

# From the Archives

By Phil Weber

This month we feature a letter from one of the very active and notable leaders in our network during the last century: **Orie A. Kauffman**.

A quick search through conference reports and histories revealed the following Conference assignments. Some may have been missed:

1951-53. Orie served on the investigative committee and then the first school board for what has become Rosedale Bible College.

1951. Resolutions Committee

1951-1960. Peace Witness Committee

1952-1954. Ministers' Fellowship Committee

1956, 1957, 1961, 1962. Executive Committee

1961-1963. Faculty at CMBS (RBC)

1963-1971. Mission Board

Orie and his family played a critical role in the establishment of Pineview Mennonite Church in Vassar, Michigan, moving there from Pigeon, Michigan in 1947 after years of making weekend trips to serve the emerging congregation. In 1954 Orie was called to pastor the Riverview church in White Pigeon, and in 1963, at the request of the executive committee, the family moved to Sarasota, Florida to help provide leadership for the Palm Grove congregation.

The letter which follows was an open letter to leaders of the conference, and it reveals Orie's deep love for the network and the people in it. His initials appear at the conclusion of the letter as OK, a happy coincidence of affirmation that his friends enjoyed and that he used as a personal trademark. And yes, for the inquiring minds who want to know, the JYS that indicates the typist are the initials for Janet Yoder Shetler.

He writes about a health crisis in the letter that involved his heart and a much longer hospital stay than we might expect today (19 days!) but seems to feel that he'll be okay. Neither he nor anyone else could have known that his heart would fatally betray him a mere 14 months later.

Orie's appeal for courageous and honest fellowship in the midst of challenging diversity can serve as good pastoral advice for our times as well as his. The backdrop to this appeal seems likely to be official concerns raised in 1967 by "concerned brethren" about "consistent wearing of the veiling, cut hair, wedding band, television and the necktie" (1967 Conference Report 273). The topics have changed, but the appeal remains timely.

Now for the letter:



Erma Mae (Keim) and Orie Kauffman

Sarasota, Florida  
June 10, 1970

AN OPEN LETTER TO ALL MINISTERS IN CONSERVATIVE MENNONITE CONFERENCE

My Dear Brethren:

Greetings in Christ.

I am lying here in bed convalescing from a 19-day stay in the cardiac section of the hospital. It is not a coronary, but congestive heart failure, of a nature that baffled the doctor. I am glad to depend on God as the healer.

I had some rich experiences with the Lord while in the hospital as well as in sharing "my Jesus" with roommates.

I want to thank all of you who had a part especially in praying for me. During the time I was there I could do some reading, and thinking too. In my reading I was made aware of the distance which is developing in Conference between us as brethren--not north and south pole, nor left and right, but lets call it the 2 poles of "teeth" and "liberty;" putting teeth in Conference discipline or taking the liberty I feel the Lord grants me, regardless.

I feel very deeply about our Conference, with a deep concern for the spiritual quality of the love and relationship of each one of us; with God and each other as brethren. If we are at these 2 poles, is this really necessary? Is it truly Biblical to insist on either of these? Can we not find a course between these where all of us could be more centrally in Christ, in the will of God, in the Spirit, and on more sound Biblical basis?

I pondered this one night in the hospital when I could not sleep. I believe the Lord showed me a more excellent way, the way of brotherhood, true Christian brotherhood, covenant brotherhood.

Just a brief look at the past. For 60 years we could fellowship, worship, share, and counsel together. Even though we always differed rather widely in some practices, yet there was a spirit of brotherhood and brotherly love that pervaded which we cannot now afford to lose, but must maintain in order to be in the will of God according to the Scriptures.

In Christian brotherhood there is always Christian unity, that is, the Holy Spirit has united us in one body in Christ. When we are saved, is it not the work of the Trinity made effective through the one Spirit (Eph. 4:1-6) as we respond to Him, whether it is me or my Indian, African, Amish, or Mennonite brother. We are to keep this unity in the bond of peace (that which the Spirit has wrought in each of our hearts.)

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Please note, this is not at this point speaking of uniformity of practice, rather all united by the one Spirit into the one body of Christ. In Ephesians 4:16, God has given to the church teachers, etc., "Till we all come in the unity of the (one) faith into a perfect (mature) man in Christ. . . ."

Isn't it true that at times we may have treasured uniformity to the point of violating the "unity of the Spirit?"

In our ministerial body I see at least 3 areas in which I feel we need help in keeping the true spirit of brotherhood. (And I do not have in mind the universal brotherhood of Man nor the Ecumenical Movements of today.)

1. Some of us are afraid of each other, that is, what will happen to me or to our church; or of being branded "liberal" or "conservative," etc. I believe we need to be deeply honest to see this. I know I am afflicted by this.
2. Too often we are not listening to or hearing each other as we should. As Christian brothers, we need to sit down and hear each other out, whether for or against any issues on which we may not agree and really try to understand each other's heart throbs honestly. And if we yet cannot agree regarding certain practices, could we not disagree agreeably and still regard each other as brothers in Christ?
3. Or, we can tolerate each other, with this idea: To endure or sustain, as pain or hardship (dictionary term)

But this kind of tolerating each other would violate the very spirit of true Christian brotherhood. This would not be accepting each other as "my brother in Christ."

I believe the solution for each of these is (agape) love. "Perfect love casteth out fear." "Fear has torment." Jesus said, "A new commandment I give unto you that ye love one another as I have loved you." (including Judas and Peter) When we love each other with this love we become willing and glad to sit down and listen to each other and though we may yet not see alike, we continue to love.

God's love in us will enable us to accept each other rather than "just tolerate" or maybe less than that. This love is the bond of perfectness. Brethren, we cannot afford to think lightly or violate the spirit and quality of this love. I Corinthians 13:1-3.

Might it be that with God this becomes the most serious factor of our whole problem. In all of this I have in mind the practicing or expression of Bible principles.

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My plea is: To those of us who feel we need to put teeth in Conference discipline (might it be more teeth than God puts in His Word?), could we together consent to follow a more central and Biblical course of true love and consideration for all of our brethren (in Conference and in our congregations)? Might it be that if we all were more deeply honest with ourselves and with God, and more open to the Holy Spirit and the Word and could really listen to each other more carefully, some of these things might not have the degree of importance they seem to have had. This I suggest for both poles.

Let us earnestly seek to understand and follow the mind of the Spirit as He leads us in expressing the quality of true Christian brotherhood for the glory of His name, the gathering in of the lost, and the upbuilding of His body.

Sincerely your brother,

*Orie Kauffman*

Orie Kauffman

OK/jys