

THE PLACE OF FEELING IN CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

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THE PLACE OF FEELING IN CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

I. Some Basic Concerns

The life of the Church does not flow like a still quiet stream; but rather like a mighty river, once gently, then over rocks and rifts, then spreading wide its refreshing waters, then pressed by circumstances into narrow chasms, once dammed up to form large reservoirs, then breaking dams and flooding the parched fields. As the life of the Church passes through history it has its high and mighty chapters, then its low and lethargic plateaus. As with life in general, so the life of the Church rarely flows on an even keel.

Religion is generally a deeply emotional experience. Whether we think of "fear of the Lord," of profound awe and reverence, or in terms of love, hope, forgiveness, peace, joy -- all of these attitudes are rooted in emotion and feelings. Religious emotions are complex, often difficult to sort out. Without emotion religion tends to die. On the other hand, with emotional experiences often come excesses. So, it is not a question of having or not having emotional experiences, but of determining their place in our spiritual growth.

This paper is concerned with emotion in Christian experience because of the varied ways in which it finds expression in our brotherhood today. Following are a few of the current streams of Christian experience which raise questions for us:

A. The renewal movement of the Church is accompanied by various manifestations and expressions. Bruce Larson writes:

When historians of the future look back at the 1970's they will doubtless see this era of chaotic change in the Church, a day of new beginnings, and a strange mixture of despair and hope, frustration and boldness, disillusionment and expectancy.¹

With every period of religious revival there are excesses and "spill-overs" of an emotional nature that threaten the substantive life-giving value of the movement. One must expect that also now in the current renewal movement certain "spill-overs" will occur. Whenever there is a release from bondage and the experience of a new freedom; whenever there is an exchange of forgiveness for guilt, joy for sadness, power for weakness -- there is indeed an exhilaration of feelings. Often-times such experiences lead to excesses or emotional expressions which are unrealistic and which lead to disillusionment.

Also accompanying renewal movements is a certain divisiveness which threatens the quiet life of the congregation or denomination. This is the result of tensions which occur when some believers are being stirred with new life and others are not.

The reactions in the Church to new life movements vary greatly. Some members are glad, others are afraid; some are truly revived and liberated in the spirit, some are confused, others experience a momentary excitement and then go back to their former life; some leave for another church.

Our General Conference in 1972, which met in Reedley, California, took action on a new position regarding the charismatic movement in order to maintain understanding and unity in the brotherhood. We are asked to be knowledgeable and gracious about the movement.

¹ Bruce Larson and Ralph Osborne, The Emerging Church. Word, 1970, p. 9.

I quote in part, "It (the brotherhood) should be aware of self-righteousness and complacency, and of a censorious attitude towards those who have become involved in these movements. We must take seriously Paul's warning not to quench the Spirit (I Thessalonians 5) and constantly strive to be charitable towards those whose experience of God is attended by somewhat unusual phenomena."² (To gain the full perspective, the resolution must be read in total.)

B. The charismatic movement raises the question of feelings in Christian experience. This movement, although a part of the larger renewal movement, finds the place of feeling highly significant. In the charismatic experience we do not only see revival, but often so-called "second experience." This experience is often accompanied by ecstatic utterance, or speaking in tongues. The believer rejoices and utters unintelligible words in a spiritual language praising and glorifying God. This is whereof the Apostle Paul speaks in I Corinthians 12-14.

While a second experience may not fit into our theology, the need for a deepening experience with God after conversion and later in life is often felt. This is well stated by Dr. Robert Coleman:

. . . when we get through all the theological differences, a remarkable number of men and women greatly used of God from various schools of thought witness to essentially the same kind of a plus experience in their own lives. Naturally they speak of it in different ways, depending upon their particular doctrinal point of view. Some call it "entire sanctification," "holiness," "perfect love," or the "victorious life." Others may prefer to describe it as "the Baptism of the Holy Spirit," "the rest of faith," "death to self" or something else. The terminology, however, is not the important thing. What is significant is that there exists among Christian leaders representing many different

²General Conference Yearbook, November 11-14, 1972, Reedley, California, p. 9-10.

theological and church connections a basic unanimity of agreement upon the fact -- the fact of a deeper and abiding life in Christ entered into subsequent to regeneration whereby the trusting heart is delivered from the bondage of self, filled with the Holy Spirit, and set aflame by the love of God to serve the Lord with gladness.³

Moreover, the charismatic movement has also pointed us to the significance of the spiritual gifts in the life of the Church and the believer. Through the great emphasis on the Holy Spirit and the spiritual gifts, we have come to see capabilities and spiritual energy available to Christians. With the realization of being endowed with gifts and capabilities, many Christians have found new cause for rejoicing whereas formerly they carried an undue feeling of worthlessness.

We may well look into the movement known as the Pentecostalism to see how even in that tradition emphases change as to the manifestations of new life and the exercise of gifts of the Spirit.⁴

C. The revival movement is also accompanied by an expression of feelings. Who of us can think of past revivals without giving a significant place to emotions and feelings? The revival campaigns of today are sometimes accompanied by a play on emotions, sometimes to excess so that the experience gained is only an emotional one. Within our constituency today we have many believers who question their conversion simply because they are unable to sort out the feelings which accompanied that decision and that experience. This is not to say that feelings should not accompany revival services. This is only to say emotions often run high, and therefore care must be exercised to keep the substantive and volitional aspects clear.

D. The healing movements, often companions to the renewal movements, raise specific questions about the place of feeling in the

³Coleman, The Spirit and the World. Asbury Theological Seminary, 1965, p. 5.

healing of the body and the mind. Divine healing of a person involves the interactions of the total personality. This subject takes into account the importance of psychosomatic medicines, the integral relationship of body, mind and spirit. While spiritual, or divine healing, has always been a part of our faith and practice, the excesses which one witnesses in many faith healing movements challenge us to test the spirits, whether they be of God.

E. Some theological movements speak specifically to the importance of feeling in Christian experience.

Experiential Theology must be taken into consideration here. Experiential theology is in part, a reaction to creedal theology. Creedal or propositional theology, or the emphasis upon the rightness of doctrine and theological statements, without respect for the experiential and feeling level in the Christian faith, leads to reaction. We are now witnessing a reaction to creedal theology and seeing a new emphasis on experiential theology.

Another theology now in its formative years is Relational Theology. Within this consideration arises the entire tension between systematic theology and biblical theology, the latter being more relational. The rationale is that faith in Jesus Christ involves more than the intellectual acceptance of a statement of faith or doctrine; that a relationship is established between the believer and his Lord and a new relationship is created between the believer and his brethren. Relationships involve feeling, especially the emotion of love. This approach to the-

⁴For a brief analysis of the New Pentacostalism, see Jorstad, The Holy Spirit in Today's Church. (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press), 1973, Chapters 2 & 3.

ology or Christianity brings into better focus the essentiality of inter-personal relationships in Christian experience.

The above-named movements have raised questions with regard to the place of feelings in Christian experience. In part, these movements help us to understand why a consideration of this subject comes about at all.

Among our many questions concerning the feeling over-tones of current spiritual movements is this basic concern: THAT THE NEW LIFE MOVEMENT OF TODAY MIGHT BECOME THE BLESSED EXPERIENCE OF THE CHURCH, WITHOUT THE MORE HUMAN EXCESSES AND DIVISIONS WHICH OFTEN ACCOMPANY NEW LIFE EXPERIENCES.

II. Observations and Lessons from Our Past

A. A Lesson from the Past.

Throughout our brief history of 114 years we have experienced occasional out-bursts and longings for more feeling in our services and in our personal lives. Sometimes this hunger for warmer and more emotional kinds of expression has led individuals and even families to leave our church and join another where there is more freedom in religious expression. A most significant feeling-movement in our history was that which occurred during the period of the religious awakening in Southern Russia in 1845-60. An excellent survey of this experience is recorded for us by John A. Toews in his recent History of the Mennonite Brethren Church, Chapter V, "Faith in Ferment."

Since this history is not yet available in print, permit me to point out some pertinent parts of Chapter V. The meetings of the believers became more expressive of joy and praise as a result of the new life experienced in the revival. An observer of a meeting held in the

home of Johann Claassen, Liebenau, July 23, 1881, says in part, "With the exception of the opening and closing hymn, which were sung according to the traditional hymnal, the songs were of a more lively nature, accompanied occasionally with handclapping and other manifestations of joy." The revival movement in Southern Russia, however, gave rise to a "spill-over" of emotionalism and became a movement among the Mennonites known as the "Froehliche Richtung" (joyous or hilarious movement).

J. A. Toews writes:

The movement was marked by an excessive emotionalism. Such passages as Jeremiah 31:4, "and shall go forth in the dance of the merry-makers," and Psalm 47:1, "Clap your hands, all peoples! Shout to God with loud songs of joy!" were taken literally. Musical instruments played an important part in making "a joyful noise unto the Lord." The tambourine (a kind of drum) was used extensively at these meetings. The earlier emphasis on bible study and prayer disappeared and meetings became primarily occasions for sharing experiences and for entertainment.⁵

This movement was characterized by a false freedom. The leaders laid strong emphasis on Galatians 3:28, "For in Christ is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female." This they interpreted to mean that sexual differences did not really exist in the community of believers. The proponents of this freedom doctrine insisted that, according to Scripture, brothers and sisters in the congregation should greet one another with the "holy kiss." This gave rise to serious controversies among various believer groups. Also recorded in this movement were some moral problems. The "Froehliche Richtung" was apparently led by charitable fanatical brethren who took strong measures against those who would not join their group. The story of this movement must be read in its entirety in order

⁵J. A. Toews, History of the Mennonite Brethren Church, p. 86.

to gain full perspective.

However, this rather sad chapter of the Southern Russia revival must also be considered in historical perspective. The "new life" (neues Leben) which the Holy Spirit wrought at that time came to a church decadent with heavy tradition, legalism and creedal theology. When, finally, divine grace was experienced, sins were forgiven, and the spirit was again given freedom, hearts became exuberant and glad! The joyous movement, however, suffered from lack of scriptural directives and enlightened leadership. It sought to feed its life only on feeling and experience.

At the conclusion of this chapter on "Faith in Ferment," J. A. Toews writes: "It might be well at this point to pause briefly and ask the question whether this period of religious ferment in the Mennonite Brethren history has taught the brotherhood some lessons that are also of importance to the present generation."

B. Our Current Situation.

The excesses experienced in the spiritual revival of 1845-60 among Mennonites in Russia were due to the culmination of various circumstances. Seen in historical perspective, we can sort out some factors and some circumstances which are potentially explosive situations today. It is important that we take time to describe these briefly.

1. A highly structured and tightly organized church life can contribute toward upheaval in the individual as well as in the Church. Spiritual life is dynamic and so is real life in the Church. Our history is proof enough to teach us that a cold, traditional, prescribed church life suppresses the spirit and raises the potential of a major out-break. John A. Toews writes, "Mennonite Brethren have learned that

lukewarmness and coldness in the life of the congregation may open the door to a hyper-emotional movement. If worship services do not provide for meaningful participation of members, they will look for greener pastures elsewhere . . . the whole schism in the Mennonite Brotherhood could have been avoided by a radical renewal in the large churches."⁶

2. Legalism and conformity to a prescribed life style has the potential of suffocating the spirit. Legalism places an unbearable burden on the soul. You can never "make it" in a legalistic system. You always and always fall short. This breeds guilt and shame. And these kinds of emotions tend eventually to warp the individual and drive him into hollow empty living. Life is a sham and feelings of utter worthlessness are generated. In a legalistic society a believer tries to satisfy the demands of his religion by adhering (although faultily) to rules, to authorities and to the expectations of the Church. Such a person tends to deny his emotional feelings, or his feelings of guilt are built up to such a point that an outburst of some kind or a deep depression is almost inevitable.

3. Closely associated with the foregoing dangers of legalism is the danger inherent in a propositional and creedal religion which is strong on doctrine and weak on inter-personal relationships. A person living in the midst of such an emphasis may give intellectual assent to salvation, to the Scriptures, the doctrines and whatever, but never reach a feeling level about his personal faith. In such a religious system people know all the terminology, all the requirements of a "salvation testimony," all the right verses, go through all the required ceremonies, yet never feel saved or ever sense a new relation-

⁶Ibid., p. 99.

*pastor's attitude and
emotional stance (leadership)*

N.T. conception of growth —

ship with God, or with people. To a degree it is true to say, "If you don't feel it, you haven't got it." God may have indeed accepted them, but they have no supportive feeling for it.

4. A strong emphasis on individual salvation without an adequate accompanying feeling of belonging to a group of believers leaves many Christians in a state of loneliness and nonacceptance. Many young baptized believers feel saved, but are quite lost both in the Church and in the world. Without a feeling of acceptance and belonging, without the blessing of warm and supportive inter-personal relationships in the Church body, a young believer may either feel that he is not actually saved or he will develop serious disappointments about the Christian life, and he may even seek for something else which he hopes will be more satisfying.

5. A strong emphasis on the depravity of man without a strong emphasis on the gospel of forgiveness and hope cause deep feelings of unworthiness and hopelessness. A common plague among us as M. B.'s is an inferiority complex. Our strong emphasis on man's depravity has bred a low self-image and a sense of worthlessness. The emotions of guilt and shame are then driven deep into the sub-conscious. When this happens, a person is unable to realize a healthy self-acceptance in Christ; for where feelings of hope and joy about oneself are suppressed, they breed contempt. Paul speaks rather strongly about both feelings of conceit and contempt for the self in Romans 12 and I Corinthians 12, from which we quote a few pertinent statements: "Do not be conceited or think too highly of yourself; but think your way to a sober estimate based on the measure of faith that God has dealt to each of you," (Romans 12:3), ". . . because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body. Suppose the ear were to say,

because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body, it does still belong to the body . . . the eye cannot say to the hand, I do not need you. . . but that all its organs might feel the same concern for one another . . . if one flourishes, they all rejoice together," I Corinthians 12:14-26).

The brief survey we have just made about our current situation is simply to indicate that there are forces at work which could indeed lead us into "Froehliche Richtung" or to an upheaval of some kind. This upheaval could, of course, be both a blessing and a curse. Surveying our Church life one might venture to say that we are being "set up" for another emotional outburst, unless we find a balance, and allow ourselves to be taught by the Holy Spirit and guided by enlightened leadership.

There is not only danger of emotional excess, there is also a danger of emotional suppression. We should be as concerned about emotionalism which remains hidden as we are about emotionalism which comes out into the open. One can be as disastrous as the other. This will receive further consideration later in this paper.

We now turn in Part III to the more positive aspects of feeling in Christian experience.

III. The Legitimate Place of Feeling in Christian Experience

A. Biblical and Theological Considerations.

1. Religion, in reality, reaches into our deepest emotions. How can we go through the Biblical record and not see the deep sorrows, the exuberance of victories, great bitterness, great love, deep remorse, but also hymns of praise and joy!

"Clap your hands, all peoples! Shout to God with loud songs of joy" (Psalm 47:1). "Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands; sing forth the honour of His name; make His praise glorious" (Psalm 66: 1-2). "Praise Him with timbrel and dance; praise Him with stringed instruments and organs, praise Him upon the loud cymbals; praise Him upon the high sounding cymbals, let everything that hath breath praise the Lord" (Psalm 150). "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:19).

2. Deep feelings run through the earthly life of Jesus. Jesus was "moved with compassion" when He saw the multitude; He wept with compassion over Jerusalem's fate; He wept by the tomb of Lazarus; He was filled with anger when He cleansed the temple and upset the tables of the money changers; He examined the apostle Peter with the persistent inquiry, "Do you love me?"

3. The early Church also evidenced strong emotion. The Pentacostal assembly was charged with a holy awe, and accompanied by signs of fire and a rushing wind, and with tongues. So strange seemed the behavior of the believers that they were described as those "drunk with wine." True, the experience of Pentecost should never be equated as merely an emotional experience. Here is a fitting word on the subject from Samuel Shoemaker:

At Pentecost there were those who thought the disciples were drunk. Now there is undoubtedly some emotion present in a direct experience of the Holy Spirit; but emotion, as we understand the word, represents too transient a state to describe something which in its effects is abiding -- at least the total experience of the Spirit may be abiding, even though the feelings incident to the first knowledge of it may subside. The whole appeal of the Holy Spirit is to the

total personality -- the mind, the imagination, the will, not the heart only.⁷

4. The essence of the Christian experience certainly cannot be confined to the adherence of doctrine and propositional truth alone. Note the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22), "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance . . ." How many of these fruits would remain, if we took out the feeling elements? Among the abiding blessings of the Holy Spirit's work in the believer is love and power.

Another helpful word from Samuel Shoemaker:

We must somewhere hear the true, convicting word of the Gospel, sharpened by the Holy Spirit; and unless this has in it enough of what is humanly called "emotion," it may not be able to break through our hard shell; mild church services simply do not accomplish this for a great many of us, (p. 43).⁸

5. Not only is there a legitimate emotion accompanied by an initial experience (conversion) with God, but emotions are often strong in subsequent experiences in the life of the maturing Christian. Those who find the Lord early in childhood often find strong emotional experiences significant in their further development. Sometimes we call these experiences, dedication, consecration, surrender, new life, coming back to the Lord, commitment, or whatever. It is actually not possible, nor proper, to try to catalog experiences. But for many believers in our ranks another so-called "experience" subsequent to conversion and baptism is exceedingly significant. It is unimportant here to designate this as a "second experience" or as a "baptism of the Holy Spirit."

⁷ Samuel Shoemaker, With the Holy Spirit and with Fire (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), p. 26.

⁸ Ibid., p. 26.

feelings which are part of being in close touch with another person in the atmosphere of acceptance and love.

The importance of feelings and relationships is also reflected in such passages as 1 John 1:1-2, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of Life; that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full."

To know the Lord is a relationship that moves both ways. God also has feelings. How we perceive His feelings toward us will influence our response to Him. Feeling His acceptance of us (while we were yet sinners!) brings joy. Not to know this acceptance and forgiveness on the feeling level, or only sensing His anger toward our shortcomings, results in fear and dismay.

B. Psychological Considerations.

1. Emotions defined: Emotions are experiences or mental states characterized by a strong degree of feeling and usually accompanied by bodily expression. Feelings, especially when intense, affect the total body and the total personality.

Emotions are also of various kinds, such as anger, hate, bitterness or on the other hand, love compassion, kindness, etc. Religion is an area of life which is deeply rooted in human emotions. ". . . Since religion is concerned with the deepest needs and highest worths of life, it will naturally be charged with emotional urgency."¹⁰

¹⁰Paul Johnson, Psychology of Religion (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1959), p. 73.

Often the most intense feelings appear in the most vital experiences.

"No experience is vital or dynamic without emotional support . . ." ¹¹

2. Emotion as Motivation. Probably the most significant place for emotions in Christian experience is motivation and support. Emotions often arouse us to act and direct our behavior. "Motions and emotions go together," says Paul Johnson. ¹² Who can think of conversation without any emotion? Whether it be fear of being lost, or warmly moved by forgiveness and acceptance with God. Emotions offer support in the experience.

3. Emotions are essential to wholeness. Sometimes we treat emotions, or feelings, as something apart from the normal life, or as something dangerous and to be feared. It is not so at all; emotions are an integral part of life; they belong to wholeness.

It is interesting that the word "salvation" comes from the root-word "salus" meaning "health" or "wholeness." Wholeness also includes holiness. "Holiness and health both come from 'whole' - a man whose entire being is in harmony." ¹³ Jesus healed, not only the body, but the spirit and spiritual relationships as well (John 5 and 9).

It becomes then a matter of handling our emotions properly no matter what they are. Even the emotion of anger is useful if kept in control. "Be ye angry and sin not; let not the sun go down upon your wrath," says Ephesians 4:26. Sin lies not in having anger, but in the mishandling or lack of control of anger. Sin lies not in the aroused emotions; but in the way in which we take responsibility for them. Love is a wonderful

¹¹Ibid., p. 73.

¹²Ibid., p. 72.

¹³Don Gross, The Case for Spiritual Healing (Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1958), p. 63.

the line between love and passion, or between the spirit and the flesh. The burst into new freedom, be it a spiritual experience, or the embrace of the existential philosophy with its new freedom, will indeed create greater affection between people, but the new freedom may also embrace the danger of ethical misconduct. It was this excess unrestrained which became a problem in the "Froehliche Richtung" in the early years of our history.

b. There is excess in emotionalism when our own strong feelings are made the rule and norm for others in our Christian experience. Feelings alone must not be the norm, either for our own Christian experience, or that of others. It is not unusual for a person or a group, having been strongly moved by a new experience, to expect the same of all others. No "high experience" can be classified as the norm for the Christian life. The danger of such classification is clearly stated by Shoemaker, ". . . but emotion as we understand the word, represents too transient a state to describe something which in its effects is abiding, even though the feelings incident to the first knowledge of it may subside. The whole appeal of the Holy Spirit is to the total personality -- the mind, the imagination, the will, not the heart only."¹⁵

c. There is excess when emotions expressed or unexpressed violate our true humanity. There is a danger signal when a person acts with an intensity of feeling that is beyond his "natural self," or

¹⁵Samuel Shoemaker, With the Holy Spirit and with Fire. p. 26.

beyond his ability to control. Likewise, there is danger also when feelings should be expressed, but instead are being repressed. A person who does not have the courage or the liberty to express his feelings, is also untrue to himself and is unable to achieve his full potential in growth and service.

d. There is excess when feelings expressed are in disrespect of appropriate behavior in a public gathering. Paul deals with this problem in I Corinthians 14. Here we find appropriate guidelines for the expression of ~~esthetic~~^{ecstatic} utterances, and regulations for their use in the public assembly. Expressions of joy and praise, even in tongues is not to be forbidden, but their use is regulated by principles which guide these expressions for the common good.

2. The lack of emotions in Christian experience. While it is proper and timely to speak about the excesses in the emotional aspect of Christian experience, it is also necessary to speak a word here about the suppression of emotion. Therein also lies a great danger. Gary Collins observes:

But just as emotion without intellectual control is dangerous, so reason without feeling is unnatural and unhealthy. In the local church and in our personal lives as Christians we must recognize that a complete absence of feeling and an unbridled emotionalism are equally unnatural and unscriptural.¹⁶

The suppression of emotion may be due to a cold intellectualism, or to a fear of too much emotion, or to the practice of a form of legalism.

¹⁶Gary Collins, Man in Motion. p. 53.

In our constructive and somewhat legalistic tradition, we have often unduly suppressed our feelings and have thus created the potential for an emotional explosion. It is also true that we have been in the Church. Some have felt starved for love while they have tried so hard to make it with all the rules and authorities in the Church.

Many of our people in the Church are not even in touch with their religious feelings. For them, spirituality is the intellectual, or sometimes the naive acceptance of propositional (doctrinal) truth, coupled with an earnest effort to comply with all the Church expectations. There is hardly any feeling there. This is often the experience of those converted in childhood.

IV. Some Directives for the Future

A. Learning from the Past. We have already made references to the "Froehliche Richtung" in our history. This is a chapter out of the renewal movement in 1845-60 which has relevant lessons for us today.

In J. A. Toews' new History of the Mennonite Brethren Church, appears a section in Chapter V, captioned "Some Lessons from History." Here Brother Toews quotes in free translation the advice given to us by A. H. Unruh. This is so pertinent for us today that I take the liberty to quote a part of that section. Dr. Unruh offers this advice:

The great joy that was manifested by practically all members of the early Mennonite Brethren Church was a natural result of their discovery and experience of the free grace of God in the forgiveness of sins and the assurance of salvation. It can also partly be explained psychologically as a reaction to the cold and lifeless services in the old Church. Strong emotions, however, that are not controlled by a proper knowledge of Scripture, can be very dangerous. That Christ's Great Commission, in which new converts were also to be taught to obey the commandments of Christ, was overlooked by the early Brethren. Pfarrer Wuest had instructed them in the doctrine of justification by faith, but not in the doctrine of the sanctification of the believer. Any new life movement without sound and systematic Bible

teaching is bound to end in a disintegrating emotionalism. Zeal without knowledge is destructive.

2. The need for the discernment of spirits.

During times of religious ferment and excitement, there is the danger that men who are powerful emotionally but shallow intellectually may gain control of a movement. The more mature men who could provide stability and direction are often pushed into the background. Emotional leaders have a tendency to emphasize personal experience at the expense of Bible Study in devotional meetings. The Brethren learned through harsh experience, that the church must also exercise the gift of discernment, and must not be deceived by a mere verbalization of the Christian faith. Emotion is a good servant, but a poor master.

3. The need for sane Church leadership.

The brethren soon realized that Heinrich Huebert in his quiet way could do more for the nurture of the congregation than Jacob Becker with his sensational manner. Because the church had learned this lesson, it entrusted the leadership to men of integrity and spiritual balance who were able to overcome the Froehliche Richtung. Since that time the Mennonite Brethren Church has given preference to calm and soberminded men. To the more emotional (men) they gave the position of evangelist, but were less inclined to be guided by them in the congregation.

4. The need for congregational church polity.

The church learned to suspect and reject dictatorship in any form. Since the arbitrary and willful decisions of G. Wieler and B. Becker had created such havoc in the early Church, the Mennonite Brethren have insisted on congregational participation and action. Only that is binding for the congregation, which the majority agreed to do. This does not exclude the right of the ministering brethren to give guidance on the basis of Scripture, but no minister or leader can act independently of the Church.

5. The need for a strong ethical emphasis.

In the early years Christian doctrine was divorced from Christian ethics. The doctrine of 'joyous justification' was separated from the teaching on holiness and Christian discipleship. 'Separation' was interpreted primarily in terms of isolation from the world around us, rather than in terms of death to sin within us, as Paul teaches in Romans 6:4. The brethren also realized that happiness can easily be divorced from holiness and thus lead to a false freedom. The Brethren learned that faith without works is dead, and that doctrine and ethics, faith and practice, must be kept in proper balance.

6. The need for meaningful church worship.

Mennonite Brethren have learned that lukewarmness and coldness in the life of a congregation may open the door to a hyper-emotional movement. If worship services do not provide for a meaningful participation of members, they will look for greener

pastures elsewhere. Loud complaints and protests, as well as church resolutions, will not prevent members from attending other meetings which they consider to be more attractive. The whole schism in the Mennonite Brotherhood could have been avoided by a radical renewal in the large churches.

Such lessons from history ought to be carefully heeded when movements similar to the Froehliche Richtung appear within church circles in the present day.

B. Learning from the Present. The over-all concern of this paper, thus far, has been the danger of excess in emotionalism in Christian experience and in the life of the Church. The concern is legitimate, and we have tried to deal with this in some way. The wisdom offered us by A. H. Unruh of former experiences is well taken. But this is not our only concern. A burden equally as great as that of excess of emotionalism is the stark realization that with many Christians there is not enough spiritual life to get excited about. Too much excitement in religion may be dangerous, but equally, if not more dangerous, is the lack of any excitement about the Christian life. If major attention is given to controlling emotion in our religion, than equal attention must be given to pious but lifeless Christians in our congregations.

My concern is that new life be allowed to spring forth in our churches. Maybe the right concern is not too much fire, but not fire enough. Our ecclesiastical system, although not old, is already frigid and frozen enough to snuff out the new life that wants to come forth. Christians whom God has touched must not be permitted to suffocate in the traditional scaffolding which we have built about the Church.

The Church of Jesus Christ is always in the process of becoming. Finally, it may not be revival and renewal that we need, but an openness to be a part of that Body which Christ is always in the process of Creating. Actually, we are a young Church, but already we have gone

through traditionalism and legalism as well as great periods of awakening. I feel that the present moment is an invitation to us from God to enter into the full life Christ has for us -- which is "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." It is far better to live in joyful anticipation, than to go about being afraid of too much life.

The one outstanding characteristic of the early Mennonite Brethren Church movement was "Neues Leben" (New Life). And to that we may add as of 114 years later, "We've Only Just Begun!" Pray God it be so!

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