

A RESPONSE TO THE PAPER
A CONVERTED AND BAPTIZED PEOPLE
OCTOBER 15, 1986



Pastor Raymond Bystrom has given us an excellent paper on the Church as a "Converted and Baptized People". The four divisions provide both a biblical and practical approach to the subject. Not everyone will agree with all of the writer's conclusions, but that in itself reflects the need for our coming together periodically to interact and study such topics.

1. CHURCH MEMBERSHIP - IT'S MEANING

The two definitions cited, namely the church as a "community of local believers" and as a "non-local heavenly community" are generally acceptable to most in our circles. One of the questions which we often encounter however is whether formal membership is essential to express commitment to the church. Is the Bible clear in insisting on such a formal act or should all converted and baptized Christians who attend a local assembly be considered as members?

2. CHURCH MEMBERSHIP - IT'S IMPORTANCE

The paper is helpful in reminding us that the "church" is God's plans for witness to the world and His provision of a spiritual family when the "conversion-maturation process" takes place. The quotation from Charles Kraft's book further amplifies the essential quality of such a relationship: "Woe to the Christian who is not part of a vital, tightly knit, sociologically healthy group of God's people, for they are one's family". We must constantly ask ourselves whether the quality of life in our local church is as conclusive to spiritual growth as it could be? (see Acts 2:37-47; Eph. 4:14-16)

3. CHURCH MEMBERSHIP: IT'S PRE-REQUISITES

As Mennonite Brethren we have always affirmed the N.T. pre-requisite of conversion and baptism for membership. Bystrom's caution regarding the baptism of "very young persons" appears to be timely. Some guidelines regarding this matter could perhaps help those who struggle with this matter in the local context.

Bystrom states that "Baptism is also an act of initiation" into the local church. Is church membership and baptism to be seen as being synonymous? If this is true then we further ask 'What does this do to the matter of membership as a covenant, or do we only baptize those who fully understand all the implications of church membership?' I might also ask, 'How do we incorporate these adherents who were converted and baptized somewhere else?'

4. CHURCH MEMBERSHIP - IT'S CELEBRATION

There appears to be general agreement in our churches that baptism and the Lord's supper are the two major rites of celebration in the church. There is however some disagreement regarding who should be invited to partake at the Lord's supper. The writer suggests that the following should be included:

- all who are converted and baptized
- all who are converted but who may not have been baptized by immersion due to age or health
- all those "who consider themselves to have been baptized"

While this is a fairly subjective approach to the question, from a practical viewpoint I find myself in agreement.

The limitations on participation in the Lord's supper are clearly outlined with strong Biblical support. Perhaps we need greater consistency in applying these limitations.