"The Leading Ministry in a Covenant Community"

A Response

Gerry Ediger set out to sharpen a series of questions concerning issues of leading and following within a covenant brotherhood. By enunciating 10 principles, suggesting 6 tendencies, and outlining 5 developments he focuses upon the three basic issues:

1. What is the root of Mennonite Brethren identity--the congregation or the conference?
2. How can we achieve consensus regarding basic principles of polity and practice?
3. How should pastoral leadership be appointed within the context of a brotherhood?

The paper calls us to an examination of our practices, and it challenges us to adopt a high view of leadership that will move us toward a "consensus of covenant essential to the existence and integrity of our Mennonite Brethren Church."

Some Affirmations

1. The clarion call to strengthen our vision of the church as a "ministering, discerning" community.
2. An emphasis upon the quality of relationships in the brotherhood, a closeness and warmth of fellowship.
3. The acceptance of a Scriptural model of servant leadership in contrast to "autocratic and status-minded leadership." From the beginning, Mennonite Brethren have accepted a plurality of leadership.
4. A high view of the congregation in decision making as it relates to the calling forth of pastoral leadership from within its midst within the context of the larger brotherhood.
5. An acknowledgement that practices can be modified with integrity.

Some Concerns

1. The absence of Scriptural references regarding the nature of the church (e.g., Mt. 18:15-20; Acts 2:38-44; Eph. 2:10-22; 1 Pet. 2:9, 10).
2. An unclear distinction between the "universal" church and local churches (Mt. 16:18; 1 Cor. 1:2; Rev. 1:4). The denomination is not a church; it is an affiliation of churches of a common faith, bonded together for mutual edification and united ministries under the Lordship of Christ. Not all matters of faith and practice need to be examined at each level; the battleground of global issues seems to be in the local community, in the churches not in the Conference.
3. A tendency to equate solidarity with sameness, and covenant with conformity. Spiritual maturity, both individual and corporate, should allow us to discern the Lord's will without recourse to rules and resolutions.
4. The willingness to risk voluntary participation for compulsory compliance. "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us . . ." suggests a clear emphasis upon a capacity to enter into congregational decisions without a sense of obligation. Unity cannot be legislated, nor can submission be decreed.
5. A readiness to adopt rigid structures and status positions and risk the misuse of power and an emphasis upon discipleship by dictum. Let us guard against the adoption of Madison Avenue hierarchical structures; instead let us enter into covenantal relationships under the Lordship of Christ to serve one another in all things.

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