Protect This

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Contributing Writer

The last generation of Mennonites has experienced an unprecedented ambiguity of identity that has resulted in a conflict, misunderstanding, and an element of struggle in institutions such as EMU. Part of the problem of identity, perhaps, is that we as Mennonites are not all asking the same questions.

In his 1943 instant classic, Anabaptist Vision, H. S. Bender identified three focal points of Anabaptist faith: Christian discipleship, the Church as community and the practice of an ethic of nonresistance (the term nonresistance has since fallen out of favor among many Mennonite academics, as has the term pacifism, due to their connotation with an attitude of passivity). The driving force behind Bender’s book (and much of his other work) is the timeless question: What makes us distinctive as Anabaptists?

Although Bender is often considered a pioneer in the formation of a Mennonite epistemology — and indeed his work came at a critical point in the Mennonite story — he is by no means the originator (symbolic of allegiance). It was the Schleitheim Confession that should not be seen as a kind of systematic theology; rather, these articles are presented as points of distinction from wider society.

Although political and social estrangement may render some articles irrelevant in a modern North American context, there are within these articles ideals that we may still affirm. Faithfulness to our heritage is not just a matter of duplicating the 16th century Anabaptist movement, but rather, these articles are presented as points of distinction from wider society.

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