

MENNONITE BRETHREN
CONFESSION OF FAITH

1975

Preface

The Mennonite Brethren Church has throughout its history emphasized biblical authority in all matters of faith and practice. This emphasis exalts the centrality of Scripture and counsels a proper use of creedal statements and confessions of faith as expressions of our understanding of Scripture. Such documents are to be regarded as descriptive more than normative. They are never to be given equal status with the Bible.

The Mennonite Brethren Church is historically and theologically rooted in evangelical Mennonite-Anabaptism of the sixteenth century Reformation which sought to recapture the faith and life of the New Testament church. Our forefathers agreed with Menno Simons, after whom Mennonites are named, that "No other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11). Numerous confessions in the Anabaptist tradition were used in the preparation of the first Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith.

A confession such as this one is an expression of the biblical ideals of the brotherhood, revised from time to time, reflecting the faith which such a fellowship believes and preaches. Its validity depends on its biblical character; its usefulness depends on its ability to communicate our understanding of the biblical message. The Mennonite Brethren Church accepts God's revelation in Scripture to be trustworthy and authoritative.

Since the nature and mission of the church call for a concise statement of what a brotherhood believes, the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches has undertaken to rewrite the Confession of Faith to make it more readable. May it serve as a guide and a messenger, exhorting believers to live the faith they proclaim.

I. God

We believe in God, the eternal Spirit, infinite in holiness, power, wisdom, righteousness, goodness, love and mercy. This one and only eternal God has revealed Himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Father

We believe in God the Father, who created all things. He can be known to the extent that He has revealed Himself in word and deed as the source and sustainer of life. He is a God of love who orders all things to serve His eternal purpose. In mercy and grace He adopts as His children all who repent of their sin and trust in Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord.

The Son

We believe in Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, whom the Father sent to reconcile us to Himself and to redeem us from sin and eternal death. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin, Mary. Thus He is true God and true man according to the Scriptures. He lived a perfect, holy

and sinless life. In the redemptive purpose of God, He suffered crucifixion and death for our sin. He rose from the dead for our justification and ascended into heaven where He now intercedes for all who believe. He will come again to judge the living and the dead and to establish His eternal Kingdom.

The Holy Spirit

We believe in the Holy Spirit, one with the Father and the Son, sent by them to effect redemption in man. He convicts, regenerates, guides, teaches, rebukes, indwells, empowers, comforts, intercedes, unites believers into one body, and glorifies Christ.

Basic Scriptures cited are representative, and not exhaustive: Gen. 1; Deut. 6:4-6; Ps. 139; Is. 40; Mt. 28:19; Jn. 1:1, 18; 4:24; 15:26; Rom. 8:1-17, 26-27; 2 Cor. 3:17; 5:19; 13:14; Phil. 2:6-8; 1 Tim. 3:16; 6:15-16; Heb. 11:6; Jude 25.

II. The Revelation of God

We believe that God has revealed His power and deity in the created universe so that man can know Him. God revealed Himself in saving word and deed in the Old Testament and established a covenant relationship with His people. He revealed Himself supremely and finally in the Lord Jesus Christ, as recorded in the New Testament.

We believe that all Scripture is inspired by God as men of God were moved by the Holy Spirit. We accept the Old and New Testaments as the infallible Word of God and the authoritative Guide for the faith and life of Christian discipleship. We believe that the Old Covenant was preparatory in nature, finding its fulfillment in the New Covenant. Christ is the key to understanding the Bible; the Old Testament bears witness to Him, and He is the One whom the New Testament proclaims.

Ps. 19; 119:105; Lk. 24:27, 44; Rom. 1:18-23; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; 2 Pet. 1:16-21; Heb. 1:1-2; 8:5-13.

III. Man and Sin

We believe that man was created in the image of God, sinless, and in fellowship with God, with a free will to make moral choices. But man sinned, and willfully disobeyed God, breaking fellowship with Him and bringing physical, spiritual and eternal death on the whole human race. Consequently all are sinful by nature, guilty before God and in need of forgiveness through Christ.

Gen. 1:27; 3:1-19; Mt. 19:13-15; Rom. 3:10-18; 5:12; 18:21; Eph. 2:1-3.

IV. Salvation by Grace

We believe that there is one Mediator between God and men, the Man Jesus Christ. The purpose of His coming was to

redeem man from the judgment and power of sin and to reconcile him to God. Through the shedding of His blood, Christ provided the one sufficient sacrifice for sin and established God's New Covenant.

We are saved by the grace of God through faith in Christ. The Holy Spirit, through the Word of God, convicts man of his sin and need for salvation. Those who repent of their sin and trust in Christ as Savior and Lord receive forgiveness. By the power of the Holy Spirit they are born into the family of God and receive the assurance of salvation. Saving faith involves a surrender of the will to Christ, a complete trust in Him, and a joyful obedience to His Word as a faithful disciple.

Acts 2:42, 46; Eph. 1:13-14, 2:8-9; 1 Tim. 2:5-6; Heb. 4:12; 9:15-28; 1 Jn. 1:9.

V. The Christian Life

We believe that the Holy Spirit lives in every Christian and transforms him into the image of Christ. He empowers the believer to follow Christ and to be an effective witness for Him.

The Christian lives in fellowship with God and other believers, and joins the local church at baptism. He contributes to the building of the body of Christ with spiritual and material gifts. Nurtured through the Word, fellowship and prayer, the believer grows more Christlike, glorifies God, and is a witness for Him in everyday life.

Believers attain spiritual maturity as they yield to Christ and obey His Word. In Christ the believer puts off the former way of life with its sinful affections and lusts. He is no longer enslaved to sin and Satan. His body is a temple of the Holy Spirit and should not be defiled or abused in any way. The believer is not to be bound by the tyranny of things. He seeks to dedicate his time, talents and possessions to Christ and His kingdom. The fruit of the Spirit is to be increasingly evident in his life, especially in his relationship to others. The Holy Spirit empowers him to gain victory over sin and temptation, to live a pure life, and to do good. Yet all followers of Christ continually need the forgiving, chastening, and cleansing grace of the Lord.

Mt. 5:13-16; Jn. 12:26; 15:4-5; Rom. 6; 8:9-16; 12; 1 Cor. 6:19; Eph. 2:1-4; 4:1-16; Tit. 2:11-14; Heb. 12:14; 1 Jn. 3:17-18.

VI. The Church of Christ

We believe that the church is one body, the bride of Christ, established through God's redemptive work in history. Believers from all nations, races and social classes, regenerated by faith in Christ and cleansed by His blood, are baptized by His Spirit into one body and separated to God and are members of this body, whose head is Christ. Despite diversity in congregations and denominations, the Spirit works a basic unity which results in cooperation and fellowship with believers of other Christian groups. The Scriptures, particularly the records of the New Testament church, guide believers in

questions of life and doctrine. Through His Spirit the Lord gives gifts to the church to be exercised for the upbuilding of believers and the propagation of the Gospel.

Organization

The local church is an association of believers, baptized and organized for worship, fellowship, nurture, service and witness. Each congregation regulates its own affairs. Congregations, committed to the Word of God and to this confession, affiliate as a denomination or a conference, whose polity is outlined in the constitution of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches. The work of the brotherhood is conducted in a spirit of interdependence, love and submission one to another under the Lordship of Christ.

Christian Nurture and Discipline

By washing the feet of His disciples, the Lord Jesus admonished His followers to practice personal humility, seek continuous cleansing and render loving service.* Similarly, Christians today should engage in humble service, mutual exhortation and disciplined living. In the church every member is to be concerned for the welfare of fellow-members and to intercede for them in prayer. Through public teaching, sympathetic encouragement, private counseling and earnest rebuke, the church promotes constructive discipline. Believers are encouraged to live a life of Christian discipleship, and to progress toward spiritual maturity so that the church will glorify God in the world.

God's Word is the standard for church discipline. Christians living in sin must be admonished in brotherly love and sincerity. Where private counseling fails, the church exercises redemptive discipline. If warnings are disregarded and the attitude of rebellion and estrangement persists, the

* The practice of washing the saints' feet can be a meaningful reminder of our continuous need for cleansing and mutual admonition to serve one another. Offender is formally excluded from the fellowship of the church. Believers, however, must continue to practice love and compassion toward the erring one in order to win him back. When he repents of his sin, the church forgives, reinstates him into fellowship and encourages him in the Christian life.

Mt. 18:15-35; Jn. 13:1-17; 17:21; Acts 2:38-44; 15:1-28; 1 Cor. 12-14; 2 Cor. 2:6-8; Eph. 1:22-23; 2:10-22; 5:21, 25-27; 1 Thess. 5:11, 14; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14-15; Rev. 5:9.

VII. The Mission of the Church

We believe that the command to make disciples of all nations is the primary task of the church. Every member has the responsibility to be a witness to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit and to call men to be reconciled to God. The Gospel is the power of God for salvation and is able to meet the total needs of man.

Mt. 2:23; 11:5; 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; 2 Cor. 5:18-20.

VIII. The Christian Ministries

We believe that God, through the Holy Spirit, has endowed His children with gifts for Christian ministry. Each

member lovingly ministers to the other until all are built up to the maturity of Christ. Some members of the church have received special gifts for leadership, pastoral, preaching, teaching, evangelistic, deaconal ministries. The church prayerfully recognizes these gifts and calls these persons. They must live above reproach, faithfully teach the Word of God and express loving concern for the well-being of others. A congregation, under the Holy Spirit's guidance, may commission or ordain such servants.

The church, in turn, shall love, respect and support them. She must also be on guard to detect and correct or dismiss false teachers.

Is. 6:1-10; Jer. 3:15; Acts 6:1-6; 13:1-4; 20:28; 1 Thess. 5:12-13; 1 Tim. 3:1-10; 5:17-22; Tit. 1:5-9; 3:10; 1 Pet. 5:1-5.

IX. Christian Baptism

We believe that Christians should obey their Lord's command to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. To qualify for baptism, one must repent of sin and trust Jesus Christ as personal Savior and Lord. We practice water baptism of the believer by immersion.

Baptism symbolizes death to sin and resurrection to the new life in Christ and the receipt of the Holy Spirit. Baptism is a public commitment to discipleship. At baptism the believer enters into the full fellowship and work of the church. Local congregations may receive into fellowship those who have been baptized by another mode on their confession of faith.

Mt. 28:18-20; Acts 2:38; Rom. 6:2-6; Col. 2:12-13; 1 Thess. 5:23-24; 1 Pet. 3:21.

X. The Lord's Supper

Members of the church observe the Lord's Supper as instituted by Christ. The elements, the bread and the fruit of the vine, symbolize Christ's broken body and shed blood. They remind us of His suffering and death for our salvation and our unity in Him.

In preparation for the fellowship of the Lord's Supper, every believer is to examine himself and partake of the elements in a worthy manner. Those who have peace with God, live in peace with their fellowmen, and have been baptized are invited to partake of the Lord's Supper, thereby testifying to His death until He comes.

The Lord's Supper expresses the fellowship and unity of believers with Christ. It is a supper of remembrance, celebration and praise which strengthens believers for true discipleship and service.

Mt. 18:24; 26:26-30; 1 Cor. 10:16-17; 11:23-32; 14:26; Rev. 3:20.

XI. Marriage and the Christian Home

We believe that God instituted marriage for the intimate companionship of husband and wife, and for the procreation

and nurture of children. In marriage two mature partners find fulfillment in sharing mutual love, concerns, joys, ideals, ambitions and responsibilities. Those who marry should share a common Christian commitment; a believer should not marry an unbeliever. We believe that divorce constitutes a basic violation of God's intention for marriage.

Christian parents should nurture their children through exemplary godly living, by praying for them, by leading them in family worship, by teaching them the Scriptures, and by training and disciplining them in a manner pleasing to the Lord.

Gen. 1:27-28; 2:18-24; Prov. 5:18-19; Mal. 2:13-16; Mt. 5:31-32; 19:4-9; 1 Cor. 7:10-11; 2 Cor. 6:14; Eph. 5:22-23, 6:4; Heb. 13:4.

XII. The Lord's Day and Work

We believe that God intended man to work diligently and honestly in his chosen vocation. The Christian should continually seek to build God's Kingdom through his work.

Following the New Testament example, believers commemorate the resurrection of Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit on the first day of the week. On the Lord's Day believers occupy themselves especially with worship and instruction in the Word, Christian fellowship and service and refreshing themselves in body and soul, and limiting their labor to work of necessity and deeds of mercy.

Gen. 2:1-3; Ex. 20:8-10; Mt. 6:33; Lk. 24:1-36; Acts 2:1; 20:7; Rom. 14:5-6; Eph. 4:28; 1 Thess. 4:11-12; Heb. 10:23-25.

XIII. Christian Integrity

Although the swearing of oaths was permitted in Old Testament times, it is forbidden by Christ. Christians are obligated to speak the truth because they are always in the presence of God. Therefore we simply affirm the truth in legal transactions. Because lodges and secret societies require the use of oaths and also because they foster the formation of intimate alliances with unbelievers, we discourage membership in secret societies but rather seek to promote fellowship and brotherhood in the church.

Mt. 5:33-37; 23:1-12; Jn. 18:19-23; 2 Cor. 6:14-18; Eph. 5:6-13; Jas. 5:12.

XIV. The State

We believe that God instituted the state to maintain law and order in civil life and to promote public welfare. The functions and responsibilities of the state are distinct from those of the church. The chief concern and primary allegiance

of all Christians should be to Christ's kingdom. It is our Christian duty to pray for those in government and to proclaim truth, love, righteousness and redemption. We should respect those in authority, exercise social responsibility, witness against corruption, discrimination and injustice, pay taxes and obey all laws that do not conflict with the Word of God.

Mt. 22:17-21; Acts 4:19; Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Tim. 2:1-6;
1 Pet. 2:13-14.

XV. Love and Nonresistance

We believe that Christians should live by the law of love and practice the forgiveness of enemies as taught and exemplified by the Lord Jesus. The church, as the body of Christ, is a fellowship of redeemed, separated people, controlled by redemptive love. Its evangelistic responsibility is to present Christ, the Prince of Peace, as the answer to human need, enmity and violence. The evil, brutal and inhuman nature of war stands in contradiction to the new nature of the Christian. The Christian seeks to practice Christ's law of love in all relationships, and in all situations, including those involving personal injustice, social upheaval and international tensions. We believe that it is not God's will that Christians take up arms in military service but that, where possible, they perform alternate service to reduce strife, alleviate suffering and bear witness to the love of Christ.

Ex. 20:1-17; Mt. 5:17-28, 38-45; Rom. 12:19-21; 13:8-10;
1 Pet. 2:19-23.

XVI. Christ's Final Triumph

We believe that God who acts in history will bring His purposes to a final consummation. At death the righteous enter a state of rest in the presence of God, in fellowship with Christ. The unrighteous suffer the torment of separation from God while awaiting final judgment.

When the Lord returns, living believers will be raptured and the dead in Christ will be resurrected to be with Him forever. Christ will judge all men. The righteous will inherit the kingdom of God and the unrighteous shall suffer the anguish of eternal hell. In the end, death will be destroyed, Anti-Christ will be defeated and Satan will be cast into the lake of fire. Christ will create a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness reigns, and God shall be all in all. This is the blessed hope of the church.

"Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour" (Mt. 25:13). He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon! Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 22:20).

Is. 2:4; 61:1-11; Mt. 25:13, 31-46; Mk. 9:43-48; Lk. 16:22-23; Jn. 5:25-29; Acts 1:11; 1 Cor. 15:21-58; Phil. 1:21-24;
1 Thess. 4:16-17; Tit. 2:11-14; 2 Pet. 3:3-13; Rev. 1:15, 20-22.