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CHAPTER XI

TEACHING APPRECIATION FOR OUR SPIRITUAL HERITAGE

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Every Christian denomination has inherited much from its forebears. Teachings, ideals and values have been passed form one generation to another. These ideals may be designated as a spiritual heritage. Most denominations frequently appeal to their history and the beliefs of their founding fathers to reaffirm their reason for existence.

A spiritual heritage may be beneficial or detrimental to the progress of a church. It may be praiseworthy or embarrassing. For good or for ill the process of history tends to synthesize and transform the original ideals of these distinctive groups. Historical processes also modify existing institutions. Like all other groups the Mennonite Brethren Church has changed considerably through the passing of time. In spite of the changes that occur, however, there are always values and ideals which remain intact. These are examined and re-examined in the light of Scripture, and every effort is put forth to maintain those which coincide with the Word of God. The appreciation of this is that which the Biblical Seminary attempts to teach.

It is important to note that a guarantee of divine providence is the inexorable march of the church of Christ toward its predetermined victory over the influence and forces of evil. The Mennonite Brethren are a part of that church. The church of Christ waxes and wanes in its purity and influence through the passing of time. When it tends to wane God raises up men and women of courage to proclaim again the truths that need to be emphasized. The record of history
testifies that these truths often revive the church and challenge others to full conviction and dedication to the Lord. At times this revival has been at the cost of expulsion, persecution, and even death. But the church has been saved.

The Biblical Seminary teaches that the Mennonite Brethren denomination came into being as a result of the convictions of men moved to righteousness by the Holy Spirit. These nineteenth century descendents of the early Anabaptists were moved to a holy dissatisfaction. The Bible which had been neglected was re-emphasized, and the early ideals which had made the Mennonites a people were rediscovered. Smoldering flames of truth which had almost been extinguished by zeal for ethnic purity, self-preservation, and materialism were fanned again by hope into light and power. This is seen in the Document of Secession in 1860 which expressed the burden of the founders of the Mennonite Brethren. It reads:

We, the undersigned, have by the grace of God, recognized the decadent condition of the Mennonite Brotherhood, and can for God's and conscience' sake no longer continue therein. For we fear the inevitable judgment of God, since the openly godless living and their wickedness cries [sic] to God in heaven.¹

Instead of forgetting the wayward descendents of Menno Simons as they had forgotten Him, God in his mercy revived a remnant to reaffirm and propagate the truths for which so many had lived and died in the sixteenth century radical reform movement. The efforts of Satan to suppress these truths were thwarted again.

The Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary holds that there are certain beliefs inherited from the New Testament which have come to it through the forebears of its denomination that are the *sine qua non*² of their Church. An understanding of those truths and an appreciation for them along with their Biblical bases are taught in the Seminary. These Christian concepts which have waxed and waned throughout the history of Christendom, but which have reached this date, have to do with the following themes:
1. The Bible
2. The Church
3. The Ordinances
4. Discipleship and Mission
5. The Authority of Christ and the Authority of Civil Powers.

These concepts are somewhat distinct from those of many other denominations and are indispensible to the existence of the Mennonite Brethren Church.

UNIQUE VIEW OF THE BIBLE

The Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary teaches that the Bible is the source from which all spiritual truth most clearly comes. The living, dynamic Word of God which penetrates the spirit and soul of man is transmitted best through the Bible. The Bible is the final test of truth and the highest authority regarding that which a person should believe about God, the spiritual world and the moral conduct that God requires of man. Although most evangelical denominations teach the authority of Scripture, the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary teaches that the Word of God must also be living, experienced, and dynamic in the individual in order for it to provide effective and continuing salvation. The Seminary teaches that doctrinal truths must be practically experienced. This view of the Bible which the Mennonite Brethren have espoused through their history is unique.

This position teaches that the Bible is not just one book. It consists of sixty-six books which were written by many authors in ancient languages. The authors have accurately recorded the self-revelation of God in human history. These historical records are written in phenomenal forms. The events are described as the authors experienced them.

Although each book is written for specific purposes, the central theme of the entire Bible is the grace of God and his plan for humanity. This is revealed and described as a repeated intervention by God in human history whose purpose is to redeem a people who will volunatrily submit to the
loving authority of Christ. This theme is best expressed by the Apostle Paul: "He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fulness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth" (Eph. 1:9-10).

This same theme is expressed by the Apostle Peter who applies Old Testament writings to Christians: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvellous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God: you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (I Pet. 2:9-10). For the Mennonite Brethren, the Bible is not principally a theological textbook. It is a divinely inspired compendium of testimonies which above all else speaks of God, of interpersonal relations and of God's mission of grace to humanity.

The Bible is divinely inspired and hence only through it is a living, saving faith clearly revealed to man. It is for this reason that the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary teaches that it should not be considered as a book of systematic theology, apologetics, secular history, science, philosophy nor psychology. This is not to say that it does not contain many truths which these disciplines also teach; but its central theme is revelational, relational and missionary.

The Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary emphasizes also that the truths of the Bible must be lived and experienced. The comprehension of the divine truth which one reads in the Bible comes as a result of obedience. Thus, the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary attempts to teach that behavior which coincides with the moral, ethical, and relational teachings of the prophets, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Apostles leads one into experiential truth of God (John 7:17). The Seminary recognizes that academic discipline and exacting investigation are indispensable guarantees against theoretical errors and logical fallacies; but it also knows that an intellectual understanding of the
Bible does not guarantee experiential knowledge, morality or Christlike human relations.

There is a persistent temptation among theological seminaries to look for a system into which all the truths of the Bible may be neatly placed without logical contradiction, but the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in keeping with its tradition resists that temptation. Its heritage emphasizes that the Word of God which comes to man through the Bible is a living, active, practical Word which is evasive to rigid systems formulated by men. This is not to say that the Bible is not the Word of God. But it does mean that when the Bible truths are taught as only propositional truths without being quickened by the Spirit of God through the crucible of experience, they can become a letter which kills instead of the Spirit which gives life.

The Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary teaches appreciation for the heritage that “truth is not abstract and idealogical [sic] but existential in nature. It is not resident in ideas but in living.” From this heritage of the centrality of the moral and relational teachings of the Bible, the Biblical Seminary affirms that obedience leads one to knowledge, while knowledge may or may not lead one to obedience.

In view of this concept of the Bible, the Biblical Seminary cannot easily be labelled theologically. It does not satisfy the Arminian nor Calvinistic camps. Its statement of doctrine does not even mention the millennium and thus it is not likely to be accepted in the pre-millenial camp, nor in the armillenial system, nor in the post-millenial grid. For the most part in recent years, it has resisted the dispensational system. Since it does not make science superior to the Bible, it can’t be classified as liberal in the true meaning of that word. Although it teaches that the Word of God is living and powerful, it might be suspect of being Neo-orthodox. It holds to the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith but is not considered Fundamentalist. Again, the reason for this seeming ambiguity is that it emphasizes that one must know in whom he believes through personal experience as well as what he believes.

The student of the Mennonite Brethren Biblical
Seminary is taught to appreciate this view of Scripture. Although it may be thought dangerous by some to "permit all sorts of truth to lie loose," the Seminary teaching faculty maintains that this is exactly how God has revealed his truth in the Bible. Gerhard Hasel has expressed the position of Biblical theology in contrast to systematic theology in this way:

Biblical theology is not aiming to take the place of or be in competition with systematic theology as the latter expresses itself in the form of system building based on its own categories either with or without the aid of philosophy... systematic theology will always have its place in Christian thought. But in contrast to systematic theology, must not the discipline of Biblical theology draw its very principles of presentation from the Bible rather than ecclesiastical documents of scholastic and modern philosophy? Would it not be one of the tasks of Biblical theology to come to grips with the nature of the Biblical texts as aiming beyond themselves, as ontological and theological in their intention and function through the ages, without defining in advance the nature of Biblical reality?

The formation of a Biblical Seminary instead of a theological seminary is a result of a conscious decision to avoid placing human thought systems in a superior place to the revelation of God which must be experienced as much as it is intellectualized.

**UNIQUE CONCEPT OF THE CHURCH**

Ecclesiology refers to the doctrine of the church, the People of God. Roman Catholics define the church as follows:

When the church is spoken of, it means that visible religious society, founded by Jesus Christ, under one head, St. Peter, and continuing under the governance of his successors, the popes.

Augustine (5th century) believed profoundly in the Universal Church as a visible institution distributed
throughout the world and continued from the church of the apostles through the bishops whom he considered to be the successors of the apostles. He did believe that the bishops including the bishop of Rome could err; but the Catholic Church for him was the tangible body of Christ apart from which there was no salvation.

In order to appreciate the concept of the church which the Anabaptists held, it is necessary for the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary student to understand that from the time of Constantine (4th century) when the Roman government made its peace with the church, the latter slowly but surely associated itself with the state. Before this time the Roman state had insisted on managing the religion of its citizens. The emperor was the *pontifex maximus*, the high priest of the official religions recognized by the state. Although the Christian church never had been as subordinate to the Roman state as had been the pagan religions, the emperors put into effect the decrees of the church councils against heretics and those who were condemned. By the sixteenth century the church and the state were identical for all practical purposes. By virtue of being baptized in the church, babies became citizens of the Holy Roman Empire. Those outside this realm were pagans and enemies of the Empire. To disobey the church was the same as disobeying the state; and to refuse baptism was tantamount to treason. The Inquisition of the Roman Catholic Church did not condemn people for immorality as much as it did for refusal to believe in certain doctrines. The church tried the victims and the punishment was meted out by the state.

Some changes came with the Reformation. The Mainline Reformers viewed the church as a continuation of the Old Testament people of God, Israel. Paedobaptism (infant baptism) was believed by them to be a continuation of the rite of circumcision. In the same way that circumcision made a person a citizen of the nation of Israel and a member of the people of God, so baptism was believed to make the person a citizen of the Christian nation into which he was born as well as a member of the church.

Although Luther lived in the time of the sixteenth century, his works demonstrate his desire to form a true Christian church. His experiences and his study of Scripture led
him to reject the idea of an infallible and hierarchical church. Neither could he accept a specially endowed priesthood which dispenses salvation through the sacraments. He restored the concept of the priesthood of all believers.

He was a believer in paedobaptism, however, and was hard put to explain why there were so many church members who did not live in a manner that coincided with true Christian morality. Why didn’t saving faith, which was received at baptism and which supposedly removed original sin, produce transformed lives? He could not deny that those who were baptized were members of the church because baptism was the initiatory rite for church membership. A careful study of his writings, however, reveals an interesting evolution of his thought regarding the nature of the church. In the preface to his work of 1526 entitled, “The German Mass and Order of Service,” he attempts to provide a uniform order of service for all within the church. In this work he divides the church into three categories of people.

The first class of people in the church are those who are baptized in infancy, but who are not yet Christians. They are becoming Christians and need to be strengthened by the Word and sacrament. The Christian, says Luther, does not need baptism, the Word nor sacrament since all things are his. It is the sinner who needs these. 11

A second kind of divine service or mass is for the unlearned lay folk. This group consists also of many who are not yet sufficiently oriented to believe or to become Christians. They are interested in the Gospel and may be sympathetic toward it, but are not yet Christians. 12 Since these two groups are baptized, however, they are included in the church as members.

The third kind of service, writes Luther, should be truly evangelical and only for a select number. The group to which this order of service should be provided is so similar to the Anabaptist congregation that it seems best to quote the exact words of the great reformer.

The third kind of service should be a truly evangelical order and should not be held in a public place for all sorts of people. But those who want to be Christians in
earnest and who profess the Gospel with hand and mouth should sign their names and meet alone in a house somewhere to pray, to read, to baptize, to receive the sacrament, and to do Christian works. According to this order, those who do not lead Christian lives could be known, reproved, corrected, cast out, or excommunicated, according to the rule of Christ, Matthew 18:15-17. Here one could also solicit benevolent gifts to be willingly given and distributed to the poor, according to St. Paul’s example, II Corinthians 9:13.

Throughout Luther’s life the concept of the church as a community of believers is repeatedly mentioned by him. This seems to have been his ideal. An understanding of the logical implications of this is important. It has to do with an understanding of the divine plan in history. If God’s purpose in history is primarily to transform the societies of the world into Christian societies by the gradual influence of the Gospel, it would be wise and good to depend for help on baptized political leaders who profess to be Christians. If, on the other hand, the principal plan of God in history is to form a new society to which only converted people belong and to which they pledge their first loyalty, there is really no room for dependence upon an existing society which is fallen and which is predominantly controlled by non-Christians. The first concept would permit the use of different methods and weapons in order to realize its ideals. The formation of a completely new society of persons whose first loyalty is to Christ would admit only mature people and would permit only the methods and weapons of Christ to realize its ideals. This new society or church would consist only of truly converted believers. The mission of the church would not be that of changing a society by gradual influence, but rather that of creating a new one of converted and regenerated people who would voluntarily become members of it and who would participate in the privileges and responsibilities pertaining to it.

Beginning with 1526 Luther began to revert to the medieval concept of the church again. He began to rely less on the power of the Word to bring about reforms, and began to place his reliance more and more on the support of the
civil authorities—who were, of course, members of the church who had been baptized as infants without a conscious conversion. In 1530 he goes so far as to approve the death penalty for those who would not accept his doctrine.¹⁴ Along with Melanchthon he asked for capital punishment for the leaders of the Anabaptists, and after the peasants' revolt he wrote: "Aim, [sic] flog, massacre however you can. Should you die while so doing, be sure that you could never find a more blessed death."¹⁵ Like the pattern of the Inquisition Luther seemed to apply discipline only to cases of heresy without thought of immorality.

Calvin and some of the other mainline Reformers could not accept the Lutheran idea of the church and explained it in a different way. They felt it was impossible to know who the real church was but stated that:

The Catholic or universal church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all.¹⁶

To put it more simply, the invisible church is the church as God sees it, a church which contains only believers, but the visible church is the church as man sees it, consisting of those who profess Jesus Christ with their children and therefore decree to be the community of the saints.¹⁷ According to the main-line Reformers the church may and always does contain some who are not yet regenerated.

The Anabaptists rejected the idea of an invisible church. They believed that the church must be visibly evident by its life and works. An invisible secret church was for them a contradiction in terms. The invisible company of the elect is identical to the visible company of the baptized who persistently obey Christ. This belief is a part of the heritage taught at the Biblical Seminary.

Anabaptists also refused to believe that there was salvation on the basis of nationality. Ethnicity was definitely not an issue. That which produced their unrelenting missionary drive was their belief that the people of God is supra-national and non-ethnic. They knew it to be their duty to cross ethnic and national boundaries to bring people into
the formation of one new man out of all nationalities and thus establish peace (Ephesians 2:15). Like the Apostles before them they believed that a person did not become a part of the people of God because he was a Jew, a German, a Dutchman or a citizen of the Holy Roman Empire, but only by a faith relationship to Christ.

The church to the Anabaptists was not just a place where the sacraments were rightly administered and the Word was preached. Neither was it merely a congregation of Christians and their children. It was a group of people who had voluntarily bound themselves to Christ and to one another in a relational and missionary covenant. In order to become a member of the church, one must not only have repented of his sins and turned to Christ in faith and obedience, but he also must have responsibly committed himself to the covenant and the mission of the church in a conspicuous and active way. The church members of the Anabaptist movement were distinct from the unbeliever. The true Christian was strikingly conspicuous by his life in public and in private.

The Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary teaches that the church is supra-national and non-ethnic in character. It believes that entrance into the Mennonite Brethren Church must be by true repentance of sins, a responsible conversion to Christ, a submission to Christ through His people.

UNIQUE VIEW OF THE SACRAMENTS

Again an understanding of our spiritual heritage is best gained by contrast with the prevailing views regarding the sacraments in other branches of the church. The concept of the sacraments as expressed by the Council of Trent is still the official position of the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁸ (It must be remembered that although encyclicals of the pope have been written, no dogma nor doctrine has been changed with Vatican II. The purpose of Vatican II was to dialogue with non-Catholics in order to bring them back into the Roman Catholic Church. In order to introduce or change doctrine or dogma the pope must speak ex cathedra, in other words, with infallibility).¹⁹ For a Catholic a sacrament is “a
physical or material element clearly presented to the senses which, by its similarity, represents by the institution which it signifies and by the consecration which it contains, an invisible spiritual grace.”

Thomas Aquinas, the Catholic theologian (d. 1274) whose theological system is recognized and imposed by church law, states that the sacraments are the means by which the grace of God works. They infuse grace into the person *ex opere operato*, that is, by virtue of their being performed. Their efficacy does not depend on the faith or knowledge of the participant nor the attitude or virtue of the administrator. From the Middle Ages to the present there remain seven sacraments in the Roman Catholic Church which are sometimes described by Catholic theologians as pipelines of grace. They are: baptism, Holy Eucharist, penance, matrimony, anointing of the sick, confirmation, and holy orders. (Catholic Ency. p. 534)

Reformed theologians define the sacrament in this way:

A sacrament is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ, in which by sensible signs the grace of God in Christ, and the benefits of the covenant of grace, are represented, sealed, and applied to believers, and these, in turn, give expression to their faith and allegiance to God.

For the Reformed believers the sacraments include the covenant of grace, the righteousness of faith, the forgiveness of sin, faith and conversion, communion with Christ in his death and resurrection, etc. In other words, the sacraments for the Reformers signified Christ and his spiritual riches. For them, when the sacrament is received by faith, the grace of God accompanies it, and the believer is strengthened.

Luther taught that there were only two sacraments: baptism and the Lord’s Supper. He maintained that the baptismal water had become a gracious water of life through the Word and thus affected regeneration and the removal of original sin. The other Mainline Reformers and the Anabaptists could not accept this. All of the Reformers rejected the Roman Catholic teaching of transubstantiation which declares that the elements in the mass are converted into
the real body and blood of Christ at the moment of consecration by the priest. Luther substituted the idea of consubstantiation which states that Christ's bodily presence is in, with, and under the elements.

The non-Lutheran Reformers held a slightly different view. Zwingli denied absolutely the bodily presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper and made it principally an act of commemoration; although he did not deny that in it Christ is spiritually present to the faith of the believer. Calvin maintained an intermediate position insisting on the real, though spiritual presence of the Lord in the Supper. For both Calvin and Luther the Lord's Supper was a divinely appointed means for the strengthening of faith.

It may be said that both the Lord's Supper and baptism were understood by the Reformers as a means to strengthen faith. This posed a problem for them regarding baptism, however. How could baptism strengthen the faith of infants since they could not exercise it? Some Reformers simply stated that infants born of believing parents are children of the covenant, and as such are heirs of the divine promises, including the promise of regeneration. To these the spiritual efficacy of baptism is not limited to the time of its administration but continues through life. Others maintained that the children of the covenant were to be regarded as presumptively regenerated. This means that they are not regenerated by baptism but are assumed to be regenerated until the contrary appears in their lives.23

The Anabaptists could not find these teachings supported by Scripture. They saw too much of the influence of the Romanism in these views. Regarding baptism they did not see this ordinance as a sacrament through which grace was received. They saw it as an ordinance which must be obeyed. In keeping with their view of the church they saw this as a commitment to Christ and to his church as a covenanting community with a mission to the world. They, of course, rejected the idea of non-believers' baptism in infancy. Baptism was to them a commitment to the responsibility of a new life in the framework of a new covenant of relationship with the brethren. The Lord's Supper was a renewal of that covenant made in baptism. To become bap-
tized meant that "they went freely under the cross and for the Gospel's sake were made pilgrims and martyrs throughout the known world." The Communion Supper was a reaffirmation of that commitment.

When one became baptized he became a Christian incorporated into a fellowship of Christians with certain responsibilities and privileges. He was to receive from the community a caring concern, the intercession of the brotherhood, the mutual sharing and receiving of material goods in the time of need, and the gentle admonition and Christ-like redemptive correction when necessary. Menno wrote:

If you see your brother sin, then do not pass him by as one that does not value his soul, but if his fall be curable, from the moment endeavor to raise him up by gentle admonition and brotherly instruction before you eat, drink, sleep, or do anything else as one who ardent-ly desires his salvation, lest your poor erring brother harden and be ruined in his fall.

It has been recorded that: "In court one of the Anabaptists said that Christ was present in the community of the faithful, and not in the bread and wine." The ordinances were only reminders of certain commitments of relationships made within the community as the true church of Christ. The Lord's Supper was an institution of the cup of the New Covenant which is suffering. They believed that if one were to follow Christ seriously and live as He commanded there would be suffering. They did not shun that cross, and went freely to the countries of Europe to bring people of all nations into the Kingdom of God.

After having carefully studied history, the Mennonite Brethren Biblical seminary teaches that there are two principal sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper. It teaches that only responsible converted people should be permitted to participate in these. The Seminary also teaches that baptism is by immersion in the likeness of Christ's death and resurrection. It is a symbolic act of death to an old life of independence and sin to a new life of union with and dependence upon Christ and His church. It is a relational commitment to Christ, his church, and their mission.
The Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary teaches also that the Lord's Supper is a symbolic way of reaffirming one's faith in the new covenant made by Christ with his followers and realized by the maintenance of reconciliation among the brethren and a continual participation in the mission of the Church. It teaches that repentance, conversion, and reconciliation are prerequisites to these ordinances.

**UNIQUE VIEW OF DISCIPLESHIP AND MISSION**

The Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary teaches that the supreme and first task of the Church is world evangelism (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46-47; John 20:21; Acts 1:8; II Cor. 5:18-20 et. al.).

It teaches that all Christians are responsible for the diffusion of the Gospel and for the forming of a church with people from all nations. It teaches that the missionary mandate is binding for all Christians of all times.28

It also teaches that suffering is inseparable from the mission of the church. It does not look upon suffering as a form of masochism or indulgence that must be endured in order to bring merit and approval before God. It holds that if one is to live a godly life in this world he will have to suffer (II Tim. 3:12); and that the Christian is actually called to suffering (I Pet. 2:20-22). The contemporary teaching that the purpose of conversion is to provide the believer with peace now and heaven later is consciously refuted. It is taught that suffering without retaliation is that which attracts men to Christ. The professors of MBBS affirm that “he that does not do the works of Christ is a sham-Christian and no member of Christ’s Church!”29

The call to become a Christian for the Biblical Seminary is a call to the cross. That cross to which the Christian is called “must be, like his Lord’s the price of non-conformity.”30 Students are taught that a person who wishes to follow Christ will clash with the world and will suffer and may die for his stance. Suffering for Christ is taught to be a deterrent to sin and careless living, and that he who suffers for his faith has ceased from sinning (I Pet. 4:1). For the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary the kingdoms of
this world and the Kingdom of Christ are diametrically opposed. There is bound to be conflict. If there is no conflict either the Kingdom of Christ is becoming identified with the kingdom of the world, or the kingdoms of the world are becoming more Christianized, or both is happening.

John Bright has expressed the transfigured suffering of the Christian like this:

God is called forth for himself a true people, the people of the Servant. He is calling you to be that people, and to serve his purpose. You are to be the vessels of his redemption, to bring Israel back to itself and to proclaim his salvation in the entire world. To be sure, you will find in this destiny no exemption from suffering, but precisely a summons to it. Yet suffering will be transfigured; no longer will it be to you brute agony without meaning, but the very instrument of redemption. 31

This aspect of mission and discipleship is taught at the Biblical Seminary. It may be asked, however, that if this is what is taught, why is such a sense of mission and the discipleship of suffering so rare in the western world? There is an explanation for this which bears upon this subject.

In the early church there was from the very beginning a temptation to maintain the ease and protection which comes from the approval of the world. After Pentecost and prior to the martyrdom of Stephen, the Church grew and was notably popular with the people (Acts 2:47). It is important to note, however, that missionary activity was confined to Jerusalem and the nearby areas with the exception of those who had attended Pentecost and had returned carrying the message with them. There were the usual internal problems of ethnic differences (Acts 6:1), and the temptation to materialism (Acts 5). With the Spirit filled honesty of Stephen, however, and with his demand for repentance, intense persecution began and with it suffering (Acts 9:1-2). With this persecution came a great expansion of the church to other peoples. Church growth and mission seemed to be directly related to suffering and persecution.

Throughout the early days of the church there was much persecution and suffering and yet the church grew
faster and more effectively in those years than since. When Constantine made peace with the church, it changed from a persecuted church to a persecuting one. It became embroiled in internal discussions, quarrels, and mutual excommunications. Although there was missionary work done during this period, it was done by force and principally to gain proselytes from opposing factors. As is well known, the church plunged into an almost irreparable degeneracy.

With the coming of the sixteenth century and the Anabaptist zeal to form a believers’ church of people disposed to live as Christ lived and taught, also came intense persecution. Suffering for Christ became an instrument of ministry and mission; and although the Anabaptist and Mennonite church was nearly obliterated as a result of persecution, its mission was clear and evangelism and missionary activity have left their permanent mark on the Christian world.

The intense persecution not only dispersed the Anabaptists, it also drove them together into protective covenanting churches. Since many came from common areas, they were naturally bound together by common interests and beliefs. They moved in groups across Europe and finally to Russia, Canada and the United States. In their zeal to preserve the church as they conceived it to be, they gradually became quite ethnic and quite concerned about self-preservation instead of mission. They had moved from the dangerous work of mission to the comfortable task of preserving their traditions.

The early Anabaptists were distinctive in their faith and life, but culturally one with general population. The later Mennonites became distinctive in their cultural enclaves, linked together by extended family ties, but spiritually they were no longer much different from the rest of the populace . . . the once decisively dynamic witness had been replaced by a quietistic kind of testimony of the Stillen im Lande—the quiet in the land. The one dominant but unpopular concept of the Believer’s Church had given way to a more popular and tolerated concept of the parish church. The once spiritual brotherhood of disciples had become a cultural denomination of citizens.32
It was from this emphasis on introversion and obsession with self-preservation that the Mennonite Brethren broke in 1860. It broke from the lethargy and moral degeneration around them and also readopted the statement of mission as it was written in the 1660 statement of faith. This is highly significant in light of the fact that other than the Mennonite confessions, few church creeds contain a statement on mission.

The Mennonite Brethren have been outstanding in their zeal for overseas missions, but have had little significant numerical growth through home-missions in the United States and Canada. Until the Second World War ethnicity was guarded to a rather large degree, and little outreach was made to expand in the English speaking areas of the Western Hemisphere. Some groups have accused the Mennonite Brethren of having a “salt water complex of mission.” By this is meant that although mission work has produced more Mennonite Brethren churches in other nations, it tends to guard its European ethnic purity in the United States and Canada.

The Seminary does not depreciate the ethnic heritage of the members of the Mennonite Brethren church, but it does teach that membership is a commitment to the mission of recruiting converts from all races and incorporating believers from all ethnic groups into the fellowship of Christ as equals. The spiritual heritage which has been passed down to the Mennonite Brethren today involves a clear understanding of discipleship and mission. It is a continuing call to avoid ethnic exclusivism and to bring into Christ’s Church all who repent, believe, and give themselves to the mission and discipleship of a covenanting fellowship.

Distinctive to the Mennonite Brethren heritage of discipleship and mission is the centrality of reconciliation and Christian arbitration in the settling of controversies. Negatively this precludes violence of any kind in the life of the Christian. Christ taught this categorically (Matt. 5:39-42, 44; 26:51-56; John 18:33-40.) Paul and Peter repeat the teaching (Rom. 12:19-21; I Pet. 2:21-24). It is patently clear that Jesus forbids the use of violence among his followers and requires of them to substitute constructive
peaceful action. The non-violent position for the Mennonite Brethren is clearly stated in the Statement of Faith and is a *sine qua non* of the Denomination.\textsuperscript{33}

Mission not only means non-violence. It means active participation in peacemaking. The attitudes and actions toward those who exploit the non-Christian have been explained, but how Christians are to live among themselves needs to be mentioned. The resume of this is stated by Christ who is our Lord and to whom we voluntarily submit in obedience as disciples. His instructions are clear in Matthew 18:15-17. This passage gives specific instruction as to how Christians are to settle their differences. Paul makes it clear that Christians are to settle their differences among themselves and are not to resort to pagan civil courts (I Cor. 6:1-4).

The concept of discipleship which has been inherited from the forebears of our denomination and which is taught at the Biblical Seminary is that of redemptive, caring concern for the brotherhood and aggressive and active peaceful settling of disputes in the world where that is possible.

**THE AUTHORITY OF CHRIST AND THE AUTHORITY OF CIVIL POWERS**

The Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary teaches that Christ is King with a kingdom. His true subjects are those who have been born again spiritually and have voluntarily acknowledged His sovereignty and have submitted to His authority over and above all other allegiances.

The kingdom is in the past in that God has planned it from eternity and initiated His invitation to become a citizen in it since the fall of man. It is present in the sense that it always exists whether it is acknowledged or not, and that while the present order of human history exists, His gracious invitation is still offered to men outside it. It is future in that it is eternal and will someday abolish all other rule, authority and power; and will be delivered up to God by Christ as finally consummated (I Cor. 15:24).

True Christians as citizens of the Kingdom of Christ, then, are bound to acknowledge civil governments as having been temporarily arranged in their present positions to
maintain order in society (Acts 17:24-31). Since these governments are inferior and subject to the sovereignty of Christ, they are responsible to Him. Christians are obligated to respect them, pay the taxes that they require for existence, and obey their statues in so far as these concur with Christ's teachings. When those teachings are not congruent with Christ's the true Christian is bound to obey God rather than men.

Most denominations of the Protestant tradition teach that the Christians should disobey the mandates of civil governments when they do not agree with God's laws except in the orders to kill and make war. The Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary teaches that an order from a civil government to participate militarily against a person or nation is contrary to Christ's order not to resist evil by force.

The Mennonite heritage teaches that the spiritual princes which influence the nations are fallen beings and oppose the sovereignty of God (Dan. 10:12-13). The Christian, however, is called upon to do what his government requires of him when that is congruent with Christ's teachings. He is to refuse to do what the civil authorities demand when those demands do not agree with Christ. The Christian, however, remains under the sovereignty of the government and is subordinate to it when he accepts the penalties it imposes even unto death. Positively speaking, the Christian is to respect, honor, and work constructively to improve his government and to remind it that it is subject to the sovereignty of God.

EPILOGUE

The spiritual heritage that is taught and appreciated at the Biblical Seminary is the transforming of evil into good. It is expressed in becoming involved in deeds of justice and in the preaching of the Good News of liberty. Our heritage is a call to do good, to save lives, to alleviate suffering, to promote the well-being of others as Christ has commanded us to do.

This kind of action by individuals and groups clashes
with the world. It is this clash with the world which comes from living as Christ would have us live that is the cross for the Christian. The obeying of Christ in contradistinction to the obeying of the government to kill is bound to be misunderstood as close to treason especially in the time of war. Yet, it is to this that the Christian is called. This is our heritage which we proudly claim. Constructive, peaceful, aggressive action for righteousness is a cherished heritage at the Biblical Seminary.

Obviously there is always a great gulf between the real and the ideal. Theory and practice are often poles apart. We live in a real world and we strive joyfully to close the distances more and more between what we are and what Christ would have us be. As we continue to behold the glory of our Lord in His life-style and seek to emulate it we discover that we are constantly being transfigured into His very own image from one degree of glory to another. Continuous serious and careful study of Scripture and history is the norm for the Seminary in order that the heritage of divine truth might not be lost and that our tradition might be established on truth.
FOOTNOTES


2 *Sine qua non*, something indispensable.


18 The Catholic Encyclopedia defines the sacraments in these words: “These are: (a) a sensible sign instituted by God, which gives sanctifying grace; (b) both matter and form present with each sacrament; the matter is the
material used the forms, the accompanying words and actions; and (c) a minister, some one authorized to give the Sacrament with the intention of doing what the Church intends. It is good to know that the Sacraments produce grace . . . sanctifying grace is given by reason of the rite itself (ex opere operato) p. 534.

19 Ibid., p. 203.
20 Latourette, op. cit., p. 597 (translation mine).
22 L. Berkhof, op. cit., p. 617.
23 Ibid., p. 627.
26 Franklin Hamlin Littell, op. cit., p. 100.
27 Ibid., p. 101.
28 Ibid., p. 112.
33 Article XV
34 John Howard Yoder, op. cit., p. 212.