
Separation and Nonconformity

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Nonconformity in Anabaptist History

A chronicler of the Hutterian Brethren has left us with the oldest known written account of the first adult baptism of the 16th century Anabaptist movement. After explaining how that after prayer Georg Blaurock “stood up and asked Conrad Grebel in the name of God to baptize him with true Christian baptism on his faith and recognition of the truth,” and telling how subsequently the others were baptized by George, the chronicler stated, “This was the beginning of separation from the world and its evil ways” (Hutterian Brethren 45). While this account was written some decades after the fact, it is noteworthy that the chronicler stated the significance of this watershed event in terms of separation from the world.

Early Anabaptists grasped the concept of separation from the world readily. For them the world was not only unholy and unrighteous practices counter to the teaching of Scripture and the will of God, but also that union of state and church, now known as Christendom, which opposed and oppressed them. In their so-called “doctrine of two worlds” or “two-kingdom theology,” the state, with its sub-Christian duties and non-Christian conduct, was closely identified with the sphere of Satan (Stutzman 35, 36).

Scripture depicts two, and only two, spiritual worlds which are in opposition one to the other and to which all mankind pertain. Separation and nonconformity have to do with how believers in the Lord Jesus Christ—those who have been freed from Satan’s world and brought into the kingdom of God (Eph. 2:1-10; Col 1:12-14), who have been created by God to be like Himself in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph. 4:24), who are disciples of Jesus Christ being conformed to His image (Rom. 8:29; 12:1-2), and who live in the world but are not of the world (Jn. 17:11-19) should relate to the ungodly societies and cultures in which they live (2 Cor. 6:14-17; Tit. 2:11-14).

Whether consciously or otherwise, the apprehension of this theological truth provided a simple basic framework for life which, particularly for conservative Anabaptist people, undergirds their worldview almost one-half a millennium later. Consequently separation and nonconformity to the world is not an ornament or even a room in the Anabaptist house of doctrine, it is one of the main beams resting upon the foundation of Christ (1 Cor. 3:11). To lose the understanding and practice of separation from the world is to lose the truth of Scripture as well as part of the genius of Anabaptism.

Evidence of Separation Among Anabaptist People

Separation makes its appearance rapidly in the documents of Anabaptism and in secondary sources. But first a note of explanation and clarification. Who are the Anabaptists and Mennonites to whom this study refers? Historians of Anabaptism have criticized the H. S. Bender generation of scholars as being overly selective of who qualified as an Anabaptist. Then, the charge goes, those scholars defined normative Anabaptism in terms of those whom they had selected, thus misrepresenting the Anabaptist movement as it actually was. Whatever the validity of that criticism, the fact remains that certain personalities, teachings and practices were, or became normative in this sense: a historical flow of major Anabaptist church traditions are traceable to some Anabaptist springs and streams and not to others which dried up and left no ongoing historical legacy. The sources represented in this study are largely those within that historical flow. While the early resources are both Swiss/South German as well as Dutch/North German, the later focus is on the Swiss/South German branch in North America, particularly the Mennonite Church as opposed to the Amish and streams flowing from that branch. The Mennonite Church in focus has been designated as (Old) Mennonites, then later as The Mennonite Church (MC) and presently is part of the composition of the Mennonite Church USA. That historical stream represents the spiritual and ecclesiastical heritage of many conservative Mennonites, who separated themselves organizationally from that church in the last half of the 20th century, and has influenced other present-day Anabaptists who are outside of that stream, whatever their ethnic or ecclesiastical background.

In 1527, with the nascent Swiss Anabaptist movement in danger of disintegration from both internal and external forces, a meeting was held at or near Schleithem, resulting in a written statement around which the

movement coalesced. While not a full orb ed confession of faith, the *Brotherly Union of a Number of Children of God Concerning Seven Articles* brought cohesion and direction. Both the text and the accompanying cover letter make explicit reference to separation. Following an “apostolic” greeting, the letter reads: “Dear brothers and sisters, we who have been assembled in the Lord at Schleithem on the Randen make known, in points and articles, unto all that love God, that as far as we are concerned, we have been united to stand fast in the Lord as obedient children of God, sons and daughters, who have been and shall be separated from the world in all that we do and leave undone. . . .” The letter goes on to point to false brethren who “are given over to lasciviousness and license,” from whom the recipients must separate, having “crucified their flesh with all its lusts and desires” (Yoder 35).

Besides the mention of separation in the cover letter, an entire article is dedicated to separation. Article IV begins by saying, “We have been united concerning the separation that shall take place from the evil and the wickedness which the devil has planted in the world, simply in this; that we have no fellowship with them, and do not run with them in the confusion of their abominations” (36, 37). The document continues in making significant reference by indirect quote from the classical separation passage which has its beginning in 2 Corinthians 6:14. The united brethren then make specific application:

From all this we learn that everything which has not been united with our God in Christ is nothing but an abomination which we should shun. By this are meant all popish and repopish works and idolatry, gatherings, church attendance, winehouses, guarantees and commitments of unbelief, and other things of the kind, which the world regards highly, and yet which are carnal or flatly counter to the command of God, after the pattern of all the iniquity which is in the world. From all this we shall be separated and have no part (38).

Article VI, concerning the sword, is also significant in terms of Anabaptist separation from the world because the “sword,” in its larger meaning, refers to the state. The fourth point in that article speaks to the appropriateness of serving as a magistrate:

. . . [I]t does not befit a Christian to be a magistrate: the rule of the government is according to the flesh, that of the Christians according to the Spirit. Their houses and dwelling remain in this world, that of the Christians is in heaven. Their citizenship is in this world, that of the Christians is in heaven. The weapons of their battle and warfare are carnal and only against the flesh, but the weapons of Christians are spiritual, against the fortification of the devil. The worldly are armed with steel and iron, but Christians are armed with the armor of God, with truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and with the Word of God (40, 41).

Thus the document by which the Swiss/South German Anabaptists defined and regrouped themselves established separation from the world as a foundation principle, both as it applied to Christian living and in relating to the state. Further, it applied separation specifically.

There is abundant evidence that while “nonconformity” was not a buzzword—in fact there is no direct equivalent in the German language, and that word became commonplace only after Mennonite idiom became Anglicized several centuries and a continent later—early Anabaptists not only understood but practiced the concept of taking their cues for Christian living from Scripture rather than simply following cultural conventions. In the very first year of Swiss Anabaptism (1525), Johannes Kessler described them by saying, “They shun costly clothing, despise expensive food and drink, clothe themselves with coarse cloth, cover their heads with broad felt hats. Their entire manner of life is completely humble” (Gingerich 14).

In the Anabaptist ferment to the north, both Menno Simons and his fellow-laborer Dirk Philips sounded the theme of separation. Writing on the new birth in 1537, Menno says, “We are taught . . . that we must not love the world and the things therein, nor conform to the world . . .” (Wenger, *Complete Writings* 101). In *Foundation of Christian Doctrine*, he writes, “No other kingdom do we know, teach, and seek, than that of Christ which shall endure forever, which is neither pride nor pomp, gold nor silver, eating or drinking, but righteousness, peace, and

joy in the Holy Ghost. For we confess with Christ that our kingdom is not of this world” (200). And in a letter to a church giving instruction on discipline, Menno writes, “Remember that you are the Lord’s people, separated from the world, and hated unto death” (1045).

Of special interest is a hymn by Menno Simons, stanzas II and III which read:

When I in Egypt still stuck fast,
And traveled calm broad paths of ease,
Then was I famed, a much-sought guest,
The world with me was quite at peace;
Enmeshed was I in Satan’s gauze,
My life abomination was,
Right well I served the devil’s cause.

But when I turned me to the Lord,
And gave the world a farewell look,
Accepted help against the evil horde,
The lore of Antichrist forsook;
Then was I mocked and sore defamed,
Since Babel’s councils I now disdained;
The righteous man is e’er disclaimed!
(1065, 1066)

Regarding Menno, both J. C. Wenger, the editor of his *Complete Writings*, and H. S. Bender, who contributed a brief biography, attribute to him belief in separation and nonconformity. Wenger says “It is plain that Menno had a sound view of . . . Christian separation and nonconformity” (vii). And Bender’s evaluation is that “He called for a genuine change of life and the faithful practice of the Christian way of life as Christ taught it, the life of righteousness, holiness, purity, love, and peace. For him Christianity was more than faith only; it was faith and works. And this practical Christianity meant for Menno . . . a thoroughgoing separation from the sin of the worldly social order” (29).

Dirk Philips likewise appealed to the principle of separation from the world. In *An Apology or Reply*, after having cited various Scriptures, he writes: “These and similar words, which are abundant in the Scripture, testify clearly to us that true Christians and disciples of the Lord are not one with the world, but are delivered, chose, and separated from it. And, therefore, they may have not fellowship with her false worship and evil works, 2 Cor. 6:14; I Cor. 10:14; Eph. 5:11” (Dyck 178). In the same tract Philips also writes, “. . . [T]rue Christians must serve God the Lord according to his Word alone and may not conform themselves to the world, Rom. 12:2, nor maintain her false worship nor carry out an evil appearance (just as Paul says, ‘Abstain from every evil appearance’), 1 Thess. 5:22, as though they were truly one with the world to have her friendship (which is yet enmity with God), James 4:4. . .” (189).

Another early Anabaptist document giving witness to the belief and practice of separation and nonconformity is the *Strasbourg Discipline*, a set of 23 regulations drawn up in 1568 by the “preachers and elders from many places at Strasbourg,” with subsequent renewals and additions. The *Discipline* is a practical and administrative document rather than a doctrinal one. Item number 20 reads, “Tailors and seamstresses shall hold to the plain and simple style and shall make nothing at all for pride’s sake” (Strasbourg Discipline).

While the first Anabaptist “confession of faith” has an explicit article on separation, a survey of 12 subsequent and readily available confessions from 1554 until 1660 shows none with an article specifically dedicated to separation from the world. (The “Thirty-Three Articles” of 1617 has an article entitled “separation,”

but it actually deals with shunning.) Nevertheless two of those confessions speak rather pointedly regarding matters we would categorize as separation and nonconformity. The first of those is the “Concept of Cologne,” (1591), a concise conciliating statement between Anabaptists who had become estranged over issues of doctrine and church discipline. While the nature of the document may not have lent itself to detailed specifics, the practical matters it speaks to indicates that the signatories of this document understood Christian living to run counter to the practices and values of the world, and that it was incumbent on the church to bring discipline to bear on those whose lives reflected the world.

[W]e have discussed our apprehensions concerning the growing inclination of the merchant class toward temporal greed and the vanity of ostentatious clothing, which imitate the world rather than displaying the humility of Christ. And because these are insidious, creeping sins, and it is to be feared that they will lead many to destruction, although one can hardly prescribe for anyone how much business he should do or what he should wear, yet we desire that each of us would restrict his business activities and dress modestly, indeed that he might enlighten the world in all he does, and not attire himself like the world, after the manner of the discontented and the insatiable. For this reason we have agreed that all who keep watch over the House of God should censure the members in all faithfulness and in the power of the Scriptures . . . (Koop 121, 122).

The other confession which addresses separation issues comes from the conservative Old Frisian Anabaptists. In what is commonly referred to as the Thirty-Three Articles (1617), under the heading of “Good Works,” we read:

Truly, where the kingdom of God is received in the heart through the clear light of God’s word, there the deadly works of darkness (like the night before the clear sun light) must be removed, departed from, and disappear. . . . And as obedient children of God in everyway [sic] express the nature of Christ. . . . [P]ride must be seen as the beginning of all destruction (Tob. 4:10; Gen. 3:5); it originates from the heart (Mt 15:19) and reveals itself in clothing (Sir. 19:25; 1 Pet. 3:3; 1 Tim. 2:9), housing, speaking, eating, and drinking. Lay aside everything and arm yourselves against these with the humility of Christ (Matt. 11:29; Titus 2:1; Gal. 5:19). For all vain pleasures of the world exist in drunkenness, feasting, unchastity and similar things (Koop 235, 236).

Two things particularly noteworthy in this quotation are the juxtaposition of the kingdom of God with the world, and the inclusion of housing, speaking, eating and drinking in addition to clothing as areas of concern.

As is true today, many people in the Anabaptist stream took separation and nonconformity very seriously, leading to ruptured fellowship with those who saw things differently. Dutch Anabaptists, as well as northern Germans, were racked with dissension and division already in Menno Simons’ lifetime, and extending well beyond the middle of the 17th century. In fact, the enduring *Dordrecht Confession* (1632), later adopted by the Swiss Brethren (1660) and carried to North America, emerged during this time in an attempt to bring unity from among the chaos. Interestingly, the *Dordrecht Confession* has no article or specific reference to separation and nonconformity. (Incidentally, the presence of both liberal and conservative tendencies and factions, even in the early centuries of Anabaptism, should caution us against being too simplistic or categorical in proof-texting “what the Anabaptists believed.”)

Gerald Biesecker-Mast, in commenting on the schismatic 16th century period of Dutch Anabaptism, attributes some of their tensions to matters of what we would call separation and nonconformity. He writes, “Following the death of Menno, an influx of Anabaptist refugees from Flanders into Friesland precipitated one of the most bitter and longstanding divisions among the Dutch Anabaptist communities. The Flemish refugee communities were culturally different from the Frisian Mennonite congregations, less concerned with plain clothing than were the Frisians but critical nevertheless of Frisian wealth as displayed in expensive homes and furnishings” (Biesecker-Mast 203).

In commenting further he says, “Most of the issues that precipitated the conflicts, whether they involved the proper form of the ban, the proper lifestyle of Christians, the reputations of elders, or involvement in real estate deals, originated in the shared commitment to a visible alternative community of believers who live separate from the world, ‘without spot or wrinkle,’” . . . (205). Harold Bender agrees with Biesecker-Mast’s analysis when he writes, “practically all the schisms among Dutch Mennonites from 1570-1700 involved questions of nonconformity.” He goes on to say that “until recent time, practically all schisms among Mennonites dealt with practical issues of separation and nonconformity” (Nonconformity 890, 891).

Separation and Nonconformity in Dress

An area of particular focus for Anabaptists/Mennonites is, and always has been, clothing and personal appearance. While documents already cited show that, a few more examples will be given. In a tract entitled *True Christian Faith* in which he defended the brotherhood against charges of legalism, Menno Simons condemns people who “. . . say that they believe, and yet, alas, there are no limits or bounds to their accursed haughtiness, foolish pride and pomp; they parade in silks, velvet, costly clothes, gold rings, chains, silver belts, pins and buttons, curiously adorned shirts, shawls, collars, veils, aprons, velvet shoes, slippers, and such like finery. They never regard that the exalted apostles Peter and Paul have in plain and express words forbidden this all to Christian women. And if forbidden to women, how much more to men who are the leaders and heads of their wives!” (Wenger, *Complete Writings* 377). This is but one of many references to dress in Menno Simons’ writings.

A forty-one stanza song of personal testimony and admonition, written by an Anabaptist in the Simmental and published in 1662, contains these lines:

Of clothes there is no lacking, with much unneedful pride,
And manifold silk ribbons and trim of every kind,
As our own age has now disclosed, to which the Lord God is opposed.
Those who such things are leaving much money can be saving.

There would be goodly colors that by themselves do grow;
Such are the ones for wearing—we find it written so.
Sheep wool itself has varied hue which is quite inexpensive too;
One could, to this submitting, still dress in manner fitting.

Besides these explicit admonitions on clothing, the poet, in his song, also mentions righteous business practices, honest labor, and temperance in eating and drinking (Ruth, *Lancaster* 95, 96).

Another window into Anabaptist practices comes from a Reformed pastor from the Swiss Emmental writing in 1693 to persuade his parishioners that they could be good Christians without becoming Anabaptists. In regard to their clothing he writes, “In their distinguishing themselves in outward clothing from all other honest people, do they not thereby make it understood that they are not averse to being recognized among the people so that one can immediately say, ‘This is [an Anabaptist]’”. More specifically he said, they “wear no collars around the neck” and wear “nothing embroidered or of lace or anything else that our rural people consider pride and ostentation in dress” (Ruth, *Lancaster* 127, 128; Gingerich 22).

Moving on to North America, a German Pietist who lived for a short while in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania around 1750 wrote concerning Mennonites that “These people [are] modest . . . and upright in their conduct. They wear plain clothing; proud colors may not be worn by them” (Ruth, *Lancaster* 265). And L. J. Heatwole, a prominent Virginia bishop, wrote in 1922 when he was 70 years old that, “the early habits and

customs of dress among pioneer Mennonites in Virginia were strictly in keeping with the principles of separation from the popular styles of their time” (Gingerich 32).

While sources relating to Anabaptist/Mennonite “preaching” and practice regarding attire are sizable, particularly for the North American scene, how did dress play out as a separation and nonconformity issue? One of the themes running through the story of Anabaptist/Mennonite attire is pride. It came through the 1525 description by Johannes Kessler when he said, “Their entire manner of life is completely humble.” It came from the pen of the Simmental poet in the words, “much unneedful pride.” It came through the *Strasbourg Discipline* when the church leaders declared, “Tailors and seamstresses shall . . . make nothing at all for pride's sake,” and it comes through other previously cited sources as well. It is also evident from the records of The Mennonite Conference in Virginia. They discussed the subject of pride at length in August 1865 and “unanimously resolved to guard against pride, and the fashions in their various forms and keep them out of the church as much as possible” (Gingerich 8, 10). Twelve years later the same district conference revisited the issue of pride according to this minute:

55. Pride—The subject of pride was again discussed, and the following resolutions adopted:

RESOLVED 1, That the wearing of finger-rings, breast-pins, ornamental shirt fronts, cuffs, fashionable collars, ruffles, roached or otherwise fashionable hair, is inconsistent with word of God.

RESOLVED 2, That the brethren and sisters be required to be faithful to their promise in conforming to the rules of the Church in regard to dress.

RESOLVED 3, That the superfluous ornamenting of houses or other buildings, either in the manner of building or in decorating the walls and tables with pictures, etc., is inconsistent and contrary to the word of God.

RESOLVED 4, That every brother or sister neglecting to comply with these promises, with regard to conformity to the rules of the church, shall be visited and reasoned with.

RESOLVED 5, That the actions of this Conference be presented to the Churches in the several districts at meetings appointed for that special purpose (Virginia Mennonite Conference 16).

Pride was antithetical to humility—a virtue which should characterize believers, and which was a particularly dominant theme among North American Mennonites from the last half of the 18th century and for much of the 19th (Schlabach 28-32). Pride expressed through personal appearance was simply a worldly vice and an expression of worldliness from which believers should separate (Ruth, *Lancaster* 741, 742). The appeal to pride most likely tells us two things. First, until the 20th century with its increasingly sultry values, pride rather than explicit immodesty was the pressure point of worldliness in dress. Secondly, Anabaptists and their spiritual descendants saw the clothing issue as a mark of worldly pride rather than a mark of separation from the world (or as an expression of nonconformity) as it is sometimes viewed today. In fact the current practice among many conservative Anabaptist people of consciously prescribed, regulated attire, including perhaps the idea of it being a visible and/or symbolic mark of distinction from the world, is of relatively recent origin in the sweep of Mennonite history.

According to Melvin Gingerich in his book, *Mennonite Attire Through Four Centuries*, prior to the time of Jakob Ammann (1693), “no documents have been found prescribing a definite form of dress, although a degree of uniformity of style was achieved in some groups by forbidding certain styles and colors of costumes” (Gingerich 18). This is not to say that clothing was unregulated; rather it was regulated by *proscription* instead of by *prescription*. For example, an extensive footnote by Gingerich gives an incomplete listing of rules adopted by an Old Flemish Anabaptist group in 1659, all of which are prohibitions, some very specific (“That Christians should not wear high-heeled shoes or shoes decorated with white yarn, nor two straps, or spy-holes”), and not all related to clothing but none stating a uniform or prescribed practice (18, n.12).

A statement by Heinrich Bullinger, Ulrich Zwingli’s successor at Zurich, is sometimes used to support the thesis that Anabaptists did prescribe clothing patterns. He describes some Anabaptists whom, he says, “one can

call the separated from the world. . . These want to have nothing in common with or like the world. Because it is written: You shall not be conformed to the world . . . therefore they make rules about clothing, whereof, of what form and shape, and how long, wide or big they shall be.” While this clearly describes prescribed separation and nonconformity, the context of Bullinger’s writing from which this is quote is excerpted indicates he was referring to a group of Anabaptists distinct from the norm. An appeal to this as a basis for saying early Anabaptists practiced prescribed nonconformity is somewhat like saying, on the basis of the Munster episode, that early Anabaptists were militaristic (Gingerich 21, 22).

Perhaps only a fine line exists between proscribed and prescribed dress. In a study of the Dutch Mennonites published in 1743, a German author indicates quite a range of practice from the extremely conservative to the pistol-packing liberal wings. Among the more conservative groups, according to C. Henry Smith’s telling, “Worldliness in all its varied forms was carefully guarded against. The cut of a man’s coat and the style of a woman’s dress were still a matter of strict regulation.” He goes on to say, “Black was the acceptable color for both. Buttons, shoestrings instead of buckles, wall pictures, stained glass, and portraits were all on the proscribed list,” which indicates concerns regarding appropriate Christian lifestyles extended beyond matters of personal appearance (Smith 134). Apparently Smith overly generalized. According to Melvin Gingerich, the source document does not mention the “cut of a man’s coat and the style of a woman’s dress” (Gingerich 24). Yet the question remains, can strict prohibition, combined with group practice combine to produce, in effect, a normative standard in regard to separation from the world, be it in dress or in some other area of Christian living? J. C. Wenger seems to think so. He says that while dress was regulated, “the Swiss and South German Mennonites never seem to have developed any specific religious garb; they remained simple Christians avoiding the luxury and ostentation of the rich.” Yet they became recognizable as such in part by their plainness of dress, which over time tended to develop into a standard way of dressing. (Dress 101; Wenger, *Separated* 81).

Admonitions and prohibitions targeted at pride gave way to aggressively promoted prescribed plain clothing among the large body of (Old) Mennonites. This was true among those district conferences associated together in a Mennonite General Conference (to be distinguished from General Conference Mennonites), as well as the large body of Mennonites comprising the Lancaster and Franconia Conferences which did not join the General Conference (Ruth, *Lancaster*, Narrated throughout Part 6; also see Ruth, *Maintaining the Right Fellowship*). Melvin Gingerich states that “between 1865 and 1950 in the district and general conferences . . . no less than 230 resolutions were passed on non-conformity in dress which was more than on any other subject. Many of these called for the wearing of a definitely prescribed garb” (28). While General Conference was not able to mandate to its constituent membership, its denominational structure and organized influence moved the church to greater, though sometimes reluctant uniformity, especially among the leadership.

What led to this shift toward uniformity? John Ruth notes that it was rooted “in simplicity and humility [that] had been cherished for centuries among Swiss-deriving Mennonites as positive strands in the fabric of the gospel of Christ,” and he believes it was part of a defense against young people being lost to the world (Ruth, *Lancaster* 737). In his study, Melvin Gingerich is inclined to think that “earlier the weight of tradition had been sufficient to maintain the practice of wearing simple clothes that had a degree of uniformity without any teaching being done on the value of uniformity as an end in itself,” though he concedes that “there may have been local rulings or even conference rulings which were either not written or else not preserved” (34). But plainness was threatened by the loss of Mennonite isolation and the leveling of society through American democratization and standardization of dress. In fact, the very concept and practice of separation and nonconformity was considered endangered. The leadership responded by stressing not only simplicity, but uniformity as well (Gingerich 28,148; Juhnke 130-132).

We must not assume Mennonite leaders were primarily motivated by a sociological impulse for Mennonites to be a distinctive group in society, although J. C. Wenger appealed to the “sociological value of external symbols of dress as aids in the maintenance of a group-consciousness and group-solidarity,” and

appeared genuinely concerned that in 1951 (the time of his writing), never before was the church “in danger of losing all external evidence of nonconformity to the world” as it was then (Wenger, *Separated* 85). Whatever sociological factors may have been involved, consciously or otherwise, there is no reason to doubt, for example, that when the Mennonite General Conference formed a “Dress Committee” to bring “all our people to the Gospel standard of simplicity and spirituality,” its highest motivation and concern was spiritual (Juhnke 130).

The Scope of Separation and Nonconformity

Our lengthy examination of clothes raises the matter of the scope of the Anabaptist and Mennonite conception of separation and nonconformity: was worldliness shrunk down to dress, or was it as large as Scripture reveals Satan’s sphere to be, touching on values, attitudes and all sorts of social and cultural matters? Mennonites did see worldliness as larger than clothes as previous citations show. Besides clothes, another large chunk of the world involved recreation and entertainment. Franconia Conference rulings and warnings in the 1880s and ‘90s highlight these as well as other concerns: “Women’s surprise parties and ladies’ fairs; brethren joining in horse companies, fairs, and gambling; traveling to Atlantic City with organized excursions and their ‘hard class’ of people; going to any such outing on Sunday; drinking at public sales or at bees such as for shoveling snow or raising buildings; stopping at an inn to eat after a cornhusking; and letting Mennonite ministers preach in any chapel which had a choir or a Christmas tree” (Schlabach 70).

Yet the Mennonite record shows some inconsistency in regards to separation and nonconformity, as seen, for example, through the eyes of a Swiss immigrant living in Pennsylvania in the early 1800s where her husband was teaching music in a Mennonite community. In a letter home to her parents she said that while Mennonites belonged to “a class of people who do not believe in luxury, we found, in two attractive homes, that all the rooms were furnished according to the latest styles, with gorgeous beds, armchairs, chests of drawers, desks, tables and curtains.” Speaking of their bedroom, as guests in a Mennonite home, she wrote, “The magnificent beds covered with artistically worked spreads, the floors covered with Turkish rugs, all dazzled our eyes. Costly drapes covered the windows. We stood there transfixed. Never would we have expected such things in a Mennonite farmhouse. We will find the same thing, my dear husband said, when we accept other invitations” (Gingerich 30). That such a display of wealth was perceived, at least by some, to be inconsistent with a separated life is confirmed in a caustic epistle from Lancaster bishop Christian Herr (1780-1853) to his distant cousin and antagonist, John Herr, Reformed Mennonite leader. By the evidence of their fine ornamented homes, the “spirit of worldly riches is flourishing in your fellowship as [well as] among others,” he wrote (Ruth, *Lancaster* 516).

Another area of some inconsistency particularly noticeable among Lancaster County, Pennsylvania Mennonites in the 18th and 19th centuries was political involvement. This is well documented both in Lehman and Nolt’s book on Mennonites and Amish in the Civil War and especially by John Ruth in his narrative history of Lancaster Mennonite Conference. Among other things, Mennonites were involved as county commissioners, in electoral politics and by serving jury duty (Ruth, *Lancaster* 492, 503-504; Lehman 78-79). Perhaps Lancaster Mennonites were particularly vulnerable to this close association with “the sword” having gotten in on the ground floor in settling that frontier woods as Anabaptist immigrants. There they found themselves not only increasingly freed from the shackles of being persecuted non-citizens but constituting a significant portion of the population as well.

Whether inconsistencies were a result of too small a “worldview,” or carelessness and carnality, inconsistencies are not the whole story. In its last major resistance to the forces that would sweep the Mennonite Church (MC) over the falls of acculturation, the Mennonite General Conference, meeting in the summer of 1955 adopted a “Declaration of Commitment in Respect to Christian Separation and Nonconformity to the World.” The last paragraph in the introduction, as well as the specific topics addressed, demonstrate comprehensiveness and consistency on the conceptual level, however much it was falling short in practice in the local churches:

We believe that union with the Lord Jesus, with its ensuing nonconformity to the world, is not a matter of ecstasy or mere emotion, but that it is a devotion of love and faith which calls for a resolute discipleship in life, a holy obedience to the precepts of the Word of God, lived in the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Furthermore, Christians are called upon by Christ to "make disciples of all nations." They are not to withdraw from all contact with society, but are to labor actively to bring all people to the obedience of the faith. It is also our understanding that a Christian separation and nonconformity to the world apply to all of life including the areas hereinafter specified.

Areas specified were Christian love, attitude toward possessions, courtship and marriage, dress and external experience, the clean life, worldly organizations, recreation, simplicity of worship, and speech (Mennonite Church).

Separation and Nonconformity as a Mind-set

While looking for specific examples of how separation and nonconformity were applied, such as in dress and taboos, we must not overlook the *ethos* of separation that has been a part of the Anabaptist/Mennonite historical mind-set. James Juhnke gives us a glimpse of that ethos when he writes concerning the Mennonite experience in the American Revolutionary period that it "vindicated and enhanced the doctrine of separation from the world. . . . Although they were part of a regional language and culture group known as 'Pennsylvania Dutch,' they remained politically and socially marginal to American public power. . . . Swiss-Americans of Amish or Mennonite background inherited and developed a religious tradition which made a virtue of their marginality" (Juhnke 34).

This aloofness or withdrawal from society reflected in the Swiss Anabaptist tradition has its roots in the very formation of the movement. While they engaged society in debate and evangelism, the early Anabaptists were oppressed by the state and separated from the state by Biblical persuasion. They existed on the margins of society both by conviction and by necessity. When they came to feel at home in America, they began to lose that sharp sense of separation from the world, conforming themselves to normal cultural conventions and involving themselves in the political arena. That story, as it played out in the 20th century Mennonite Church (MC), is told by Ervin Stutzman in his book, *From Nonresistance to Justice*.

From time to time bitter experiences as nonresistant people in America during times of war, such as the Revolutionary War mentioned above, caused Mennonites who had become somewhat comfortable in their niche in society to strengthen their identity as a separate people (see Lehman and Nolt). Another such time was during World War I. While going through that difficult experience, the Franconia Conference resolved that "we have learned that the world expects us to be separate. We therefore consider it advisable to abstain from voting." The war experience even convinced a General Conference Mennonite pastor from Ohio to write of the need for more distinct separation "if we want be recognized as different by others and stand firmly on our peculiar Mennonite Principles" (Juhnke 245).

John C. Wenger also alludes to the Mennonite ethos of separation when he asks, "What then did nonconformity mean to the members of the Mennonite Church in the nineteenth century?" He answers his question in part by saying, "The Word of God asks Christians not to be as the world, and by the world Mennonites tended to think more or less of all of society outside of their own fellowship. Long years of persecution in Europe, and of having been different from other Christians . . . had imbedded in the Mennonite soul a deep suspicion of the 'world.' They felt instinctively that the most acceptable occupations were first of all farming, then engaging in such trades as carpentry or painting or operation small businesses . . ." (Wenger, *Separated* 81).

On a personal note, I experienced the ethos of Mennonite separation and nonconformity as one who grew up in a Mennonite home. I knew instinctively that participating in my public high school sports program, either as a spectator or an athlete, was out of the question, or that being an airline pilot was not an option because of dress requirements. Admittedly my concept of the world was not nuanced. And I've been affected by inferiority,

embarrassment, shame and timidity for believing and being different. Yet the sense of separation from the world that was ingrained in me as a child and which I experienced as a student is still a valuable companion functioning somewhat like a conscience to keep me from friendship with the world (James 4:4).

Late 19th and 20th Century Mennonite Church Nonconformity

While separation is as old as Anabaptism, nonconformity as a term, understood first and foremost to mean not to be dressed like the world, began to be used widely around the turn of the 20th century with the reinvigorated emphasis on applied separation in the (Old) Mennonite Church (Gingerich 8). That coincided with what some have considered to be a Mennonite awakening or quickening which resulted from various influences, among them revivalism and the progressive spirit of the age. Whatever one's views of this era, whether an advancement for the church, or a departure from the Mennonite genius, those in the vanguard of the movement, according to Theron Schlabach's analysis, made a subtle but significant shift in the Mennonite conception of salvation. Historically Anabaptists/Mennonites, unlike the tendency among Protestants, "did not narrow salvation down to one forensic process or 'plan' or transaction." Rather, while they believed that salvation was rooted in the redeeming work of Christ, it was, in the words of John F. Funk, "by repentance, faith in Christ and a willingness to obey the word of God in all things that we become converted and true children of God" (Schlabach 316, 317). Consequently salvation was more than an event, it was an ongoing process.

The shift to thinking of salvation as a plan and an event seems to have been with no intent to minimize the importance of Christian obedience, and perhaps was motivated in part by the understandable need to call the unregenerate to decision. But this subtle shift had the effect of placing salvation and practical Christian living into different conceptual categories. The initial getting right with God, involving regeneration, justification and so forth was called "salvation." Some areas involving Christian living came to be called "restrictions." The transition, both in the conception of the word "salvation" and the use of the word "restrictions," came to be institutionalized in Daniel Kauffman's doctrinal books and in the statement of *Christian Fundamentals* adopted in 1921 at Garden City, Missouri (Schlabach 317, 318). The conference which adopted this statement, made in response to the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy, expressly declared that "this statement does not supersede the eighteen articles of the Dort Confession, which the Church still confesses and teaches" (Confessions of Faith 685). Nevertheless it came into its own right as a statement of faith. Article XIII is entitled, "Of Restrictions" and includes Christian duties to the state, the separation of church and state, nonresistance, personal appearance, non-swearing of oaths, secret orders and life insurance—a catchall of separation issues.

Apparently "restrictions" was not conceived as a substitute word for separation. Article X of this Garden City statement is entitled, "Of Separation," and states, "We believe that we are called with a holy calling to a life of separation from the world and its follies, sinful practices and methods; further that it is the duty of the Church to keep herself aloof from all movements which seek the reformation of society independent of the merits of the death of Christ and the experience of the new birth." It's unclear to me why the contents of "restrictions" are separated from "separation," other than the possibility that "restrictions" had assumed a life of its own as negative commands of God (Stutzman 64).

The incoming tide of greater rigor and regulation of separation and nonconformity among Mennonites in North America of Swiss-South German heritage crested by mid-20th century. Many church members were increasingly galled by clothing and cultural restrictions, and viewed nonconformity as isolation from the world—a world which had been opened to them by the experiences of World War II, and which many wanted to engage for Christ. Apparently even many church leaders had conformed to the non-conformed dress expectations of the church without having a deep commitment to it (for example, Ruth, *Lancaster* 737, 743, 814). While there were attempts to revitalize nonconformity by broadening its scope, and calls to redefine and reconceive it positively as "transformity" and "dynamic discipleship," the tide had turned against "cultural" nonconformity (Toews 224, 225). H. S. Bender and J. C. Wenger, both prominent Mennonite Church scholars and churchmen wrote in the

Mennonite Encyclopedia in 1957, “The struggle to maintain true Scriptural nonconformity continues to be a major problem for the Mennonite Church (MC). With the acceleration of cultural change in American life and the pervasiveness of modern American urban cultural influences through almost universal advertising, periodical reading, radio, and television, even the most withdrawn groups are subjected to pressures to surrender principles, not to speak of the more open groups” (Nonconformity).

The story of the “more open groups” is summarized in the book, *From Nonresistance to Justice*: “As the Mennonite Church moved from being a sectarian society toward becoming an engaged and assimilated society, it struggled to maintain definitive communal boundaries. Mennonites responded to several threats to the doctrines of nonresistance and nonconformity during this period. In the early 1950s Mennonites [sic] leaders emphasized the importance of nonconformity with some articles in *Gospel Herald* and a major book by J. C. Wenger. But at least partly due to the shifting patterns of authority, as well as increasing assimilation, efforts to maintain nonconformity in dress largely failed by the mid-1960’s. Although the leadership viewed nonconformity as a twin to nonresistance, the younger generation disdained nonconformity as an appendage to be surgically removed” (Stutzman 148, 149).

Some churches and individuals resisted the outward flow of the tide of nonconformity into the world, resulting in major partings of way and realignments beginning in the 1950s. Ironically the words of Bender and Wenger—“the struggle to maintain true Scriptural nonconformity continues to be a major problem for the Mennonite Church,”—were descriptive not only of their era, but seem prophetic a mere half-century later. This time it applies to us who were not the “more open” groups; to us who have our roots in the Amish tradition; to us whatever our ethnic, cultural or faith background as conservative Anabaptist/Mennonites.

Conclusions and Applications

So what is the value of having surveyed the history of separation and nonconformity? We need to recognize that history not only describes, it directs in that many churches reflect something of a historical tradition. At its best historical tradition offers accumulated understanding and stability. It represents time-tested solutions and helps successive generations avoid many mistakes by building on the wisdom and experience of earlier believers.

But tradition can become confining and suffocating. It can become stuck in time and offer solutions that better served a different era. Tradition can become so pervasive that tradition itself becomes the point rather than the application of principle. We must recognize that in the application of separation and nonconformity, most of us do represent some degree of historical tradition. We should appreciate the experience and wisdom it represents, and the stability it offers and not be too cavalier in assuming we suddenly have full and sufficient insight for rapid and radical new applications.

A complementary historical value is perspective. Perspective allows us to view our understanding and practice in a larger context. It may reveal the cause for some peculiarity, show the consequence of certain choices, suggest the validity of other options, confirm the wisdom of present practice or indicate relative importance.

What can we learn and apply from this brief survey of separation and nonconformity in Anabaptist history? I suggest five dimensions of a historically informed doctrine of separation and nonconformity.

Biblically Based

While Anabaptism arose in a particular political and social context, it was primarily a spiritual quest predicated on the Bible (Estep xi-xiii). Has Anabaptist/Mennonite separation remained rooted in deep spiritual soil, or is it primarily nourished by ethnicity and sociology? Granted, spiritual beliefs and values need to be applied and lived out in social and cultural contexts. But separation and nonconformity driven by anything less than its Biblical base is certain to crash into dissention, dysfunction, disuse or misuse. To the degree that

Anabaptist people over the centuries rooted their separation in Scripture, they were one in essence with those who signed the *Brotherly Union* in 1527, in regards to the basic meaning of Biblical separation.

The Biblical basis for separation and nonconformity, properly grasped and taught, brings both legitimacy and understanding to the issue. It answers the question of why? Why must we scrutinize our culture and live counter culturally in so many different ways? Because all cultures are permeated by the world—“the secular order of society, together with its thoughts, beliefs, interests, motives, attitudes, practices, institutions, and systems that are contrary to God’s will” and under the control of Satan, God’s enemy (Proceedings 55). Those who are of the world are outside of the saving grace of God’s Kingdom. Believers who love the world and have friendship with the world are committing spiritual adultery and have no claim to the promise of a saving relationship with God (1Jn. 2:15; Jas. 4:4-5; 2 Cor. 6:17-18).

However, separation and nonconformity, deprived of its Biblical basis, becomes an instrument for which it was not intended, and a tool to supplant the Gospel of God’s saving grace through Jesus Christ. Separation is not a means to salvation, a way of upholding a standard of meritorious righteousness (Rom. 3:20-22; Phil. 3:4-9; 1 Pe. 1:18-19). We also need clear thinking that while conversion results in works of righteousness, which a life of separation and nonconformity reflects, and this walk of obedient righteousness must be undertaken seriously and conscientiously, we are ever dependent on the righteousness which comes by faith in Jesus Christ rather than on one which is through meticulous and scrupulous separation and nonconformity to the world (Rom. 4; Gal. 2:14-21).

Neither is separation and nonconformity a means to achieve holiness of life. Holiness is the result of the work of God in cleansing us from sin and separating us unto Himself (1 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 4:24; Tit 3:4-7). The progressive aspect of holiness in a believer’s life is “simply” the practice of that which God has so graciously brought about in our lives. Holiness is perfected in the sense that as we walk with the Lord, with all that entails, we grow more into His likeness. It seems that sometimes in our history we have used various standards of separation and nonconformity as a benchmark for God-approved holiness by which to judge the spirituality of others. While there is room for honest differences concerning the merits and wisdom of specific applications, and while unity of thought as well as submission are essential elements of church life, separation resulting in holier-than-thou attitudes and acrimonious church splits (sometimes over the minutest of details) has lost its way.

A Biblical basis for separation and nonconformity guides its application. The point is not to be social nonconformists, arbitrarily distinctive or even to set up marks of separation. Rather, we are to be as separated and non-conformed as obedience to Christ and His Word makes us, and as being cleansed from all “filthiness of the flesh and spirit” takes us (2 Cor. 7:1). Employing such devices as amoral cultural, linguistic and geographical fences for purposes of separation from the world raises the question of whether one is trying to achieve isolation rather than separation from the world (also see Acts 15:19).

Positively Framed

In an address to the Fourth Mennonite World Conference (1948), entitled “The Limitations of Nonconformity,” Paul Mininger observed that nonconformity, being entirely negative in its meaning, “does not furnish any general or specific guidance to the individual or the church in the development of the Christian life or in meeting moral and spiritual problems. The principle says ‘do not’ but gives no suggestion as to the direction in which one ought to go” (Proceedings 57). What shall we make of the negative character of separation and nonconformity?

First, we do poorly to unhitch nonconformity to the world from its teammate, conformity to Christ (Rom. 8:29; Gal. 4:19; Col. 3:10). These are simply the negative and positive aspects of progressive sanctification. John C. Wenger captured the fact that separation is part of a larger purpose by the well-stated title of his book, *Separated unto God*. Positioning separation and nonconformity as a necessary part, but only a part of a larger whole brings understanding and appreciation for its role in living a holy life.

Secondly, the validity of separation and nonconformity is not diminished by its negativity. Six of the Ten Commandments, we will recall, are stated negatively. And Paul, in light of the promise of God to be our Father, and the privilege of us being His children as a consequence of separation, exhorts us to “cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor. 7:1). Cleansing ourselves from worldly contaminants of body and soul—negative actions—produces the positive result of growth in Godlikeness.

Thirdly, while we need not feel apologetic for a negative doctrine, knowing its Biblical basis and positive good, the doctrine of separation and nonconformity is well served by framing it in terms of liberation rather than only in terms of restriction (Col. 1:13-14; 2 Tim 2:24-26). A positive focus on separation as liberation from the enslaving and degrading values and practices demanded by conformity to the world should enhance appreciation for this fundamental Biblical teaching and stimulate a more genuine and consistent practice among Anabaptist believers.

Fourthly, while separation and nonconformity are negative terms, must its application only be negative? Might a given church address the implications of being in the world but not of the world holistically—not only in terms of what is restricted but what is recommended or required? As we have seen, this approach has been taken at times in Mennonite history in regard to dress, beginning at least in the 19th century. But it finds very little reach outside of dress. Interestingly, while the Old Covenant prescribes specific ways the Israelites were to be separated from the peoples around them, the New Covenant does not. Perhaps rather than simply assuming that any prescription of separation and nonconformity is incompatible with the New Covenant, this distinction between the covenants is a reflection of the transnational and multiethnic nature of the church, and the need to tailor applications as local conditions and cultures warrant.

Comprehensively Applied

Over the centuries, has the Anabaptist/Mennonite conception of worldliness been too narrow? Has separation and nonconformity been conceived primarily in terms of personal appearance? Have we focused on a few boundary markers while overlooking where we may have imbibed worldly values and attitudes resulting in more conformity to the world than we might care to admit, and inconsistencies which onlookers find both perplexing and amusing?

Certainly a lot of focus over the centuries has been on dress. The personal nature of dress, and the motives associated with personal appearance readily lends attire to be an indicator of the heart. Since we all wear clothing and it's so easy to use clothing as a means of self-expression and identification, the concentrated attention on separation and nonconformity in personal appearance is understandable. Yet the historical record shows the church addressing issues of worldliness beyond clothing and accessories.

The early Anabaptists probably conceived the scope of separation and nonconformity more clearly than has been the case of some of their spiritual descendants. They had no Mennonite culture to carry them along, no long-standing established Anabaptist norms to support them. They understood the reality of the world, which included the state and the established churches. For them, separation from the world was not primarily an issue of attire, but of applying Scripture, in a way they had never done before, to the realities of their lives, socially, politically, culturally, ecclesiastically and economically. Over time as the Anabaptist movement aged, with some people withdrawing and becoming more secluded and isolated, and others receiving greater tolerance and acceptance as members of society, the forces that come with time had their effect. On the one hand, general patterns of belief, thought and practice became established and indicated a path to follow. On the other hand, as Anabaptists/Mennonites became more able to function freely in society the world no longer stood out in such bold relief—the lines between the world and the Kingdom of God became blurred in some people's thinking and practice. Then present too was the inevitable spiritual battle each Christian must wage, and the lure of the world to which some, both individually and corporately, succumb, while still retaining Mennonite identity.

Those have been continual dynamics over the centuries as Mennonites have lived in the world but have had a greater or lesser sense that they were not to be of it. Consequently the level of comprehensiveness and consistency has varied. The historical record shows the church wrestling with and addressing issues beyond personal appearance. And the 1951 publication of *Separated Unto God* by J. C. Wenger is an outstanding example of a broad based approach to separation and nonconformity. How well conservative Christians in the historic Anabaptist tradition relate all the dimensions of their lives to being separated unto the Kingdom of God is another matter, and begs the question, how can the church comprehend and embrace the Biblically based, broadly applied and culturally fitting life that the reality of living for God in the sphere of Satan's world demands? Of particular challenge to 21st century North American Anabaptists is recognizing and responding to worldly beliefs and values. To the extent these are imbibed, the fruit may have a ruby glow but the core is rotten.

Consistently Practiced

If separation and nonconformity is conceived too narrowly, or if social, cultural and ethnic forces become dominate, however subtly and unconsciously, the result will be inconsistency. After reviewing some of the action and reaction to uniform plain dress in the (Old) Mennonite Church, Gingerich makes this observation: "Unfortunately, the struggle over bonnets, neckties, and 'plain coats' often partly obscured the underlying principles of the issue. Behind the struggle were the issues of nonconformity to standards not set by Christian idealism, modesty, and simplicity of life" (Gingerich 153).

If Gingerich is suggesting that sometimes people contended for practices without adequate attention and appreciation for the principles which gave rise to them, he is articulating a perennial problem in the practice of separation and nonconformity, one which fosters so much inconsistency of practice be it in personal appearance or in other areas. The question is, how can the reality of separation and nonconformity to the world permeate a believer's spiritual worldview and seep from all his pores as he lives his life? Too often, it seems, a few issues become paramount and symbolic, diverting attention away from the real issues and principles, thus leading to inconsistency of practice. The inconsistency may involve embracing a form for practicing nonconformity but the function of which fails to address the worldly issue that called for a non-conformed response. It may also involve appropriating some "marks" of nonconformity while other values and practices reveal a life still gripped by worldly mindedness.

According H. S. Bender, the three-pronged fork by which separation and nonconformity has been carried forward in Anabaptism over the centuries has been tradition, indoctrination and discipline (Nonconformity 891). Tradition and indoctrination in particular are relevant to a consistent practice. *Tradition* by itself is wholly inadequate and easily contributes to inconsistency as time separates practice from principle. Paul Mininger gives a warning word regarding tradition when he writes, "where the emphasis is primarily upon the externals of the Christian life, the group tends to perpetuate these outward forms by a process of social conditioning rather than through giving insight and understanding with the purpose of securing voluntary acceptance. This blind conformity to the social group, even though it is the church, cannot but result in stagnation and sterility (Proceedings 58).

Yet tradition is not without merit in that at its best it can represent accumulated wisdom and provide stability. To be effective, the accumulated wisdom of tradition needs both to be refreshed and respected. It is refreshed by successive generations appreciatively thinking through what has been handed to them, holding to what is good, adding their godly wisdom and making it their own through thought and not mere convention. It is respected by recognizing that those who have walked this life with God before us may have something of value to contribute to our own walk. And respect for tradition, in turn, is enhanced by the refreshing process.

Indoctrination—thorough and convincing teaching—may be both the greatest challenge and the greatest mechanism for the church to promote consistency. It's a challenge because we are so easily blinded to inconsistency, especially if we're steeped in thoughtless tradition. Through the work of the Spirit, thorough and

convincing teaching is the church's greatest resource because commitment based on comprehension and conviction orders a person's life.

Intentionally Transmitted

While there seems to have been ebb and flow in Anabaptist understanding, commitment and practice of separation and nonconformity over the centuries, the fact remains that separation and nonconformity is imbedded both in Scripture and in Anabaptist conviction. That means that Biblical Christianity in the historic Anabaptist tradition must include teaching and applying this foundational doctrine in whatever geographical and cultural setting. It is not a distinctive doctrine and cultural tradition peculiar to North American Mennonites of Swiss heritage but irrelevant elsewhere. Rather the spiritual reality of two kingdoms in opposition is a Biblical truth that all believers everywhere need to reckon with; what does that mean for me personally, for us corporately as we walk with the Lord "in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation" (Phil. 2:15 NKJV)?

The spiritual heritage that those who have embraced conservative Anabaptism enjoy does not guarantee that successive generations will value and practice separation from the world in any comprehensive and consistent way. Parents who simply assume their children will follow after them, and churches that naively suppose the next generation will continue on in paths of faithfulness, without giving thought to the perils along the way, may find themselves disappointed. Sometimes one is amazed at how quickly an entire church jettisons separation and nonconformity. Is it possible that such a seemingly rapid collapse takes place from having lived off the "interest" of spiritual heritage while the "capital" was being squandered? How can we avoid losing the knowledge of this truth, and the blessing of its practice which has been sustained to a greater or lesser degree since the rise of Anabaptism?

Four enduring threats to separation are inadequate teaching, the effect of wealth, ineffective churches and the pressure to assimilate into society. Our *teaching* must start with the spiritual reality of two, and only two spiritual kingdoms. Christian conduct, when rooted in that understanding, becomes meaningful beyond obedience to assorted commandments of God and principles of Scripture. *Wealth* is a subtle competitor to God for our hearts (Mt. 6:19-21, 24; Col. 3:5). One of its subtleties is that we can think we are pious Christians when in fact wealth is corrupting us—our affections, values and life-styles. The effect of wealth is reflected in the "Concept of Cologne," cited earlier, which spoke of "the growing inclination of the merchant class toward temporal greed and the vanity of ostentatious clothing, which imitate the world rather than displaying the humility of Christ." *Effective churches* are fertile soil for producing holy living, of which separation and nonconformity is a vital part. Churches have the potential to be effective when a committed community of believers who have received life through the Gospel are living out Christian discipleship and brotherhood discipline lovingly and holistically. Separation and nonconformity finds stony soil in the hearts of those young people who have found what to them is meaningless law and condemnation where they should be learning grace and discipleship as it flowers and fruits amid congregational teaching and life. Finally, *the world* has always, and will always try to squeeze us into its mold. Will we allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by that pressure? Do we intend to transmit the Biblical doctrine and Anabaptist legacy, or do we simply expect (or hope) it will happen? Will we rise to the challenges, reflecting in our lives, and in the church, the glory of the Lord, being transformed into His likeness with ever increasing glory?

—Wendell Heatwole

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NONCONFORMITY AMONG TODAY'S ANABAPTISTS

Introduction:

The title could give one the idea that the term "Nonconformity" is something recent on the world scene. We, of course, know that this is not the case. Many scripture texts emphasize the concept of the people of God being separate from the world and belonging exclusively to the Almighty. Our focus is on how God's people practice this in today's culture. We are concerned about the obvious loss of the application of this vital Bible doctrine. We will only be able to grapple with the issues relating to this in real life today if we understand the Scriptural basis for nonconformity. Biblical truth is as relevant today as it was when it was conceived in the mind of the Author and penned by holy men as they were inspired by Him. We minimize this truth to our own ruin.

It is a well-known fact that everything is in "deterioration mode". The second law of thermodynamics presupposes this. The faucet begins to drip, the roof begins to leak, the shiny car rusts, businesses wax and then wane, the hard drive falters and then crashes, and our own physical condition reminds us of this truth personally.

But NOT everything is deteriorating! Our Good God tells us in Malachi 3:6 "For I am the LORD, *I change not*". And Hebrews 13:8 reminds us that "Jesus Christ *the same* yesterday, and today, and forever". Also, His Word is not diminishing in content or relevance. "Forever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven". Psalms 119:89 Paul makes this personal in 2 Corinthians 4:16 "For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day"!

Biblical Cornerstones

God's will is clearly expressed in a number of Passages from three different Apostles' perspectives.

Romans 12:1 – 2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

2Corinthians 6:14 – 7:1 Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

1John 2:12 – 17 I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake. I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father. I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one. Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

1Peter 2:9 – 10 But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

While these passages are profoundly deep, they are at once easy to understand. With the disciples we confess, "Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb." We do not struggle with hidden apocalyptic interpretations here or with authorial intent, but with Spirit-directed application of being "doers of the word, and not hearers only" which leads to deception. Likely our Good God still cries, "O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children forever!" Deut 5:29

These Scriptures, which are typical of the entire New Testament, are but a sampling on this subject that was also alluded to betimes in the Old Testament. Probably all Bible Believers would readily give verbal assent to the inspiration and truth of these Scriptures. Ask nearly any evangelical Protestant what the Bible says about salvation, conversion, respecting authority, modesty, even nonresistance . . . and they know the right answers and the verses that speak to the issues. How they work in "shoe leather" for those same adherents is an entirely different matter.

Questions begging for answers are legion. How does "being transformed" relate to "not being conformed"? What does it mean to "love the world"? What is the "world" referred to in these passages? How can I fulfill the injunction to "be separate" from the very world in which I live? What aspects of the answers to these questions are factors of my spiritual life and experience and what aspects are a practical, physical reality?

"This Bible doctrine is not a mere arbitrary dogma which, as some think, interferes with the liberties of men, but the more we study it the more we see in it the wisdom of God for His creatures". Daniel Kauffman *Doctrines of the Bible* 491

"One cannot be nonconformed to the world by adopting a few symbols of nonconformity while remaining carnal and unspiritual in heart. Nonconformity to the world is the natural outcome of having been born again and of being alert to the spiritual issues which confront Christians living in a given culture." *Separated Unto God*, page ix.

Nonconformity, Separation, and Holiness

"Nonconformity" is derived from the phrase "be not conformed" in Romans 12. Although our focus is on nonconformity, the letter to the Corinthians also includes the command "be ye separate". "Separation" and "Nonconformity" have come to be used almost interchangeably – and with good reason. Nonconformity is impossible without separation!

Defining the primary terms will be an asset to our considerations. Separation refers to a clear-cut division between ourselves and all that is sinful or anti-God. It implies distance. It is also evident here that we are not only separated *from*, but separated *unto* something.

Nonconformity is "the outward expression of inward separation" or "separation put to practice". These twins impact nearly every area of the believer's life.

The concepts of Separation and Nonconformity are rooted deeply in the holiness of God. The story of God's people in the Old Testament era is a story of God defining His holiness and instructing His people how to live so as to illustrate it. Many and various commandments were given to God's people but the clear, ongoing reason is summarized in Deut 7:6, "For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth." God's heart has not changed on this matter. He is still holy and He longs for us to experience holiness as well. To attempt to live separated or nonconformed without this fundamental motivation is frustrating and confusing. The Christian life is reduced to a list of do's and don'ts; an endurance test of regulated accountability.

God calling Abraham out of Ur is a practical illustration of separation. What are the implications of such a move for us today? This has been at least part of the impetus for various colonization efforts that have resulted in a

church witness being planted where it may otherwise not have been. Part of the reason for the call to Abraham was for his own spiritual wellbeing, too.

The neglect of separation leads subtly but steadily to assimilation. An example of this can be found in Ezra 9 where the lament was brought to Ezra, ". . . The people of Israel, . . . have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations, . . . This neglect led to acculturation. Intermarriage soon followed. So did the reproof of God and the resulting bitter reaping.

Assimilation has always been a threat for the people of God. "Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom". Gen 13:12. This choice was not only economically advantageous but could easily have been justified on the basis of being near enough to the cultural centers of his day to impact them for good and for God. But Lot, instead of leaving an impact, lost most of what was precious to him, barely escaping with his own life. This story has been repeated countless times since then. Names and details change but the scenarios are strikingly similar short of the falling fire and brimstone. In spite of its frequency, this happens gradually enough that few seem to notice. And those that do, seem, at least at times, reluctant to rock the boat. Where is the sincere lad who is willing to declare that the progress of our day is akin to the Emperor's new suit of clothes?

One example of significant changes in nonconformity in appearance is documented in the book, "*Passing on the Faith – The Story of a Mennonite School*" by Donald Kraybill. From the introduction we learn, "This story of a Mennonite school is more than the story of a school. It is the story of a rural people seeking to pass on their religious faith while in the throes of becoming modern. It is the story of a people struggling with the relentless forces of industrialization in the middle of the twentieth century. The book also traces the multitude of changes and the controversies surrounding them that the people and their school experienced since the early '40's. Primarily the saga of a school, this light social history also chronicles the clash between deeply held religious convictions and modern ways". We will consider a number of overlays depicting some of these changes.

"*God and Uncle Dale*", a book by Lester Bauman, chronicles a similar series of events in the Mennonite church in Alberta Canada in the '60's and '70's.

In contrast to Lot's assimilation, Abraham lived a life of physical separation. But he had a far greater impact on the city as an intercessor than Lot did living among them. The fathers' impact on their families is notable as well.

Jesus understood the threat of assimilation and prayed that we may learn how to be in the world but not of it. I have often wondered to what extent this prayer of our Lord is answered. For the answer to Jesus' prayer lies right in our laps!

Nonconformity and the Two Kingdoms

Both of the terms "separation" and "nonconformity" have negative implications. Separation at once rings of division, distance, disconnection, the building of walls, and exclusiveness – not the typical vocabulary we wish to have as our primary identifiers. And yet this concept is used repeatedly in both the Old and New Testaments. Consider these two examples:

Deuteronomy 10:8 – 9 At that time the LORD separated the tribe of Levi, to bear the ark of the covenant of the LORD, to stand before the LORD to minister unto him, and to bless in his name, unto this day. Wherefore Levi hath no part nor inheritance with his brethren; the LORD is his inheritance, according as the LORD thy God promised him.

Revelation 18:4 And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.

Nonconformity does not rate much higher. Odd, different, out of synch, and peculiar might be other terms that come to mind as synonyms. If this is all we see when approaching this subject it is little wonder that it is met with skepticism at best and more often, open disdain. But is this the will of our good God?

It is regrettable that we have not done better at conveying the truth and glory of the Kingdom of God in contrast to the kingdom of this world. Too many Anabaptists see the "two kingdom concept" as a neat idea; a carpet under which to sweep the "uniquities" of our traditions and peculiarities. What a pathetic view! The growth and glory of the Kingdom of God is one of the primary themes of the New Testament. It is a cause that gives focus through times of personal and corporate, spiritual fog. It is intertwined with a faith that works – a faith that is visible. My comprehension of the implications of this truth continues to grow from glory to glory. And yet I feel like I am standing on the shore of the ocean, marveling at the quantity of water and then realizing anew that I am only seeing the surface!

These two Kingdoms stand in sharp contrast to each other. From creation, God divided the light from the darkness. And Jesus clearly reiterated this truth before Pilate when He declared, "My kingdom is not of this world!" Indeed, the kingdoms are as opposite as day and night. Each kingdom has a culture and a civilization. James 4:4 reminds us "that whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God". The contrast here is so sharp, so diverse, it would appear there would be no question as to which kingdom anyone belonged to. While the contrast is clear in Scripture, in reality there is a confusing mixture of the cultures. Many have a Godly profession but lack transformation evidence. This may indicate that there has been a separation *from* but not a separation *unto*.

The "two Kingdom concept" then, provides the foundation for principles of salvation, separation, nonconformity, relationship of Church and State, nonparticipation in Government and the Military, to state just a few.

Jesus made it clear that we cannot serve two Masters. We cannot be part of both Kingdoms simultaneously. But neither can we simply choose to be part of neither. God hates the attempting of integration of the two kingdoms. The first of the Ten Commandments addresses this in worship: thou shalt worship only one God. Marriage is to be non-integrational as well; "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers . . ." One cannot help but wonder why there is such a large "gray area" in "churchianity" where it is not immediately obvious which kingdom one is a part of.

Part of this confusion is due to the inconsistency of evidencing a mixture of traditionalism, worldliness and spirituality. For example:

- Young men wearing a plain, long sleeved button down shirt under an expensive Nike jacket.
- Ladies wearing a modest cape dress while sporting a Hollywood hairstyle on the part of the head that is not covered.
- A preacher wearing a plain suit is also wearing Western style boots.
- It is easy to sense the warmth in the discussion on politics as the need for justice is stressed by brethren who profess nonresistance and love to all men.
- A \$300,000 house is outfitted in latest décor and is deemed a good investment but the couple finds the expected offerings to operate the school as unnecessarily high.

Each one of us has blind spots – areas we make allowances for ourselves that seem inconsistent to others. One of the great blessings of the Brotherhood is for brothers to submit one to another in practical areas. Rather than pulling us all down to a common denominator, it lifts all to higher ground.

Significant Expressions of Separation and Nonconformity

Many of us probably were born and raised in an Anabaptist home and church. It became a way of life without our needing to have wrestled with many of life's tough choices at an early age. We learned to look at life through a given set of lenses. And for most it was probably also a Biblical set although there are also, no doubt, factors of our culture and traditions of our family background and church, too.

In decades past, a large percentage of plain people were involved in some facet of agriculture, but today that has changed significantly. For various reasons outside of this writing, many have entered the day labor force in a

variety of general and specialized fields of employment. While not wrong in and of itself, this shift has impacted us in unique ways. Involvement in agriculture does not guarantee nonconformity. Nor does the shift from it equal assimilation. But the relationship is undeniable. However, I believe it is also true that there are many God-honoring businesses among us today that operate on the basis of Matthew 6:33 "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you". Honesty, integrity, and a genuine concern for the spiritual wellbeing of the employee and the consumer set these apart as nonconformed businesses.

The Bible does not specify which fields of employment are for the child of God. It does teach us the value of purposeful employment. "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth." Ephesians 4:28 "Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labour shall increase." Proverbs 13:11 Even while ministering, Paul reminded his brethren, "Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me." Acts 20:34

One only needs to intermingle briefly with the general populace to be reminded of the vulgarity and God-dishonoring speech that characterize so many people of the world today. Nonconformity impacts our speech – both in what is not said and in what is said.

Practical nonconformity impacts our leisure time, hobbies, recreation, use of insurance, our philosophy of education, romantic relationships, choice of vehicles, and use of our possessions. . . . just to name a few. Each of these could warrant a paragraph or a subtopic section. Suffice it to say that a commitment to separation and nonconformity significantly alters the practical ways our lives are lived - and for good reason. Kingdom life is so much more than a Sunday experience, or a certain style of dress experience. It is rather a way of life that impacts every area of our life.

It is interesting to note the areas where and why the Christian and the unbeliever follow similar customs and methodologies, and why they differ. In many areas of life, whether in brands of home furnishings, kinds of vehicles, methods and implements used in agriculture, places we shop, what we eat, etc., etc., there is little difference as long as necessity, practicality and service are the guiding principles. But let pride, lust, egotism or vanity enter and the picture changes dramatically. This is true of many aspects of our appearance as well.

Nonconformity in Appearance

Perhaps the area where nonconformity or its absence is first noticed in a church or culture or in meeting a person for the first time is in the area of our appearance. It is not uncommon for this subject to consume a disproportionately large portion of our Anabaptist brethren's church Brotherhood Agreements. It is perhaps the area most often targeted by our archenemy. Worldly fashions and fads coupled with our own pride and carnality make a volatile combination.

The Scriptures are not silent on this subject. Duane Eby identifies 5 Scriptural principles affecting personal appearance in the booklet, *"Adorning the Temple"*.

1. Clothing is to cover ones nakedness

Clothes should be adequate to cover most of the body regardless of gender. Exodus 28:42 – 43 And thou shalt make them linen breeches to cover their nakedness; from the loins even unto the thighs they shall reach: And they shall be upon Aaron, and upon his sons, when they come in unto the tabernacle of the congregation, or when they come near unto the altar to minister in the holy place; that they bear not iniquity, and die: it shall be a statute for ever unto him and his seed after him.

1 Timothy 2:9 In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel . . .

2. God desires that we use our bodies for His glory, not our own glory.

1 Corinthians 6:19 – 20 What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

3. God calls us to be pilgrims and strangers on the earth.

Romans 12:2 "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." While this verse can be applied to a wide range of life it seems particularly applicable to the area of dress.

Ponder the example of our Lord. 2Corinthians 8:9 For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.

4. Christians are not to follow the fads and fashions of this world in personal appearance.

Clothes are not to be made or worn according to the fashion of this world.

I Peter 1:14 – 15 As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance, But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation.

Our clothes should not be the cause of worry. Matthew 6:30 – 31 Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

5. A Christian's clothing should support and promote morality.

1Ti 2:9 – 10 In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works.

As we are "doers of the Word", each of these principles finds *expression* in our appearance.

- Our nakedness is to be covered and concealed. Transparent fabrics and fabrics that cling to the body violate this principle as well.
- Adornment, makeup or jewelry that draws attention to me violates the "glory to God" principle. Hairstyles fall in a similar category.
- Simplicity and serviceability are two marks of pilgrim and stranger clothing.
- The fashion world is part of enemy territory. It is our old man that is intrigued with its glitz.
- Sensuality and immodesty are major issues in the area of dress. Gender distinction in appearance is still a Biblical value.

What is the value of uniformity within a community of Believers? At a fundamental level, we all espouse a basic uniformity. For example –

- Clothes are necessary to cover our nakedness.
- The Bible prescribes principles of Separation and Nonconformity.
- There should be gender specific dress.

It is simply the methodology and extent of uniformity that gives us problems. It is as the principles of Scripture find expression that we struggle to find a place of unity and rest.

Many organizations and schools utilize uniforms and have found them to have significant value. Identity, diminishing the social gulf between the haves and have-nots, and increased camaraderie are only a few of the many positive consequences of uniforms. These values also enhance "Brotherhood" and "community". The "ribband of blue" principle from Numbers 15 was one of God's injunctions to the children of Israel that highlights the value of uniformity among other purposes.

Ideally, this uniformity will spring from a motivation far deeper than my commitment to our Brotherhood Agreements although that is important as well. There are a number of "common" factors within the Brotherhood that are foundational to this consideration.

- A common Lord

For all who have been redeemed by our Lord, God is our Father and Jesus our elder Brother. This at once connects us in ways that the unconverted know nothing of.

- A common Love

This fruit of the Spirit is a powerful, bonding cause within the community of Believers. Who can list all the positive consequences of an active practice of the first and second great commandments – to love God with our whole heart and to love our neighbor as our self?

- A common Labor

Builders enjoy shoptalk with other builders. It is easier to "walk a mile in the moccasins of another" when we have been there previously or are there now. Many of us can identify with the joy of common labor in the midst of or immediately following a crises or disaster such as a fire or devastating storm. A unity grows out of the shared goal.

The following four verses are but a sampling of many that instruct us to like-mindedness.

Romans 15:5 Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus:

Romans 12:16a Be of the same mind one toward another.

Philippians 1:27 Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;

Philippians 2:2 Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.

We believe that a Spirit-directed Brotherhood that seriously endeavors to live out the principles of God's Word in a literal, practical and united expression and to help one another through humble accountability will far outlive one where each member endeavors to do so individually as he understands the same principles. Where time and mindless repetition have choked the practice into dead tradition, let us resurrect the principle and revive the practice rather than "throwing the baby out with the bathwater".

How different can one be from the accepted or expected norm until it hinders or distracts from what the church is trying to accomplish? This question is a helpful guiding principle in practicing uniformity. For example, If the norm on Sunday morning is long sleeved shirts and suit coats and I take the pulpit in bib overalls . . . it does not matter that I am modest and the garment is serviceable. It distracts from the message I am trying to convey. If any part of our appearance identifies us with a major league sports team, or Hollywood, or simply says "look at me", it hinders what the church is about!

The Effects of Another Gospel

Paul labored hard to establish the church at Galatia. He was distressed when a few short years later he learned of wide spread apostasy. Paul wrote, " I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel, which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. Galatians 1:6 – 7 Paul marveled that this apostasy had set in. What is our response to steps toward assimilation? Some yawn. Others shrug it off. Some even consider it progress. Paul did not. He was shocked.

They had been converted due to the good news of the Gospel. Now he rebukes them for turning to *another* Gospel. Why did he call this foreign influence a Gospel? The Gospel is to be good news. And this other Gospel includes teachings that seem to be good news.

- Divorce is no longer always a sin. Sometimes there simply is no other good way to solve this particular problem.
- We can change the corruption in politics and government by electing enough conservative Christians into

office.

- Accountability to a brotherhood can be stifling to one's spiritual growth. You only need to be accountable to God.
- Do you want to go to heaven? Say this prayer after me and you will never need to worry again about missing heaven.
- The way you apply the Bible is taking things a bit far. Don't you realize that many of the teachings in the Epistles are time- and culture-specific?
- You can be free from traditions and cultural factors of bygone times. We are justified by faith.

This other Gospel, rather than bringing us liberty, gradually brings us into the bondage of worldliness. It is akin to a U-turn that is so gradual that the casual traveler does not notice he is turning around. Only as we pay attention to the "compass" of God's Word will we notice where we are heading and the repentance it will take to right the course.

The Dilemma of Incremental Justification

There was once a woodchopper who had a fine mule and wagon with which he hauled his wood. One day as he was loading the wagon he began thinking of the time he could save if he took more wood with each trip. His wagon was large but he had only been partially filling it heretofore. As he approached the point where he normally stopped he reasoned that if the mule could pull the load with this much wood, surely he could pull it with one more. And if that was alright, one more piece would not be a big deal either. Thus his reasoning continued until the wagon would hold no more. But, alas! The mule could not budge the wagon even with "carrots and goads". There was nothing to do but take some off. As he threw a piece off he began to reason that if he could not pull it with this much on, one less piece would not make a big enough difference that he could now satisfactorily pull it. He toiled on with this rationale. Eventually the wagon was empty.

The logic of this process has been repeated dozens of times in the Kingdom. Let's use one article of clothes for an example. When is a shirt nonconformed?

Is a long sleeved shirt nonconformed? A short sleeved? What if it has no sleeves?

Is a full button down shirt nonconformed? What about one with three buttons? What if it has no buttons?

Is a white shirt nonconformed? A bright red one? A black one? Does color matter?

Is one solid color nonconformed? What if it has two colors? Stripes? Small plaid pattern? Big plaid pattern?

Is a shirt with no insignia nonconformed? What about a small insignia? A big one? What if the whole shirt is green and yellow with a tractor so real you can almost hear it run?

Is a shirt made by a general manufacturer always nonconformed? One considered "name brand"? What if that brand name is not visible? What if it is in small print? How about the brand splashed across the entire garment?

Is it nonconformed if I was able to get a \$70 shirt at Good Will for \$5?

What does the shirt's contact with the body have to do with nonconformity? Is a tight shirt nonconformed? A loose one? One that is three sizes too big?

Is a nonconformed shirt appropriate for one occasion but not for another? Who decides?

Is a shirt even necessary?! What about when I am swimming by myself? With a small group? A big group? A mixed group?

Perhaps these are not the right questions to be asking. But they are being asked. And often they are answered with less than Biblical perspectives. What complicates this process is that different groups, whether families, local congregations or denominational structures, ask these questions and come out at different places. And with scriptural justification!

Change usually takes place gradually. In a positive way, the Father leads us from glory to glory, faithfully working in our lives by His good Spirit. It is a "line upon line" process, here a little and there a little. Our enemy uses similar processes against us. He knows most of us will not be enticed with a leap into the world. But if he can get us to progressively lose a little here and justify a negative change there, he is satisfied.

Another effective methodology our enemy utilizes is what I call "conditioning factors". Jeff Pollard discusses this in his book *Christian Modesty and the Public Undressing of America*. In his short book, he effectively points out how beaches were the conditioning factor for public undress. He maintains that in centuries past, there was basically only segregated swimming, especially on any public beach. Then mixed swimming became popular but with modest swimwear. With time, fashion designers made swimwear increasingly scanty and provocative. Finally, there was little left to the imagination. At the same time, modesty was taking a hard lick on the street and in the workplace. It is easy to follow the logic. If it is alright to dress this way on the sand, or on the street leading to the sand, or in the restaurant on the street leading to the sand, why not anywhere?

Weddings are one conditioning factor in our churches today. It is a special day for the bride and groom. Materials that are shiny, slinky, and form-revealing are sometimes utilized. Special garments are sometimes rented and used. Well wishing and blessing leads to hugging. And cross gender. But it is only for one special day! Really? Clothes for that one special day are not then discarded. They are slowly incorporated. And there is increasing looseness between the two genders. It is erroneous to blame weddings for the proliferation of these problems. It is sticking our heads in the sand to conclude they make no difference.

Discerning what is healthy recreation and what falls in the category of inappropriate involvement in professional sports can easily follow a similar path. Watching big league sports or participation in infrequent tournaments can easily be the conditioning factor that pushes our youth groups in the direction of professional-type sports on small scale.

Asking "What's wrong with..." greatly accelerates this process that leads to assimilation. This is not the question we should be leading our people to ask! The challenge is to rather ask, "What is right with...?" "How can I more effectively be faithful?" "How can I best serve and represent Jesus and His bride in this life?" From 1Corinthians 6:12 and 10:23, we can summarize three meaningful questions; 1. Is it expedient? 2. Does it enslave? 3. Does it edify?

Youth and young adulthood is an especially vulnerable time. The importance of nonconformity in most areas of life is a challenge during this time and especially the area of nonconformity in appearance. Part of the reason is the strong God-given desire for community; to belong to a group with similar identity and culture. This is a wonderful bonding factor when directed by the Spirit of God. But it can be damaging, even damning, when it is purely peer focus that results in what we call peer pressure.

What shall the Redeemed wear? Simon Schrock asks and effectively answers the question in his book by the same title. The clothes we put on is a daily reminder of our need of the blood of Jesus to cover us and of the robe of righteousness He offers us to cover our spiritual wretchedness and shame.

Concluding Ponderations

There are several factors that will contribute to the practice of ongoing nonconformity.

1. Nothing can take the place of an unapologetic embracing of and commitment to the Holy Word of God. These truths are eternally settled in heaven. We neglect them to our own hurt. Multitudes give verbal assent to the inerrant authority of the Word of God. But far fewer have a solid commitment to literally apply that which is written. Many are in the category of "every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand". To be a hearer of the Word but not a doer is self-deception. I believe our Lord still often wonders, "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" This is not rocket science theology but just simple, loving obedience. "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous." 1John 5:3 In contrast to that, His directives are given to us "that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath promised thee." Indeed, "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." Revelation 22:14

2. It is a waste of valuable time and energy for every generation to reinvent the wheel. But I believe there is great value in every generation reinventing the nonconformity "wheel". It is important that every new generation asks the hard questions as they read the Scriptures. What doctrines of the Bible are being challenged today? How do these truths apply to me in today's culture? How will they find appropriate expression and application? Each generation must wrestle with the issues to a place of personal understanding, peace, and appropriate expression. This may happen at a decisive point in one's life where a climax of battles is settled once and for all and our face is set forward with no turning back. But more often these convictions grow as we are exposed to truth – day by day personally, and Sunday by Sunday in preaching and teaching. Colloquies, Men's Meetings, Bible Study groups may provide good platforms to tangle with applications and encourage one another forward. In the Christian home setting, it is important that there be sufficient dialogue on this subject and other important issues to not only reveal to the parents what is going on in the minds of the youth but to help them think through the consequential implications of their thought processes.
3. The Revelation of Jesus Christ includes seven letters to seven different churches. Each church was blessed for what they were doing right. Where each church had needs, the Spirit faithfully directed them to repentance. The directives given to one church were different from the directives given to the other churches. To each was given the injunction, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." Rev. 3:13 One application we may conclude from this is that there may well be some Spirit-directed variation to applications of a given Scriptural principle.
4. While the church has a profound responsibility in promoting and teaching Biblical Nonconformity, nothing can replace the impact of this being taught and modeled in the home. The unfeigned faith of Timothy dwelt first in his grandmother and mother. We cannot easily overemphasize the importance of this doctrine being a conviction of father and mother. It should be consistently loved in the hearts and faithfully lived out in the lives of parents. It is appropriate to expect the same from the oncoming generation as well.
5. Another asset in retaining applications of nonconformity is to develop an appreciation for the work of those who have lived before us. The principles of the Word of God are unchanging. They are forever settled in Heaven. Applications vary and change as new inventions and situations arise. A young man does not have to age far beyond the teen years until he is amazed at how his father has grown in wisdom during this time. Sometimes we are a part of a church for a time before we see the wisdom of some injunction a previous generation struggled over and left behind for our benefit. This is not to say that everything that is handed down to us is "Gospel" or even beneficial. There may also be baggage left behind simply because of the difficulty of addressing it.

May God grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot and should not change;
the courage to change the things we can and should;
and the wisdom to know the difference.

Nathan Yoder

Nonconformity in Cross-Cultural Context

In March of 2010, nineteen students from nine countries attended our Asian Bible School in Chiang Mai, Thailand. In our class entitled, *The Christian Family*, various controversial subjects were discussed; family planning, divorce and remarriage, and women's appearance. Several Korean ladies attending the class suggested that the views presented on feminine appearance, the veiling, stay-at-home mothering, family planning, and other related topics could work in American culture, but not in Asia. I assured the class that the families who followed these principles in America were as much, if not more, counter-cultural than in Asia. When they expressed uncertainty, a Thai pastor spoke up and affirmed that Biblical practices will set Christians apart from their host culture in any part of the world. This is the truth that this paper will attempt to defend.

I must make a disclaimer before getting to the subject. Most of my experience in the past six years has been working with conservative Anabaptist young people in Asia. The illustrations and stories are primarily taken from that context. This is where my continued development of this conviction has taken place.

In many cases the current generation of young Anabaptists question what has been traditionally called non-conformity. Many conform to a list of guidelines and see themselves as "good conservative Protestants." The differences in life-style and practice are seen as cosmetic rather than connected to the core change of values that comes through regeneration. They don't particularly see themselves as being cross-cultural in America. They are surrounded primarily by their own conservative sub-culture, unengaged with the fallen world around them. The list of guidelines their churches give to them puts "shoe leather" to their non-conformity, as it relates to their host culture, but the seclusiveness of the non-conformed prevents their engagement with the antagonistic culture. There is an accompanying loss of meaning to the concept of being a holy nation, a peculiar people who are separated unto God. Their associations in family groupings, school attendance, recreational activities, church participation and even employment all tend to be in platonic (detached/dispassionate) agreement with the doctrines and life-style to which they personally ascribe. This significantly hinders the development of personal, inner conviction about the guidelines to which they conform.

We seem to know all the right answers, yet see no value in them. We don't know their significance, because in many cases, our "answers" have never been tested. I concur with Walter Hendrick's questions in *The Light That Never Dies* when he asks, "How do you help them embrace what is true when they don't have a clue as to why that truth is important? It is not that they are necessarily opposed to the truth. But how deeply can they believe in something that has yet to matter one way or another in their life? They don't know that they don't know." When a Biblical sub-culture fails to engage with the fallen culture around it, the convictions it holds are seldom tested. Without testing there is an accompanying weakening of conviction. The weakened conviction is then shorn up with inadequate and irrelevant explanations. These inadequate answers fail to convince young people who have been enthralled by dynamic, but compromised, Evangelical speakers and writers and have grown up with much exposure to a group of peers who also have lived with untested practices of non-conformity. If this persists for a generation or two, the strength of non-conformity issues is weakened or lost. I would like to suggest that as participants in the theology and practice of Anabaptism, we are just as cross-cultural in America as we are in any country of the world. When the Biblical expressions of non-conformity are lived in the context of an antagonistic community, rather than primarily with like-minded people, the beauty of being separated unto God will emerge in every culture. And, may I add, especially in America!

If we relegate our non-conformity to the retention of a few significant practices, rather than embracing the radical life-style of Jesus and His teaching in whatever setting we live, we will continue to lose the next generation. It may be hard to admit, but if we have chosen in the past to change churches because we wanted more "liberty" and less non-conformity than the church of our younger days, how convincing will we be when our children follow suit to leave our church for the same reason? A significant portion of the membership of most of our churches is made up of those who have come to us from what are considered more conservative backgrounds. Whether right or wrong

they considered the non-conformity of their previous church to be irrelevant. This is the problem many parents are facing today as their children feel the same way about their parent's beliefs and practices. The next generation will be disenchanted with our understanding of being "non-conformed" unless it is relevant to engaging, not only the antagonistic world, but the compromised Evangelical church as well. The practical expressions of being separated unto God will always be dynamic. A static "statement of practice" will eventually become irrelevant. Our forefathers wrestled with the impact of the automobile on family life. Today we wrestle with the impact of inter-net. We can hardly imagine what challenges family life will have tomorrow. As time goes on, the strength, of what in one generation may have been a valid application for the church, weakens. If it is not transmitted convincingly or the issues have changed so significantly that the former standard has a sense of redundancy, it will be lost. Unfortunately, the perceived loss of meaningful, contemporary conviction tempts many to defect to apostate Evangelical churches. They then ascribe what they had been taught as legalism.

It is my conviction that we have floundered by emphasizing non-conformity to the world with almost no discussion about the beauty of holiness, or the impact of a transformed life. When being "non-conformed" is accented to the neglect of the energizing source for that separation, the "non-conformity" becomes dead legalism and has little more appeal than retaining an antiquated culture with the accompanying awkwardness of being living specimens of a past culture to tourists. We must move from a fixation to be different, to a passion of being transformed. Our difference with the world will then spring vividly out of our conformity with Christ. While there may be some value in disallowing an activity or appearance simply because the world does it, that argument alone will be relatively unconvincing. It also tends to throw us in the opposite ditch by allowing the world to determine our actions inversely.

Gerald McDermott in his book, *Seeing God*, comments, "If I had to summarize in one statement what distinguishes true from false spirituality, it would be this: **the unregenerate never see the beauty of holiness.**" Holiness is not an austere, sterile, or bleached condition of the soul. Holiness was the atmosphere of Eden, the most untainted beauty this planet has ever known. Heaven is not only the holiest realm in existence; it is also the most beautiful. The holiest place in all God's Kingdom is described in Revelation where the light of Jesus glistened off the shimmering surfaces of jasper, sardine, gold, and crystal with an emerald rainbow overhead. Though that beauty may have been aesthetic in nature, its dynamic source was the life of the One on the throne, the Lord Jesus Christ. We can hardly wrap our powers of imagination around the holiness and beauty of Heaven. Every attempt to draw the next generation of Anabaptists to non-conformity must be married to the conviction that holiness is beautiful.

Most theological venues of Western Christianity may applaud various expressions of holiness which separate the believer's life-style from that of unbelievers, yet the problem is deeper. In their theologies the holiness of Christ is forensic and applied to the believer's account in heaven but is unrelated to the actual condition of the believer's heart. This denies an intrinsic transformation of the believer's heart as directly connected to the change that happens in the record books of Heaven. When the dual transformation of regeneration is dichotomized the expressions of holiness become arbitrary and secondary. When inseparably linked, they are foundational and dynamic to Christian life and experience. Living a holy life, separated unto Christ and from the world's self-centered expressions, becomes the joy-filled anticipation of the believer. He is a new man in Christ. Old things have passed away and all things have become new.

To grasp the importance of holiness, we must understand its uniqueness. Peter takes us to the compelling source when he says, *But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy* (I Peter 1:15, 16). Anything that is holy is set apart from the mundane. It is in a category all by itself. God is holy and distinctly outside all other forms of being. It is the title most often used in the Bible to describe God. The Bible itself is holy because it transcends all other writing as inerrant and infallible. Marriage is to be seen as holy matrimony because it places our spouse in a uniquely different relationship to us than that of any other human being. The believer becomes a part of a delightful, beautiful people group that contrast all other people groups like day contrasts night.

The moral effect of this holy ethnic group is that they manifest to the world that God is holy. Their lives, words, and passion suggest that holiness exists in a divine and absolute sense that penetrates human experience through those who know its Source. In a world wracked with heinous unholiness, the holiness of the believer catches the attention of a skeptical and sneering world with a beauty for which they have no explanation. It is truly peculiar!

God's intention was that Israel would be such a holy nation in their demeanor, actions and knowledge that other nations would be captivated as they traveled through the Jewish cities and villages. He tells them in Leviticus 20:24, 26, *Ye shall inherit their land, and I will give it unto you to possess it, a land that floweth with milk and honey: I am the LORD your God, which have **separated you from other people**. . . . And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the LORD am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine.* The beauty of their culture would cause the sojourner to ask questions. Deuteronomy 4:5-8 records God's plan to use holiness in evangelism. He says, *Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?* God designed Israel to be, *a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation* (Exodus 19:6). When Israel chose to be like the nations around them, they lost their mission.

Many years later, God raised up Ezekiel to speak into Israel's loss of the beauty of holiness. Ezekiel's cry echos down to our day as well, *Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they shewed difference between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them* (Ezekiel 22:26). The most distressing enigma of Israel's condition was that God was seen as common! God was profaned! The God of Israel was no longer different! He was not seen as distinctively holy! Those who observed Israel would be unable to see the beauty of the Lord. His holiness had no trickle-down effect. His people were not unusual. Israel's God was perceived to be like all other gods. The same is true today. Much of what is called Christianity is an obscene representation of a holy God. If those who claim to have Jesus living within them live no differently than those who make no such claim, then the character of God has been grossly distorted. His reputation has been violated!

Jesus has called His followers to be the, *chosen generation, the royal priesthood, the holy nation, the peculiar people; that we should shew forth the beauties (excellencies) of him who hath called us out of darkness into his marvelous light* (I Peter 2:9). Paul raises the question in II Corinthians 6:16 - 18, *What agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and **be ye separate**, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.* Much of the contemporary missionary movement has dismissed the high impact of holiness and degraded it to legalism. Therefore, like Israel among the heathen nations, Christianity today has minimal effect in many people groups.

Unfortunately, significant leaders like Ghandi and Mohammed marveled at the ethic of Christ to the extent of seriously considering Christianity, but turned away when they observed those who claimed to be His followers. Frederick Nitzche, the apostate son of a Lutheran pastor said, "If these Christians want me to believe in their God, they will have to sing me better songs, they will have to look more like people that have been saved, they'll have to wear on their countenance the joy of the beatitudes. **I can only believe in a God who dances.**" While we do not want to get our doctrine from Nitzche, it is true that the more holy a person is, the more joyful they are as well. Solemnity and somberness have their appropriate place, but they should never veil the vibrant joy of holiness.

Bob Sjogren, in *Unveiled at Last*, addresses this problem astutely when he writes, "Complicating the issue even

more is how Muslims view Christianity. Muslims believe that we worship three Gods: God the father, God the son, and God the mother, and that that threesome came to be when God came down to earth, saw Mary, lusted after her, and had sex with her. (No wonder they believe Christianity is simply ‘out to lunch’.) This concept of an immoral religion is confirmed in Muslim’s minds when they turn on television and watch ‘Christian’ programs. They assume that ‘Dallas’ and ‘Dynasty’ are Christian TV programs and that they exemplify Christianity. What is the overall effect? In considering the claims of Christ, most Muslims start at a negative fifteen rather than zero.”

Toward the end of his life, Martin Luther lamented, “If we look aright at what people now do who reckon themselves as Evangelicals and know how to talk much about Christ, there is nothing behind it. Most of them deceive themselves. The number of those who began with us and had pleasure in our teaching was ten times greater, now not a tenth part of them remains steadfast. They learn indeed to speak words, as a parrot repeats what people say, but their hearts do not experience them, they remain just as they are, they neither taste nor feel how true and faithful God is. They boast much of the Gospel and at first they seek it earnestly, yet afterwards nothing remains; for they do what they like, follow their lusts, become worse than they were before and are much more undisciplined and presumptuous than other people, . . . peasants, citizens and nobles, all are more covetous and undisciplined than they were under the papacy. . . Now we are almost utterly heathen with the name of Christian.” This sorrowful lament still rings true nearly five centuries later. When faith is the only measure of righteousness, holiness becomes optional.

The beauty of holiness does not primarily come from contrasting the world, but from imitating Christ. The imitation of Christ is what places all believers into a cross-cultural setting. Imitating Christ is what separates the believer from every other cultural group. There is no geographic place on the globe where Christians are not in a cross-cultural community. They are strangers and pilgrims with an entirely different value system from all others due to their rebirth into the Kingdom of God. The passion of their heart was captured by Albert Orsborn when he penned:

Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me
All His wonderful passion and purity
Oh, Thou Spirit divine, All my nature refine,
Till the beauty of Jesus be seen in me.

It does not take a rocket scientist to observe the splendor of holiness. It is brilliantly obvious. Holiness is so obvious and convicting that Peter tells us that even in silence, a wife’s chaste (beautiful) conversation (life-style) can win the heart of her husband. (I Peter 3:1,2) Bitterness, pride, immorality, and apathy are among the vices that dull our human ability to perceive this beauty. It is obscured by the fleshly heart.

Allow me to contrast the beauty of holiness as compared to the affliction of unholiness. The couple who follow God’s design for marriage grow in oneness and faithfulness which sweetens and strengthens their relationship as each year passes. The unholy traumatize their spouse, children, parents and friends as they engage in adulterous affairs, divorce and remarriage. Multiple marriages leave in their wake a stream of broken, hurting people where ugly confrontations are common.

Where holiness reigns, the children learn respect, domestic skills, dependability, truthfulness, and other desirable virtues in an atmosphere of love and discipline. The blessing that adult children give parents by honoring their teaching brings joy which swells the heart with grace. The beauty is copious! These children reach to their siblings with compassion to invest in their spiritual well-being by communicating how they value them. There is beauty all around, when there’s love at home. But where holiness has been lost, children become peer dependent and engage in activities that grieve their parents. They become independent and estranged from their families. The inner agony of fathers and mothers is heart-rending as they grieve when reflecting with close friends on the life-style their off-spring have chosen. It is not pretty!

In the beauty of holiness young people come to their wedding day as virgins with a much higher level of marital and sexual delight and anticipation. Their radiance and innocence brings a trust into their oneness that has long been lost by the young people who have compromised their purity. According to the authors of *Girls Uncovered*, over eighty percent of American girls, ages twenty and twenty-one, have lost their virginity. This dismal situation accounts for the bitterness, guilt and loss of delight that defiles their marriage beds and contributes to the infidelity of half of American marriages. This dilemma is far from beautiful. As a side note, it is painful to see young people abandon their conservative Anabaptist heritage of faithfulness in marriage to join Evangelical groups whose ratio of marital faithfulness is worse than those who claim no religion. Confidence that their own children will be faithful in the next generation has no statistical basis.

The redeemed have an engaging friendliness that brightens the doorway of their churches and homes to those who are seeking. Gracious hospitality highlighted the beauty of Christ living within believers when a recent guest testified, "This is the friendliest church we have ever attended." A visitor came to sit beside the couple who had invited him to church one Sunday. As he sat down, he commented, "It is a good thing you invited me for lunch before I came today. I've had three dinner invitations since arriving this morning." In a culture that is characterized by keys and locks, there is beauty in the knowledge that you are welcome to these godly homes at any time. There are no strangers there.

When a father, business leader, or pastor takes the smallest portion, sits in the most uncomfortable seat, or waits till last in order to serve those who are under his care, we see the beauty of holiness. That leader understands that every blessing he is given becomes a means to bless others. It is truly marvelous! This is in stark contrast to the haughty "dog eat dog" mentality found in the commercialism of the world, where "getting to the top" involves climbing on the backs of competitors, employees, staff, and consumers. The "me first" mentality is truly unattractive.

In an increasingly socialistic society where the entitlement mentality has resorted to a welfare check to compensate for slothfulness, the beauty of a work ethic that honors the sweat of the brow is refreshing. Employees who serve from the heart to make their CEO, foreman, or manager successful are a special tribute to the beauty of holiness. They will go the extra mile without being asked. The godly contractors who take loss charitably and refuse to haul their offenders to court are a rare but beautiful breed. These men go beyond the call of duty to satisfy their customers at personal loss in order to exemplify the spirit of Christ.

Having a tradition of singing, we have been provided rich opportunities to develop four-part a capella harmony. It has been my privilege over the years to be part of churches where singing was richly enjoyed and enthusiastically engaged in. While a capella singing may be no more holy than other forms of harmonious Christian music, it has been my observation that in a significant number of cases, it was the spirited singing that drew people back to our conservative churches time after time. There was no loud accompaniment by a talented few, but rather the richness of blended, passionate voices that caused one visiting worshiper to say, "The next time I hear music like that I know I will have angels standing beside me."

Evangelicalism has succumbed to the moral chaos of Western culture's iniquity and immodesty to such a degree that men have to constantly guard their eyes while attending the churches of America. Several times we have attended the commencement exercises of the most conservative school for missionary children in Chiang Mai. The immodesty of the missionary children is only surpassed by the ladies of the red light district. My spirit grieves that Buddhist people perceive this as Christian. But what a contrast when we are in the company of godly women where the elegant, tasteful and modest clothing points the observer's eyes toward the radiance and purity of her Christ-reflecting countenance. Is it possible that the proliferation of "Amish" novels that fill significant sections of America's Christian bookstores points to a nostalgic reflection on days when beauty involved modesty? Complete strangers have come up to the women in our ministry and made comments about how beautiful they were. The

on-lookers didn't know that the non-conformed were just wearing their "every day" dress. It is not uncommon for Asian women to make statements about how beautiful our women are and even request to be photographed with them.

When disaster hits a family in the circles of those who aspire to live holy lives, the beauty of the "barn-raising" mentality actively engages as people give sacrificially to get the family "back on their feet" again. This is in contrast to the lonely vigils of the majority of Western population who bicker with their insurance companies to get whatever they can and feel abandoned by their supposed friends.

The beauty of holiness confounds the ugliness of revenge in some of the most dynamic ways in relation to its enemies. The artist's rendition of Dirk Willem's rescue of his pursuer still captures humanity's attention centuries after the incident because of the beauty of forgiveness. There is rich beauty in the account of an early American Anabaptist whose neighbor despised Christians. The ungodly neighbor accused the Anabaptist, saying his dog had killed his chickens. Though he demanded an inflated price for his loss, the Anabaptist gave him extra beyond what he required. It was some time later that the accusing neighbor discovered that his Anabaptist neighbor never owned a dog. Such a gentle response illustrates the beauty of God's holiness.

It goes without saying that the beauty of the preceding scenarios is not without its lapses in our Anabaptist circles. On the other hand, wherever there is holiness, these beautiful expressions abound. In some cases they have abounded so prolifically that they have seemed normal and are mistakenly seen as merely a characteristic of a sub-culture. Yet the loss of the beauty of holiness brings a mystical sense of sadness about the "good ole days" even to those who are unconverted.

It is essential that we become aware that the beauty of holiness is dramatically captivating! All true holiness issues from the heart of the believer where Jesus has taken up residence. It is His beauty that we display. We are little more than the glass case that is enclosing the life of Jesus within. Paul tells us twice that, "we are the temple of the Holy Spirit". The most profound glimpse that most people in the world will ever get of the life of Jesus Christ is what they will see in His followers. The beauty of His life will continue to captivate the attention of apostate religious people as well the adherents of false religions. They are to see in us a beauty that is found nowhere else. This beauty oozes out of the actions, the words and the radiance of the believer. The world may scorn it in public, but that beauty haunts them in their quiet hours of reflection.

Let me finish with practical examples of the beauty of holiness that we have been privileged to observe while working in an Asian cross-cultural setting. The non-conformity that comes from each of these illustrations directly links to the beauty of Jesus as seen in His people.

The soul of La has been hardened and embittered by the many men who have used her for their perverted delight. She knows no safe men. Her concept of a godly man is non-existent. Every male she has known well was another source of pain and exploitation. Yet, she began riding her Harley Davidson out to our church service which is conducted in a language she can hardly understand. When asked what it is that draws her to IGo Christian Fellowship, her answer was simple. "I want to watch the fathers relate to their children." It is an expression of holiness she has never before witnessed.

An Evangelical missionary wife was caring for a fifteen-year-old mother of a two-year-old daughter. When she needed to return to the States to care for her terminally ill son, she began praying for a conservative Mennonite family to foster the two-some until she returned. She felt her prayer was ridiculous because she had never met such a family in Asia. Yet she longed for that kind of home for her foster-daughters while she was gone. Providentially she met one of the IGo students at a nearby restaurant and arrangements were eventually made for the temporary care of her daughters. She said, "The Mennonites have the purity, character, and innocence that would be so healing to my sexually-abused foster daughter. You all have something that is very precious."

Several young male students sat around the monk chat table at a local Buddhist temple with two monks. The one monk seemed fairly well-informed about Christian doctrine but emanated a rather haughty attitude. All of that changed to one of respect and interest when he inadvertently discovered that his “guests” were all virgins. That was a “beauty” that he could hardly fathom coming from Westerners. Buddhist monks have attended our Anabaptist church services from time to time due to their intrigue with a separated, holy people.

A Nepalese pastor came to pick up the IGo students at the Kathmandu airport. He reported later how astounded he was when he saw them exiting the airplane. He was delighted as he became aware that these young people were the ones who were coming to minister with him. His church had previously hosted numerous American mission teams. Those young people came off the plane with their spiked hair, cut-offs, loud music, immodesty and immorality. He felt compelled to entertain them due to their sponsorship of his programs but he secretly grieved at their presence. This group was so different! Their enthusiasm, availability, and industriousness caused him to comment that the students were like angels serving him and the church. The impression was so deep that he bought a ticket to fly from Nepal to Chiang Mai so that he could live in the dorms and see if the beauty of this group was real. He later organized what he called an “Anabaptist Conference” for the pastors of Nepal to be taught the doctrines as understood and applied by Anabaptists.

Pastor Isaac from Myanmar has traveled to our Asian Bible School the past three years. He confessed to despising Americans because of how unprincipled and immoral they were when they came to visit his ministry. As he observed the ABS staff and families, he commented that the classes are inspiring and enjoyable but his primary reason for coming is to observe Christian couples and families. He recently wrote, “I want to invite you to come to Myanmar to teach *Christian Family* class that you taught us at ABS. That subject is very essential for the Kachin state because many Christian parents leave their children and are doing business all the time. They don't know God's plan for the family. They neglect their children. So, many youth became drug users, prostitutes, drunkards, and most become street boys and girls. Many churches in Kachin state are not teaching about Christian family life and parental (responsibility). I believe that if you come and teach us that subject, we will really be blessed.”

The Tamar Center sits in the middle of Pattaya, Thailand, the whoredom capital of the world and home to 20,000 prostitutes. The Tamar staff hesitantly allowed two IGo ladies to join their team for training in 2010. They were not sure what it would be like to have two women so modestly dressed in their ministry. It may be hard to comprehend the ostentatious contrast these two young ladies made on streets filled with prostitutes, pimps and transvestites. The result was amazing! As their three-month term of service came to an end the IGo ladies were told they could bring as many ladies of their type, as often as they could. After a second group ministered there, the Tamar staff ladies accompanied them to the bus as they were returning. One of the Thai staff told my daughter, “You are our favorite team because of your radiance and different way of dressing. It attracts a real interest in the bar girls and you have more chance to talk with the women.” The innocent purity of those young ladies were a real-life representation of what most of those prostitutes have a deep inner longing to be. This is the beauty of holiness.

This past September we sent our third team of interns to the border town of Mae Sot. These young ladies have been serving the displaced Burmese citizens that have fled from their homes due to the genocidal attempts of the government to exterminate them. The girls have worked under Allen Brown, the mission leader of Compasio, a ministry that takes Christ's love to the refugee camps in the area. As Mr. Brown observed the character and devotion of these ladies, he asked for an opportunity to meet with us. His impression of these students was so impacting that he wanted to know how to produce such workers.

Pastor Kiat became IGo's Thai advocate for legal and immigration work immediately after our initial visit to the country. He currently is the leader of the largest association of Christian churches in northern Thailand. He has watched the Anabaptist students closely for the past six years, culminating in his attendance, with his daughter, at

Faith Builders this past winter. The Christ-honoring life-styles he has observed now compel him to re-direct his church planting efforts to raising up a Thai church of like-mind with the Anabaptists. Pastor Kiat reflected to one staff member, "I now know the Anabaptists I have gotten to know here in Thailand are for real. They don't just act this way because they are on the mission field. They are different because of conviction and choice."

On this past December 16th, ET, an underground Church leader from China, told our students, "It is good to take Bibles into China but more important is to teach and live it. Mennonite brothers and sisters have something to give. Chinese need examples that the Word of God is applicable, a new way to live, a holy life. We need teaching by life example." He then reminded us that one-third of the world lives in China and India so, if we are to follow the great commission, those two countries should be a major focus.

Some have mistakenly concluded that the disciplines of a holy life-style are legalistic and detrimental to the cause of missions. While it is my conviction we should not attempt to impose our applications upon every culture we seek to evangelize, we should teach and demonstrate a suitable application which in turn invites and compels the host culture to determine and utilize their own Biblical application.

The beautiful character, message and practices that flow out of a holy life lived in vital communion with the Lord Jesus Christ are the attention-getters for a broken, sin-cursed world to be drawn to the holiness of the Lord Jesus Christ! Through His holiness they become aware of their sinfulness. That awareness points them to the Savior who longs to make their lives reflect His beauty as well. When we are caught up with the holy beauty of the Lord Jesus Christ and His teaching, we will no longer look at the world to make our guidelines directly or inversely.

I'll close with a novel story adapted from the accounts of the Old Testament Rechabites and two significant leaders of the Reformation time, Martin Luther and Menno Simmons.

In days long ago God raised up Martin to confront the false teaching and practices of His people. As Martin was furiously riding in his chariot down the road one day, he happened upon another young man named Menno. When Martin inquired of Menno as to whether he was of the same mind about the people's sin, Menno quickly agreed that he was. Stepping into the chariot, the two young men sped off to hold conferences and seminars to confront the heresy of the people. Due to his initiative and diligence, Martin was promised by the Lord that the next four church leaders would be his descendants. Unfortunately, Martin's personal compromises were imitated and strengthened by his progeny.

As Menno observed the effect of pomp and power upon his friend, he determined in his heart to take a different path. Menno returned home to implant the beauty of holiness in his sons. He gave them five extra-biblical guidelines as preservatives against the immoral, materialistic mind set he observed in the sons of Martin. His commands were clear:

- Do not cut off your beards
- Sing a cappella in your churches
- Wear cape dresses and plain suits
- Sit segregated in your assemblies
- Attend church regularly

Menno promised his off-spring that if they would remain true to these commands, their holy life-style would have a lasting impact in the land. Four hundred and fifty years later a lone gunner came to Menno's descendants and killed five of his daughters. When the enraged community turned to hear the response of the sons of Menno, they responded with one voice, "We forgive!"

While there are glaring inconsistencies among some of these descendants, that act of holiness went out to the confront the fallen cultures of the world with its exquisite beauty.

We recognize that the five issues I have ascribed to Menno were not practices that he necessarily advocated to his followers, but they are issues which our forefathers have embraced as appropriate expressions of holy living. We dare not cannonize extra-biblical practices, but neither should we carelessly abandon what reflected legitimate attempts in the past to live holy lives in a fallen culture. While we wrestle with discerning how to express holiness in light of contemporary issues, let us never forget that non-conformity glows the brightest where the world is darkest.

According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue, (II Peter 1:3) the beauty of holiness.