

## THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE CREATION OF CULTURE

### WHAT ELEMENTS OF CULTURE CAN WE USE TO BUILD THE KINGDOM?

Melvin Lehman is an instructor and former administrator at Faith Builders. He teaches World History, the Gospel of John, and Life & Leadership for Men. This article is a summary of a larger work that has been adapted for this issue. Melvin continues to work on writing about the Kingdom of God and its practical effects in the life of individuals and the church.

By all appearances, the church has been seduced by the siren call of Western secularism. Why have so many Christians joined the world rather than rebuked it?

We could entertain many reasons. I will only highlight two. The first reason is the 20<sup>th</sup> century phenomena of seeing personal salvation apart from membership in the body of Christ. The second reason has been the separation of personal salvation from deeds done in the flesh. There has been failure to see the relationship between loving Jesus and doing works. This failure has paralyzed the Christian community's capacity to create Christian culture and has ended with a wholesale buy-in to the secular culture around us. The results have been catastrophic.

We must think deeply, clearly, and proactively about the connection between culture and godly living. We must be committed to the hard work of discipleship and culture building. In this short essay, I identify several core issues that are important to forming Christian culture. I call them value-builders. These are practices and habits that form loves and loyalties, which in their turn dictate life priorities and passions.

**KINGDOM BUILDERS  
UNDERSTAND  
THE CONNECTION  
BETWEEN TRADITION  
AND VALUES.**

#### Song

Music is queen among the arts. And music is a major shaper of culture. I am encouraged by the renaissance of interest in music, composition, and singing in many Anabaptist communities. Much of this, I think, is a result of the movement out of public schools toward Christian schools. It is important to push back against the seducing music of this world in our preaching and teaching. It is even more important that we promote excellent music that will capture the hearts of our young folks and endear the Kingdom to them. Good music, I insist, is an effective agent of culture-creation.

#### Story

Nothing gets to the heart of a matter like a story. Consider the story of Dirk Willems. You could explain the idea of suffering love in great detail and offer verse after verse that affirms it, but it will fly right over the head of a 10-year-old. Even some of us grandpas won't get it! But illustrate the concept with Willem's story and you give immediate clarity.

Among other things, the Bible itself is an extended story with a lot of commentary. Heroes directly shape our values and add to the power of story. Story produces heroes,

heroes produce values, values are at the base of passion, and passion impacts communities.

Why do so many passive Christians sit in our church pews? They have the wrong heroes because they are listening to the wrong stories. We do well to pay attention to the heroes of our sons and daughters.

#### Education

What cultural values do we reflect in our approach to education, and how are our forms of education shaping the next generation?

In my lifetime, tobacco use has declined noticeably. Americans eventually accepted the prohibition of smoking in public places, largely because of a massive initiative to educate and persuade the public that this would be a good thing. Such power ought to concern us. Why? Consider the massive initiative, under the guise of tolerance, that is currently underway to push Americans toward accepting all manner of sinful behavior. Public education is one arm of this initiative.

But the power of education should also encourage us. When parents and churches take up the responsibility of education, this powerful culture-

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### COLLEGE STUDENT WEEKEND | JULY 6-8

19 openings remain.  
Register at [www.fbep.org/cssr](http://www.fbep.org/cssr).

### TEACHERS WEEK | JULY 31- AUGUST 3

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### TWO-YEAR STUDIES BEGIN | AUGUST 20

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### TEACHERS CONFERENCE | OCTOBER 12-14

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### WINTER TERM | DEC. 31- FEB. 1, 2019

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shaping tool is in their hands. Being an educator myself, I have seen how powerful this tool is. I have also explored its limitations. I was a young teenager when there was a stirring in the 1960s and early 70s that led to the creation of many Christian schools. That movement is now 40-50 years old. These schools have accomplished their first mission of removing our children from the social and philosophical pressures of the public school. But now, the real work of culture-building begins.

### Boundaries

Boundaries define culture. It could seem that boundaries reinforce cultural conduct that occurs just because, "that's the way we have always done it." Sometimes these boundaries seem to have little rhyme or reason. But, there's a deeper meaning to boundaries. Why? They work behind the scenes to carry forward the values of a culture in ways that are not immediately apparent.

For example, the term modesty is practically meaningless today because very few church leaders are bold enough to set boundaries. The result? In the final state of things, everyone thinks they are modest because there is no

consistent standard to challenge their assumption. When people are free to think without definition, their thinking cannot be challenged. A culture without boundaries is a back-slapping society stripped of its capacity to build Kingdom culture.

### Tradition

Tradition often gets a bad rap. But I have come to see tradition quite positively. Few things, humanly speaking, have a more powerful effect on us. We are all carried along in a gigantic river of tradition. Many times, this tradition serves us well.

Traditions, properly held, embody our deepest values. We should be careful not to confuse values with morals. When asked why we hold a certain tradition, it is a mistake to defend the tradition on the basis of ethical commands alone. It is more effective to talk about the value associated with a tradition than to try building a water-tight ethical or moral imperative. When a tradition seems stale and outdated, it is often because someone has lost or forgotten the value(s) carried by that tradition.

## SUMMER TERM

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## CLASSES OFFERED IN 2018

Foundations of Education .....	Steven Brubaker
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Research Skills for Teachers .....	John Mark Kuhns
Teaching Science .....	John Mark Kuhns
Teaching Secondary Math .....	John Mark Kuhns
Beginning Choral Conducting .....	Brandon Mullet
Choir .....	Brandon Mullet
Class Voice .....	Brandon Mullet
Music Fundamentals .....	Brandon Mullet
Growing Into a Godly Woman .....	Marie Mullet
Anabaptist History .....	Stephen Russell
Plato's <i>Republic</i> .....	Stephen Russell
Art Appreciation .....	Jonas Sauder
Child Development .....	Jonas Sauder
The Life of the Teacher .....	Jonas Sauder
Teaching Language Arts .....	Sharon Yoder

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**Kitchen** | Food preparation and service

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### APPLICATION AVAILABLE

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It is unwise to rashly discard traditions that have a long cultural history and are deeply embedded in the culture's moorings. Deep-running roots are often inextricably entangled with other roots. My heart has turned from discarding traditions toward creating them. I want to create traditions that will expand our capacity to serve in the Kingdom of God. What values are non-negotiable? What traditions do we have or what traditions are we creating that will carry those values forward?

Kingdom builders understand the connection between tradition and values. They are not afraid to discard a tradition that works at cross-purposes with Kingdom values. Neither are they afraid to embrace and even create strong traditions that build Kingdom culture.

### Habits of Life

Life habits are what a person or family actually does in their daily routines. One attitude that has been counter-productive to culture-forming is the attitude that habits make one dull and boring and that the really cool people are always trying something new. While I can understand this, I also know the power of repetition. One young man

recently wrote this birthday note to his father: "When my world seems like it is falling apart, I think of you. Your strength and stability is deeper than words can describe." This particular dad is a man of habit.

Never under-emphasize the power of accumulated habits in the formation of culture. If our habits change, our culture will change.

### Conclusion

A huge part of Kingdom business involves everyday affairs. Those everyday affairs must align our lives with Kingdom principles. Over time, as such an alignment occurs in a group of believers, we create a culture. If that culture aligns with Kingdom principles, it will surely be counter-cultural to its core.



# COLLEGE STUDENT WEEKEND

JULY 6-8

College Student Weekend encourages and equips Anabaptists who are attending college or university. It is an opportunity for college students to discuss college experiences that contrast with their Anabaptist heritage and values.

Each participant is assigned to a small group of peers and two mentors. This group meets multiple times, offering support, guidance, and prayer for each other.

The weekend features plenary presentations by speakers who have navigated the world of higher education and remained committed to faith in Christ and to belonging to an Anabaptist congregation. In addition, breakout sessions offer content devoted to the development of a Christian mind.

## SPEAKERS & TOPICS IN 2018

To Vaccinate or not to Vaccinate.....	Rosanne Bauman
Truth, Beauty, and Goodness.....	Steven Brubaker
Navigating Psychology as an Anabaptist....	John Coblentz
The Place of Faith in an Academic Setting ..	John Coblentz
Ethical Issues in Science .....	John Mark Kuhns
Can Christians Think?.....	Jonas Sauder
Gaining Wisdom or Technique? .....	Jonas Sauder
The Christian and Politics .....	Stephen Russell
Living Out our Faith in Our Profession .....	Wes Schrock
The Great Physician, Our Example .....	Wes Schrock

## RENOVATION UPDATE

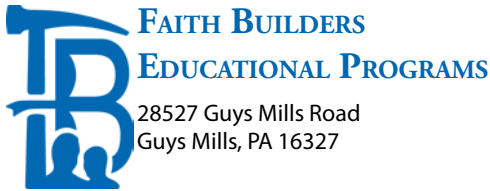
We are grateful for funds to renovate the center section. Renovations include an elevator to the chapel and new space for a reception area, conference room, and staff offices. We hope to complete the project by fall of 2018.



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**FAITH BUILDERS NEWSLETTER** The Faith Builders newsletter is published quarterly and serves to inform, inspire, and equip its readers. Subscription is free upon request.

*I came to FB anticipating academic growth. What I had not realized was that academics are only a springboard from which each student is launched toward deep personal growth. Through interaction with Godly staff and classmates, I am presented with daily opportunities to grow in ways I had not dreamed possible. In the future, I hope to inspire those I interact with to be committed to Jesus with a life created to be given away. Jason Johnson, Teacher Apprentice*



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