

Title – The American Society of Equity: The Rise and Fall of a Farmers’ Organization

Program of Study – History

Presentation Type: Oral Presentation

Subtype: Textual or Investigative

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Abstract: *The American Society of Equity: The Rise and Fall of a Farmers’ Organization* seeks to investigate and place into context the first major farmer’s movement founded in the twentieth century. The American Society of Equity represents a transitional period in the history of American farmer’s movements and organizations, serving as an inheritor of the ideas of the Populist era as well as the progenitor of numerous farmer’s groups in the early twentieth century. The Equity, as it came to be known, helped to spread the concept of cooperative action to farmers across the nation. Outside of a flurry of scholarship in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the Equity achieves only brief mentions in the histories of its successors, suffering from a lack of dedicated scholarship. By examining the rise and decline of the Equity, the original research compiled here seeks to bridge the agrarian movements the late nineteenth century with the origins of modern farm organizations. In addition, the research seeks to compare and contrast the Equity and the Farmers’ Union. Founded in 1902 with an almost identical platform to the Equity, the National Farmers’ Union continues to exist as an influential farm organization. Why did the Farmers’ Union succeed while the Equity declined? Research suggests that a combination of disjointed central leadership, weak cooperative contracts, and similarity and confusion with the Farmer’s Union lead to the decline of the Equity beginning in 1907 and ending in the mid-1930s when the remnants of the Equity merged with Farmers’ Union.

Worldview Statement

The driving biblical principles for my presentation, “The American Society of Equity: The Rise and Fall of a Farmers’ Organization,” come down to three major tenets of the Christian historian. First, the Christian historian is called to be honest and objective in his or her historical investigations. While it is impossible to be completely unbiased in anything, especially historical work, Proverbs 12:17-19 tells us that the truth endures forever while a lie is but for a moment and that the truth gives honest evidence while the false witness utters deceit (ESV). Second, the Christian historian is called to construct a thoroughly investigated and well-reasoned account of events using primary sources. Luke 1:1-4 tells us that Luke set out to “compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us” (ESV). The “orderly account” is constructed so that Theophilus will “have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.” The principles of Luke apply not only to the biblical account, but to all historical accounts as well. Third, we are taught that all people must recognize their human limitations. The truth of this statement applies not just to my subject, but to myself. My presentation makes no claim to be the final authority on my topics nor do I claim to be faultless in my investigations. My presentation is constructed through primary sources, thorough investigation, and as objective a viewpoint as I can have. To the best of my ability and knowledge, my presentation represents the biblical principles laid out above. I believe that by adhering the biblical principles, I can represent my faith and my discipline in way that promotes the integrity and value of both.