go along with the tide and they enjoy being tied in.

I am at a crossroads. I have one more point. Can I make it? 7) *The cost of counteraction.* Brothers and sisters, we must do something. I would like to share with you the cost of counteraction. i) We must teach with renewed conviction that there is a relationship between the inner experience and the outer expression. When we see friends, as only man can see, that the outer expression is not right, we must go and talk to those folks and find out why not. If they are coming toward the light, praise God! Encourage them. However, if they are moving away from it warn them. As the songwriter says, “You tell me when this world’s empty glory is costing me too dear.”

ii) We must warn them. There is an integral relation between inner experience and outward

expression. We need to recognize that both sound doctrine and wholesome disciplinary action are necessary to maintain separation. Friends, we have a teaching program in our church the like of which we have not had before today. We have opportunities like this right here to hear sound Bible teaching and preaching. However friends, that alone will not do it.

iii) We have the important responsibility of following through with a disciplined church life in order to maintain separation. They go together. No church has been able to successfully stem the tide of worldliness, or maintained the doctrine of separation by a teaching/preaching program alone. If they did not have supplementary wholesome discipline to follow it and to supplement it, it never worked. History will tell you that. Better than that, God's Word teaches it. We need to encourage our church leaders. My dear people hear me. We need to encourage our church leaders to hold a high Biblical standard for the group. It is high time we quit ridiculing our leaders when they are trying to hold a high Biblical standard for the church. It is high time, I say.

iv) We need to expel those who are chronically dissenting. It is

that kind of leaven that is permeating churches today and causing people to get unsettled and restless and leaving the church anyway. Some folks say, "I am afraid to do anything because my children might leave the church." I want to tell you one thing, my dear people, if you will let them go the way of the world, they will leave the church anyway. It is high time that we stand up and help them to see the Bible reasons why. We need to stir up a genuine appreciation for our present day application and reprove those negative attitudes among us.

v) We need to be alert, dear ones, to our own children. My dear friends, it is high time that we take seriously the fact that we are preparing our children for a sound conversion experience. We work with them cautiously and carefully. There is no such thing as simply training children into the Kingdom. They are born into the Kingdom. We need to be training them now so that they will be able to have a good birth experience and commitment to discipleship.

Listen, coming into the Mennonite church, my dear people, or any other Bible believing church, is more than a cultural transition, it is a spiritual experience. It is a spiritual crisis. We

want to see our folks come in on that basis. We need to thoroughly examine those who are trying to get into our church, who are seeking admission, whether they are Protestant or Mennonite. I say friends, we ought to examine them. We have Mennonites today who need a good thorough examination before they are admitted into fellowship. You must believe it.

vi) We need to challenge our parents and our congregations to awaken to the threat of modern day pressure and to take time to prepare their children for a satisfying experience with the Lord. I tell you folks the pressure is on us. Where is the father and mother who take time with their children. We have some, praise God. May He increase their number. Our mission, education, publication agencies must combine to hold forth that one faith which clearly distinguishes the Church from the world. It must be now.

vii) We must be aware that with the affluence of our culture

comes unprecedented pressure. I will tell you friends, we are in it today. We have unprecedented pressure for associating with the world's society which will obliterate the line between the Church and the world. I marvel how glibly Mennonites are going right along with the cultural accommodation process, joining organizations and societies in their communities. It is startling friends, when we have a clear Word from the Lord that we are not to be joined to unbelievers.

viii) Lastly, be assured, my dear people, that the true Church of Jesus Christ here on the earth never has been, nor ever will be a popular group in the world community, or will they ever be a group of numbers. Let us remember that. Friends you can count on it if you will be a Biblical church. You will not be a group that is popular in the world society. Nor, will you be a group of large numbers. May God bless you.

The Leaven of Anti-Mennonitism

For a message I have chosen to share something that I had been assigned to give outside the area sometime. It is the kind of message we do not necessarily choose for Sunday morning. It is

more the kind that we are assigned to give. I am thinking of the leaven of anti-Mennonitism. It is the kind of message we do not give often. It is not really an inspirational chal-

lence from the Scriptures as such, but it is rather going on what we understand the Scriptures to teach and what we know your understanding of the Scriptures is and thinking about this.

It is good to look at a subject like this occasionally because we are constantly faced with ideas along this line and I think we need help. We need to think and sort through it. What is anti-Mennonitism and what way is it a leaven? I know that one does not find the word Mennonite in the Bible. It is a term that has been applied to the followers of Menno. Or, rather it is a term that refers to the Anabaptists for which Menno Simmons became somewhat of a leader or spokesman. He articulated the beliefs of the Anabaptists and wrote many of them down. He put into writing many of the beliefs and teachings of the Anabaptists. He was, however, not the founder of the movement.

In Switzerland, the Anabaptists were known as the *Swiss Brethren*. The Swiss did not use the term Mennonite until after they came to America. We might have thought that the term Mennonite was given by the enemies of the movement as a derogatory term, but that is not necessarily the case. That was

true of the identification, or the name, *Anabaptist*. That was somewhat given as a nickname by the enemies — the *wiedertäufer*. In Holland, having the Dutch language more than the German, they preferred to refer to themselves as the *doopsgezinden*, but it has the idea of the “baptism minded” people. Until the 1700’s probably they used that more.

Menno was well known. He was a leader in the movement. They chose terminology that distinguished them from any connection with the Münsterites. Today, the term *Mennonite* is used for those churches that descend from the Anabaptists and have maintained the similar beliefs and convictions. Even in 1607, a pastor in a congregation at Workhum, Holland and in the Netherlands objected to the name Mennonite. He said, “Because we do not call ourselves for Menno but for Christ.” There was a lot of concern about that. I have already been challenged with that in my time. I remember someone a number of years ago saying that to me. “Are you followers of Menno Simons? Did he save you? Or, did Jesus Christ save you?” Certainly Menno Simons did not save us. He did not die on the cross for our sins. We are saved through the blood

of Jesus and through faith in His work.

Nevertheless, it is an identification. It is an identification perhaps that is less clear today than it was at some times because of the wide range of people that have identified themselves with this name. The anti-Mennonite spirit would refer to that view which sees the Mennonite church in a very negative light. It considers it a disadvantage. It is also an expression of those people who are trying to distance themselves from it.

Anti-Mennonitism has taken a number of different forms over the years. Going back perhaps a century or a little more into the latter part of the 19th century (the 1800's) quite a few people of Mennonite background were somewhat ashamed of the church, and felt the church to be inferior to other denominations. Other denominations were bringing in a lot of activities like revival meetings and Sunday schools and things like that. There were many Mennonite people who felt that Mennonite people were less educated, did not know as much, and could not do things like that. Then, there were also the criticisms that came, like in the early part of the 19th century from the Herrite movement (the Reformed

Mennonites) and all their terrible accusations against the Mennonite church. Also, there were those accusations in the mid century accusing the church of apostatizing. An old order group withdrew at that time.

John F. Funk wrote a book entitled *The Mennonite Church and Her Accusers* during this time to help people see the value of the church. Even though he favoured some things in the way and had some influence that we question the value of today, he did want to defend the church. In more recent times there were those Mennonites who came to feel that the Mennonite distinctives (as we sometimes refer to them) were somewhat optional and not necessarily essential to salvation. The things that separated Mennonites from other denominations were more optional.

There were also those who felt that the outward forms in themselves were a problem. We know that they do not save and yet we recognize the relationship of obedience to salvation.

Then, in the early 1950's a Pentecostal influence swept through the Lancaster, Pennsylvania area that led people away from the church and had a strong emphasis against form, and a strong emphasis on so-

called spirituality. There was an emphasis on faith healing and tongues and that sort of thing. Mennonites were ridiculed for being formal, dead and cold and not having spiritual life. Some of my relatives were involved in that. Therefore, I saw the effects of some of those things firsthand. Now, this all started before I can remember, but I see some of the effects of it today yet.

I remember my parents telling me about when these things were starting. My father's family, when they were challenged about some of the practices would hear, "We walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7). "We ought to walk by faith" they were saying. They ridiculed the separated attire and things like that. I guess I do not need to say where the children and grandchildren of those people are today.

Going back maybe more like forty or fifty years ago and a little more recently than that, there were many Mennonite people who were somewhat ashamed of what they termed the *Pennsylvania Deutsch [Dutch] culture*. They saw that again as a hindrance to missions. Well, what we believe is a lot more than *Pennsylvania Deutsch culture*, even though we have that background.

Now, in more recent times,

there were those who professed to be wanting to maintain some of these distinctives without the heavy emphasis on discipline, but from the idea that people do it more from a spiritual motive. Sure, people like that believe that woman's heads should be covered and that one ought to dress modestly and resist the influences of the world like television, and so on. There has been a lot of emphasis on modesty and separation and nonresistance and the Christian woman's veiling. However, it is along with an anti-regulation, anti-form emphasis. While this later form seems more pure and more sanctified, I really believe it will finally lead to the same place if given enough time. We ought to see that. It will lead to where some of these other things have lead. I am not necessarily wanting to just reflect against a certain group. I have seen some of those people who, while they appear very modest in a lot of ways, they do not really look like plain people (many of them) because some of the things that have come in.

What do we mean by *leaven*? When we talk about the leaven of anti-Mennonitism, what do we mean by that? In the Bible leaven refers to, or is a term that means "the yeast that is put into a lump of dough to cause it to rise."

In the Scriptures this has become a symbol of evil influence. Jesus said, “beware of the leaven of the Pharisees” (Matthew 16:6; Mark 8:15; Luke 12:1). Paul, writing to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 5:6 said “a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.” It spreads rapidly. It permeates. It spoils. If this process were not stopped (thinking of the natural illustration) by baking it would eventually spoil the dough. It would cause it to become not useful anymore. This influence of anti-Mennonitism, this anti-Mennonite attitude works like a leaven.

What are some things that the Mennonite church has represented or stood for over the years? What are some things that have characterized the church? *The Anabaptists had a strong emphasis on the two kingdom concept.* They emphasized that there was the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world, and you could not mix them. They were certainly strongly opposed to State church system. That was an attempt to mix the two, and the government, in their view and their understanding of the Scriptures, belonged to the kingdom of the world. Therefore, there was a strong resistance to the world and its influence.

An emphasis on separation and against the sin of pride. A lot of things were put into that category. That was a reason not to do something because that was an expression of pride. *There was a strong emphasis on suffering the reproach of Christ. Along with that went the nonresistance — the way of love.* They referred to themselves not necessarily with the term nonresistant but rather the early American Mennonites called themselves the *Defenceless Christians.* Those were “meek and lowly” (Matthew 11:29) and were like “sheep in the midst of wolves” (Matthew 10:16). They did not defend themselves. They did not promote themselves.

They were not prominent in civic affairs and civil affairs. They were not involved in those things. They refused to be shackled to the state. *There was a strong emphasis on separation of Church and state.* I found it interesting, while I had studied some of this before, I am not sure if I had actually realized, or had come across this terminology. In 1775 Martin Boehm, who was a bishop in the Lancaster Conference, located in the New Danville area, had imbibed some very strong pietistic influences. He was associating with Methodists and others. He had

come under the influence of George Whitefield, a Methodist preacher in Virginia, and had been very greatly influenced by that emotional type of preaching. He began to preach more that way himself. The bishops were forbearing with him. The bishop board appealed to him and it went a number of years until they finally came to the place where they needed to remove him from church fellowship and took his ministry.

When Martin Boehm was excommunicated, their charge was that "He walks with those who do not walk according to the Gospel of Christ — people who go to war and who swear oaths." You might say, "Well that, yes those are Bible teachings but are there not a lot of other things?" Well, those were outstanding things. I heard a man say one time to me, "In other words you would have more in common with people who dress plain but do not claim to be born again, than you would with Baptists who claim to be born again, but are not plain?" I did not think of it at the time, but really, I have more in common with people who do not go to war than I do with people who go to war. Now, I am not answering all the questions that could be raised, I would strongly emphasize that.

There was also an emphasis on simplicity of life. That goes along with the meekness. They were a plain people and there was a uniformity. That uniformity did not accent economic status. When it comes to modesty and some of those things, the churches around the early American Mennonites also were modest. No one dressed like they do nowadays — nothing even close to it. They were modest as far as covering the body, but there were the extras, the frills, the fancy things to draw attention, and those things the Mennonites resisted, emphasizing simplicity.

What they represented relates to the view of the Church and the relationship of the individual to the group. Contrary to the pietistic emphasis there was the belief that man is in Christ with his brother and not separate or apart from his brother. One is in Christ with Him.

There was also the emphasis on mutual assistance and the Scriptural approach to meeting each other's needs. I think that is directly related also to the feet-washing ordinance which was a practice by them.

There was a strong emphasis on morals. Modesty and the right attitude toward divorce and remarriage. There again, in a lot

of those areas the Mennonites were not as distinct from the rest of society because those things were not in society at that time. Therefore, things like nonresistance, separation of Church and State and non-swearing of oaths stood out as marking, or characteristic of the defenceless Christians who walked in the way of Christ and suffered with Him.

The emphasis on the Christian woman's veiling and uncut hair for sisters. We could add to that the understanding of the woman's place in the Church, or woman's place in God's order. In more recent times, it is the resisting of the feminist movement. Today, those things are issues in the parent group from which we came. Today, it is an issue in the Lancaster Conference as it relates to the ordination of women. A lot of Mennonite groups are beyond that and that is not an issue anymore. However, there is still more reserve here in this area of the church in relation to that. Nevertheless, the Church has been greatly affected by the feminist movement — the women's liberation movement. It is a rebellion against established moorings and the establishment, like some of the other things were in the '60's and that social upheaval.

Mennonites have been characterized by their resistance to the entertainment industry. Therefore, they were prepared when television was introduced in more recent times, to resist that and see it for the evil that it is. They were weaker on the radio, but movies and television, they were not a question. The old order groups, of course, resisted the radio as well. I do not think the Lancaster Conference ever made the radio a test of membership, but it was prohibited for the ordained men for a period of time, and then that was also later relaxed.

One of the things that changed, which brought things to culmination and that gave rise to our group was changing the discipline as it related to television. It was less restrictive in the 1968 revision of the discipline and made more room for television. There were areas of the church where bishops were allowing it, and not disciplining people for it, but the official record was against it until that time.

There was also an emphasis on a literal understanding of the Scriptures, and an emphasis on obedience and practical faith. It is the belief that faith produces works and produces a change of life. Mennonites represented an attempt to follow the "all things"

(Matthew 28:20), of the Scriptures. You may ask, "Did not everyone do that? They merely had different applications." Well, Protestantism has not necessarily been characterized that way. I remember one time talking to a couple who asked us why we dress the way we do and why we drive the kind of cars we do. We tried to explain the Bible principle that those things rest on. The lady said, "In other words you try to follow the Bible as closely as you can." That was sort of a new thought, as if there is any other way to do it. Is that not our interest to follow the Scriptures as closely as we can and make application to Scripture?

Thinking a little more of the leaven of anti-Mennonitism and the criticisms that are brought. This attitude, or this leaven that sometimes moves through groups or in the hearts of people causes people to despise their heritage. As a result they lose the benefits of it. I am approaching this subject from the premise that we recognize that there have been some weaknesses in the past. There were periods of Mennonite history where the history does not read so well in some ways. There were some weaknesses. Nevertheless, for those who remained in the

Mennonite fold their descendants are much better off today.

I talked about Martin Boehm. He started the Church of the Brethren. Later, that merged with another group to become the Evangelical United Brethren. Then, sometime in my lifetime the EUB united with the Methodists to form the United Methodists. That has come full circle, back to the Methodists of whom Boehm was in contact with.

I am not suggesting that the applications that our churches, the church, and the church in the past has made are the only possible applications that could be right. However, perhaps they have been as consistent as any. Perhaps the most consistent. It gave their descendants an opportunity to know the truth, at least. That is one of the things that I think we need to face and reckon with. Do we have a church life and a way of life that will at least give the next generation an opportunity? Not everyone will defend the truth. Not everyone will want to walk according to the way of the Lord.

We need to maintain and recognize the remnant concept of Christianity. Jesus said, "few there be that find it" (Matthew 7:14). We would like to save all our families, and we want to do

our best to try to do that but at least let us give them an opportunity to know the truth and to choose the right. Many people do not even have that much. It is really something how in a short time, in only a few decades, people do not know anything about a plain background. I heard of a case recently where one of our families in our church was at a family reunion. One of the nephews of one of our brethren was asking this brother how our group got started and what the issues were, and what took place. He had no idea. Therefore, he attended one of our congregations one Sunday morning to hear his uncle preach and to see what our church was like. He told someone of the family afterwards that was the first time he ever was in a service where they knelt for prayer. When I was a boy in that same setting that was the common thing. It was done frequently but it was being challenged at the time our group started. I am giving that as an illustration. Here was someone who in all sincerity wanted to know. We are a whole generation later, plus a little and people do not remember.

You might ask, “What if one does not have the heritage, what then? Does that mean we missed it?” This is a heritage of faith

rather than a heritage of blood. Even if people do not have the genealogical connections, they benefit from this heritage if they embrace the beliefs. And there are some people who have the blood connections — they have the genealogical connections but they have turned away from the beliefs and they lose the benefits of that background.

This feeling, this leaven we are talking about attacks the church as being too traditional. Sometimes these movements are presented as a new, fresh approach based on the Scriptures rather than on a dead, formal tradition. Have you heard those kinds of accusations at all? I recognize that Jesus warned us against dead formalism and tradition of men which undermines the Word of God. We recognize that possibility and we do not want to close our eyes to that. However, brethren and sisters, it is not necessary for every generation to rethink all the applications and to figure them out. We benefit from the applications that have been made. We do well to appreciate those applications and to build on what has been done. We would like to build on what has been done in the past and hopefully make some improvements as we go along where we see that they are needed, but we

benefit from tradition.

Practice has developed. It is true that there are some things perhaps that would be a little hard to defend. Yet, to eliminate all that, destroys along with it things that we do not want to destroy. If we would be starting out from, let us say (if we want to call this starting out from “scratch”), and I say we will work out a system of applications here. Maybe we would not come out exactly where we are today, but on the other hand I do not think you can do that and come out right, because it simply does not work that way.

Some people have taken the approach, we will scrap all that has been developed and make relevant applications for today. I do not believe it is possible to do that and come out right, as I said, because you must undo some things and some of what it takes to maintain the right things in doing that. Therefore, I appreciate the traditional practices that we have and I believe that they serve the church well.

This leaven also emphasizes the individual and de-emphasizes the place of the church or the group. It is a reflection of the individualism that is so prevalent in today’s society. We hardly know anything different anymore; there is such emphasis on

the individual.

It is proposed that it is a controversy between following the Scriptures or following the church. This is another thing in this emphasis on the individual versus the church. It is proposed that this is a part of the conflict we are in, when we defend traditional Mennonitism and the new version of Christianity and where we will make relevant applications. One has a high view of the Scriptures and the other one has a high view of the Church. That was an issue in the Anabaptist days. That was the question that the people struggled with in relation to the Roman church. The question was, “Does the final authority rest in the Church, or does final authority rest in the Scriptures?” The Roman church said that the final authority rests in the church. There are some who suggest that maybe we are back at that place and we are saying that today the final authority rests in the church. No, the final authority rests on the Scriptures. We stand on that. We have nothing else to stand on. We go by the Scriptures. Today, we believe, that the Scriptures are the final authority.

However, who decides what the Scriptures are saying and what the Scriptures are teaching? The Scriptures need a certain

amount of understanding and perhaps interpretation. Who should decide what the Scriptures are teaching and how should the applications be made? The individual? There is a lot of safety and stability in having the applications and the understandings developed in the group. That does not mean a person cannot read the Scriptures and have personal inspiration and insights. However, when we form church polity, individuals do not do it, but the group together does those things. There is lot safety, as I said, and a lot of stability in that. That is not to say that a traditional understanding can never be challenge. It can be.

Sometimes I have come across some ideas in studying the Scriptures that do not seem to come out quite where we have heard it taught. Before we start teaching something a little different we need to test those ideas with some brethren. "What do you think about this?" I remember as young men in 1W service there was a brother who was very diligent and interested in studying the Scriptures. Sometimes he would come up with a fairly new idea and really be impressed with it until somebody would say, "Well, what about this?" He would say, "Well, I did not think about that." We need that kind of

testing of ideas with other brethren that we have confidence in and together we find our way.

God is calling people out for Himself. 2 Corinthians 6:17, 18 says, "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, (18) And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." God is calling people to Himself. He is calling a people for His own name to live in Holiness. It is related to what we were studying.

We have also been criticized already for having no place in our church group for the leading of the Holy Spirit in the individual's life. You know, "It is all group conscience and the Holy Spirit cannot lead in the life of the individual." That really is not the case. Let us remember that the Holy Spirit does not lead apart from the Scriptures. That is a principle that we need to have firmly fixed in our minds.

In John 16:13, 14 Jesus is speaking, "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. (14) He shall glorify me: for he shall

receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.” We come again back to the Scriptures, to the words of Jesus that came to us through the Holy Spirit.

In this strong anti-group feeling that some of these groups have, and strong anti-Mennonite feeling, the ordinances are seen primarily in relation to Christ and not to the group. There have been cases where people have been baptized who did not become members of the church. They only wanted to be baptized. That is a not a sound view of the ordinances nor a sound view of the church to the Christian life and relation to the ordinances. Usually, along with this is an emphasis on the Holy Spirit and much more emotion in church services bordering on the charismatic. That often goes with these ideas.

Another thing along with this is the criticism of church regulations as legalistic, excess baggage that we are carrying along. There is an emphasis that motivations need to be spiritual, and we agree with that. However, then they go on to say that when people are born again and led by the Spirit then we do not need rules and standards, and we do not need as much church discipline. I remember a person who had been a part of us at one time and

found his way elsewhere. In some of our discussions as we were trying to find our way, he told me one time, “I have always appreciated the Mennonite emphasis on purity, but I do not like the form.” Then, he said, “If we would all of a sudden take all these regulations and the discipline away you would be surprised what some of your people would do.” Well, I do not think our people are simply “bumping up” against the rules all the time. There might be some in that category. I realize that it is true. Sometimes we are trying to help people who do not understand the principles like they should, and who are weak in personal conviction. We recognize that, but is the answer to that removing all standards?

No, that is not the answer. When we do that, we do away with church order and the stability that goes along with that. What we would like is an evangelical church emphasis with a certain amount of form that helps to keep that in place and helps to guide it.

These groups are also very negative in their view of church organization. All of this leads to a very casual approach to church life and to church standards. It removes the reproach of being a disciple. Some have suggested

that some of these anti-Mennonite movements which put so much emphasis on the individual and promote spirituality as opposed to form almost give this as a revival comparable to Anabaptism in its return to the New Testament Scriptures in opposition to the Roman church. People somehow have the idea that they have figured out things that no one else ever thought of. It is simply not that way. They are repeating some of the same things that people before them did.

I would like to say that I am not teaching that all change is bad. We do not do things exactly like they were done a hundred years ago, or even fifty years ago. We do a lot of the same things but we do not do it exactly the same way. We are glad for some improvements that have been made along the way. Today there is a good conviction against the use of Tobacco. That is not even an issue among us, but it was quite a hurdle for the church at one time. Whenever we make changes, they should be made carefully and cautiously. We do not want to get to the place where we become innovative and experimental, where we try this and we try that. Someone has a new idea and we try that.

Any changes should be made

very carefully and cautiously. If we become innovative and experimental there will be no stopping place. We will do away with one thing after another until there is nothing left anymore. We need to see this as something that we are on guard against. Leaven is so deceptive. It seems all right. Some of this emphasis that I have been talking about appeals to people. It sounds so right and so spiritual, but brethren and sisters it will undo the things that we need to maintain a safe and right church life.

I will say this. While sometimes the challenges that are brought by those kinds of people, people who have those ideas, may not all be bad for us, it is probably not good for them. In other words, when people criticize the church and say, "Well, what about this? It is simply legalistic." It does not hurt us to have that challenge. In fact, we probably need that because there is that danger that we would go that route. We want to benefit from those challenges. However, that thinking will lead us in the wrong place.

At Winter Bible school I was listening to some things the teacher had to say and he was making this comparison of merely having form. I said I recognize that danger. I like to think of

form as something that helps to contain the life. It is like I heard one of our brethren say recently in a message. Sometimes we compare our church regulation with the pasture fence. We know that the fence is not the pasture. There is no value as far as nutrition for the animal in the fence, but the fence helps to keep the animal where the nutrition is. They might say, “Well, people are not animals, they do not need fences.”

Maybe this is a meagre illustration but as this person was speaking I thought of this. If we want to go somewhere and we might want to take some water with us, we need to have something to put it in. We need a jug or a container of some kind to put

this water in. The jug does not give us any refreshment. There is no life-giving qualities in it whatsoever. It is dead. Nevertheless, it helps to hold the life in place so that it is there for us. I think there is a sense in which in a lot of ways regulation, church form, and church order does that for us. It helps to guide life. It helps to give it substance, so to speak, so that it is not lost. If we would simply let the water run out on the ground it would still all be there and it would exist, and it would have all the qualities but it is of no value to us whatsoever.

Let us appreciate the things that help to protect and to maintain spiritual life and try to strike that right balance. May the Lord bless us to that end.

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The Intermediate State

From a message by Stanley Wine
date unknown

Given in Ontario, Canada

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“There is a wealth of wisdom sealed up in the experiences of those who have trod the path before us. May we humble ourselves and unlock those treasures of wisdom that are reserved for us, just for the taking. The only cost to us is to pass them on to the rising generations. The wise man must remember that while he is also a descendant of the past, he is a parent of the future.”

—
“We use Church history to illustrate truth, to give it life and blood, and to make it a reality. While we link our life with those of the past, history can bring the whole of life into one scene, as one great story to inspire us to a life of faithfulness. It can warn us of the failures of the past, and it can show us cause and effect — the choice and the consequences of others’ choices. But history should not be used to drag up the failures of the past to be amused by. If we do this, we can expect to break down respect and appreciation for those in the past, as well as for our own present convictions for truth.

“We hear some people say that we should live and do just as our forefathers and the Anabaptists did, or that we should have church life just like the early church did. No, they did not have all the answers, nor did they

have the experiences that the church would have throughout the centuries. They were a very infant church, yet they had the faith and obedience that it took to come through the things that faced them in their day.

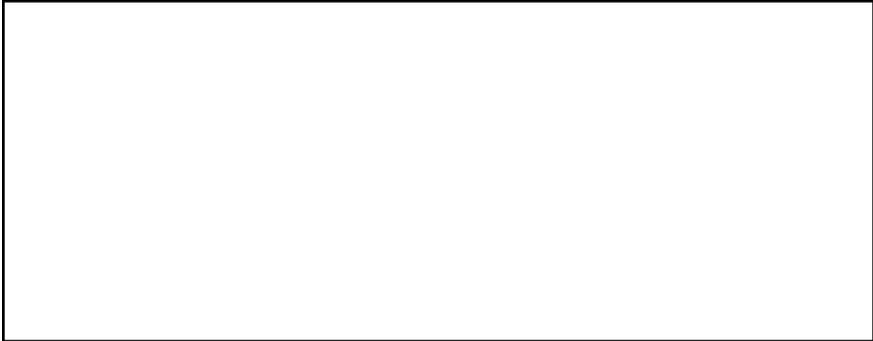
“History teaches that man learns little from the past. He is always seeking to know the future, but the future is a repeat of the past. The best way to suppose what may come is to remember what is past. So study the past if you would know the future. He who learns nothing from the past will be disappointed by the future. All history is incomprehensible without God, for history is not based upon man’s accomplishments but upon God’s workings with mankind through the ages.

“The only way to preserve Bible principles and doctrine is to pass them on unscathed and unadulterated to the next generation. But we need to know them for ourselves before we can pass them on to the next generation. It does not take long for the rising generation to see if what we say is a reality to us or not. If it is not, every generation will make its own deductions and applications without being linked to the past.”

Bible Wines: Laws of Fermentation

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