

To you, who are about to read these concerns:

Jesus says nearly 70 times in the gospels, “I tell you the truth”. We must ask ourselves, why are the words “true” and “truth” mentioned nearly 300 times in the New Testament?¹ Is it not that our adversary Satan, is constantly enticing the Church to make concessions with the truth?

In 1541 Menno Simons wrote the following concerning, “The True Christian Faith”.

“Everyone who is rightly taught of God in biblical wisdom (for it alone is the wisdom of the saints) may for the grace given him boast above all graduate doctors, theologians, jurists, orators, and poets, even though the hands of such a one cannot write nor his tongue speak, and he were the most helpless beggar upon earth. But all those who do not become acquainted with this wisdom from God, though they were as glorious as Solomon, and victorious as Alexander, as rich as Croesus, as strong as Hercules, as learned as Plato, as subtle as Aristotle, as eloquent as Demosthenes and Cicero, and as expert in language as Mithridates, yes, in so great demand that the like were not seen from the beginning, nevertheless they are fools in the eyes of the LORD.”

The Complete Works of Menno Simon by: John P. Funk and Brother, 1871, page 325

Where are the Menno's of today who will bring the Church back to its biblical roots? We do share Menno's zeal for the church's orthodoxy to be the foundation for its orthopraxy. We pray that the content of our concerns will be understood in the light of this spirit.

Introduction

We may be a minority, however we anticipate the same respect and consideration that has been shown to other minorities. Howbeit, we are speaking not only for ourselves, but for the pastors and many lay persons who share our concerns. In the spirit of respect for all who differ with our concerns, and think we lack this or that, may it be understood that we do not see ourselves as superior, but in mutuality with all who desire to be true to the written Word of God, and the Lord Jesus Christ that the Word reveals.

It is in that spirit that we humbly submit the following:

“Reasons for valid concern about MC USA and VMC”

REASONS FOR VALID CONCERN ABOUT MC USA AND VMC

1. We believe that there is a declining view of the Word of God.

Our 1963 Confession of Faith, Article 2, states... (Underline is for emphasis)

“...We believe that all Scripture is given by the inspiration of God, that men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. We accept the Scriptures as the authoritative Word of God, and through the Holy Spirit as the infallible Guide to lead men to faith in Christ and to guide them to the life of Christian discipleship....Christian doctrine and practice are based upon the whole Word of God, the word of promise of the Old Covenant as fulfilled in the New...”

Mennonite Confession of Faith Adopted by Mennonite General Conference August 22, 1963

Now, our current 1995 Confession of Faith, Article 4, states... (Underline is for emphasis)

“...We accept the Scriptures as the Word of God and as the fully reliable and trustworthy standard for Christian faith and life. We seek to understand and interpret Scripture in harmony with Jesus Christ as we are led by the Holy Spirit in the church...”

Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective Adopted by Mennonite General Conference July 25-30, 1995

There is a vast difference between the meanings of infallible and fully reliable and trustworthy. For example, no human being can be said to be infallible, but some persons we know are fully reliable and trustworthy. It is significant that in the index of *The Complete Works of Menno Simons*, there are ten references to the infallibility of God’s Word. Furthermore, when we interpret all of Scripture in harmony with Jesus Christ the following example is the natural consequence.

The next two paragraphs are taken from Mennonite Mission Network’s Missio Dei series of books.

It is entitled: WHAT IS AN ANABAPTIST CHRISTIAN? (Underline is for emphasis)

While Christians from an Anabaptist perspective see the Scriptures as the ultimate source of information, they see Jesus as the final authority for faith and life. He is Lord of Scripture and is normative for both personal and social ethics. No text is an authority other than in the way it is honestly related to the teaching and Spirit of Jesus. Thus, when Anabaptist-minded Christians face an ethical question, they go first to Jesus for their primary guidance and then to other Scriptures for further background and understanding. If two passages of Scripture seem to disagree, they let Jesus be the referee! (pg. 10)

Christians are to be a blessing to people of all backgrounds, genders and convictions. When we encounter individuals or groups in conflict with one another, we are to “think reconciliation” rather than judgment. (pg. 19)

What is an Anabaptist Christian by Palmer Becker (Missio Dei Series Number 18)

This view of Scripture that is promoted in “What is an Anabaptist Christian?” minimizes the Old Testament scriptures and the New Testament epistles as a guide for the church and promotes the justification of active homosexuals, a low view of the inspiration of Scripture, accepting the god of Muslims, and making peace into an idol, etc.

It is heartbreaking to us to see our beloved Church drifting away from the fundamental beliefs of God's Word and moving toward the worldly belief that there is no absolute truth that can be known universally and personally transcending individual feelings and desires. We are grieved that the Church is unable or unwilling to stand up for Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation and to hold up the Word of God as our only source of Divine truth.

Psalm 18:30 (NIV) "The LORD's word is flawless." **Psalm 19:7 (NIV)** "The law of the LORD is perfect." **Psalm 119:160 (CEB)** "The first thing to know about your word is that it is true." **Psalm 138:2 (CJB)** "You have made your Word even greater than the whole of your reputation." **Proverbs 30:5 (NIV)** "Every word of God is flawless." **John 17:17 (NIV)** "Your word is truth." **Romans 3:4 (NCV)** "God will continue to be true even when every person is false." **II Timothy 3:16 (CEV)** "Everything in the Scriptures is God's Word..."

We believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God, inerrant in its autographed form. We also believe that the omniscient and infallible God has preserved His Word from any serious error.

2. We believe that there is a hesitation to affirm important doctrines by our seminary and university professors/educators.

A prominent Mennonite Seminary professor² was asked, "Will the majority of human beings go to hell?" His answer was, "I don't know." Then he was asked, "Is everyone's destiny fully and finally determined before they die?" He answered, "I don't know." Next he was asked, "Will the punishment of the wicked be never-ending, or will there be a provision for termination of suffering and/or repentance after death?" The seminary professor responded, "How would you or I know this?" Finally, he was asked, "Will persons of other faiths be included or excluded in salvation and heaven?" He answered, "I do not know."

Another prominent Mennonite Seminary professor³ was asked, "Is the Word of God infallible?" The answer was, "There is far too great potential for misunderstanding for a simple "yes" or "no" answer."

When the President of EMU⁴ was confronted with concerns about a Bible professor advocating a homosexual lifestyle as biblical, the president's response was that the university is committed to academic freedom.

While the school motto used to be "**Thy Word is Truth**", any discussion of truth as an absolute, seems to be now considered archaic and foolish. The "post-modernity" of the world has entered the church. 1 Corinthians 1:25 says... For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.

II Timothy 2:15 (GWT) "Do your best to present yourself to God as a tried-and-true worker who isn't ashamed to teach the word of truth correctly." **II Corinthians 6:7-8 (NLT)** "We faithfully preach the truth. ...We use the weapons of righteousness in the right hand for attack and the left hand for defense. We serve God whether people honor us or despise us, whether they slander us or praise us." **I Peter 3:15b (MSG)** "Be ready to speak up and tell anyone who asks why you're living the way you are."

We believe that God expects us to be firmly rooted and established in the faith, able to detect error, and ready to defend and articulate essential biblical doctrines on the basis of the Word of God.

3. We believe that there is an increased failure to affirm Jesus as the risen and only Savior.

1 Corinthians 15:12 says... But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? (NIV)

MC USA reported in *Growing as Communities of Grace, Joy and Peace*⁵, that 6% of MC USA pastors that were polled believed that Jesus was not physically raised from the dead. Romans 10:9 says... That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. While it is stated in the same publication that "We share core

beliefs and practices” it seems to be emphasizing how our core beliefs have moved from the fundamental doctrines of our faith to those things contrary to God’s Word. When questioning the credentialing process to conference officers concerning how pastors that don’t believe in the resurrection of Christ preach on Easter morning, one group was told...“We aren’t the thought police”⁶.

I Corinthians 15:13-15 (NKJ) "If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless. And we apostles would all be lying about God-for we have said that God raised Christ from the grave. But that can't be true if there is no resurrection of the dead." **Romans 4:24-25 (AMP)**

"Righteousness, [standing acceptable to God] will be granted and credited to us also who believe in (trust in, adhere to, and rely on) God, Who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, Who was betrayed and put to death because of our misdeeds and was raised to secure our justification (our acquittal), [making our account balance and absolving us from all guilt before God]."

We believe that Jesus died, was buried, rose from the dead, and is now in heaven as LORD of lords.

4. We believe that peace rather than Christ has become our god and that true evangelism has been devalued by MC USA.

In the December 20, 2010 Mennonite Weekly Review⁷, Don Augsburger suggested that MCC change the label on the food they distribute from “In the Name of Christ” to “Food for Peace”. He wants us to “adjust to what is offensive to them rather than let them starve”. By suggesting this change it is clear that he wants to appease the Muslims who are opposed to the name and claims of Christ. And if we don’t... it’s our fault if they starve. It seems that the defining factor as to who is at one with us in our mission is no longer who believes that Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, but who is committed to living peacefully together in spite of differences of belief, convictions, and faith.

A recent graduate of EMS has written this: “If I was not securely founded in the faith before attending EMS, I could have easily started down the slippery slope of heresy. I believe that if EMS had its way, my God would be “peace” itself. I was taught to be tolerant of all faiths. Don’t use the name of Jesus, I was told, for it might be offensive to someone. And certainly don’t say that there is only one way to heaven! I might have believed that God is better represented as a Mother than a Father. At seminary, if scripture was read it was in many cases adjusted to make it gender neutral.”

MC USA says that it nurtures a seamless web of evangelism, justice and peacemaking. While this may sound good, we believe it has become peace and justice with little or no emphases on true evangelism. The mission endeavors of the Mennonite Church were at one time to win souls for Jesus Christ, and we are deeply troubled by the shift we see in that emphases.

Much of what is considered evangelism today could be construed as little more than doing good works. The need for conversion on the part of those to whom we minister must receive priority if we hope to continue in an Anabaptist tradition. While it may not have been intended, Peace, appears to be the gospel or overriding message in this “new evangelism”. Substitutionary atonement, which may be repulsive and meaningless to some, has been and remains, we believe, the central and sole message of the gospel. Therefore, there is no place in Mennonite theology for a non-violent atonement. The Church is more than a religious Red Cross or a humanitarian organization putting Band-Aids on terminal wounds, it is the hope of eternity for lost souls!

Deuteronomy 5:7 (AMP) "You shall have no other gods before Me or besides Me." **I Corinthians 10:14-15 (CEV)** "My friends, you must keep away from idols. I am speaking to you as people who have enough sense to know what I am talking about."

Galatians 1:6-9 (MSG) "I can't believe your fickleness - how easily you have turned traitor to him who called you by the grace of Christ by embracing a variant message! It is not a minor variation, you know; it is completely other, an alien message, a no-message, a lie about God. Those who are provoking this agitation among you are turning the Message of Christ on its head. Let me be blunt: If one of us - even if an angel from heaven! - were to preach something other than what we preached originally, let him be cursed. I said it once; I'll say it again: If anyone, regardless of reputation or credentials, preaches something other than what you received originally, let him be cursed."

We believe that it is God's will for us to live in peaceful relationships as much as possible, but that peace was never meant to be the decisive factor by which we determine our faith and lifestyle. We

also believe that God freely offered His Son as a sacrifice for our salvation, and this act of grace sets Christianity apart from all other religions. Consequently, Jesus is the only means of salvation.

5. We believe MC USA has elevated relationships over truth.

Sound doctrine seems to be no longer important because doctrine divides. What's more, many elite in MC USA do not want to make their doctrine explicit because they are unsure of what they believe, or do not want it to be public. They may feel that to be sure of what one believes is a sign of arrogance and naivety. So it remains ambiguous what our leaders really believe. Relationship is now paramount to truth and so we are told to "agree to disagree in love"⁸, and when there is conflict we are *not* to try to determine who is right or wrong, but we are to consider only how reconciliation and peace can be established. We are told that it is more important to think together than to think alike.

A Mennonite pastor⁹ was asked to speak to a class at JMU on what Mennonites believe. He was concerned about how to answer the question that was sure to be asked, "If Mennonites are a peace church, why are there so many divisions among Mennonites, and why has MC USA lost so many congregations year after year due to not being at peace with each other?" When this pastor was advised to tell the truth and say, "Obviously, there are some things more important to Mennonites than peace, and over these things Mennonites divide." A valid interpretation of his response to this is, I could never be that truthful! So truth was subverted to defend our image.

Ted Grimsrud and Mark Thiessen Nation's book, *Reasoning Together*, illustrates that theological arm wrestling¹⁰ is to be an enjoyable recreation whenever the church deals with critical issues. It seems like anyone who does not remain in fellowship with the establishment over controversial topics makes truth far more important than it should be. As their interview and book was featured in local newspaper commentaries¹¹, it gave a clear message that the Mennonite Church does not know the truth about God's stand on homosexuality.

It is academically in vogue to have no answers to significant questions, such as these. Does the Bible teach that homosexuality is wrong? What is sinful and what is normative for us in the 21st century? Is there a clear consensus in church history for or against homosexual practices? Rather, as Grimsrud has said, "One of the contributions his book makes is to show how hard it is to make those decisions." With that in mind, those who hold firmly to a sinful position on homosexuality are considered uninformed and narrow-minded.

II Timothy 4:2-4 (NCV) "Preach the Good News. Be ready at all times, and tell people what they need to do. Tell them when they are wrong. Encourage them with great patience and careful teaching, because the time will come when people will not listen to the true teaching but will find many more teachers who please them by saying the things they want to hear. They will stop listening to the truth and will begin to follow false stories."

We believe that there is absolute truth stated in the Word of God and that it alone is to be the criteria by which we determine what is right and what is wrong, and what is most important.

6. We believe that there is a trend to become more Catholic in our worship.

The trend to become more Catholic in Mennonite worship has expressed itself in the use of mysticism, lighted candles, confessions, recorded prayers, and the labyrinth at EMS and conventions. Can we come to know God better by a labyrinth walk? Is the labyrinth a step to greater self-understanding? It may be the latest fashion in spirituality touted as a spiritual tool of meditation and prayer, but is it biblical? Though it may be repackaged to our modern times, we can be assured the labyrinth has nothing to do with the teaching and life-style of Jesus who gave us the true way to eternal life, absolute truth, self-understanding, and mature spirituality.¹²

Colossians 2:8 (NCV) "Be sure that no one leads you away with false and empty teaching that is only human, which comes from the ruling spirits of this world, and not from Christ."

We believe that there is a constant temptation to distort the gospel and to have faith in other things than the Word of God for salvation and for a deep and meaningful spiritual life.

7. We believe that the doctrine of Substitutionary Atonement is being attacked.

"Reconciliation is not something accomplished by Christ for God or inflicted on Christ by God but forged by God in Christ. This wreaks havoc on the medieval (but still widespread) doctrine that Christ's death functions to placate an angry or offended deity. Rather, the Cross represents a restorative initiative by the divine victim toward the human offender. God absorbs the violent injustice of the offender and offers the gift of forgiveness... Second Corinthians 5:16-21 asserts that reconciliation is the dream of God, who through Christ has modeled restorative justice as the only means of achieving it. Paul's theological indicative presses upon believers an urgent imperative: to renounce whatever dominant culture privileges and prejudices we have internalized in order to become a "beloved community" across lines of class, gender, sexuality, race and nation. May the Mennonite Church USA Convention this July take up afresh Paul's challenge and invitation to become ambassadors of reconciliation."

Taken from the 3-1-11 issue of The Mennonite by Ched Myers and Elaine Enns

Once again, we are made to believe that a substitutionary atonement is not biblical, and that Isaiah has it all wrong when he says in 53:10-11 (NCV), "It was the Lord (God) who decided to crush Him (Christ) and make Him suffer. The Lord made His life a penalty offering, but He will still see His descendants and live a long life. He will complete the things the Lord wants Him to do. After His soul suffers many things, He will see life and be satisfied. My good servant will make many people right with God; He will carry away their sins."

Furthermore, even Jesus Himself must have been in the wrong when He said, "Shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?" John 18:11 (ESV)

We affirm Pierre Gilbert's warning as it was published in the Mennonite Weekly Review on June 20, 2011 under the heading of "Three Dangers". The information in the MWR article includes excerpts taken from the Mennonite Brethren Herald publication.

Three Dangers

Beware of progressive Anabaptism, warns a Mennonite Brethren theologian Pierre Gilbert. The "progressive agenda" has three problems: pluralism, the peace position and human sexuality. First, progressives have adopted the belief that all worldviews are equally true, which reduces Christ to merely a moral teacher. Second, they have adopted a "radical pacifism" that rejects "the state-sanctioned use of force to maintain law and order." Radical pacifism also leads to stripping the doctrine of atonement of its violent overtones so that "there is no need for Jesus to die on the cross." Finally, progressive Anabaptism "echoes popular culture's crusade" to base sexual ethics on "one's natural impulses rather than a moral code inspired by Scripture." - *Mennonite Brethren Herald (Canadian Conference of MB Churches)*

Taken from the 6-20-11 issue of The Mennonite Weekly Review

1 Peter 3:18 (AMP) "Christ [the Messiah Himself] died for sins once for all, the Righteous for the unrighteous (the Just for the unjust, the Innocent for the guilty), that He might bring us to God." **1 John 4:10 (NIV)** "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." **Romans 8:32 (GWT)** "God didn't spare his own Son but handed him over to death for all of us." **2 Corinthians 5:21 (NIV)** God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

We believe that Jesus Christ was the perfect God Man who gave Himself as a substitutionary sacrifice and atonement for the sins of all who will believe in Him as their personal LORD and Savior.

8. We believe that “continued dialogue” is MC USA’s open door for sexual inclusion and religious pluralism.

For the past two decades, it seems that the issue of homosexuality has been a primary concern among Mennonites because of an “agreeing to disagree”¹³ policy on the issue. Such an ambivalent approach on a critical issue has left the church reeling like a drunken tightrope walker. In 2010 groups that share a common vision of an inclusive MC USA met in Chicago¹⁴ for a three-day strategic planning summit. The gathering’s purpose was to build upon the strengths of Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender and Queer and Questioning (LGBTQ) people and their supporters in a concerted effort to force increased inclusion in the Mennonite Church. The group addressed topics related to empowering church members, addressing denominational leadership, changing policy in their favor, developing relationships beyond barriers in theology. The Gay Mennonite League has said that since the issue of homosexuality cannot be resolved biblically, one would rightly deduce that the truly godly persons are those who choose to love, and practice peace, and thus support the inclusion of LGBTQ individuals. The Pasadena Mennonite Church has a Peace and Justice Academy¹⁵ that includes all regardless of their “sexual orientation” in its non-discrimination policy, which applies to students, parents, and staff. It seems that the MC USA policy has been that of a doctor who, when he or she detects evidences of cancer, says that in time the body will get used to it, and make the necessary adjustments for its inclusion.

I Timothy 1:10 (NLT) "The law is for people who are sexually immoral, or who practice homosexuality, or are slave traders, liars, promise breakers, or who do anything else that contradicts the wholesome teaching that comes from the glorious Good News entrusted to me by our blessed God." **Matthew 7:23-24 (NLT)** "You can enter God's Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way. But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it."

We believe that marriage is to be between one man and one woman for life, and that all sexual immorality, including LGBTQ relations, are sinful and not for the people of God.

9. We believe that Biblical Foundations are now in question.

Psalms 11:3 says... “When the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (HCS)

The Bible gives us the foundation for our view and concept of God, knowing our depravity and the only way of salvation, the origin and meaning of life, future events, ethics, and much more.

Nevertheless the excerpt below comes from a recent sermon preached in a Mennonite church in Harrisonburg¹⁶.

How do we approach the Bible? It is not simply a book of verses that we should learn. It is not a book of ideas and theology, which we simply need to learn in a rote manner so as to have “right” beliefs. The Old Testament isn’t just an extended genealogy of Jesus, outlining the family into which he was born? Nor is it just a series of books with shadowy references pointing to Jesus? The Bible is certainly not a book about a God who deals with puppet-like people, pulling their strings and making them act at God’s whims. Do we view the Bible as being written by God, a book that is perfect, without error or contradiction, a book that is an exact history, and a science book following modern scientific approaches? I would say “No.”

Park View Mennonite Church preached by Ross Erb, Sermon entitled: *This is my story.* January 24, 2010

How then are we to look at the Bible according to this Anabaptist preacher? Are we to think of the Bible as a story book, with an imperfect timeline of events that are incomplete and inaccurate?

It seems that more and more Mennonite preachers and educators accept as true that there should be a disbelief or doubt of the Biblical narrative. It seems like there is less and less confidence in the Bible as accurate, historical, and unequivocal reality. The creation story told in Genesis 1-3, the account of Adam and Eve as the first humans, and the responsibility of Adam for the fall of the entire human race into sin - real sin, that is all-pervasive - is questioned. It seems that "Open Theism" has given us the world view that we are about as much in control of the future as God is (if not more so), and we know nearly as much about tomorrow as He does. What we are to see in scripture is "the coming of age", and know ourselves as evolving in our understanding of it. When the sovereignty of an omniscient God is in doubt, our task to make this world a better place rises to be the new gospel. We become the savior of the world. Furthermore, it seems that the deity of Christ, His resurrection and His return to earth in judgment to take vengeance on all those who deny Him as Lord, is absurd with our image of God as we imagine Him, or hope Him to be nothing but peace and love. We are told by many sources that love always wins, and so we are to be a blessing to people of all backgrounds, genders and convictions. Those that promote these things also seem to promote that, "To fear the judgment of God is to be spiritually neurotic".

Hebrews 4:12-13 (MSG) "God means what he says. What he says goes. His powerful Word is sharp as a surgeon's scalpel, cutting through everything, whether doubt or defense, laying us open to listen and obey. Nothing and no one is impervious to God's Word. We can't get away from it - no matter what." **Hebrews 10:26-27 (AMP)** "If we go on deliberately and willingly sinning after once acquiring the knowledge of the Truth, there is no longer any sacrifice left to atone for [our] sins [no further offering to which to look forward]. [There is nothing left for us then] but a kind of awful and fearful prospect and expectation of divine judgment and the fury of burning wrath and indignation which will consume those who put themselves in opposition [to God]."

We believe that the biblical record is meant to be taken and understood as historical reality and untainted truth. Therefore, it is to be the foundation of all that we believe and practice.

10. We believe that the wider "Mercy Theology" is making inroads into the official MC USA thought and teaching.

The Believers' Church Bible Commentary Series is said to represent the Anabaptist perspective for Biblical interpretation. In reading one of the BC commentaries, it could be concluded that at least one of the authors has accepted the popular "wider mercy" theology that thinks God will send no one to hell. But we wanted to make sure, so we contacted one author of a volume to confirm our assumption of his theology. Here is the exact question that was asked: "What biblical texts best support your view that all humanity eventually will be reconciled to God in His process of peacemaking and ingathering so that only the devil and his angels end in hell?" He emailed us back the next day but avoided answering the question¹⁷. Nothing he said, or even implied, denied that his theology is exactly as we stated. If we were wrong in our assumption, surely he would have set us straight - but he didn't. His choice to not correct any misconception in our conclusion of his theology clearly confirmed where he stood on this issue.

Early Anabaptist leaders on the other hand, firmly believed in hell as the eternal punishment of the wicked, spoken of often by Jesus Himself. They didn't need to decode His words. Belief in the reality of eternal punishment is confirmed repeatedly in The Complete Writings of Menno Simons. Below are just three examples:

Page 810 - "I believe that those who have rejected the Lord and His Word shall be tormented eternally with unquenchable, everlasting fire, with the devil and his angels, under the fearful, unbearable judgment of the Almighty and great God." **Page 530** - "If we revert to the broad way, then we fall into the hands of God, and must bear His wrath eternally ... 'depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.'" **Page 585** - "We know that the Scriptures testify that they (the impenitent) shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven, but that their portion shall be in the fiery lake which burns with fire and brimstone, and that fire will be an everlasting fire."

II Peter 2:4-9 (NIV) "God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard) - if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment."

We believe that Jesus meant what He said when He spoke repeatedly about the judgment of the wicked and the everlasting punishment of all who reject God's Word and offer of redemption.

11. We believe that "religious pluralism" stands against God's Truth.

The Center for Interfaith Engagement at EMU¹⁸ is an example of this. Can you imagine one of the apostles, or Menno Simons establishing a center for community-wide forums, seminars, and public meetings where highly diverse religious leaders can present their non-Christian beliefs without any intention of establishing "the truth" and what is wrong with such belief, rather than merely seeking deeper understanding and acceptance of differences?

There are those in the Mennonite Conference that are promoting that religious pluralism is just a matter of finding common ground with people of other faiths. They feel that this common ground is an open door to proclaiming the Gospel. We feel that this open door also swings the wrong way and is in fact an open door to other faiths and cults to deceive the people of God.

2 Corinthians 6:14-18 (CEV) "Stay away from people who are not followers of the Lord! Can someone who is good get along with someone who is evil? Are light and darkness the same? Is Christ a friend of Satan? Can people who follow the Lord have anything in common with those who don't? Do idols belong in the temple of God? We are the temple of the living God, as God himself says, 'I will live with these people and walk among them. I will be their God, and they will be my people.'" The Lord also says, "Leave them and stay away! Don't touch anything that isn't clean. Then I will welcome you and be your Father. You will be my sons and my daughters, as surely as I am God, the All-Powerful."

We believe that all religions apart from Christianity are false, even though they may have some good or similarities to Christianity. We shouldn't compromise our faith to adapt to other Abrahamic religions who claim to know and worship the same God.

12. We believe that there is an attempt to merge evolution with creation.

Owen Gingerich, professor emeritus of astronomy and history of science at Harvard University was the keynote speaker at the 11th annual Goshen College Religion and Science Conference on March 25 and 26, 2011¹⁹. The theme of the conference was "Worrying About Evolution". As a 1951 graduate of Goshen College, he spoke on "Becoming Human" in which he explained how the gradual emergence of Homo sapiens and the Genesis account, especially in respect to the soul, can be made cohesive and consistent. How can evolution and creation merge without evolution being dominant?

Genesis 1:27 (CEV) "God created humans to be like himself; he made men and women." **Colossians 1:16-17 (CEV)** "Everything was created by him (Christ), everything in heaven and on earth, everything seen and unseen, including all forces and powers, and all

rulers and authorities. All things were created by God's Son, and everything was made for him. God's Son was before all else, and by him everything is held together."

We believe that the creation accounts in the Bible cannot be harmonized with evolutionary theories, and to do so minimizes and distorts the Word of God.

13. We believe that the abortion issue has taken a back seat in our witness.

Abortion – why the silence? While MC USA and VMC are quick to speak out about peace and justice on other issues, why the dead silence on the abortion issue? It seems obvious why so little to nothing is said in our official publications. MC USA leaders feel more respectful and at peace with Muslims, than with Christians who call themselves fundamentalists, evangelicals, or whatever, and are outspoken about abortion but silent on the evils of war. Is our definition of the gospels such that Muslims will get to heaven sooner than Baptists and other such persons who claim Christ as their LORD and Savior, even if they do not interpret the Bible exactly like we do? There are a multitude of innuendos that mean we cannot call Baptists our sisters and brothers in the faith, but it seems that many times we are justified to treat them as our greatest antagonist.

Deuteronomy 27:25 (CEV) "We ask the LORD to put a curse on anyone who accepts money to murder an innocent victim."

We believe that abortion is an act of violence and the killing of innocent human beings. We believe the church should be as outspoken against this atrocity as it is against any other form of violence.

14. We believe that there is a move toward condoning same-sex marriage.

Is MC USA and VMC moving toward an approval of same-sex marriage? Will there be gay and lesbian preachers ordained within our conferences? We only need to look at what's happening now to see where we are going.

On May 6, 2011 Western District MC USA Conference reviewed Pastor Harader's credentials after she performed a same-sex covenant service last September and eventually found her credentials in order. No disciplinary action was taken²⁰.

In a May 13 interview, Harader said she is glad for herself and her congregation that she has retained her credentials. She said the process of discernment with the Leadership Commission "was respectful," that she and her congregation "were heard and listened to throughout the process."

In a May 13 interview, Terry Shue, director of leadership development for Mennonite Church USA, said, "We respect the authority of individual conferences, and the Leadership Commission did due diligence in understanding the membership guidelines." However, he added, "it's likely to be a surprise to other conferences at the conclusion they came to. Since credentials are transferrable to other conferences, this will give pause to other conferences."

Since these interviews took place, we have been told that the makeup of people on this Leadership Commission, has been changed. We were assured that if the vote was taken today that the outcome would be different. Does the outcome of this commission change God's truth? Of course not. God's truth remains the same and we are the ones who have already invited sin into the camp.

Romans 1:24-27 (ESV) "God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error."

We believe that the world and the culture are constantly luring the church to conform to its agenda. The church is meant to be the salt and light that convicts the world of its evils and depravity.

15. We believe that our message is no longer repulsive to the world.

Luke 6:26 (MSG) "There's trouble ahead when you live only for the approval of others, saying what flatters them, doing what indulges them. Popularity contests are not truth contests - look how many scoundrel preachers were approved by your ancestors! Your task is to be true, not popular." **John 15:18-19 (CEV)** "If the people of this world hate you, just remember that they hated me first. If you belonged to the world, its people would love you. But you don't belong to the world. I have chosen you to leave the world behind, and that is why its people hate you."

We are in serious trouble when our message is not repulsive to the world. Maintaining a tolerant dialogue on the issue of homosexuality is not repulsive to the world. Praying to our Mother in Heaven is not repulsive to the world. To say that the Muslims worship the same God that we do is not repulsive to the world. Preaching that Jesus is but one way (not the only way) to heaven is not repulsive to the world. Admitting that the Bible is not inerrant is not repulsive to the world. Teaching that the flood in Genesis is a myth and that the miracles of the Bible may or may not be true, is not repulsive to the world. Proclaiming a non-violent atonement is not repulsive to the world. Spiritual formations and practices that include labyrinth walks, yoga, prayer rituals, etc. is not repulsive to the world. To say that a god of love will never punish anyone forever, is not repulsive to the world. For pastors to believe that Jesus did not rise from the dead is not repulsive to the world. To accept evolution as good science and try to make it compatible with the creation account in the Bible is not repulsive to world. To say that every religion has some good and we should respect each other as being on the same road to heaven is not repulsive to the world. To degrade other Christians who do not have the same theology as we do is not repulsive to the world. To have colleges and universities where academic freedom is paramount is not repulsive to the world. To distribute food in the name of peace rather than in the Name of Jesus, is not repulsive to the world.

But, to say that everyone is born in sin and has a sinful nature is repulsive to the world. To say that Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven and all who do not accept Him as Savior and Lord will suffer God's wrath forever is repulsive to the world. To say that the Bible is the only source of absolute truth is repulsive to the world. To say that God is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe is repulsive to the world.

Plus, it seems that we are moving outside of the spiritual arena and into the political arena. We have become more concerned with the temporal rather than the eternal Kingdom of God. We now make our battleground on CNN with blogs as our weapons, rather than warfare in the Spirit.

We emphasize "peace with nature" and preach from our pulpits the improvement of the environment and to be fretful about global warming which is not repulsive to the world. Rather than emphasize peace with God we are a strong advocate of world peace which is not repulsive to the world. Rather than emphasizing the judgment of God we work at bringing about social justice which is not repulsive to the world. Rather than emphasizing submitting to a country's laws and ordinances we protest what we consider unfair immigration policies and laws, even encouraging people to harbor "undocumented" persons, which is not repulsive to the world.

To avoid being repulsive to the world we have changed our terminology so that no one will be offended. We call an "illegal alien" an "undocumented person". When we take a vote at our conference meetings we no longer have a "for" or "against". We have "those that are other minded". When it comes to scripture we emphasize being gender inclusive. And in doing so we are changing God's Word. While changing the Word of God is not repulsive to the world, it is repulsive to Christians who believe in the inspiration and infallibility of scripture.

We believe it is the will of the Holy Spirit that we live holy and unadulterated lives, and that the church should not compromise its purity for justice and/or reconciliation with those who differ. We believe that truth is more important than congenial relationships.

In Conclusion

With all the changes that have occurred in the Mennonite Church in recent years, it is not surprising that more and more persons are concerned about the direction the church is going. Our concern is that a trend to accept recycled heresies as legitimate is real. We also know that the way of our adversary, Satan, is to mix truth with error and in doing so, the error seems less repulsive.

While most persons who have concerns choose to remain silent, we wish to be heard in the spirit of mutual respect as fellow pilgrims in the search for a more perfect understanding of the God of grace and peace as revealed in the Holy Bible.

II Peter 2:1-2 (GNB) "False prophets appeared in the past among the people, and in the same way false teachers will appear among you. They will bring in destructive, untrue doctrines, and will deny the Master who redeemed them, and so they will bring upon themselves sudden destruction. Even so, many will follow their immoral ways; and because of what they do, others will speak evil of the Way of truth."

Notes:

¹ New Living Translation

² See note below.

³ See note below.

⁴ Loren E. Swartzendruber - President, Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg VA, 2003 - present. Southern District Pastors Meeting at Springdale Mennonite Church on March 26, 2009.

⁵ Growing as Communities of Grace, Joy and Peace - Distributed by Mennonite Church USA - These were the "Findings from the Mennonite Member Profile 2006".

⁶ Steve Carpenter - Conference Coordinator - Southern District Delegate Meeting at Mountain View Mennonite Church.

⁷ December 20, 2010 Mennonite Weekly Review - <http://www.mennoweekly.org/2010/12/20/three-concerns/>. Make sure you read the comments to Don Augsburger's concerns.

⁸ 1995 Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love - <http://www.mcusa-archives.org/library/resolutions/agreeing-1995.html>

⁹ See note below.

¹⁰ Theological Arm Wrestling picture of Ted Grimsrud and Mark Thiessen Nation.

¹¹ Staunton News Leader Newspaper Review - January 3, 2009.

¹² Labyrinths - Roll Over Menno - <http://rollovermenno.wordpress.com/2007/08/17/into-the-mennonite-labyrinth/> and

Lighthouse Trails Research Project / Exposing the dangers of the "New Spirituality" -

<http://www.lighthouse Trailsresearch.com/labyrinth.htm> - Prayer Labyrinth Dedicated at EMU -

<http://www.emu.edu/seminary/features/labyrinth>

¹³ 1995 Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love - <http://www.mcusa-archives.org/library/resolutions/agreeing-1995.html>

¹⁴ Chicago Meeting hosted by Chicago Community Mennonite Church - Gay Mennonite League -

<http://gaymennonite.com/Documents/PR-Summit.pdf>

¹⁵ Pasadena Mennonite Church Peace and Justice Academy - <http://www.pmcweb.org/html/programs.html>

¹⁶ This comes from a sermon preached by Ross Erb on January 24, 2010 at Parkview Mennonite Church. The copy was taken off of Parkview Mennonite's public website. <http://www.pvmcsermons.com/2010/01/ross-erb-this-is-my-story.html>

¹⁷ See note below.

¹⁸ Center for Interfaith Engagement - <http://emu.edu/interfaith/>

¹⁹ Goshen College Religion and Science Conference on March 25-26, 2011 - <http://www.goshen.edu/religionscience> and <http://www.goshen.edu/news/pressarchive/03-21-11-religion-science594.html>

²⁰ No disciplinary action for WDC pastor - The Mennonite - 5/1/2011 - http://www.themennonite.org/issues/14-5/articles/WDC_retains_pastors_credentials_after_she_perform_samesex_covenant_service

Note: Documentation related to personal correspondence or personal conversations.