

MENNONITE NONCONFORMITY

A Thesis Presented to  
the Faculty of  
the School of Religion  
of the University of Mobile  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
of Masters of Arts

by

Reuben Sairs

172-48-4649

December 1997

## CONTENTS

### Chapter

1.	INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
	Introduction: What is Meant by Nonconformity	1
	Review of the Literature . . . . .	6
	Statement of the Problem . . . . .	12
	Methodology . . . . .	17
	General Organization . . . . .	21
	Concluding Remarks . . . . .	23
2.	NONCONFORMITY IN THE OUTLAWED PERIOD . . . . .	24
	Introduction: The Outlawed Period Defined . .	24
	Nonconformity in the Earliest Mennonite Churches . . . . .	24
	Conflicts Over Nonconformity . . . . .	33
	Nonconformity and Seventeenth-Century Confessions of Faith . . . . .	35
	Conclusion: What Can be Learned from the Outlawed Period? . . . . .	36
3.	NONCONFORMITY IN THE MIDDLE PERIOD . . . . .	37
	Introduction: Persecution Led to Emigration .	37
	Problems in the Middle Period . . . . .	39
	Teaching on Nonconformity in the Middle Period	42
	Conclusion: A Doctrine in Distress . . . . .	55
4.	NONCONFORMITY IN THE LIBERAL PERIOD	
	Introduction: The Beginning of the End of Nonconformity . . . . .	56
	Transitional Teachers . . . . .	57
	J. C. Wenger and the Apex of Teaching on Nonconformity . . . . .	62
	Final Teachers of Nonconformity . . . . .	66

The Doctrine Declared Lost . . . . .	70
The Lancaster Conference Nonconformity Committee . . . . .	80
Nonconformity Committee Tracts . . . . .	91
5. CONCLUSION . . . . .	97
Introduction . . . . .	97
Observations . . . . .	98
Suggestions for the Mennonite Church . . . . .	104
Conclusion . . . . .	107
APPENDIX ONE: NONCONFORMITY AS A BIBLICAL IDEA . . . . .	110
Nonconformity in the Old Testament . . . . .	110
Nonconformity in the New Testament . . . . .	119
APPENDIX TWO: NONCONFORMITY IN THE LARGER CHURCH . . . . .	124
ENDNOTES . . . . .	132
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	147

## CHAPTER ONE:

### INTRODUCTION

#### Introduction: What is Meant by Nonconformity

How does a Christian live in the world without becoming stained or entangled in the world's sin? Jesus called his people "strangers" in this world in John 17:15.<sup>1</sup> At the same time he prayed for his followers not to be taken "out of the world" but rather to be "kept from the evil one." A young Christian who has learned that now he or she is "in the world, but not of the world" is faced with choices daily. Among Christians, there is a range of opinion on major moral issues such as sexuality and marriage, and these matters often are scrutinized and debated. There remains yet a host of issues that are considered minor or personal and not subject to church-wide discussion. Are these to be considered only personal issues? Will an individual Christian's intuition be an adequate guide?

Consider some typical questions. May a Christian dance or drink socially? There is no Bible verse that says a Christian should not smoke marijuana, so why not indulge? May Christian sons and daughters date after the manner of the secular Western world? Should a Christian go to the cinema? If so, is R-rated entertainment appropriate? How

about PG-13? May a believer aspire to greatness in competitive sports or the entertainment industry? How should a Christian man or woman dress? May a young Christian girl or boy pierce his or her ear? How about doing it ten times? How about piercing the eyebrows or navel? Can he or she go to a restaurant on Sunday? Does it make a difference if they serve alcohol in the restaurant? Suppose it is a Greek restaurant with nightly entertainment by a belly dancer? In many congregations the only guidance young Christians receive on such matters is to be told to read their Bibles and follow their own consciences. After all, would not firm rules on these kinds of "secondary" issues constitute legalism? Is it not the common practice of most modern evangelical congregations to draw up a short list of essentials and a long list of personal options?

An individual is prone to rationalization in those areas in which he or she is weakest. The same might be said for groups or generations of Christians, but group discernment and agreement in support of specific conduct could be a powerful aid to the believer. At the very least group discernment could raise the individual's awareness of personal weaknesses.

This thesis examines one group of believers, Mennonites, on these kinds of issues. The subject may be called "The Doctrine of Nonconformity." Other Christians might refer to it as separation from the world. The Mennonite

faith has a history of "defined" nonconformity as opposed to "indefinite" nonconformity. These terms and the distinction they represent are essential to this thesis. Defined nonconformity is stated, explicit, codified nonconformity in any number of areas. In other words, the church together decides what is to be considered worldly or acceptable. Indefinite nonconformity is that which happens perhaps unconsciously and individually. Rather than the congregation examining the issues and attempting to arrive at a consensus, the individual decides for himself or herself, and at best the congregation offers general principles to help guide them. This thesis attempts to track the doctrine of nonconformity through Mennonite history, especially as it leads up to its status in the Mennonite Church at this time. The anticipated finding is that the doctrine for the most part is lost in the Mennonite churches under consideration. Defined nonconformity is no longer evident, nor is the general concern with worldliness.

Mennonite church history is complex. There are well over twenty Mennonite denominations, and many of the smaller churches owe their existence to varying interpretations of nonconformity. Moreover, differences existed between the original Swiss and Dutch Anabaptists who came together to create the Mennonite church in the first place. As the movement spread, especially to Russia and North America, the groups continued to diversify.

In the mid-nineteenth century the General Conference Mennonite Church developed out of a reaction to defined nonconformity in the Mennonite Church.<sup>2</sup> In Wichita, Kansas, in 1995, the Mennonite Church (now the largest Mennonite denomination) and the General Conference Mennonite Church voted to merge at an unspecified time in the future.<sup>3</sup> The proposed merger clearly shows the breakdown of the doctrine in the larger and older body. By the late twentieth century, the two groups had nothing left about which to disagree. Even so, where the residual influence of earlier nonconformity is strongest, the proposed merger might touch off a few misunderstandings, and even open up some of the old discussion again. As interesting as that might become, this thesis deals with the Mennonite Church, the largest of the Mennonite denominations.<sup>4</sup>

Some additional terms might be confusing with regard to the issue at hand. Separation and nonconformity are overlapping, but not synonymous, terms. Separation is the more general term, and has other associations. Separation may or may not lead to nonconformity. Since separation is the more common word outside Mennonite circles, it is important to note the difference. The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology offers the following definition of separation.

What one does and thinks with respect to certain wrong and evil matters may be termed primary separation. There is also the question of whether one should separate oneself from others who are not consistently Christian. This is then secondary separation.<sup>5</sup>

In an article in the Fundamentalist Journal, Del Fehsenfeld argued that true Biblical separation must be internal and external in the life of the believer.

It is not difficult to distinguish between man-made separation and biblical separation. The results are entirely different. Man-made separation is based on the traditions of men. It tends to exalt either external separation or internal, heart separation, to the exclusion of the other.<sup>6</sup>

In this thesis, separation will be used as a more general term, mainly associated with internal matters. Once the issues become what Fehsenfeld called external, they will be referred to most often as nonconformity.

Nonconformity as commonly understood in Mennonite circles will be similar to the following ideas taken from Article VI of the "Gospel Standard," a Mennonite document written by commission of the General Conference (Assembly) in 1939. Nonconformity is the

Scriptural admonition to the people of God, "Be not conformed to the world." This applies to daily life, to business methods, to amusements, to dress, to speech, to everything in which the standards of the world are in conflict with the standards of the Gospel.<sup>7</sup>

Although it appears the definitions changed over a period of time, the interest in nonconformity is inseparable from historical Mennonitism.

Despite the role of nonconformity in its past, however, the Mennonite Church has been almost completely silent on the subject for most of the latter half of the twentieth century. Her teachers do not teach about it, and her preachers do not concern themselves with it.<sup>8</sup> This silence

has led to an awkward predicament in which the church does not know how to relate to a large portion of her own history. Part of the problem may be stated in two questions which will be taken up again in the conclusion. First, can the Mennonite Church jettison defined nonconformity without at the same time throwing out nonconformity altogether? Second, can the Mennonite Church survive as a Mennonite church without having nonconformity as a doctrinal emphasis?

#### Review of the Literature

This thesis briefly surveys Mennonite writing on nonconformity from 1525 to the present. The more significant works are introduced in this section. The last major comprehensive work on nonconformity was the book Separated Unto God by J. C. Wenger.<sup>9</sup> This book, commissioned by the General Conference (Assembly) of the Mennonite Church and first published in 1951, summarized teaching up to that time, and is thus a necessary starting place for the study. There are few other modern books dedicated to the issue of nonconformity among Mennonites, and none from the Mennonite Church. Several books by non-Mennonites or related groups, however, lent useful perspective.

The thesis retraces the doctrine through the work of selected influential writers, confessions of faith, and official denominational statements which generally were published by the biennial General Assembly. Although scholarly writing was considered, the thesis does not emphasize a

"scholar's-eye view" of the issue. The doctrine of nonconformity was the concern of the rank and file, and was by no means an ivory tower issue among Mennonites.

Several general histories of the Mennonite church were especially important. Glimpses of Mennonite History and Doctrine by J. C. Wenger, Introduction to Mennonite History by Cornelius Dyck, and the short studies by C. Henry Smith and Harold Bender in the book Mennonites and Their Heritage provided the broader background needed to understand Mennonite nonconformity.<sup>10</sup>

The Complete Writings of Menno Simons, the "Schleitheim Confession" and other confessions reprinted in the Martyr's Mirror were essential for understanding the early Mennonites.<sup>11</sup> Also important in investigating the early period were general works on Anabaptism, such as George William's Radical Reformation and Franklin Littel's Origins of Sectarian Protestantism.<sup>12</sup>

Nonconformity in the middle period could be traced in part through Burkholder's Useful and Edifying Address to the Young on True Repentance.<sup>13</sup> Toward the end of the middle period more scholarly writing concerning nonconformity appeared. None of these writers were in dialogue, and they were not always in agreement. The Doctrines of the Bible edited by Daniel Kauffman and John Horsch's The Mennonite Church and Modernism were both essential to understanding the middle period.<sup>14</sup> The confessions and resolutions of the

General Conference (Assembly) declared official Mennonite Church positions in no uncertain terms, e.g. "The Gospel Standard."<sup>15</sup> C. Henry Smith's "Mennonites and Culture," Edward Yoder's "The Need for Nonconformity Today," and Karl Baehr's "Secularization Among Mennonites of Elkhart County" all proved to be revealing concerning strains in the doctrine in the late middle period.<sup>16</sup> Edward Yoder, in particular, appeared to have a great deal of insight into the problems of nonconformity in his time.

In the early liberal period, John Mumaw's "Current Forces Adversely Affecting the Life of the Mennonite Community" took a pessimistic view of the future of nonconformity.<sup>17</sup> Paul Mininger's "Limitations of Nonconformity" was both insightful and devastating in its appraisal of the doctrine.<sup>18</sup>

Several articles touching on nonconformity by laymen appeared in the denominational paper the Gospel Herald. Mary Ebersole's article revealed how extreme some Mennonites were in their pursuit of nonconformity in the late middle period.<sup>19</sup> In the liberal period, articles by Amos Weaver, Merle Good and Levi Miller all expressed opinions about nonconformity in practical terms.<sup>20</sup>

Several scholarly articles challenged the value of nonconformity in the past and proposed fairly radical new models. Marlene Epp's "Carrying the Banner of Nonconformity" made a feminist critique of nonconformity, which was

supported by the historian Leonard Gross in a response.<sup>21</sup> Gerald Schlabach's "Beyond Two-/vs One Kingdom Theology: Abrahamic Community as a Mennonite Paradigm for Christian Engagement in Society" sought to scuttle traditional understanding and embrace a new paradigm.<sup>22</sup> J. Daniel Hess's "Toward a Hermeneutics of Popular Culture" challenged Mennonite understanding of nonconformity, but still proposed a reading of culture that would be necessary to understand nonconformity.<sup>23</sup>

Newer histories of Anabaptism, such as J. Denny Weaver's Becoming Anabaptist and Richard K. MacMaster's Land, Piety, Peoplehood, demonstrated how some Mennonites now look back on the Mennonite church and try to understand it.<sup>24</sup>

The Mennonite Church consists of conferences, each of which has its own identity. Lancaster Conference is the largest conference, and is undoubtedly more conservative than most. Until the early 1970s the Lancaster Conference had a standing Nonconformity Committee which answered to its Bishop Board (Lancaster Conference maintains what is in part an episcopal church polity). This thesis tracks the minutes of the Nonconformity Committee.<sup>25</sup> The Committee dissolved about the time that a major conservative split occurred in the Lancaster Conference. A few of the later members of the Committee became leaders in the Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church. It is apparent that much of the energy to

maintain a doctrine of defined nonconformity went with the more conservative body. These minutes were located in the Lancaster Conference Historical Society Library in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, which graciously supplied photocopies. They also provided numerous tracts published or sponsored by that Committee. A review of the tracts is very informative about defined nonconformity in the Lancaster Conference.

The other necessary books and papers were acquired from church libraries in the Northwest Florida-Southwest Alabama District of the Lancaster Conference and through Inter-Library Loan programs at the University of Mobile and Mobile Public Library. Articles from The Mennonite Quarterly Review and the Conrad Grebel Review, scholarly Mennonite journals, were acquired through Inter-Library Loan, as were other religion journal articles.

The thesis followed a roughly chronological approach to the subject with special attention given to those areas and times of change in the doctrine. Since so little has been written about the subject for over forty years, a survey of contemporary writing was not difficult. A search through the Comprehensive Dissertation Index from 1973-1992 for theses written on this subject yielded no pertinent finds. An on-line search for dissertations conducted through Mobile Public Library found a Ph.D. dissertation written in anthropology in 1983. "Motivational Bases for Conformity to

Religious Norms" by Dan William Forsyth was interesting and gave an outsider's view of the church, but was of limited relevance to the matter at hand.<sup>26</sup> A DIALOG search conducted by University of Mobile librarians found three journal articles and responses that were somewhat pertinent to the study, but none of which took up the matter from a purely theological viewpoint. An ATLA disk search turned up only four articles from two different journals, one not Mennonite, that were also of some use in research. A few promising articles were located in the Religion abstracts in the University of Mobile Bedsole Library.

Many books and articles were consulted or read only to find that they did not deal directly with the subject. This hidden quality to the doctrine of nonconformity made research quite a challenge. Even early Mennonite writers like Menno himself, his fellow bishop Dirck Philips, or the South German leader Pilgram Marpeck did not write about nonconformity except as the direct result of Christian morality and participation in the true church.<sup>27</sup> That said, they of course had a keen awareness of their separateness and nonconformity. The Mennonite church of their day was sufficiently nonconformed and her energy taken up by being a free church, exercising church discipline, practicing believer's baptism and attempting to restore New Testament church order to the church. It might be fair to say that they had bigger

issues with which to cope than later generations did when they dealt with this issue.

#### Statement of the Problem

Mennonite scholars agree that the doctrine of nonconformity has had an unusual intensity in the Mennonite Church.<sup>28</sup> There existed a vibrant consensus through most of Mennonite history that the church should define standard Christian practice and enforce it through church discipline. In North America during the period following World War II, however, the doctrine ceased to be a living aspect of the Mennonite Church. The ossification of this doctrine led to a situation in which teachers and those with doctrinal authority in the church for the most part quit attempting to engage (or disengage, as the case may be) the modern world with a fresh and reviewed doctrine of nonconformity. The best they were able to do was to clamor to preserve the forms of nonconformity adopted by previous generations.

Recent history documents the failure of the Mennonite Church to preserve the doctrine. There have been numerous church splits, with the departing bodies leaving to cling to the old forms of nonconformity. For example, from the Mennonite Church have developed several more conservative bodies: the Mennonite Bible Fellowship (1967), the Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Conference (1968), the International Bible Fellowship Conference (1971), the Southeastern Mennonite Conference (1972), the Conservative Mennonite Churches

of York and Adams Counties, PA (1975), and the Conservative Mennonite Conference, which previously had fraternal ties with the Mennonite Church, but dropped them in 1996.<sup>29</sup> Many more conservative congregations have split from the church but remained independent. The Mennonite Yearbook and Directory 1994 listed 137 independent churches.<sup>30</sup> Many of these would be conservative congregations that pulled away from their parent conferences. The main body has suffered a gradual erosion of the practices of nonconformity, and then in recent years usually has given up the doctrine altogether.

The problem with a stagnant approach to nonconformity is obvious. The world changes. What about new things? What about things that did not enter anyone's mind fifty years ago: the Beatles, MTV or the Internet, for example? Likewise, should some old understandings be discarded or modified in light of new data? The Amish demonstrate that it is possible to lock the church into rigidly defined nonconformity and resist new things because they are new. How does a modern believer escape this trap?

Although this thesis treats one specific group of Christians, the issue is desperately relevant to all followers of Jesus Christ. Nonconformity is the solution to the problem of worldliness. Hopefully others can learn from the Mennonite Church's experience with defined nonconformity, especially its struggles with the hermeneutics that guided

it. The Bible may not speak explicitly to issues that Christians face in the modern world, such as marijuana use, dating, or some questions related to attire. The Bible did not speak explicitly to every situation the first-century believer faced. On the other hand, the Bible did address questions related to head covering and hairstyles, attire, meat sold in marketplaces, jewelry and using lawsuits, all very practical matters. Do those prescriptions still apply?

Mennonites recognize that the Bible grants a realm of personal authority to the believer. They consider Romans 14:5, for instance, to allow room for personal scruples. The doctrine of nonconformity at its best was not an attempt to run a Christian totalitarian state, removing all prerogatives from individual believers. Correctly understood, nonconformity was the attempt to make direct application of Scriptures or scriptural principles to life, when appropriate and without becoming oppressive. Is it unreasonable to suggest that the Bible's injunction "to work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12) referred not only to major moral issues like murder or adultery, but also to the practical details of everyday life? Mennonites conceived it to be part of the church's work to attempt to arrive at a consensus on Christian practice, including many areas addressed only in principle. Mennonites attempted to meet such issues squarely. Most congregations deal with

these matters on some level, but often without clear methods or open analysis of the issues at hand.

Many congregations, Mennonite or otherwise, have unwritten rules which, if violated, would cause a person to be held in some suspicion. Many evangelical congregations have never issued rules against smoking, social drinking or gambling, for example. Yet indulging in those behaviors violates certain unwritten rules and occasions concern among the congregation. Is there an advantage to this kind of discipling by unstated process, rather than by addressing such issues as part of an open and explicit doctrine? Has the modern Bible-believing church been so successful in resisting the world's sinful attractions that there is no need to consider adjustment? Has the fear of a stultifying legalism led to a cul-de-sac where leaders may not define anything as spiritually dangerous? When can a congregation legislate or even advise normative practice? If the answer to this last question is never, is the church in a similar situation to that found in the time of the Judges when "every man did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6)? What happens when generations do not agree? When one generation will not dance or drink socially by unspoken consensus, it might find itself sharing the church with a new generation that both dances and drinks and cannot understand why the older generation disapproves.

Historically, as the Mennonite church attempted to define and regulate Christian practice in detail, it almost could go without saying that it was an imperfect endeavor. The church experienced its own turmoil when Mennonites could not agree over the details of defined nonconformity. Churches experienced tension and divided over little issues. This thesis will show that some of the conflict bordered on the ludicrous. These tensions developed early and have continued to this day. A Mennonite historian from a previous generation summarized the situation this way: "Among the new ventures that became sources of controversy were the use of English language in worship, Sunday School, prayer meetings, evening meetings, the mission enterprise, new and changing styles of dress, the use of new inventions and a more liberal affiliation with the non-Mennonite social and religious world."<sup>31</sup> Well-documented examples abound in Mennonite history that details mattered to most Mennonites.

Details mattered because Mennonites did not distinguish between essential and unessential beliefs, at least in the Mennonite Church. In other words, issues that may seem secondary to other believers mattered deeply to these Mennonites. They could not find a short list of essentials in the Scriptures, but sought the "all things" referred to in Matthew 28:20.<sup>32</sup> Mennonites attempted to be the church of "all things," and considered it irresponsible for Christians not to try to be "like-minded" as Paul demanded in 2 Corin-

thians 13:11. Such a quest can be prone to self-righteousness and stubbornness.

### Methodology

This thesis is based on historical research into the theology and practice of Mennonites. The investigation followed Mennonites through three major divisions of history with a special emphasis on the Mennonite Church since 1945.

Mennonite history can be seen from many angles. There was a long period in which there were few or no scholarly histories of the Mennonites by Mennonites.<sup>33</sup> Critics told the story. Later, especially in the twentieth century, a group of Mennonite historians arose. Seeking to distinguish a lineage within the Anabaptist Movement that excluded the fanatical element associated with the Peasant Revolt and the Munster debacle, they traced direct lines to Conrad Grebel and company in Zurich, and the Philips brothers and Menno Simons in Holland. It is generally agreed that Mennonites recently have passed through a time of revision in which the polygenesis and diversity of the movement has been emphasized over the clear lines earlier scholars like H. S. Bender, J. C. Wenger and John Horsch tried to establish.<sup>34</sup> This thesis accepts the more traditional lines of historical and doctrinal development as tenable. Undoubtedly many people and small movements were labeled Anabaptist in the sixteenth century, but there is an obvious continuity from the Swiss Brethren in the south and the peaceful Obbenites

in Holland. Literally dozens of denominations find their roots in the early Mennonite church. Some of these no longer bear the name Mennonite.

This research also involved the attempt to understand Mennonite hermeneutics with regard to nonconformity. This latter dimension of the research proved to be critical with regard to both understanding the situation and proposing a way out of the Church's current dilemma

The hermeneutical issue may be stated as a question. To what extent has nonconformity among Mennonites been a result of obedience to specific New Testament directives as opposed to a more general application of New Testament principles? Unquestionably it has been their effort at following Christ's words literally that has made Mennonites a distinctive presence in their host societies. Although the specific practices have not been static, New Testament nonconformity as practiced by Mennonites was categorized three ways. First, some of the practices that caused them to be nonconformed to continental European culture in the sixteenth century are no longer distinctive. On this list would be included believer's baptism, separation from the state and insistence on a free church, and their effort to organize the church along New Testament lines. This last item is especially important since it includes the pattern of church discipline found in Matthew 18:15-18 and evangelism as found in the Great Commission: "The Anabaptists

maintained that the New Testament was clear both as to the content of the Christian faith and the organizational procedures in the true Christian Community."<sup>35</sup>

The second category is the list of scriptural directives taken literally. On this list are included nonresistance (Matthew 5:43-46), not swearing oaths (James 5:12), simplicity and modesty in attire (1 Timothy 2:9), prayer veiling for women (1 Corinthians 11:10), foot washing as part of communion (John 13:14-15), greeting with a holy kiss (1 Corinthians 16:20), and prohibition on membership in secret societies (2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

The third category includes those practices which grew out of attempts to find applications for Biblical principles, but which are nonetheless human interpretations. On this list are included abstinence from alcohol based on passages such as 1 Corinthians 9:25; prohibitions on worldly amusements, from farm shows to television, based on passages like 1 Timothy 5:6; absolute prohibitions on jewelry and cosmetics based on 1 Peter 3:3-4; absolute prohibition on political activity, including voting, based on Hebrews 11:10,13; unified practice with regard to dress or decoration based on Philippians 2:2; prohibition on all social dancing based on 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; and prohibition on higher education based on 1 Corinthians 2:13. Much of this third category has included issues related to entertainment and dress. Mennonites have variously proscribed card-play-

ing, billiards, mixed bathing, and competitive and professional sports based on principle.<sup>36</sup>

It is too easy to mock the third category as legalism. The fact is all Christians have a third category. Conscientious Christians will inevitably look for specific practices based on principles found in the New Testament. For example, the New Testament is silent on arson and the use of psychedelic drugs, but most Christians would agree that arson and consuming LSD are grave violations of New Testament principles. The question that has plagued Mennonite history is how to address the issues directly without falling into legalism. This thesis will show that it is impossible to hold people to a list of restrictions, developed on principle alone, that they do not consider valid. What is perfectly obvious and sound application to one Christian, may not be so obvious and sound to another. Even among the early Anabaptists division occurred over this dilemma: "The Hutterites criticized their Anabaptist confreres, the Swiss Brethren, because they mixed with the world and made no Christian distinctions regarding war taxes, woodwork on images, and 'close practice' in commerce."<sup>37</sup> In turn, the Polish Brethren criticized the Dutch Mennonites for worldliness in attire, for painting images, and having vases.<sup>38</sup> In the chapters on Mennonites it will be shown that Mennonite history is crowded with

disagreements over what constitutes a solid Christian life and church based on the New Testament.

In summary, the principle elements of nonconformity in the New Testament are not controversial. They are shared with some little variation among most Bible-believing Christians. The first category examined is the common property of a significant number of Christians, principally the Baptists. The controversial aspects of nonconformity are found in the second category of literal interpretations, but the third list accounts for the most uproar in Mennonite history.

#### General Organization

Chapter One of this thesis is divided into six parts. The first section attempts to introduce the subject of nonconformity, particularly as it pertains to questions facing the modern Christian. The second section indicates what literature was available for review. The third section states the problem, which is that the Mennonite Church has ceased to deal with one of its own principal doctrines. The fourth section deals with methodology. This section is essential to this thesis for three reasons. First, it indicates that it is research into the history of a doctrine. Second, it indicates the approach to Mennonite history used in this thesis. Third, it lays out the hermeneutical dimensions of the doctrine by dividing Mennonite nonconformity into three parts. Section five, General Organization,

briefly summarizes each chapter. Finally, section six provides concluding remarks to Chapter One.

Chapters Two, Three and Four break Mennonite history into three broad categories in order to understand nonconformity. The first period (Chapter Two) is called the "Outlawed Period" and covers the period from 1525 to the various times of emigration to the New World. The second period (Chapter Three) is called the "Middle Period" and covers all times and places in the New World up until the end of World War Two. The third period (Chapter Four) is the "Liberal Period," and covers the period from roughly 1945 to the present day. Chapter Four examines the Lancaster Conference and their Nonconformity Committee in depth. Some of the last major battles over nonconformity happened in the Lancaster Conference and the Nonconformity Committee documented some of those struggles in their minutes and tracts.

Chapter Five serves as the conclusion to the thesis with observations and suggestions for the Mennonite Church. In short, it is suggested that defined nonconformity is unnecessarily divisive and destructive. On the other hand, defense of biblicism is very important if the Mennonite Church wants to maintain continuity with its own past.

Three appendices are attached to the thesis. Though determined not to be germane to the issue of nonconformity within the Mennonite Church, these three appendices could

help a reader place the issue in the larger contexts of the Bible and church history.

#### Concluding Remarks

As a final introductory comment, in the last thirty years numerous studies have attempted to understand Mennonite nonconformity in sociological terms. These investigators have looked at a group of mostly rural Dutch and Swiss immigrants, and traced their assimilation into mainstream North American culture. Often these writers emphasized the processes of urbanization, education, movement away from farming and into the professions, and historical events like the World Wars, but they de-emphasized doctrine. Their deterministic approach is in some measure antithetical to Biblical Theology, because they indicate that consciously-held beliefs are of secondary importance. For them doctrine is shaped mostly by forces other than conscious and objective decision-making. This thesis assumes that the genuine drive toward or away from nonconformity is rooted in consciously held beliefs. This is an investigation in theology, not in sociology.

## CHAPTER TWO

### NONCONFORMITY IN THE OUTLAWED PERIOD

#### Introduction: The Outlawed Period Defined

The first period in Mennonite history might be called the Outlawed Period. From 1525 to the varying times of emigration to the New World or to Russia, some degree of illegality and persecution shaped the church. It is true that the Dutch Mennonites gained tolerance and even affluence before their Swiss and South German counterparts, but they, too, had been persecuted brutally. Some petty harassment lasted through the eighteenth century. Their story, however, really pertains more to other Mennonite denominations.<sup>39</sup>

#### Nonconformity in the Earliest Mennonite Churches

To understand the doctrine of nonconformity, a brief summary of Mennonite history is essential. The Mennonite Church finds its roots primarily in the Swiss and South German branch of the Anabaptist movement. The Anabaptist movement might be traced to 21 January 1525 when Conrad Grebel baptized Georg Blaurock.<sup>40</sup> Of course, a long series of events and evolving theology led up to this act, but it serves as a useful starting place. Some ten years later, Menno Simons, a Catholic priest, began to consolidate the

theologically analogous movement in the Netherlands.<sup>41</sup> The northern and southern wings of the Anabaptist movement found solidarity for the first time at a conference in Strasburg in 1555.<sup>42</sup> Although there are enduring historical differences between the northern and southern Mennonites, certain principles characterize them as a movement distinct from Catholicism, Lutheranism and the Reformed tradition. Among these principles are believer's baptism, separation of church and state, and nonresistance. Of course, historians continue to debate the relative rank of each element. For this thesis it is important to establish that nonconformity as an explicitly stated doctrine was one of these defining characteristics of the movement.

In the modern period, Mennonite writers have tended to downplay the doctrine of nonconformity as an incidental or expendable dimension of the Anabaptist Movement. This thesis argues that the doctrine of nonconformity is a linchpin in understanding Mennonite theology and history. It is hard to overstate the power and influence of it in Mennonite history and theology.

The problems related to the practice of nonconformity have caused much trouble in Mennonite history and have been major factors in schisms, particularly in Holland and the United States. It is notable that practically never has any significant Mennonite schism occurred over doctrinal questions. It was more often questions of discipline, particularly in relation to nonconformity, that led to breaks in personal and group relations.<sup>43</sup>

In his short work "Mennonite Origins and the Mennonites of Europe," H. S. Bender called nonconformity one of the foundation stones.<sup>44</sup> He went on to quote both Menno and the Swiss Brethren.

On this principle of separation Menno Simons says: "the whole evangelical scriptures teach that Christ's church was and must be a people separated from the world in doctrine, life and worship." In the great debate of 1528 at Zofingen spokesmen of the Swiss Brethren said: "the true church is separated from the world and is conformed to the nature of Christ. If the church is yet at one with the world, we cannot recognize it as the church."<sup>45</sup>

Starting with the fateful meeting on 21 January 1525 the Anabaptist movement in both southern and northern Europe saw separation from the world as an inextricable dimension to being a Christian in the true church. Franklin Littel wrote: "In spite of differences of degree, however, separation from the world was a dominant theme in all wings of Anabaptism."<sup>46</sup>

The Schleithem Confession was adopted by the Swiss Brethren at a conference held in Schleithem on 24 February 1527. It is widely assumed that Michael Sattler was the author.<sup>47</sup>

This Confession was written not to serve as a complete handbook of doctrine, but rather to set forth seven articles upon which the Swiss Brethren agreed. These articles cover believer's baptism, the ban (church discipline), communion, separation, pastors in the church, refusal to take up the sword, and lastly, the refusal to swear oaths. It is the

earliest known Mennonite confession of faith.<sup>48</sup> At this time, the new movement had tasted bitter persecution. For example an early leader, Felix Manz, was drowned in the Limmat River on 5 January 1527. Sattler was burned at the stake in May of that same year. Cornelius Dyck claimed the Schleithem Confession defined and saved the movement at a dire hour.<sup>49</sup>

Article Four of the Confession dealt with separation, by which the Swiss Brethren meant separated both from the nominally Christian world around them and from the state churches which they regarded as apostate. The complete article is too lengthy to reproduce here, but the heart of it follows.

A separation shall be made from the evil and from the wickedness which the devil planted in the world. Since all who do not walk in obedience of faith, and have not united themselves with God so that they wish to do His will, are a great abomination before God, it is not possible for anything to grow or issue from them except abominable things. By this is meant all popish and antipopish works and church services, meetings and church attendance, drinking houses, civic affairs, the commitments made in unbelief and other things of that kind. From these things we shall be separated and have no part with them for they are nothing but an abomination and they are the cause of our being hated before Christ Jesus, Who has set us free from slavery of the flesh and fitted us for the service of God through the Spirit Whom he has given us.<sup>50</sup>

Separation from the world meant nonconformity on several levels. Swiss Brethren dropped out of both civic affairs and certain social activities such as going to drinking houses. They refused to participate in any activity in both the Roman Catholic Church and the reforming church. The

state-affiliated reformed church was referred to as antipopish in the Confession. This view of separation is admittedly radical. Yet it was the beginning of a free church movement in which individuals were free to join and submit to church discipline or remain on the outside. This freedom stood in great contrast to the state churches, whether Roman Catholic, Lutheran or Reformed. The Swiss Brethren sought to restore the biblical idea of voluntary commitment to Christ and thus to his church through baptism. This commitment is at the core of the idea of separation.

The root of the Anabaptist view of toleration lies in their principle of separation. The "Hutterian Chronicle" reporting on the beginning of the movement when Conrad Grebel, George Blaurock, and others rebaptized each other on January 21, 1525, concluded, "Therewith began the separation from the world and its evil works."<sup>51</sup>

The concept of nonconformity was part and parcel to the idea of separation from ungodliness in all its forms. That separation is effected when a believer accepts baptism and joins the kingdom of Christ. Separation seen this way is the foundational and unifying principle on which all Mennonite nonconformity grew in all its periods. J. C. Wenger wrote:

The question arises, was there for the Anabaptists one central interest around which all this Christian nonconformity revolved and to which it was related? The answer is, yes. The central concept for the Anabaptist was membership in the kingdom of Christ, the church, and obedience to his word.<sup>52</sup>

In the modern world in which separation of church and state has gone further than could have been imagined in the

sixteenth century, and mutually tolerant denominationalism is the order of the day, the Brethren's demand for separation from the antipopish (reformed) church might seem fanatic. Yet in those days the free church stood apart equally from Rome and from the Reformation in its understanding of the church. To the Anabaptists the Reformation simply had not gone far enough in this regard. E. H. Broadbent wrote:

While reviving the teaching of scripture as to individual salvation by faith in Jesus Christ and His perfect work, Luther did not go on to accept the New Testament teaching as to the churches, separate from the world, yet maintained in it as witnesses to the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ; he adopted the Roman Catholic system of parishes, with their clerical administration of a world considered Christianized.<sup>53</sup>

This radical concept of separation led to defined nonconformity in broader areas of life, but since the movement barely had time to catch its breath before savage persecution broke out, there was little time at first to be concerned with more subtle aspects of lifestyle.

In the first ten years over five thousand of the Swiss Brethren were executed in Switzerland and surrounding territories, particularly in Austria and Tyrol. Within the first five years, most of the early leaders died at the stake, under the headsman's ax, or by drowning.<sup>54</sup>

Simply stepping out of the established order and being rebaptized condemned many persons to death for their nonconformity. In the early days of the movement, nonconformity consisted of restoring specific biblical prescriptions: "The Brethren in Switzerland and those of Swiss extraction . . . thought of nonconformity in terms of avoiding the un-

scriptural practices of the state churches: baptizing infants, swearing oaths, participating in warfare, and the like."<sup>55</sup>

Persecution did not succeed in making the movement abandon its separatist approach to the Christian life and church. Very soon, and even during persecution, nonconformity was defined for broader areas of life. In his monumental book, The Radical Reformation, George Williams wrote about the period just twenty years after Schleithem: "The Strasburg discipline of 1568 two score years after the exploratory attempts at Schleithem shows us a community which has developed a settled social and group consciousness, and awareness of themselves as a distinctly different element in an unregenerate society, and a program for preserving their distinctiveness."<sup>56</sup>

That program in part involved defining the extent and nature of their nonconformity to the world. This program had evolved sufficiently to be thought of as tyrannical by Casper Schwenkfeld before his death in 1561. Schwenkfeld, a mystical reformer, who might be considered a friendly antagonist to the Mennonites, complained about the tendency to legalism. E. H. Broadbent summarized Schwenkfeld's view: "He complains also that tyranny was exercised over the consciences of the members, that there was legality as regards habits, dress and other outward things."<sup>57</sup> Broadbent took it upon himself to defend the Anabaptists against

Schwenkfeld's charges while conceding a part of the point. "From all which it may be safely gathered that among these people, as among any considerable body of men, even of Christians, there were failures, weaknesses and errors to be found, and that narrowness and legality complained of were limitations to which some of those called Anabaptists were always liable and against which the better men among them were constantly protesting."<sup>58</sup>

Menno Simons (1496-1561), perhaps the greatest leader among the Anabaptists and from whom the Mennonites draw their name, was no less an advocate of the separated church than the Swiss Brethren. Justo Gonzalez identified the separatist emphasis in Menno's teaching using some of Menno's own language. "The basic tenor of Menno's theology is one of separation from the world, whose `spirit,' doctrine, sacrament, worship, and conduct are quite diverse from Christ's Spirit, Word, Sacrament, worship and example, and are also nothing but a new Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon."<sup>59</sup>

Menno wrote extensively. His writing is almost totally free of specific prescriptions for nonconformity other than those ideas which come directly from Scripture. This lack of specific prescriptions was found in Dirck Philips and Pilgram Marpeck as well. The absence of rule-making might not be so surprising. One of the Mennonites' reoccurring complaints about Roman Catholicism was that it elevated human teaching to the level of Scripture using Scripture and

tradition as twin authorities.<sup>60</sup> Mennonites stood firmly with the Reformation with regard to the doctrine of *sola scriptura*.<sup>61</sup> Since the accretions of human tradition in the Roman Catholic Church were abhorrent to the Mennonites, it is clear that Mennonites would not soon elevate their own man-made rules to the stature of Scripture.

Menno's view of the church as a people separated from the world appeared regularly in his writing, and laid the groundwork for the prescriptions that soon appeared in the Anabaptist churches. In 1555 Menno wrote his Instructions on Discipline to the Church at Franeker. In it he instructed them, "Remember you are the Lord's people, separated from the world, and hated unto death."<sup>62</sup>

Dress is hardly the principal issue involved with nonconformity, but convictions regarding clothing restrictions are an indicator of the development of nonconformity in Menno's time. In True Christian Faith Menno blasted the fashions of his day without making specific prescriptions for a uniform attire. "Everyone has as much finery as he can afford, and sometimes more than that. One surpasses the other in this cursed folly, and they do not reflect that it is written Love not the World."<sup>63</sup>

Apparently the development of the doctrine of nonconformity was progressive, beginning with the principle of separation and proceeding to specific rules of conduct (defined nonconformity). As early as 1554 Dutch Mennonites

created a list of prohibitions.<sup>64</sup> Yet the doctrine did not progress to defined nonconformity all at once. As late as 1591 the Concept of Cologne, which was written to unify northern Mennonite practice, declined to define nonconformity in dress, stating, "It is not possible to prescribe to each individual what he shall wear; in simple clothing and in all his deeds he shall be a light to the world."<sup>65</sup>

#### Conflicts Over Nonconformity

Before the seventeenth century, though, defined nonconformity had led to serious conflict within the Mennonite church. There was the notorious conflict between the Frisian, Flemish and Waterlander Mennonites in Holland. A few years later the Amish schism divided the southern branch of the church.

The Flemish-Frisian divide revealed the value placed on defined nonconformity and the strong feelings associated with it. Persecuted Mennonites often became a refugee church. When large numbers of Flemish Mennonites relocated in Frisian areas, their distinctive practice led to conflict: "The Frisians took offense at the dress and manners of the Flemish which they thought too worldly and sumptuous."<sup>66</sup> The Flemish in turn saw the Frisians as worldly in their own way: "The Flemish are worldly in respect to their dress; the Frisians in their homes."<sup>67</sup> The Frisians might have been more austere and reserved about food and dress, but they did appreciate fine household goods

and linens.<sup>68</sup> On top of these other differences, the two groups held different ideas regarding shunning as part of church discipline. The Flemish, it is said, took a much harder line.<sup>69</sup> It was reported: "The point of the quarrel was a different conception of the church among the Flemish, whether the church should be conceived as strictly separated from the world, as a church without spot or wrinkle or not."<sup>70</sup> In time this quarreling led to over five distinct divisions.<sup>71</sup> All these groups were concerned about nonconformity, and even the more liberal Waterlanders warned the church against the loss of nonconformity in dress, meals, homes and trade.<sup>72</sup>

These conflicts happened against the backdrop of fierce persecution. Between 1531 and 1597 well over a thousand Mennonites were martyred.<sup>73</sup> That such bickering took place under the specter of persecution shows that the issue of the nature and extent of nonconformity to the world was a very critical issue to the Mennonites.

In southern Germany and Switzerland the most notable schism was the Amish division of 1697 led by the elder Jacob Amman. There are several theories regarding precisely what led to this schism. Certainly the issue of church discipline, specifically the extent of avoidance of excommunicated members, was the primary issue.<sup>74</sup> There were certainly other issues. Wenger identified three elements: the extent of avoidance, the spiritual status of those outside

the Swiss Brethren churches, and the issue of proper clothing. A north German elder wrote the Brethren in Alsace condemning Amman's regulations concerning headgear, clothing, stockings, shoes and the manner of the cutting of the hair of men.<sup>75</sup>

#### Nonconformity and Seventeenth-Century Confessions of Faith

Mennonites wrote several important confessions of faith in the seventeenth century. As in the case of the Swiss Brethren in Schleithem, these often were used to cement unity in the church. Since they were attempts at finding common ground, they tended to avoid sensitive issues. A confession adopted on 27 September 1627 in Amsterdam was an effort to unify Flemish and Frisian Mennonites.<sup>76</sup> Although the familiar Mennonite elements of refusal to swear oaths and church discipline were present in the confession, it was silent on the issues of nonconformity that had caused such rancor. The 1630 Confession was also silent on nonconformity.<sup>77</sup> The most important confession, since it was adopted by the Dutch (1632), the South German Mennonites (1660), and the American Mennonites (1725), is the Dordrecht Confession. While revealing the distinctive Mennonite practices of no swearing of oaths, church discipline and nonresistance, it also was void of anything that might be called defined nonconformity. This silence can be explained in two ways. First, as already mentioned, the confession was an attempt to state common ground and achieve unity, so it avoided

contentious or potentially divisive issues. Second, the Confession concerned itself primarily with general principles and broader theological concerns facing all Mennonites. Since the church wrote all these confessions when it was embroiled in conflict over what would constitute standard Christian practice, none of these early confessions provides useful evidence that the church did not care about nonconformity.

Conclusion: What Can be Learned from the Outlawed Period?

This investigation into Mennonites in the Outlawed Period has demonstrated two important issues. First, nonconformity is inextricably tied to Mennonite church history as a principal doctrine, a first or primary understanding. Second, although the issues were not identical, the church had already proved the divisive potential of defined nonconformity.

Into the Anabaptist drama of the seventeenth century a new factor entered, which freed the Mennonites from persecution and petty harassment, namely emigration. In the New World the doctrine of nonconformity was to be confronted with new challenges based on freedom and affluence rather than persecution and poverty.

## CHAPTER THREE

### NONCONFORMITY IN THE MIDDLE PERIOD

#### Introduction: Persecution Led to Emigration

In this thesis any point in Mennonite experience in the New World is referred to as the Middle Period with regard to nonconformity. Although Mennonites have experienced difficulties during all times of war for refusal to bear arms, there has never been systematic persecution of Mennonites in the United States or Canada. The Middle Period is definable based on this freedom. The Mennonite Encyclopedia states that persecution and oppression of Mennonites in western Europe by state and church authorities lasted from the Reformation up to the nineteenth century.<sup>78</sup> C. Henry Smith wrote:

At the time they began their migration to America, in 1683, the state churches in Europe were still closely enough associated with the state governments to make life miserable for all those who did not share the religious beliefs of their persecutors. To be sure, the day of burning men and women at the stake was past, but nonconformists were still greatly limited in their religious rights.<sup>79</sup>

Persecution provided a strong reason to emigrate. Some of the Dutch Mennonites emigrated east, principally to the Vistula Delta and Prussia, and from there by invitation to Russia in 1786. A few Dutch Mennonites showed up in the New World as early as 1644, but their main influx into North

America did not occur until the mid-nineteenth century when they began to leave Russia.<sup>80</sup> It was the Swiss and South German Mennonites, fleeing persecution, who came to North America first in significant numbers.

Mennonites had arrived in the New World in the seventeenth century. Their first congregation in America was established before the end of that century.<sup>81</sup> However, most of the emigrants came in two broad waves. The first wave entered eastern Pennsylvania, starting in 1709 and lasting until the outbreak of the French and Indian War in 1754. The second wave lasted from 1815-1861, and consisted primarily of Alsatian Amish, but included Mennonites.<sup>82</sup> They spread westward with the general advance of settlers. Those unfamiliar with Mennonite history should take note that large numbers of individual Amish, and many entire congregations, reunited with the Mennonites in the New World.<sup>83</sup>

Not all Mennonites fled Europe to escape persecution. Some came for more positive opportunities. Richard MacMaster described these as "pull factors" as opposed to "push factors."<sup>84</sup> For example, Mennonite emigration continued through the nineteenth century, but those who came later in that century had experienced different conditions in Europe. Cornelius Dyck wrote that those who came after 1830 had experienced spiritual and intellectual freedom in Europe. This difference in experience had impact on the practice of nonconformity. Dyck quoted Jacob Krehbiel who

wrote back to Germany in 1841: "I do not wish to deny that in some American Mennonite congregations too much emphasis is placed on outward forms and at times, therefore, some points seem exaggerated."<sup>85</sup>

Extreme persecution, petty harassment and a dismal lack of opportunity did not follow the Mennonites to the New World. Here Mennonites were free to pursue religion as they saw fit. The doctrine of nonconformity changed to meet the new challenges of a free society. In part, separation had been forced on Anabaptists in the Old World as soon as they made their confession of faith. Even after the time of vicious persecution, a minority mentality prevailed. In the New World, freedom and opportunity brought the new temptations of seduction and assimilation. The outward expression of nonconformity did not have to change, but the drive toward the goal needed to be restated. The Middle Period shows the attempt to codify, preserve, and define nonconformity in the context of a free society.

#### Problems in the Middle Period

Referring to the period up to the time of the Revolutionary War, Cornelius Dyck wrote, "Most Mennonites remained largely to themselves, fearing rather than seeking contact in that vast sea of secularism."<sup>86</sup> Rural isolation made for a hedge of protection around Mennonites, although too much should not be made of this factor. New practices and ideas inevitably challenged the Mennonites. Some wanted

to embrace innovation. On the other hand, some not only rejected innovation, but went on to reject the larger church if it embraced new things. As early as 1775 a Mennonite bishop, Martin Boehm, led out of the Mennonite Church a group which would eventually be called the United Brethren Church. He was simply after a more progressive faith.<sup>87</sup> It is interesting to note that, in 1889, long after Boehm left the Mennonites, his new denomination divided over lodge and secret society membership, an issue that Mennonites would recognize as pertaining to nonconformity.<sup>88</sup>

In 1778 another bishop, Christian Funk, separated from the Mennonite Church over issues connected with the Mennonite Church's relationship with government. A conservative group led by John Herr left the larger body in 1812.<sup>89</sup> Yet another group left in 1846 under Jacob Stauffer. The issues in both latter cases involved to some degree the nature of nonconformity to the world. C. Henry Smith reported that the Herrites "found no fault with Menno Simons and his teaching, charging rather that the Lancaster church had departed from the ways of their leaders, especially from the life of nonconformity with the outside world which Menno taught and practiced in his own day."<sup>90</sup> Another case in point would be the Stauffer Mennonites, an old order Mennonite church still in existence. In their church

nonconformity is outlined in eleven articles ranging from a rejection of secular office holding, jury duty, voting, insurance, lawsuits and lightning rods to modesty in dress, housing, and a stress on the need for

shunning the excommunicated. Automobiles are forbidden.<sup>91</sup>

There were several mid-nineteenth century schisms that developed at least in part over the interpretation of non-conformity. Once again some groups left seeking a more progressive faith, for instance the groups that united to form the General Conference Mennonite Church. One of the streams that led into this movement was John Oberholtzer's from Eastern Pennsylvania. Nonconformity figured prominently in his debate with the mother church. In Oberholtzer's case, "refusing to wear the plain coat, urging the keeping of conference minutes, and writing a church constitution" led to his excommunication from the Franconia Conference.<sup>92</sup> He desired less separation from the world and more cooperation with other Christians. Cornelius Dyck summarized: "It was clear that the Ordnung (Oberholtzer's church constitution) would lead to less separation from the world and greater adaptation to their American environment."<sup>93</sup>

Others, such as, John Holderman, founder of the Church of God in Christ Mennonite, left seeking the conservative path.<sup>94</sup> Holderman was not a man who reduced faith to rules, but from the beginning led his group to stress nonconformity.

The Dordrecht Confession of 1632 was adopted as a spiritual guide. Added to this was a particular emphasis on nonconformity to the world in dress and all of life, one of the more obvious marks being the wearing of beards by all male church members.<sup>95</sup>

This drive toward nonconformity among the Holderman Mennonites continues unabated to the present day.

During the 1970s many church schools were established to achieve greater nonconformity to the world. The Church seeks to maintain the 'stranger-pilgrim' stance in society. <sup>96</sup>

Although conservative groups left over what they perceived to be worldliness in the main body, the Mennonite Church still struggled mightily to maintain a defined nonconformity to the world up until the mid-twentieth century.

#### Teaching on Nonconformity in the Middle Period

A work called A Useful and Edifying Address to the Young, by Christian Burkholder, a Mennonite preacher from New Holland, Pennsylvania, was published originally in 1804 and distributed with an endorsement from twenty-seven ministers and deacons. It was published in English for the first time in 1857. The introduction to the book, written in 1792, presumably by a representative of the twenty-seven, stated the concern that prompted the first and the English editions: "And as we have fallen upon times and circumstances in which our predecessors never were, they could give neither warning against, nor instruction about them."<sup>97</sup>

This booklet reveals some of the concerns Mennonites struggled with in the Middle Period. Repentance, to be sincere, would involve separation from the world's entertainment. "Now if you intend to enter into the covenant with God, you must renounce the world and its sinful practices, all places of vain amusement, and sinful company."<sup>98</sup>

Apparently places of vain amusement needed no further explanation in Burkholder's day. Dress was an issue, too. "And here it may be remarked, that a person who is 'meek and lowly in heart' cannot bring forth fruit that has externally the appearance of pride, whether it be in words, actions, or the 'putting on of apparel.'"<sup>99</sup> It is hard for most modern Christians to grasp how vital the issue of dress is to the plain-dressing groups. It became a kind of focal point in the discussion of nonconformity. Although he was from the Church of the Brethren, Matthew Eshelman could have spoken for many Mennonites of his era. In one of his books he goes so far as to argue that the loss of distinctive attire ("ribbon and fringe") was causative, not symptomatic of Jewish apostasy in the Old Testament.<sup>100</sup>

Summarizing the nonconformity of the nineteenth century, J. C. Wenger wrote:

What then did nonconformity mean to the members of the Mennonite church in the nineteenth century? Included in their more or less vague and undefined understanding of nonconformity would have been the following items: the Word of God asks Christians not to be the world, and by the world Mennonites tended to think more or less of all of society outside their fellowship.<sup>101</sup>

In the first half of the twentieth century, Mennonite nonconformity faced more threats. The Industrial Revolution and improvements in agriculture often led to more leisure time and pursuits. Around the Mennonites, America became even more secular. The big denominations began their battles with modernism. A popular World War challenged Menno-

nites' right to and belief in nonresistance. New defenders of the Mennonite Church arose, formally educated and capable of administering new church institutions. Nonconformity was articulated as something more than church rules.

In 1908 a layperson, Mary Ebersole, wrote a hortatory article for the Gospel Herald, the weekly denominational newspaper. It is hard to say she spoke for everyone, especially since she was decrying worldliness in her church. Her concerns were consistent enough with many Mennonites in her time. She wrote, "But I see we are getting far from being plain." Ebersole stated bluntly that "any unnecessary thing is wrong," and catalogued eight items for which money was unnecessarily being spent: neckties, fancy rings about our horses, stylish hats, sisters carrying watches, lace curtains, musical instruments, having pictures taken, and collarettes.<sup>102</sup>

Few leaders are as important to the study of nonconformity as Daniel Kauffman, 1865-1944. An ordained leader by 1892, he loomed large over the denomination in the early part of the century. A bishop and indefatigable committee man, "in the years after 1905, more than any other man, 'D.K.,' as his friends knew him, served as the chief leader and major voice of the Mennonite Church."<sup>103</sup> The book Doctrines of the Bible, for which Kauffman served as an editor "assisted by a committee of twenty-one brethren," is an authoritative look at the official positions of the Menno-

nite Church in the early part of the twentieth century. Partly an expansion of Kauffman's own book, Bible Doctrines, the new work called on most of the big names among Mennonite leaders and writers. The Mennonite General Conference (Assembly) commissioned the work. D.H. Bender wrote in the introduction: "In this critical age of liberalistic and modernistic tendencies and positions, that characterize so many present day theologians and institutions of learning, it is very essential indeed that the Church have a work of vital doctrines that rings clear, and is free from the blasting influence of these false teachings."<sup>104</sup>

Chapter six, "Nonconformity to the World," gave thirteen pages to the subject. The writer boldly linked nonconformity to the idea of restrictions.<sup>105</sup> The chapter started with a short summary of New Testament passages enjoining believers to nonconformity. It proceeded from there to explain the doctrine in general terms, but hinted at some restrictions, asking, "Why are theaters, moving picture shows, ball rooms, swimming pools, and other forms of irreligion and vice so ardently patronized by Christian professors today?"<sup>106</sup>

Under a section called "Marks of Worldliness" specific sins are condemned. Most Christians, even in the modern world, would recognize some of these as sins, such as pride and disobedience. From the standpoint of defined nonconformity, it is interesting to see intemperance, fashionable

attire and worldly amusements listed. The book condemned fashion, based on Zephaniah 1:8, Isaiah 3:16-24, Jeremiah 4:30, 1 Timothy 2:9-10, and 1 Pet. 3:3-4. It condemned amusements, based on Ecclesiastes 11:9, Proverbs 15:2, Ephesians 5:4 and 1 Timothy 5:6. The passages listed for apparel made a considerably stronger case than those listed for amusements. Perhaps for this reason, the book gave little commentary on attire. There were more specifics listed under amusements. The "works of a fleshly and sinful heart will include: ball rooms, theaters, movies, gambling dens, circuses, bowling alleys, etc." The list continued with "Sabbath desecration in the form of joy rides, popular games, and dissipation in parks and swimming pools; of the hundreds of thousands of girls disappearing from year to year as victims of seduction and pleasure and vice; and of other means of carnal pleasure in this pleasure loving world."<sup>107</sup>

A modern person has to wonder who these hundreds of thousands of girls were, and why this has not been heard of before, especially considering their disappearance was a yearly phenomenon. The book listed its catalog of vices not to warn about possible dangers in these activities, but to prohibit any questionable activity. The question to consider in light of the Scripture passages cited is: "How can one get there from here?" Even assuming the best about the authors' awareness of how to live in their own times, it is

hard to escape the impression that absolute prohibition of many of these activities was a draconian measure.

The balance of the chapter went back and forth between attitudes and behaviors many Christians would recognize as worldly, and the distinctive Mennonite restrictions. Three pages were dedicated to dress. When dealing with the issue in principle the arguments stayed very close to the Scriptures and were strong. Unfortunately, the arguments are not limited to the principles or specific biblical injunctions. The Mennonites of that day still believed strongly in uniformity. Although not spelled out in the book, those were the days of a church-prescribed "regulation garb" in which the various conferences prescribed varying degrees of identical plainness. "Nobody who believes in nonconformity and faithfully obeys the Word of God in the kind of clothing worn will ever be bothered by the `uniformity bogey.'"<sup>108</sup>

Other Mennonite leaders of that day saw the threat of worldliness as a significant danger to the Mennonite Church. Noah Mack was a minister and bishop in the Church from 1900 until his death in 1949. The Bishop Board of Lancaster Conference authorized and published his biography not long after his death. An interesting portion of the book tells in his own words how he struggled with the issue of nonconformity in dress.<sup>109</sup> Mack was something of a late convert to the wisdom of plain dress. Yet he did not reduce the doctrine of nonconformity to rules about dress.

We have made much progress in the Gospel in recent years but with it we see another danger, and that is the church taking on the worldly way of doing things. One of the greatest dangers in the church today is lack of separation from the world.<sup>110</sup>

There were a few scholarly discussions of the issue of nonconformity in the early twentieth century. Printed in The Mennonite Quarterly Review, these papers often spoke around the subject of nonconformity. Yet they did represent an effort to understand and preserve the best parts of the doctrine. Edward Yoder, a promising Mennonite scholar of that era, gave an address at the Goshen College Nonconformity Forum, 9 December 1936. The Mennonite Quarterly Review printed the text. Yoder argued thoughtfully that there were two reasons to preserve distinctive practices. The first was that "the teachings in the Epistles on separation are quite as applicable today as they ever were."<sup>111</sup> The second reason was

the nature of American life today, especially the type of democratic thinking and practices that prevails widely among us. The Christian must always preserve an objective and critical attitude toward the dominant spirit and life of the period in which he lives, toward the ideas that are most popular at any time, and toward all phases of the Zeitgeist.<sup>112</sup>

Yoder identified some of the forces bringing the world closer to the Mennonites at that time. Among the forces named were the decreasing influence of the linguistic barrier that Pennsylvania Dutch had provided and the Mennonite participation in public education.<sup>113</sup> His most creative argument, bolstered surprisingly with a quotation from

Norman Thomas of the Socialist Party, involved resisting conformity to the dominant culture. He saw such resistance developing naturally by an attempt to live by the Sermon on the Mount in an evil world.<sup>114</sup>

Yoder was clearly on the right track, trying to preserve the heart and soul of the doctrine.

Though nonconformity for a group needs some definite forms of outward expression, yet it is essentially a nonconformity of spirit, or mind and thought. The fact needs to be constantly emphasized.<sup>115</sup>

Another important writer, and perhaps the only Mennonite writer of his time with influence outside Mennonite circles, was John Horsch. In his book The Mennonite Church and Modernism, Horsch argued for nonconformity fortified with restrictions (defined nonconformity). Horsch believed that defined nonconformity had produced good fruit in the past and continued to be important for the Mennonite Church in his time. Looking backward favorably, Horsch quoted a Dutch Mennonite minister who had visited the United States in 1824: "I found among the American Mennonites a deep-rooted feeling of obligation toward God, a great moral and religious fervor, which is continually nourished and kept alive by their attitude of separation from the world."<sup>116</sup>

To Horsch, defined nonconformity was a necessary part of being Mennonite. He wrote:

From the earliest times the Mennonite Church has laid down certain restrictions - rules of conduct - that were obligatory for the members. These restrictions had reference to worldliness in general and to such points as dress, manner of life, worldly amusements, etc. If

the church members were convinced Mennonites, they believed such restrictions to be a necessary characteristic of a true Christian Church.<sup>117</sup>

To this day the Mennonite Church sometimes sees distinctive practices or restrictions as an impediment to outreach. In other words, there is a fear that strict practices will scare people away from the faith and the church. Horsch was aware of that fear in his day. Speaking of outreach, he wrote:

It is true that many of the converts were not willing to accept the restrictions asked by the church. But disregarding the restrictions would not remedy matters. If the church would drop her unpopular teaching and regulations, there would be no good reason why we should desire converts to unite with our communion in preference to more popular churches.<sup>118</sup>

One of the problems with Horsch's reasoning was that there was no middle ground. Horsch was correct that a concern about worldliness and nonconformity is a vital part of the Mennonite faith. He did not recognize that specific restrictions might be unnecessarily harsh, unreasonable or even false. The Mennonite Church never proclaimed itself infallible. The fact is that in Horsch's time, many Mennonites did find defined nonconformity at times to be without scriptural warrant and oppressive spiritually, but, nonetheless, they still wanted to be Mennonites and share their faith in Jesus Christ with the world.

Another towering figure in Mennonite scholarship in that era was C. Henry Smith. Smith gave an address at the Mennonite World Conference in Amsterdam, July 1, 1936. Almost

two years later the address "Mennonites and Culture" appeared in The Mennonite Quarterly Review. In tone and content the article anticipated some of the thinking of the Modern Period with regard to nonconformity. Smith took pains to establish Mennonite contributions to culture, and encourage more of the same. Nonconformity does not fit well in a scheme to gain cultural influence, and so there was no mention of it as a doctrine. As a matter of fact, Smith saw it as incidental at best.

In America Mennonites have not exerted the same direct influence upon the cultural life of their times as have their brethren in Northern Europe. Here they lived for the most part in the open country, with no inclination to higher learning, and often with a decided prejudice against everything that seemed of this world, worldly. Occasionally some young man with a little more ambition than his fellows would leave his home surroundings, attend some institution of learning, and usually made good. But he never returned to the church that nourished him.<sup>119</sup>

Smith went on to extol the accomplishments of scholars, politicians, academics and industrialists who came from Mennonite backgrounds. Oddly he waxed rhapsodic about one aspect of Mennonite nonconformity - the plain meetinghouse. "What could be more symbolic of the simple sincerity and genuineness of their life than the plain, unpretentious meeting houses as one sees them in both country and city, simple, modest, without tower or bell, with unpainted windows and unadorned architecture."<sup>120</sup>

Smith's view was misleading. Was Mennonite nonconformity in this period simply a lack of initiative? Was it

prejudice? It is obvious that it was more than unconscious prejudice. A church that seeks cultural influence somehow needs to dismiss the long record of nonconformity to and noninvolvement with the dominant culture.

As stated previously, Mennonite nonconformity can be studied sociologically. The sociologist, in the case about to be considered, attempted to understand Mennonites as a group and evaluate the forces of disintegration. In the early 1940s, the close of the era under consideration, The Mennonite Quarterly Review published an issue concerning Mennonite life and contemporary problems. A contribution by Karl Baehr focused on secularization among Mennonites in Elkhart County, Indiana. His basic argument was that Mennonites "tend to adapt themselves gradually to the secular world of which they are a part and thus lose much of their distinctive heritage."<sup>121</sup> Baehr sampled four different Mennonite denominations to evaluate the degree of secularization. Although he did identify nonconformity as a universal principle among Mennonites, unfortunately his study did not evaluate it directly. Nonetheless, some issues involving nonconformity appear in his discussion of the Mennonite church. For example, he tracked the issues of membership in secret societies and exogamy, which are good indicators of the degree of defined nonconformity in a congregation. These and other of his findings tell something of the state of nonconformity in that time.

Concerning secret societies, Baehr found that Mennonite Church congregations prohibited or discouraged belonging to the Lions Clubs, Rotary Clubs, and even the Farm Bureau.<sup>122</sup> Breaking dress restrictions could lead to excommunication.<sup>123</sup> He discovered that these churches discouraged voting in any election.<sup>124</sup> On the issue of exogamy he arrived at no strong conclusion, but pointed out that it was rare and that the churches did not excommunicate those marrying outside the church.<sup>125</sup>

Few churches are run by their scholars, and this is even more true in a denomination historically suspicious of higher education. Official statements on nonconformity were found in books such as Doctrines of the Bible or Noah Mack which had the imprimatur of the Church. There were other official documents. The Mennonite Church issued confessions in article form. In 1921, the Mennonite General Conference (Assembly) issued the "Christian Fundamentals." These articles and the reason for their creation reveal much about the state of the doctrine of nonconformity at the end of the Middle Period. The tone was defensive, if not overtly aggressive. "Particular doctrines of the Church have been attacked and there has been much compromising with the world on matters of Christian living."<sup>126</sup> The Conference (Assembly) stated that it had no intention of replacing the historic Dordrecht Confession, but sought to address those

issues that "since that time have been questioned or denied by many church organizations."<sup>127</sup>

Article Ten concerned separation. It restated the Church's position on nonconformity in principle. Christians are called to "a life of separation from the world and its follies, sinful practices, and methods."<sup>128</sup> Article Thirteen spelled out the restrictions. Proscribed are "carnal warfare, swearing of oaths, immodest apparel, participation in secret societies and life insurance."<sup>129</sup>

The "Gospel Standard" was drawn up by the General Problems Committee of the General Conference (Assembly) in 1939 and is very similar to the "Christian Fundamentals" in tone and intent. The fact that it was produced by a Problems Committee is telling. Article Six defined nonconformity to the world in principle, declaring it to be "one of the most clearly established facts connected with Bible Doctrine, it says: 'be not conformed to the world.' This applies to daily life, amusements, to dress, to speech, to everything in which the standards of the world are in conflict with the standards of the Gospel."<sup>130</sup> Article Ten concerned worldly amusements and defined nonconformity in that area: "Such activities exist to gratify the flesh, theaters, moving picture shows, circuses, gambling resorts, dances, card playing, popular swimming resorts and such like, are destructive to the spiritual life, and should

therefore be scrupulously [sic] avoided by all Christian people."<sup>131</sup>

Of course, the "Gospel Standard" also focused on apparel. Article Eleven offered four principles for clothing suitable for God's people: substantial, not fragile or transparent; modest, not partial nudeness; offering distinction between the sexes; economical.<sup>132</sup> Generally speaking, at this time in Mennonite history, these principles were the guiding lights for congregations to use when setting more specific rules and restrictions, not just principles for individuals to apply at their own discretion.

#### Conclusion: A Doctrine in Distress

In summary, the Middle Period of nonconformity showed both decline and vigorous defense of defined nonconformity. The simple fact that the practices were in need of defense demonstrated that the doctrine was in trouble. In the Liberal Period which followed, it collapsed.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### NONCONFORMITY IN THE LIBERAL PERIOD

#### Introduction: The Beginning of the End of Nonconformity

The Liberal Period of nonconformity has already seen the collapse of defined nonconformity in the Mennonite Church. For that matter most of the drive to be nonconformed to the world has collapsed with it. This collapse did not happen without considerable uproar. As in all periods of Mennonite history there were schisms. Disagreements over nonconformity figured in much of the turmoil. Writing in Christianity Today, John Ruth said: "In America, Mennonites have divided so often over church policy, and degrees of `nonconformity' that the largest of their conferences . . . contains only a third of the entire family."<sup>133</sup>

Tracing nonconformity in the later part of the Liberal Period is not easy, because so little has been written since 1970. In the early part of the Liberal Period, Wenger's Separated Unto God appeared. In the Lancaster Conference, which had a conservative inclination, the Nonconformity Committee played out a now familiar drama that ended in 1968 with the founding of the Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church, a new conservative schism. There has been much

self-examination in the Mennonite Church in the last two decades, but little of it has focused on nonconformity *per se*. The silence speaks volumes. In the last twenty years, if nonconformity has appeared in Mennonite writing at all, it has certainly not been to reinvigorate defined nonconformity. In most cases it has either been reduced to the idea of nonresistance in the sense of pacifism in time of war, or sneered at as an obsolete and incidental doctrine which bound the church with an oppressive dress code.

#### Transitional Teachers

The transition to the Liberal Period did not happen overnight. For example, a church leader, Paul Erb, wrote a revealing editorial for the Gospel Herald in 1944. His comments revealed dissatisfaction with the state of the doctrine: "In the circles of our own church it is probably true that the term 'nonconformity' suggests the subject of clothes and personal appearance."<sup>134</sup> If this reduction to the matter of dress was correct, it showed that Edward Yoder's wishes, and actually much of Mennonite history, had not been communicated very well to the rank and file. Erb suggested a solution, which hinted that ground had been lost.

Those to whom we should teach the doctrine of nonconformity both inside and outside the church, will

probably be far more easily convinced of the truth of this teaching if we give nonconformity its complete and scriptural sense. To be nonconformed to the world is to be Christian in every phase of living.<sup>135</sup>

Another transitional writer was Paul Mininger, president of Goshen College from 1954-1970, who wrote "The Limitation of Nonconformity" in 1950. In this thoughtful article, Mininger identified both the ideal and the limitations of the ideal of nonconformity. At its best, nonconformity accented the differences between the church and the world. "Only a nonconformed church can be salt of the earth and a light to the world."<sup>136</sup>

Mininger spent considerably more effort on the limitations of the doctrine. Among these limitations is its emphasis on the negative. In principle it says "do not" but gives no positive direction. Second, like the law, it lacks power to motivate obedience. Third, it separates a person from the world, but gives him no sense of responsibility to the world. Fourth, the principle alone cannot reproduce itself. Fifth:

The principle of nonconformity does not contain within it the essential elements of the Gospel. It is law and not Gospel. It is a result and not a cause. Therefore, we cannot expect it to accomplish what the Gospel alone can accomplish.<sup>137</sup>

Mininger went on to attack sharply the doctrine as it was practiced in his day.<sup>138</sup> It was negative goodness. It was external only. The externals constituted a blind conformity based on conditioning rather than voluntary acceptance. It was inconsistent: "Any fair appraisal of the

practice . . . will reveal that at times we have carried the idea too far."<sup>139</sup> This last criticism was tempered with several paragraphs of explanation. It is intriguing that one of his first examples of areas where Christians must continue to stand aloof from the common life or culture was "in regard to modern commercialized amusements."<sup>140</sup> Continuing with the limitations, Mininger asserted that nonconformity could cloak cultural chauvinism. It could stifle social responsibility and outreach. It had been divisive. Finally, it led toward perfectionism and self-righteousness.

His blast against the state of nonconformity ended with four suggestions: develop a clearer understanding of nonconformity, develop a deeper understanding of the Gospel, work more diligently at relating the faith to the culture, and finally, rejuvenate the church's sense of call to bringing the Gospel to the world.<sup>141</sup>

Mininger's article revealed deep dissatisfaction with the state of nonconformity in the Mennonite Church. His critique, even with its sketchy suggestions, could have yielded good results, if taken seriously.

John R. Mumaw wrote "Current Forces Adversely Affecting the Life of the Mennonite Community" in 1945. This article was also transitional. It identified the threats against preservation of nonconformity at the beginning of the Liberal Period. Mumaw painted a too-idealized picture of the

Mennonite Church as a rural religious community, and then identified the forces working against it. He offered no solutions. In each example of a force working against the Mennonite Church, he issued a tacit call for nonconformity. Materialism in its philosophical sense was a primary problem. Modern education, especially higher education, led to "regrettable accommodations of doctrine and practice."<sup>142</sup> Mumaw strongly condemned movies, television, and the overuse of radio. Urbanization was a powerful threat.

If the Mennonite community is to be vitalized with a pattern of life that remains true to its own traditions and religious persuasions, something must be done to protect the home from the hostile influences of urbanization. This pertains to her distinctive doctrines of nonconformity and nonresistance as well as the sanctity of the family ideal.<sup>143</sup>

Quoting Karl Baehr's article, Mumaw claimed secularization led to compromise by individualism, participation in worldly organizations, inactive church memberships, and mixed marriages [with non-Mennonites]. Lastly, he decried the religious tolerance which had robbed the Mennonites of the stimulus of persecution.

Mumaw did not offer solutions, but he did make some dire predictions. Concerning individualism he wrote: "Unless an effective teaching program is inaugurated . . . it will become increasingly difficult to preserve the historic values of the Mennonite rural community."<sup>144</sup> Concerning religious tolerance he believed: "We have been pressed with lines of logic, with demands of theology, and with systems

of belief until men are afraid to accept and preach literal interpretations of the Bible."<sup>145</sup> Mumaw concluded pessimistically: "If the Mennonite community is to be revitalized with the strength of her historical values, we must initiate a movement back to the Bible in simple faith and in child-like obedience to its teachings."<sup>146</sup>

Mumaw's observations are interesting to the study of nonconformity because of his analysis of forces working against it. His analysis was flawed somewhat by his romantic view of the past and his vague quest to preserve values in a community as opposed to being a church in the world.

The cry of worldliness was raised many times in Mennonite history. The calls to nonconformity in the late Middle Period and early Liberal Period had come from big names in the Mennonite Church. They usually had official sanction. There was often a tone of alarm in the writing, and one might conclude that the battle had already been lost. Such is not exactly the case. Even while recognizing that they "had lost considerable ground," in 1944 the Mennonite General Conference (Assembly) in a special session adopted the seven-point "Resolutions on Nonconformity." These resolutions would appear very strict to an outsider. For example, their second resolution read: "That our expressed standard on the doctrine of nonconformity to the world, relating to the holding of life insurance, membership in labor unions, immodest and worldly attire (including hats for sisters),

the wearing of jewelry (including wedding rings), attendance at movies and theaters, be made a test of membership."<sup>147</sup>

Not only did they recommend that individuals be disciplined for infractions to this code, they were prepared to exclude entire conferences if they would not hold the line.<sup>148</sup>

#### J. C. Wenger and the Apex of Teaching on Nonconformity

This special session took another significant action. They commissioned a book on nonconformity. The resolution stated: "Inasmuch as we need a comprehensive treatment and exposition of the doctrine of nonconformity to the world to indoctrinate and enlighten our people better on the Bible teaching on this subject, and to show its applications to conditions as we find them in the world today, we recommend that the General Problems Committee and the Publishing Committee of the Publication Board work together in securing a writer and supervising the publication of such a book."<sup>149</sup>

The result of this resolution came to fruition five years later in 1951 when Separated Unto God by J. C. Wenger attempted once more to shore up the doctrine of nonconformity in the Mennonite Church. It was an ambitious work. It attempted to cover nonconformity from the beginning, i.e. the Old Testament, up to the contemporary Mennonite Church. This book, while painfully out of step with its denomination in 1997, is still available through the more conservative Mennonite-affiliated Christian Light distributors. It is telling that it appears in their catalog with a caveat that

it is weak (read "too soft") on certain points of application.<sup>150</sup>

The book merits scrutiny for several reasons. First, it might be the only book-length treatise on nonconformity to appear and have any broad circulation in the Mennonite Church in the twentieth century. Second, it is also the last such work. Separated Unto God might have been the apex of teaching on nonconformity in the Mennonite Church.

Much of the book addressed itself to the kind of nonconformity most Bible-believing Christians would recognize: moral conduct as stated explicitly in the Bible. In the author's preface, Wenger made the point that Edward Yoder had made. Nonconformity was not a mere code of external rules, but must begin in the inner life of the believer.

Members of the Mennonite Church and of similar groups need to clarify their thinking in reference to the concept of worldliness. Being nonconformed to the world is not a matter of rejecting science and inventions, nor is it the maintenance of a cultural status quo, nor is it difference for its own sake. 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.<sup>151</sup>

Wenger began his biblical argument with the Old Testament. It was God's intention from creation to have a separated people. This separating proceeded through Noah and the Patriarchs, and then found a fuller expression in the giving of the Law. "All of Israel's differences from her national neighbors were, therefore, the results of, or

symbols of, her spiritual separation unto the Lord; the fact that Israel alone was God's peculiar and special treasure, His covenant people."<sup>152</sup>

Separation continued in the New Covenant. Wenger stated: "The principle of separation unto God is essentially the same under both the Old and New Covenants."<sup>153</sup> Later he elaborated on this statement.

We find therefore that the great spiritual principles of separation between the children of God and those of the world are found alike in the Old Testament and the New. This separation is a spiritual separation which works itself out in all of life. The main difference between the Old Covenant and the New are [sic] the ceremonial regulations of Mosaism now are done away in Christ, and the revelation of the will of God is much clearer in Christ than it had been in Moses.<sup>154</sup>

Wenger found support for specific restrictions in the New Testament. For example, he argued for a prohibition on all jewelry and against all elaborate hairstyles.<sup>155</sup>

Turning his attention to church history, Wenger found that ancient Christians not only avoided gladiatorial contests, but also refused all attendance at the theater.<sup>156</sup> Yet his general portrayal of the church in the Middle Ages was not positive. The idea of separation was confined to ascetic orders while the church became largely a worldly institution.

Wenger, of course, spent much time on the development of the Anabaptist movement. He retold the story much as it has been described in this thesis. In the Outlawed Period, Mennonites developed some degree of defined nonconformity.

Nevertheless, in the early years, nonconformity seems to have been more a matter of unspoken consensus built upon a strong drive to separate from the world. Wenger summarized:

Being a Christian therefore meant a radical break with every form of worldliness. It meant avoiding intemperance in every form, it meant avoiding unbecoming speech; it meant avoiding vain attire and jewelry.<sup>157</sup>

Wenger also drew a quotation from a contemporary witness who said that the Swiss Brethren shunned costly clothing and expensive food.<sup>158</sup>

Wenger recounted the familiar story of Mennonites in Europe. The Dutch Mennonites who remained in Holland largely gave up on nonconformity by the nineteenth century. "The Dutch Mennonites not only lost the doctrine of nonresistance, but almost every trace of nonconformity to the world disappeared."<sup>159</sup> The South German Mennonites held on a little more tenaciously in Wenger's eyes. In 1803 they continued to oppose military service and forbade exogamy, dancing, gambling, playing cards and theater attendance.<sup>160</sup> However they, too, dropped most of this by the twentieth century.

Wenger continued with a description of Mennonites in the New World that led up to his times in the early 1950s. Wenger stated rather confidently that the Mennonites of his day resisted activities that tended to carnality, such as theaters, mixed bathing at pleasure resorts, card playing, gambling, dancing and the like. "The commercial moving

picture is regarded as a major influence against spiritual life."<sup>161</sup>

In Chapter Six, "Some Personal and Social Aspects of the Christian Life," Wenger's view of defined nonconformity went beyond what many non-Mennonite Christians would recognize. Some of the chapter is refreshing. For instance, gluttony is placed in its rightful status as a sin. He also argued for abstention from alcohol; from jewelry, especially engagement and wedding rings; from cosmetics, including nail polish and plucked eyebrows; and from short hair on women.<sup>162</sup>

Wenger's attempt to preserve nonconformity did not stand against the pressures to abandon it. His prescriptions and all of defined nonconformity rapidly disappeared from the Mennonite Church in the forty-six years since Separated Unto God first appeared.

#### Final Teachers of Nonconformity

Conferences and congregations moved at different speeds in their retreat. For example, as late as 1969 in a book for young people called We Believe, Paul Erb showed some interest in nonconformity. Commenting on the "Mennonite Confession of Faith of 1963," he proscribed dancing, drugs and liquor, gambling, jewelry, immodest and fine clothing and cosmetics.<sup>163</sup> However, this same author four years earlier, editing a book of Mennonite sermons, had framed the discussion of nonconformity in such a way as to signal a significant change of perception. He stated:

There is also emphasis in these Mennonite sermons on discipleship, which has been stressed from Anabaptist days. The historic phase was "separation from the world," but today the emphasis is more positive on commitment and cross-bearing in true discipleship.<sup>164</sup>

In 1957, the Mennonite General Conference (Assembly) authorized the development of a new confession of faith, which they subsequently adopted in 1963. Article Sixteen shows how far the church had travelled from 1944 when the General Conference (Assembly) sought a strictly defined nonconformity. In the 1963 confession, nonconformity is argued for in principle, but with few specific prescriptions or restrictions. The article was framed in typical Mennonite two-kingdom theology. Thankfully it explicitly stated that one feature of nonconformity is love for all races, cultures and classes. Since Christians regard their bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit, it recognized, "they therefore avoid such things as harmful drugs, beverage alcohol, and tobacco."<sup>165</sup> Clothing came under consideration, but in general terms. There was no regulation garb such as many conferences had prescribed earlier. Clothing should be "modest, economical, simple and becoming to those professing Christian faith."<sup>166</sup> Without any specific suggestions, the Confession says of Christians: "Their recreational life should be consistent with the Christian walk."<sup>167</sup>

The 1963 Confession did not approach the subject of nonconformity the way it was done in the Middle Period. Instead of defined nonconformity, this Confession focused on

principle. It would be wrong to assume that this meant all defined nonconformity had disappeared by 1963. For instance, the battle was not yet over in Lancaster Conference, which though not technically a part of the General Conference (Assembly) at that time, was a *de facto* participant.

To show how far the church has come since the 1944 Resolutions, one need only compare those resolutions with the 1963 Confession and then turn to the "Confession of Faith from a Mennonite Perspective" adopted by the General Assembly in 1995. In the newest Confession, nonconformity hardly appears. Article Seventeen, "Discipleship and the Christian Life," stated:

As by faith we walk in Christ's way, we are being transformed into his image. We become conformed to Christ, faithful to the will of God, and separated from the evil world.<sup>168</sup>

The Confession continued: "Conformity to Christ necessarily implies nonconformity to the world."<sup>169</sup> What exactly constitutes the evil of the world, and what precisely will be the content of this nonconformity? The Confession mentioned several things on which many Christians would agree: for example, willingness to do God's will instead of the willful pursuit of individual happiness. The Confession also advocated, in vague terms, simplicity over materialism. It rejected military service, although this gets an entire article elsewhere. It advocated loyalty to God's kingdom over all earthly allegiances. It went on to mention chastity and faithfulness in marriage, although these issues, too,

get their own article. Without mentioning specifics, the Confession stated, "True faith means treating our bodies as God's temples, rather than allowing addictive behaviors to take hold."<sup>170</sup>

Official commentary appearing with the Confession added little clarity or substance to the article. What had been stated explicitly in 1944, and mostly in principle in 1963, now became a watered-down principle in 1995. Article Seventeen has trouble justifying its existence. The absence of specific content makes the Article worthless to anyone without additional input. Like many modern confessions, strategic ambiguity is the order of the day. Articles are written so they can mean many things to many people.

The transition to a church without defined nonconformity or even an emphasis on nonconformity did not happen without some soul-searching. Many still remember the old ways, even though many of its advocates have already exited for more conservative denominations. In 1974, Amos Weaver, a minister in Lancaster Conference and ten-year principal of Lancaster Mennonite High School, wrote an article for the Gospel Herald called "The Old Paths and the New." While conceding that old is not necessarily better, he decried the loss of defined nonconformity with regard to jewelry and wedding rings. He said, "On the other hand, there are also changes about which many of us are greatly disturbed and which are not in harmony with clearly defined Scriptures."<sup>171</sup>

Along with jewelry, he targeted clothing, specifically immodest attire and long hair on men and short hair on women.

### The Doctrine Declared Lost

In 1988 Merle Good, a lay leader in the church, wrote an article titled "If not now--when?" for the Gospel Herald. His article is fascinating because it demonstrated his perception that defined nonconformity was buried in the past. "We've become weary of being `distinguishable.'"<sup>172</sup> He wrote that Mennonites do not want to stand out. "We fancy the idea of leaven in society more than the image of light in darkness."<sup>173</sup> He was not altogether happy with what had replaced the old nonconformity, and he argued persuasively that a new uniformity had filled the vacuum: "We Mennonites have been so intent on demolishing any hint of the old legalism of rules and restrictions that this new legalism has crept up on us by surprise."<sup>174</sup> The new legalism, according to Good, was belief in change.

Another lay leader, Levi Miller, writing about Harold Bender's famous "Anabaptist Vision" address, also placed defined nonconformity safely in the past. Speaking of the 1960s, he wrote, "By that time, Mennonite Church members had become increasingly indistinguishable from other Christians in cultural and vocational patterns."<sup>175</sup> Speaking then of the 1970s, he said:

For more traditional Mennonites, who were quietly withdrawing and quietly growing, the older Mennonite Church

standard of nonconformity and nonresistance still had meaning. But for the moderns . . . a new standard of peace, community and discipleship was in place.<sup>176</sup>

Although the "Anabaptist Vision" is not relevant to this thesis, some comment may be in order here. This address, given to the American Society of Church History in 1943 and reprinted many times since, has served as an engine for Mennonite thought since that time. Part of its power is its simplicity. Although Harold Bender and his colleagues in the 1940s undoubtedly saw defined nonconformity under the rubric of discipleship (one of his three cardinal points of Anabaptism), few of those who came later found it there.<sup>177</sup> The vision laid a theoretical framework and is strong on separation in principle, but it cannot be summoned as a witness for or against arguments in this thesis.

As the main body of Mennonites has moved toward the mainstream, the mainstream has shown considerable curiosity about the Mennonites. In 1990, Christianity Today featured articles on America's Anabaptists: "Who They Are," "What They Believe," and "Where They Are Going." John Ruth, Marlin Miller and Timothy Jones, respectively, wrote the articles.

In "Who They Are," Ruth reflexively identified nonconformity as a principle shared by descendants of the Anabaptists. He wrote: "But the old tension with 'the world' is still visible, even if it takes new forms."<sup>178</sup> Unfortunately his examples are all found in political or social activism.

These examples may indeed signal a tension with the world, but it is hard to see them as proper descendants of Mennonite nonconformity, which almost always eschewed political and social reform apart from personal conversion.

Timothy Jones, in "Where They Are Going," was more perspicacious. He discussed the identity crisis that occurred in the church as the consensus on nonconformity collapsed. Clearly referring to the past, Jones wrote, "An earlier emphasis on `nonconformity' linked with largely rural locations and Swiss-German ethnicity, made it easier to maintain boundaries between church and `the world.'"<sup>179</sup>

The Christianity Today articles demonstrate an interesting dimension in the discussion on nonconformity. An older church leader, Ruth, still saw nonconformity as an emphasis, only with new forms. An outsider, Jones, perceived a true identity crisis caused primarily by the loss of the doctrine.

If there is such an identity crisis, contemporary Mennonite scholars rarely address nonconformity squarely. On those odd occasions when they do, it is rarely sympathetically. In a scholarly article, Marlene Epp discussed the issues of prayer veiling and plain dress. She was concerned primarily with uniform plain dress as an onerous aspect of nonconformity placed primarily on women and called for a review of other practices of defined nonconformity. "More research on the history of dress, as well as other points of

separation from the world, is needed to assess more fully the extent to which Mennonite nonconformity has had a disparate impact on men and women."<sup>180</sup>

Several points are of interest regarding her article. First, she saw defined nonconformity in dress as rooted partly in fundamentalist influence in the church. "An examination which considers the unique impact of dress regulations on women will reveal that the language of fundamentalism was not only useful to the Mennonites in defining their separatist identity but also served to place women in a subordinate position in the creation order and with the human order."<sup>181</sup>

She went on to write that the practice of prayer veiling among Mennonites was a mere custom with no religious significance until it was useful as a symbol of subordination in the 1890s.<sup>182</sup> The most telling aspect of Epp's article is that to her, nonconformity in dress is not a legitimate, albeit misguided, attempt to define a longstanding Anabaptist doctrine. For her, it was rather a late development mostly in service of another agenda, namely, men's oppression of women. It is refreshing to see a Mennonite author address the issue of nonconformity directly, but her article is flawed by attributing a kind of illegitimacy or irrelevancy to an impulse that has been with Mennonites from the beginning, i.e. separation from the world leading to nonconformity. Her wholesale dismissal of scriptural

arguments for head covering also crippled the article's usefulness.

In response to Epp's article, Leonard Gross, a Mennonite historian, affirmed her approach. Speaking of dress, he wrote, "Yet the fact remains: Thousands of women (and men) felt the effects of a Mennonite era of authoritarianism from above, that declared truth `from the ordained men up there, to us down here.'"<sup>183</sup> Both Epp's article and Gross's response show the entrenched hostility among Mennonite intelligentsia to defined nonconformity as it was practiced in the church through the Middle Period. Both also clearly show that the doctrine belongs to the past.

One writer who moved to consider new paradigms for living in the world is Gerald Schlabach. In his article, "Beyond Two-/vs One-Kingdom Theology: Abrahamic Community as a Mennonite Paradigm for Christian Engagement in Society," he proposed that the traditional two-kingdom view had become obsolete. "It is doubtful that two-kingdom theology alone can ever again provide an adequate paradigm for churches in Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition."<sup>184</sup> His death sentence on the old view is pertinent to the discussion of nonconformity. "But without reinforcement from a separatist sociology, two-kingdom theology will sound more and more like an unknown tongue, a clanging cymbal, a source of cognitive dissonance."<sup>185</sup>

Schlabach declared the death of the very principle of separation from the world as traditionally understood by Mennonites. He referred to the separation prescribed in the Schleithem Confession as a "stark apocalyptic dualism."<sup>186</sup> One of the strengths of that dualism, according to Schlabach, was that "it is not content with a cosmological construct alone but instead presses for a difference in visible social reality."<sup>187</sup> Its weakness was that it made more sense in times of persecution or when it could justify the rural community of Mennonites.<sup>188</sup> Schlabach proposed a new paradigm based on the example of Abraham. In Schlabach's scheme Abrahamic communities exist to bless the world, not avoid it. Important to this thesis is his certainty that the old model is obsolete.

Another Mennonite writer calling for new ways of looking at the world, i.e. a hermeneutic of popular culture, was J. Daniel Hess. His interest in "critical studies" of popular culture does not translate into any particular view of nonconformity. One could follow his proposals and believe strongly in defined nonconformity or not. He points out that even the Amish participate in popular culture: "No one, not even the Amish whose motifs have been co-opted by Esprit and whose quilts are collector's items, can be zip-locked from the world."<sup>189</sup> Actually his proposals for a way of reading the "texts" of popular culture would have to take place to develop an intelligent nonconformity. On the other

hand, his ideas are marred by a naive faith in scholars. What Anabaptists did as a fellowship and assumed themselves competent to do, Hess seems to want college professors to do for the rest.

Nonetheless, in his view, the old Mennonite way of looking at the world is obsolete. "At one extreme this disquiet [about the world] has encouraged a geographical, physical, and behavioral remove of Mennonites from people and pleasures outside the community of faith and given substance to a doctrine of separation--being in the world but not of the world."<sup>190</sup>

One text that Mennonites of the past felt they understood and tried to live out was Romans 12:2. Hess used the positive side of the text as a call to transformation by a renewed mind. He thought this transformation was composed primarily of cognitive activity, brain work.<sup>191</sup> It is revealing that Hess claimed that Mennonites do not understand the negative side of that verse:

We do not fully know what the Apostle Paul, by his own admission a citizen of the Roman empire, meant by his words, "do not be conformed. . ." We are even less clear how to apply that statement to our times when the issue is not just citizenship but the ubiquitousness of popular culture.<sup>192</sup>

No statement could be more of a death certificate for non-conformity in the Mennonite Church.

J. Denny Weaver's Becoming Anabaptist gives a modern view of Anabaptism. Weaver correctly identified separation as a driving force for Anabaptists.

While a wide range of degrees of separation from the host-society have developed--from self-contained Hutterite colonies to modern acculturated Mennonites, common to all was the sense of posing some kind of alternative to the dominant fusion of religion and national culture.<sup>193</sup>

Using another Mennonite historian's viewpoint, he wrote of the changes in the doctrine of nonconformity from the Outlawed Period to the Middle Period. "Richard MacMaster describes how 'humility' then came to replace suffering as the operative motif of the expression of nonconformity or separation."<sup>194</sup>

In his conclusion he once again identified separation as basic to Anabaptism. Unfortunately he stated it more in terms of what might loosely be called political positions, rather than in terms of nonconformity as traditionally understood.<sup>195</sup>

MacMaster's Land, Piety, Peoplehood concerned itself with the establishment of Mennonite communities in America. The book is an historical survey, and does not directly pertain to the issue at hand, but the chapter entitled "The Inner Religious Life: Mennonites and Pietism" pointed out the transformation of piety when persecution ceased to be an issue.

The fact was, actual suffering was farther and farther removed from Amish and Mennonite people's actual experience. As that happened, humility then seems to have subtly begun to replace the theme of suffering as an organizing idea for Mennonite and Amish theology and self-perception.<sup>196</sup>

As fascinating as this idea is, it pertains only indirectly to nonconformity. Humility preached in Mennonite churches, as described by MacMaster, does provide a basis for acceptance of nonconformity as a cost of discipleship. Still, nonconformity was more than a result of persecution. It caused the persecution. Similarly humility is a result of nonconformity, not a cause.

The Mennonite Mosaic merits attention both for its own commentary and its extensive polling across several Mennonite denominations. In the former category, the authors correctly identified separation as a driving force in the history of the Mennonite church.

Separation from the world has been a strongly held Biblical principle throughout Anabaptist-Mennonite history. It has been incorporated into a number of confessions of faith.<sup>197</sup>

They went on to discuss differences revealed between the Schleithem and Dordrecht Confession. "Throughout their history, Mennonites of Dutch origin have tended to emphasize the church-world dichotomy somewhat less than their kin of Swiss origin."<sup>198</sup>

It must be remembered that the Mennonite Church is mostly of Swiss origin. Referring to the Mennonite Church as the Mennonite denomination which strongly identifies with Mennonite heritage and traditions, the authors wrote: "Many are of Amish background, greatly concerned with nonconformity and still the most rural [of the groups under consideration], but is presently changing rapidly."<sup>199</sup>

Unfortunately, even while identifying the importance of nonconformity, the book's surveys do not include much concerning the subject. Two questions indicated something about the theoretical side of the issue. For example, they found that 92% of the Mennonite Church members in their study agreed with the statement, "The Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of the World are clearly different." The writers went on to explain: "Their responses do not, of course, reveal which particular involvements they would avoid and which they would not."<sup>200</sup> This warning was in order considering the response to the next question. Fifty-nine percent agreed that they should "avoid involvements in the 'kingdom of the world' as much as possible."<sup>201</sup>

It is fitting to conclude the survey of modern writing with these perceptions of Mennonites by Mennonites. Almost all declared that there are two kingdoms. Better than half of them thought they needed to avoid the kingdom of the world as much as possible. Such a percentage reveals a large body of Mennonites still advocating a rigorous separation from the world. That these sentiments still exist in the church is remarkable, since there has been little or no intellectual leadership for nonconformity for close to three decades. The modern literature shows that after the initial attempts to preserve nonconformity, the teachers and denominational leaders fell silent on the subject and even assaulted the past.

The next section deals with a particular battleground in the Liberal Period, i.e. the Lancaster Conference. Experiences in that Conference reveal considerable information about the loss of defined nonconformity in the Mennonite Church.

The Lancaster Conference Nonconformity Committee

Lancaster Conference had a Nonconformity Committee from March 1955 to January 1971. The Committee was appointed by the Conference Bishops to promote nonconformity. The original Committee was made of nine persons: three bishops, three ministers and three deacons. It was an aggressive committee that worked principally through weekend and evening conferences and the distribution of tracts. Occasionally it lobbied church agencies for greater respect for nonconformity. The creation of the Committee should not necessarily be seen as an indication of strength of the doctrine. The fact that there was a committee probably indicates there was some alarm about nonconformity. It was formed to face the threats of the modern world and to shore up a doctrine that was weakening. That said, there was considerably more confidence in the doctrine and the hope to re-establish it in the early days of the Committee than in the later ones.

The Committee kept minutes most of its years. Its members began confidently. At their first meeting on 6 April 1955, they planned to petition the Bishop Board for

permission to hold a meeting for pastors and their wives on 24 May 1955 at Mellinger's Meetinghouse. The program would include worship, discussion of prayer veiling, plain dress, the influence of literature, ecumenicism and open communion, and an attack on Calvinism.<sup>202</sup> At their second meeting, 19 April 1955, they planned a series of morning meetings with varying topics.<sup>203</sup>

At their fifth meeting on 29 May 1955, they made no comment as to the success of their first conference. Apparently it was successful, because they continued with plans for five regional conferences, and began planning for a Conference-wide meeting.<sup>204</sup>

At their seventh meeting, 28 March 1956, they planned a tent meeting and the development of a series of nonconformity pamphlets targeting various readers. It is obvious that up to this time they had a strong sense of purpose and a future. There is no indication of discouragement or floundering. They had met thirteen times by the end of the year, and increasingly widened the scope of their activities.<sup>205</sup> Later the sense optimism waned, and their tone became desperate.

At their twelfth meeting on 10 September 1956, "Convictions were expressed as to the liberalism being introduced in our church publications."<sup>206</sup> The Committee, which apparently had been a special committee, now called on the bishops to make them a standing committee "to study current

needs in the area of nonconformity and separation and to suggest methods and plans for work in this area."<sup>207</sup>

Through 1957 the Committee concerned itself with planning meetings and developing literature. A note in the 9 July 1957 minutes shows they reviewed a manuscript and proposed changes. Among the changes was "change wording that puts too much endorsement on the bow tie."<sup>208</sup>

There were apparently no meetings or no minutes for 1958. Minutes resume for 9 March 1959 with a "recently appointed Nonconformity Committee" of five members.<sup>209</sup> An entry stated the purpose and intention of the reorganized Committee. "Some time was spent in a general discussion seeking the best way to present the doctrine of nonconformity in a manner that would be most acceptable."<sup>210</sup> This point was taken up at the next two meetings. They created a list of eighteen concerns with regard to nonconformity. These concerns showed a more pessimistic tone than previously was the case. Among the concerns noted were "preaching on nonconformity; uniformity of receiving members; instructions for the recently ordained; smaller congregations [presumably smaller congregations kept tighter discipline]; kind of persons used in Sunday Schools; nonconformity in business entertainment and worldly organizations."<sup>211</sup> The new Committee apparently did not immediately endeavor to run meetings of their own. They spent more time working on literature and petitioning the Bishop Board.

On 20 July 1959, the Committee met with another *ad hoc* committee of persons interested in preserving the conservative witness of the Mennonite Church. The Committee approved and endorsed a program that the visitors were planning for the Millwood Mennonite Church.<sup>212</sup>

The Committee did not meet or leave minutes for 1960. Minutes resume in January 1961. They recorded their concern for the distribution of literature already produced and also introduced the idea of evening institutes to study nonconformity. At this meeting they also decided to send a list of suggested sermon topics to pastors.<sup>213</sup>

On 23 March 1961, they decided to print three thousand more tracts on prayer veiling and to plan a five-day evening institute on nonconformity at the Martindale Mennonite Church.<sup>214</sup> For reasons not expressed, this institute was by invitation only. It appears they attempted to invite people who already had strong convictions regarding nonconformity.

In December 1961 they decided to duplicate the institute with an open invitation. In January 1962 they laid plans for two new evening institutes in different church districts. On 27 April 1962, the Committee reported that 91 persons attended the second institute.<sup>215</sup>

On 31 August 1962, plans were on for yet another evening institute for Spring 1963. Called a Doctrinal Institute, it would have two major topics: church discipline and the history of nonconformity.<sup>216</sup> The evaluation of this

institute in the minutes for 3 June 1963 was positive. The Committee proposed yet another institute for Spring 1964. At this meeting, the Committee began to behave as a watchdog within Lancaster Conference, not just an educational or promotional vehicle. "This Committee desires to register our concerns to the Bishop Board relative to the appearances of the workers at the Salunga office [Conference and Mission offices were located in Salunga, PA], not being dressed in the order of the church."<sup>217</sup> Eventually, the minutes reported that this letter of concern was sent to the Bishop Board, approved, and forwarded to the Mission Board.<sup>218</sup>

The watchdog function appeared again in the April 1964 minutes. This time they addressed Eastern Mennonite College which received funding from the Conference. A member of the Committee was "to prepare a letter of concern to Myron Augsburg [then president of the College] regarding the influence and attitude of the school toward worldliness, especially in attire."<sup>219</sup>

By 17 August 1964, the Committee settled into a pattern of offering institutes around the Conference. Attendance was good, in some cases averaging a hundred and thirty persons nightly. Apparently institutes were "very well accepted."<sup>220</sup>

Once again in April, 1965, the Committee heard from another *ad hoc* group, called the Defenders of the Faith. The June minutes reported that the Defenders of the Faith

had disbanded, but the Bishop Board requested the Committee meet with the twenty-two concerned brothers to determine what action could be taken in their case.<sup>221</sup> At their next meeting there was a successful attempt to include some of these people in a subsidiary committee to conduct meetings, distribute literature and encourage the maintenance of the Conference discipline.<sup>222</sup>

The new members spoke up with several concerns. Among these were "inconsistent practices regarding the Christian woman's veiling, improper hair arrangement, cut hair, etc." They also expressed concern with "amusement programs at church camps," including films, hiking, swimming and boating. One of the new members reported that Lancaster Mennonite High School was uncooperative in helping him get his daughter to wear longer skirts. They expressed concern about youth group meetings where youth were encouraged to participate in civil rights demonstrations. Last, they felt the authority of the church was becoming too centralized in church agencies which would utilize strong-arm tactics that would lead the church to unfaithfulness.<sup>223</sup> The incorporation of these new members undoubtedly led to a more adversarial stance and a more urgent tone on the Committee.

On 20 September 1965, the Committee reviewed its tasks. Listed first was "to air some of the present policies of the various offices of the conference." In other words, the watchdog function came to mind first. Next, they were to

promote the privilege of committees and individuals to "raise their voice against laxity of the leadership of the church and be recognized properly." They expressed their concern once again on the perceived effort by church agencies to bring about a more centralized church government. They considered creating a monthly paper to deal with the evidence of apostasy among Mennonites. They planned to draft a letter to the bishops, asking them "to promote fellowship with a conservative emphasis, expose the outcome of modern religious philosophy, and help the Conference stay clear of predicted and actual apostasy."<sup>224</sup>

The new defensive posture indicated several trends. It showed that efforts to maintain defined nonconformity were failing. Conservatives perceived that church schools and institutions were not supporting the doctrine of nonconformity. Clearly whatever optimism and energy was present in the Committee in 1955 had turned to hostility and frustration ten years later.

On 9 September 1965, a feisty Committee was ready to take on several new institutes and produce a monthly paper, "The Nonconformity Messenger." Oddly, the topics at the new institutes were not church discipline and the history of nonconformity, but rather, the "Ecumenical Advancement Today."<sup>225</sup> This change probably reveals that the Committee had expanded its interests a little beyond nonconformity to

the world, and now focused on nonconformity of Mennonites to other Christians.

On 27 December 1965, they met to discuss their paper. A candidate for editor asked the Committee what they had in mind. The answers indicated an almost completely adversarial approach with church leadership over nonconformity. They proposed a four-fold mission:

We shall have liberty to speak critically of the various organizations of the church without being censored by the leadership. Second, to give the minority an opportunity to speak. Third, to publish unpublished facts both commendable and uncommendable for all who care to know. Fourth, to promote conservative Bible doctrines.<sup>226</sup>

The candidate, Clarence Fretz, whose own views were a little different, declined to serve because he wanted a more balanced approach. He envisioned a paper called "Truth and Life," balancing convictions with new life in Christ and a more meaningful devotional life. He called his vision "transformity not nonconformity," and saw it as a more positive angle.<sup>227</sup>

The broadening scope of the Committee, especially its sectarian impulse, can be seen in the minutes for 26 January 1966. They discussed the relationship of the Mennonite Central Committee to the National and World Council of Churches. The Committee agreed to look into the matter and return to the discussion.<sup>228</sup>

In March 1966 they reorganized with some new members and continued promoting nonconformity through literature and

several institutes. Ideas for future institute topics included education, Mennonites in missions and psychology. The search for an editor continued to be fruitless, as it would until the Committee disbanded.<sup>229</sup>

Throughout 1966 and 1967, the Committee promoted tracts and planned and held institutes, often with the standby topics of church discipline and the history of nonconformity. In 1968 the work continued with occasional glances at bigger topics. For example, the 22 January 1968 minutes mention a discussion about the Church's position with regard to pacifism and the peace movement.<sup>230</sup>

The 15 April 1968 minutes reveal interesting developments. They were unable to evaluate their last institute held in the New Danville district, "since none of the committee members present were in attendance at the institute." They also discussed the unfavorable response from the Paradise District churches to sponsoring an institute in their district. This is the first time in the minutes that a district appears to resist initiatives by the Committee. They decided to prepare a letter to the district leaders requesting suggestions for a different type of program that might be more effective.<sup>231</sup>

At their next meeting, 30 April 1968, the following comment appeared: "Luke Stolfuss reports that the feeling of the ministry of the Paradise District toward our

Committee's plans for an institute there would suggest that we take no further action in the matter." <sup>232</sup>

A general feeling of discouragement seems to have taken hold of the Committee. The 30 April 1968 minutes stated: "there was also some discussion as to the need for the committee's function and the lack of involvement and interest on the part of each member." <sup>233</sup>

When they met in December of that year, they continued to discuss their purpose and the need for the Committee. They determined two things: "to request five minutes at Conference Day to present their concerns," and to send a letter to ministers to "hold these concerns before their people." <sup>234</sup>

The request for time at Conference Day and the letter to ministers are the last energetic acts of the Committee. By Fall 1969 the Committee appears only to be able to tread water, and search for an identity: "Each member is to look for suitable resource material and suggestions for future mailings." <sup>235</sup>

By March 1970 their only plans were to inventory the literature left over and perhaps reprint some. At the next meeting, 15 October 1970, the Committee appears to have lost its focus: "After discussing the purpose and work of the Committee, it was agreed to ask the Bishop Board for suggestions for this Committee." <sup>236</sup>

The bishops responded, but not with much positive direction. The final meeting of the Committee, 21 January 1971, showed a Committee that had ground to a halt. "The main purpose of this meeting was to answer a letter from the Bishop Board, requesting that we study our purpose and goals."<sup>237</sup> The bishops suggested they consider merging with another committee. This was a suggestion the Committee was eager to take. They sent the following petition back to the bishops:

Since nonconformity is related to so many areas of the life of the Christian and the experience of the church, we feel the doctrine of nonconformity can best be represented and promoted in a broader approach than by a special Committee. We therefore recommend that the Nonconformity Committee be discontinued. We urge that such committees as the Christian Education Board, Ministerial Instruction Committee and the Christian Life Meeting Committee be asked to continually seek ways to include the teaching of nonconformity in their work.<sup>238</sup>

This Committee progressed from a reasonably confident attempt to shore up a doctrine in the mid-1950s to a militant, adversarial watchdog group in the mid-1960s to a Committee that struggled to understand itself in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Consider several quotations taken from each era. One of their tracts written in 1959, a time of strict dress regulations, was called "Preparing Applicants for Church Membership." It stated: "It is indeed unfortunate that here and there some of our ministry may not be able to give very good reasons for the church-prescribed garb."<sup>239</sup> In 1959, laxity was here and there. By the mid-1960s the minutes spoke of "predicted and actual

apostasy." By 1969, the Committee questioned its own existence.

#### Nonconformity Committee Tracts

The Nonconformity Committee had their seventh meeting on 28 March 1956 at the Oreville home. Among other items on their agenda was a proposal to write and develop pamphlets promoting "Biblical separation from the world."<sup>240</sup> Topics included a pamphlet for ministers on the subject of Christian dress for men and women, and one for youth in a question and answer format. At the Committee's eighth meeting, about a month later, they decided to include writers outside the Lancaster Conference when useful. The printing of tracts and pamphlets proved to be an earnest endeavor. These tracts reveal a great deal about nonconformity in the Lancaster Conference in the 1950s and 1960s. The Committee was not alone in promoting nonconformity in tracts. Some of the tracts they distributed appeared under different imprimaturs within the Mennonite Church: Television Dangers to Your Spiritual Life, Farm Shows?, Distinctive Dress Proves a Blessing, Bowling Right or Wrong?, Radio Dangers to Your Spiritual Life, Public Bathing?, Why a Christian Does Not Dance, Indoor...Theaters...Outdoors are among the titles. There were many tracts devoted to attire, specifically arguing against wearing wedding bands, and promoting prayer veiling for women. These tracts appeared at least from 1956 to 1966.

In most cases the tracts took the position of absolute prohibition. A person was not simply advised to avoid possible problems. The tract usually instructed the believer to avoid the activity altogether. There were a few exceptions, like listening to the radio. There was a pattern to the arguments. Any contact with the activities in the world almost invariably would lead to seduction and sin. Even if one did not fall into sin, his example might lead a weaker person into it. Most of these listed activities wasted time which would be better spent on spiritual development. Too much money would be wasted on the activity. The conscience would become dulled.

Farm shows, for instance, have "light, jazzy music, foolish parades and other features not conducive to spiritual life and growth."<sup>241</sup> Farm shows also involved competition which might lead to pride. The capping argument was: "Does it enhance and enrich Christian witness and testimony? If it does not, we had better deny ourselves of it."<sup>242</sup> Make no mistake, this was not an open-ended question.

Television, according to the tract, had little educational or recreational value. "Satan was really educating them in ways of murder, lust and crime;"<sup>243</sup> "Isn't it sad when one who calls himself a Christian must resort to silly, worthless, demoralizing, sin-suggestive, crime-inducing programs to relieve tension."<sup>244</sup> The financial investment was too great; the Lord's money could be be spent better.

Television was out of the question. "In view of the high standard of purity and thought as outlined in the Scriptures and taught in the church, it is scripturally right that its [television's] use should be discouraged by all Christians."<sup>245</sup>

Public Bathing? said of the Christian, "He should maintain a faithful witness against it [near nudity] and not become a participant which he surely does when he patronizes a public beach."<sup>246</sup> This tract acknowledged that enjoying waves and sand are not inherently evil, but that was not the end of the story. "And by day, the beautiful sandy beaches along the seashore, lakeside and elsewhere are alive with near-nude, mixed bathers, inflaming one another with lust and passion by their shameless exposure."<sup>247</sup> Any contact will lead to sin. "Those who frequent the present day public bathing beach or pool, with its corrupted morality, will not escape the contaminating influences of evil."<sup>248</sup> The tract fired one more salvo before finishing. "The Christian who is unable or unwilling to deny himself this trifling luxury of public bathing in the face of the evident moral degeneracy knows little about self-denial and would hardly practice it to any extent elsewhere."<sup>249</sup>

A tract decorated with a traffic light shone red on three counts against bowling: environment, stewardship and calling. "Would we want to be found in this environment when Christ returns?"<sup>250</sup> Money was also an issue: "Is the

time and money used in bowling wisely spent?"<sup>251</sup> The final question would be answered easily in the negative by many: "Has not bowling become an obsession with the American people?"<sup>252</sup> The tract recognized that bowling could be good exercise, but concluded, "For the conscientious Christian it is questionable therefore to engage in the very popular sport of bowling . . . the atmosphere of which, in general, jeopardizes the spiritual life of the player."<sup>253</sup>

One of the later tracts, Why a Christian Does Not Dance, argued that "This is one of the devil's favorite spots to hatch out petting."<sup>254</sup> David and Miriam dancing in the Old Testament, or the statement in Ecclesiastes 3:4 that "there is a time to dance" did not really refer to dancing: "This kind of dancing was little else than shouting and rejoicing with bodily exercise."<sup>255</sup> Modern, recreational dancing is a "sugar-coated evil."<sup>256</sup> The conclusion was that "no truly born-again person will ever want to defile or degrade himself by going to a dance."<sup>257</sup>

Radio, according to the tract, was found wanting in six areas: it fosters frivolous thinking, undermines reverence, conditions the personality for sensual living, breaks down resistance to temptations, builds a materialistic attitude toward life and promotes crime and hatred toward certain classes and nations. The conclusion in this tract was a little less definite. The call here was "to exercise much care in its [radio's] use."<sup>258</sup>

Tracts on clothing, wedding rings and prayer veiling revealed other dimensions of the defined nonconformity mindset. Although it was seen as perhaps the most powerful symbol of nonconformity, prayer veiling as prescribed in 1 Corinthians 11:10 is a different kind of issue. It was not the attempt to make an application of a biblical principle, but rather, a direct effort to preserve a biblical symbol. Whether a woman should cover her head in worship is a different kind of question, involving hermeneutics. Forbidding the use of jewelry and certain clothing, on the other hand, is an attempt to make concrete applications of biblical principles. Distinctive dress has a longer history in the church than issues related to leisure and entertainment. Anabaptists in their first hundred years had developed specific dress restrictions. The tract Christian Attire pointed out that Anabaptists could be identified by simple dress as early as 1598.<sup>259</sup>

In all these tracts and others, except the one on radio and the remote possibility of the one on bowling, it was assumed that any contact would contaminate. In the case of radio there seemed to be the allowance for individual discretion. There is no good reason as to why they held a double standard. Granting a realm of personal authority on the use of radio was completely arbitrary. In each other case, the warnings could have been given and the decision left to the individual. The inconsistency undoubtedly

affected people. The real dilemma for modern Mennonites is that the warnings, while ranging from quaint to hostile to unbalanced, are often correct enough. Most modern Christians wisely would leave many of these decisions in the individual's hands. It would be interesting to have heard the authors' defense of the idea that all contact would lead to the worst results. No such defense appeared in the tracts. In them adults were treated like children, lacking self-restraint or any ability to discern.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

#### Introduction

This investigator has traced the doctrine of nonconformity through Mennonite history up to the present. Research showed that defined nonconformity in the Mennonite Church is dead. It has been gone for many years. The will to teach nonconformity also has disappeared. There still may be some residual examples of defined nonconformity, but there is simply no evidence that the Mennonite Church is interested in being a nonconformed people, at least as the term was defined up until the second half of the twentieth century. Some Mennonites are casting about for new models for how to live in the world. For bolder persons and congregations there is no problem with these major shifts of understanding. For others, there remains a serious difficulty concerning identity. Yet for all the apparent interest in solving this issue, there is no interest in finding an answer by looking again at nonconformity. The embarrassed silence of church leaders and academics on nonconformity has not helped the church. How will it interpret its own history? How will it maintain a sense of continuity with its past?

Observations

Nonconformity dealt with more than clothing. Whether defined or indefinite, it depended on an outlook, a *Weltanschauung*. That outlook was that the world is tremendously wicked and hostile to Christians. It is not as if the Mennonite Church has dropped some clothing restrictions and other expressions of nonconformity, but maintained the rest of the program. At about every point, the Mennonite Church has abandoned defined nonconformity and the will that went with it. It is very important for the Mennonite Church to admit that it has done more than throw off incidental interpretations. Nonconformity has been a core doctrine in Mennonite theology, but the Mennonite Church has discarded it.

Nonconformity also cannot be reduced to the element of nonresistance. It is true that the Mennonite Church is campaigning more vigorously to maintain its scruples against participation in war and violence. It is conceivable that it will succeed in remaining nonconformed in that area, but from where will the energy come? Mennonites of a generation ago thought of nonresistance and nonconformity as the definitive twin prongs of Mennonite identity. There is a more precise formulation. Nonconformity logically precedes nonresistance. Nonconformity can explain nonresistance, but the reverse does not hold true. Why did earlier generations of Mennonites not fight in the world's wars? They did not

fight because they saw themselves as a people separated unto God, living in a consistent nonconformity to the world. J. L. Stauffer stated it very articulately in a tract: "While we have increased conviction for nonresistance, we have a growing disregard for separation and the inconsistencies will eventually lead our youth away from the doctrine of nonresistance, because nonresistance is in reality a phase of nonconformity to the world on the issue of warfare and violence."<sup>260</sup> This issue of logical priority is evident as early as Schleithem. Article Four called for separation, concluding, "Therefore there will unquestionably fall from us the unchristian, devilish weapons of force."<sup>261</sup>

The Mennonite Church cannot drop its interest in nonconformity without being willing to cut itself off from much of its own history. It was more than clothing and more than a footnote in the history of nonresistance. Nonconformity was a super-doctrine, controlling many aspects of the church's practice. It was a principal lens, a first understanding, through which the New Testament was read and applied. Not dealing with the issue is bound to lead to a serious disruption of doctrinal continuity.

There is no scientific answer as to why the Mennonite Church has changed in regard to nonconformity. To conservatives it is a case of apostasy, plain and simple. Their understanding is an underestimation. Many Mennonites have remained loyal to the church, to the Scriptures as they read

them, and to Jesus Christ as they experience him, and have rejoiced to see defined nonconformity disappear. To those already moving to new understandings, all the nonconformity of the past can be tossed out without damaging the church. This idea, too, is untenable. Nonconformity rests on a deep-seated drive to separate from the world. That drive was embedded in Mennonite theology at its beginning.

Ironically, one possible explanation for the loss of interest in nonconformity is that the Mennonite Church is primarily made up of ethnic Mennonites. As oxymoronic as that term is, considering Mennonite belief in an adult, voluntary commitment to Christ, the fact remains that the vast majority of the Mennonite Church in North America grew up in Mennonite homes. By the second half of the twentieth century, those homes were increasingly affluent. Substance abuse, sexual promiscuity, divorce and a host of other modern ills never ravaged most of these homes. By and large, Mennonites have experienced the worst the world has to offer only in their imaginations. Is it any wonder that the drive to separate from the evil world looks different to them than it did to the first generation of Anabaptists? If the world is a candy store which offers only treats and pleasures, who has the will to resist?

The fact that most Mennonite Church Mennonites grew up Mennonite has had other ramifications. It is a growing church, even if its growth is slow, but there is a general

lack of familiarity with converts who have had much experience with things from which they would like to be separated. The church is often in a quandary with these newcomers. It is often thought that nonconformity on any level is an impediment to growth. In other words, church growth/evangelism and nonconformity are seen as antithetical principles. In fact, it might be their new converts that would have the most energy for separating from the world in order to begin living a Christian lifestyle, especially if they have seen the ugly side of the world firsthand. The Mennonite Church is correct in not wanting to impose a burden of defined nonconformity on young believers, but quite wrong when it does not allow its rich heritage to help guide them. How this might be done will be taken up shortly.

Another factor that possibly explains the loss of nonconformity is that the Mennonite Church in North America has not experienced the widespread hostility and brutal persecution that plagued the early Anabaptists. In other words, the world has presented a friendlier face here, and continues to do so. The process that was begun in the New World has matured fully. Society is completely open to the Mennonite Church. All those things that stigmatized them in years past have either been dropped by the church or have become sociably acceptable. In previous generations Mennonite doctrines, especially nonresistance, helped keep Menno-

nites back from the world and preserved some of the drive toward separation. As a case in point, Mennonites have experienced little social disapproval, let alone persecution, for nonresistance since the end of the War in Vietnam (1973). As inconvenient as alternative service might have been for Mennonite young men, it hardly can be equated with persecution. Indeed the anti-war movement of that era went beyond approval and acquired a certain level of glamour. Movie stars, athletes and sports heroes put themselves, for different reasons, in the same situation as Mennonites. Undoubtedly this was a different experience than Mennonites faced during the World Wars and the Korean War. Mennonites in the Mennonite Church in turn have gone from being nonconformists to super-conformists, well-educated and affluent.

In the final analysis, there may be no satisfying answer as to why the Mennonite Church has lost so much of its interest in nonconformity. Some apostasy may be involved as theological liberalism makes inroads in the church, but that particular influence erodes all doctrines. It is also evident that when more conservative leaders, who are wedded to defined nonconformity, depart, they take a lot of energy with them. This effect can clearly be seen in the case of the Lancaster Conference, where the churches left behind are by definition less concerned with defined nonconformity. It has probably happened that way many other times. What about those congregations that dropped their

nonconformity without succumbing to theological liberalism, or never even experienced a church split? There is no answer other than they simply changed their minds, and were unified in that decision.

Two questions must be answered in this thesis. Can the Mennonite Church jettison defined nonconformity without throwing out nonconformity altogether? Secondly, can the Mennonite Church survive as a Mennonite church without nonconformity as a doctrinal emphasis?

The answer to the first question is yes, at least for the most part. Defined nonconformity has serious inherent defects. Principally, it may not accomplish anything important. Colossians 2:20-23 states clearly that rules do not necessarily wean a person away from the world. The list of other complaints is also clear. It legislates personal interpretations. It emphasizes the external, is unnecessarily divisive and is prone to self-righteousness. The unwarranted strictness of Mennonite restrictions in the past produced much confusion later. The tendency toward defined nonconformity was present early in Mennonite history, but it was slightly different. First, it was established by a consensus of the living, not a slavish obedience to the past. There was simply no past to inform them. Second, it was more general in nature when it came to applying scriptural principles. One could easily ascribe to the Schleithem or Dordrecht confessions and reject most, if not

all, of the defined nonconformity of the past. Many of the more conservative Mennonites indeed do hold that written church standards of defined nonconformity are definitionally Mennonite. The Sword & Trumpet wrote:

1955--the Mennonite Church General Conference (Assembly) made a strong appeal for adherence to church standards. Perhaps this was the last major appeal for a return to the Anabaptist/Mennonite pattern.<sup>262</sup>

That the Mennonite Church has often had such standards is not arguable. They often did, especially after the Outlawed Period. That those standards were the defining characteristic of their faith is dubious. It is certainly possible to jettison defined nonconformity while maintaining an interest in nonconformity.

The answer to the second question has already been stated. The issue of nonconformity is a foundational emphasis in the church. If the church cannot find a way to preserve its commitment to nonconformity, it must face squarely that it has severed itself from its own past.

#### Suggestions for the Mennonite Church

The Mennonite Church could steer a course for itself which is consistent with its own past and which does not call for a dismissal of hundreds of years of teaching. Chapter One in the section dealing with methodology delineated three types of Mennonite nonconformity with regard to the New Testament. The three categories were: practices which were once distinctively Mennonite but are practiced now by others (e.g. believer's baptism, separation from the

state, and a free, New Testament Church); scriptural directives taken literally (nonresistance, not swearing oaths, simplicity and modesty in attire, prayer veiling, holy kiss, foot washing, no secret societies); and practices which were applications of scriptural principles (abstinence from alcohol, prohibitions on worldly amusements, jewelry, cosmetics, political activity, dancing and higher education, and a uniform dress code). It will be necessary to consider them in reverse order.

Many unnecessary controversies with regard to defined nonconformity come from the third category. The contemporary Mennonite Church has simply rejected much of this list. This rejection moved them toward the mainstream of evangelical North American Christianity, and changed the church profoundly in the Liberal Period. In spite of the dislocations and dissatisfactions this change spawned, it is defensible. There is little evidence gathered from early Mennonites that any particular form of defined nonconformity based on scriptural principles would have been maintained after consensus in its favor dissolved.

On the other hand, there is a way to answer the problem of worldliness without resorting to defined nonconformity. Church leaders, particularly preachers and pastors, could make specific recommendations without creating hard and fast rules and using them as tests of membership. The absence of compulsion sometimes strengthens an argument. It may be

that the early church approached many issues this way.

There is some evidence that the early church handled some of these issues through influence rather than rules:

For example, despite its teaching about simple dress, the early church didn't require individual Christians to wear any special or distinctive type of clothing, and early Christians didn't all dress alike. Even though the church opposed cosmetics, some Christian women used them anyway. Other Christians ignored the counsel of elders and attended the theater and the arena. And they were not punished by the church for doing so. Nevertheless the church's method was effective.<sup>263</sup>

For the Mennonite Church to say it will no longer have defined nonconformity with written rules is not to say that it then must forfeit any interest or instruction in the same areas.

The second category of nonconformity consists of those things that have sprung from a literalistic view of the Scriptures. These ideas can and must be defended. It is in this area that the destructive intrusion of theological liberalism has assaulted nonconformity in the Mennonite Church. Theological liberalism is as foreign to the Mennonite Church as it is to any other conservative denomination, and its influence should not be underrated. If the general authority of the Bible is impeached, there is little use in appealing to it for specific practices like prayer veiling, the holy kiss, foot washing, the Lord's Day, anointing with oil, not swearing oaths or modest attire. In fact, Mennonite theology cannot rest rationally on any other foundation than a literalistic view of the Scriptures. Mennonites have

been biblical literalists from the beginning. It was their literalism that led them to separation and believer's baptism. Failure to distinguish between the second and third categories leads to critical problems. The beliefs of the second category cannot be discarded without severing essential connections with the past. Deleting the third category would not pose such a threat.

The first category includes those things that are no longer distinctively Mennonite. Among these items are the practices of a free church, New Testament church order, and believer's baptism. Items in this category can and must be defended. That these ideas now have broader acceptance is reason to rejoice. It may be harder for later generations of believers to appreciate the relative newness of the recovery of these ideas in church history, but they are nonetheless critical ideas that the church must maintain and cherish.

#### Conclusion

In conclusion, there is a way for the Mennonite Church to be true to its own roots without returning to the defined nonconformity of previous generations. Those who want defined nonconformity, conservative Mennonites and Amish, do not own the doctrine and are not the exclusive heirs of the early Anabaptists. The Mennonite Church could operate through influence rather than rules in some matters, and at

the same time hold tenaciously to its literal interpretations of appropriate Bible teachings.

In the introduction to this thesis, several questions were raised regarding Christian practice in general. It is consistent with Mennonite thinking to say that these and similar questions are not entirely private matters. It is irresponsible to turn a young believer loose with little guidance other than "do your best." Pastors and more mature Christians could provide considerable guidance and influence without resorting to rules. In this sense, nonconformity could be defined, but defined gently. The church still might find that certain convictions are held more firmly by those who are allowed to arrive at them in their own time, especially in matters of dress, entertainment and other lifestyle issues.

The Mennonite Church is uniquely suited to this task. It possesses a theological framework that leads to vigilance about worldliness. Its leaders, if they have the fortitude, could claim authority to define nonconformity through counsel, without stepping beyond their traditional roles. Very importantly the Mennonite Church has had the experience of creating overly-strict church rules to enforce their defined nonconformity, and then experienced the rejection of that model. In short, few other churches have dealt with the issue with the same level of intensity. Its experiences,

even its painful ones, might yet prove to be a blessing to the larger church.

## APPENDIX ONE: NONCONFORMITY AS A BIBLICAL IDEA

Since nonconformity has not been a doctrinal emphasis of most congregations, including contemporary Mennonite Church congregations, it is important to provide some biblical background. This appendix can provide only a cursory view of it as a biblical idea for two reasons: first, the main concern is the Mennonite Church, and second, the Bible has so much to say about nonconformity that thorough coverage would require a thesis in and of itself. The doctrine of nonconformity, far from being esoteric, is implicit and explicit in both testaments. It is a guiding principle for God's people. The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible puts it this way: "The idea of separation, so prominent in the Old Testament, is carried over into the New Testament doctrine of the church."<sup>264</sup>

### Nonconformity in the Old Testament

Perhaps the heart of Old Testament teaching on nonconformity is found in the idea of holiness. A modern non-Mennonite, R. C. Sproul, brings out the idea of separation inherent in holiness: "The primary meaning of holy is `separate.'"<sup>265</sup> God is holy, holy, holy. The trisagion declares otherness as one of his chief characteristics. It is not an attribute among attributes, but an overarching principle

about his existence, actually defining his other attributes.<sup>266</sup> His love is holy, for example. Sproul is not alone in his thinking. The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible says of holiness: "An examination of its occurrences in context suggests that the factor of separateness is basic, but that this does not exclude the further elements of radiance and purity."<sup>267</sup>

Since God is holy, his people must also be holy in order to be his (Leviticus 11:44-45). God provided for the creation and maintenance of such a holy group of people, i.e. the Jews, who were called to be his people, set aside for his use.

Considering the issue more philosophically, the principle of separation depends on the logical world view that is created and modelled in the Old Testament. Contemporary North American society places a premium on diversity and cultural relativism, so the very principle of separation, especially based on being chosen, may seem suspicious. Separation necessarily entails value judgements. Similarly, nonconformity rests better with the logical idea of opposition, rather than with a monistic worldview. For example, according to the Old Testament, things (including people) and actions can and must be separated from one another. Much of this Judeo-Christian worldview in which separation is a possibility was established early in the Old Testament, in the creation of the world. In Genesis, Chap-

ter One, God separated the phenomena of the physical world: light was separated from darkness, land from water, atmosphere from outer space. God identified appropriate religious separation in earliest society. For instance, Abel's sacrifice was acceptable; Cain's was not (Genesis 4:4-5). Noah, his sons and their families were saved; the rest perished (Genesis 6:5-8). Lot separated from Abraham in Genesis 13:9. Jacob was loved, but Esau was hated, according to Malachi 1:2-3.

God established a nonconformed people even more clearly with the call of Abram, whom he brought out of his home in Ur and later Haran (Genesis 11:31, 12:5). The fact that God brought out Abram and Sarai deserves special notice. In a short item called "Separation-Genesis 12:1" appearing in the Sword and Trumpet, a conservative Mennonite monthly, a writer stated that the calling of Abraham provided "a divine movement toward the human race that formed the starting-point of true religion."<sup>268</sup> Recognizing that Abram's call was more than just a call to move, the writer stated that Abram provided "an ideal of the life of faith and separation."<sup>269</sup> Abram's call out of his heathen environment would not have affected anything without a corresponding change in his heart, but his willingness to detach himself serves as a type for believers.<sup>270</sup> Unlike the Christian who can cross the line from the world into the kingdom of God without

physical relocation, Abram was transplanted physically in anticipation of the Jewish nation.

After Abraham's trailblazing act of physical separation, the next visible sign of nonconformity was circumcision (Genesis 17:10-14). Every Jewish male from Abraham on would have a physical reminder of his separation from other nations. Nonconformity in that period did not begin and end with clan relocation and circumcision. Before and after the giving of the law, nonconformity rested heavily on being chosen (Genesis 12:1-3), as well as on conduct or lifestyle (Genesis 17:1). It is certain that there was a behavioral dimension to nonconformity which circumcision represented in part, but the Bible does not provide many details regarding this difference in the pre-Law period. There is a clear indication that there was such a difference in the stories of Noah (Genesis 6:8), Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 13:13) and Abimelech (Genesis 20:11), among others.

For the most part, specific information as to difference in conduct between the heroes of the Bible stories and their contemporaries is not provided by the Scriptures, so it is hard to assess exactly how morally or socially different the patriarchs were from the societies around them. Certainly the principal difference, and the one that cannot be overlooked, was their faith in and worship of the true God. It is interesting to note that even before the Law, the chosen people could corrupt their worship with idolatry.

For example, in Genesis 35:3-4 Jacob asked his company to put away their foreign gods.

In anticipation of the creation of a Jewish nation of nonconformed people, the Lord preserved a distinct group that did not assimilate into the other nations. Joseph was instrumental in preserving this distinction when he settled his relatives in Goshen and prescribed herding as a profession (Genesis 46:34). His intention was to keep his clan apart from the Egyptians physically in order to maintain their own cultural and religious identity. The Exodus demonstrated the success of his strategy. A large company had remained unassimilated into Egyptian society (Numbers 1:46).

After the Exodus and in the wilderness, the Jews were reminded regularly that they were not to adopt the customs of the nations they were to dispossess in Canaan (Deuteronomy 7:1-8). A critical point in this regard, of course, was the giving of the Law which codified the practice of nonconformity. A partial list is long, even if one arbitrarily excludes the obvious moral issues and economic practices that contrasted with the societies in Canaan. The list included: endogamy (Deuteronomy 7:3); an elaborate separate cultic practice (Leviticus 1-17); a hefty set of dietary regulations "to teach them to separate clean from unclean" (Leviticus 11); a weekly rest (Deuteronomy 5:12-14); special garments which were made of unmixed materials, showed gender

distinction and were adorned with tassels (Deuteronomy 22:5, 11-12); agricultural practices forbidding planting fields with different kinds of seeds (Deuteronomy 22:9); and grooming with regard to beards and eyebrows (Leviticus 19:27).

In many cases Jewish nonconformity in these practical areas had the intrinsic value of keeping people away from the perverted practices of the nations around them, but it was more than a utilitarian or negative separation. God gave the Jews a positive identity with many symbolic representations in daily life. To say some prescriptions were symbolic would not in any way denigrate them or suggest that they were arbitrary in nature. The practices were God's chosen symbolic practices and he forbade the Jews to innovate or substitute in these matters.

It is interesting that aspects of the Law, when strictly practiced, anticipated modern hygiene and public health, but the need to find a practical reason behind all the nonconformed practices leads to excesses of its own. Is it really necessary to have a functional reason as to why Jews could not eat "a kid boiled in its mother's milk," as in Exodus 23:19, or rabbits, as in Leviticus 11:6? Was the purpose of using a single type of cloth in clothing in Deuteronomy 22:11 to prevent static electricity?<sup>271</sup> Whereas some of the prescribed customs anticipated disease control and health, and others repudiated Canaanite practices, all were pleasing to God and used heuristically to teach the Jew

nonconformity to the surrounding cultures. This nonconformity aimed at purity.

Jewish life was not fragmented into religious, political and social compartments. It was an integrated, nonconformed religious life. Religion permeated all aspects of existence from birth to death, from home to Tabernacle or Temple. The whole trajectory of Jewish life moved toward the realization of a people set aside for God. The more faithful they were, the more visible their nonconformity. Of course, the reverse was true.

Assimilation was the terrible first step toward apostasy. Intermarriage was often the first step toward assimilation (Joshua 2; 1 Kings 11:3-8; Ezra 10). Apostasy eventually led to the loss of the land and exile, but God preserved Jewish separateness even in the severe dislocation of Judah. In fact, when the Babylonians took the Jews out of their land, it unexpectedly provided another opportunity to reaffirm their separateness. God promised they could still be summoned from afar in Isaiah 43:5. In Jewish history God called his people out or back on three important occasions. God called Abram from Haran. He called his people out of Egypt. He called the Jews back from the captivity under the Persians. God's call was all-important. With each calling God reaffirmed the special status, the separateness, of his people.

The Mennonite churches of the past looked on the doctrine of nonconformity as consisting of an unbroken succession stretching from the creation to the present. Nonconformity was not a New Testament innovation. That the early Mennonites drew some inspiration from the Old Testament can be seen in Menno Simons' own writing. In his important Foundation of Christian Doctrine he wrote: "The reader should in the first place observe how the people of God were already in the days of Abraham a people separated from the world, who especially since the days of Moses have had their own preachers, ceremonies, ordinances, doctrines and services as may be abundantly read and seen."<sup>272</sup>

J. C. Wenger's book Separated Unto God started its biblical argument with the Old Testament, as do many other Mennonite and related groups' works on nonconformity. Since the Old Testament prescribed more ceremonial and external practice than the New Testament, it fit very well with the Anabaptist interest in being a separate people. This affinity with the Old Testament might seem surprising to those familiar with Mennonite belief in the finality of the New Testament. For example, Mennonites never allowed arguments validating participation in war to be drawn from the Old Testament. While not attempting to apply prescriptions for the Jews to Christians, they recognized the power of Old Testament symbols when they corresponded to the inward reality of Jewish faith. "All of Israel's differences from

her national neighbors were, therefore, the results of, or symbols of, her spiritual separation unto the Lord; the fact that Israel alone was God's peculiar and special treasure, His Covenant people."<sup>273</sup>

As a case in point, it was not uncommon for plain-dressing groups to use the Old Testament as a model for prescribing plain attire. A book that was authoritative to Mennonites in its day, Doctrines of the Bible, stated: "Pride, haughtiness, social impurity, and others of this world's sins are all indicated by the manner of clothing worn by people. Read Isaiah 3:16-24; Jer. 4:30; I Tim. 2:9-10; I Pet. 3:3-4."<sup>274</sup> This same section also referred to Zephaniah 1:8. Later in the book, the writer defended himself against the charge of an inappropriate use of the Old Testament for the church: "'But this is an Old Testament reference,' some one says. Yes, but it simply shows that God in all ages held bodily ornamentation under the ban."<sup>275</sup>

A contemporary booklet on plain dress distributed by Rod & Staff Publishers, a conservative Mennonite publisher, lists several Old Testament passages in defense of plain attire. In her chapter called "Scriptural Study of Dress" Karen Johnson cites Deuteronomy 22:12, Numbers 15:38-40, Zephaniah 1:8, and Joshua 7:20-21 to demonstrate the perils of temptation by worldly dress, Ezekiel 23:40 and 2 Kings

9:30 to condemn cosmetics, and Isaiah 47:1-5 on behalf of modesty.<sup>276</sup>

The Old Testament informed Mennonite understanding of nonconformity in two ways. First, the Old Testament modelled two-kingdom theology. Two-kingdom theology is the belief that the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world stand in sharp contrast to one another, and that this distinction must not be blurred. Although the two-kingdom idea becomes clearer in the New Testament, in the Old Testament there were God's people and the other nations. Israel was God's chosen people and their dealings with other nations were to be sharply defined and limited. Second, nonconformity appeared in the Old Testament. The Old Testament evidence was important because it demonstrated God's intention to create a distinct people practicing a defined nonconformity. As in the case of plain dress, certain prescriptions could be carried over in principle. God set the terms of Jewish nonconformity. Whereas the Jews were forbidden to modify those terms, God was free to change his prescriptions for his people, and he did.

#### Nonconformity in the New Testament

Mennonites found their nonconformity mostly in the New Testament. In their finest hours they stayed close to what is prescribed there specifically, and to what most Bible-believing Christians would find reasonable, if not acceptable. The Mennonite doctrine of biblicism which reigned in

the days of defined nonconformity explains how they read the New Testament: "The genius of Mennonitism has been to reject completely the traditional distinction between those New Testament commandments on the one hand which are binding both in form and spirit upon Christians for all time, and those on the other hand which are to be observed only in spirit."<sup>277</sup> J. C. Wenger went on to mention greeting with a holy kiss, foot washing in communion, and anointing the sick with oil as still binding in form: "The Mennonites, however, in the course of time began to stress the parity of all New Testament commands; this is of course a parity in authority, not in significance."<sup>278</sup>

The core of nonconformity in the New Testament, just as in the Old Testament, is the idea of holiness/separation. In the New Testament God is once again establishing his holy people, the church. This time he is calling them from all nations and cultures (Matthew 28:19, Revelation 5:9). *Ecclesia*, the Greek word for church in the New Testament, has the primitive sense of calling out.<sup>279</sup> In the Septuagint *ecclesia* was used to indicate a gathering of Israel, "summoned for any definite purpose, or a gathering regarded as representative of the whole nation."<sup>280</sup> The word *ecclesia* is loaded with purpose. Speculating as to why the Bible writers and/or translators chose this word as opposed to others, one writer suggested:

The term **ekklesia** has a sacred history in the sacred writings. It stresses the distinctiveness of Christianity as compared to cultic societies, for which there are special terms like **thiasos**.<sup>281</sup>

The element of separation was critical to understanding the concept of holiness in the Old Testament. The holiness of God and the subsequent holiness of his people is no less a concern of the New Testament: "Holiness is much more than a secondary feature of the church. On the contrary, it defines its very essence."<sup>282</sup> Conformity to the character of God gives New Testament nonconformity to the world its positive dimension. Speaking of holiness in the New Testament as opposed to the Old, the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia states: "The most striking difference is the virtual eclipse of the purely ceremonial aspect of holiness and a flooding of the sacred page with allusions to holiness as a conformity to the nature of God."<sup>283</sup>

Nonconformity is not just an abstract theory drawn from God's holiness. Several New Testament passages enjoin believers to a life of nonconformity to the world. Among these passages Romans 12:2 is most prominent: "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." This verse explains in principle both negative nonconformity, and positive transformation. On the other hand, it offers no specific suggestions even in its broad context.

Other passages have been critical to understanding nonconformity. 1 John 1:15-16 says,

Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If any one loves 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 boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.

A similar passage in James 4:4 speaks of friendship with the world as hostility toward God. "Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend to the world makes himself an enemy of God." James had already stated in James 1:27, that pure religion entails "keeping oneself unstained from the world."

What is the specific content of nonconformity in the New Testament as far as Mennonites are concerned? The most obvious elements are shared by all Bible-believing Christians: rebirth, redemption, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and bearing his fruit, and obedience to Christ's commands. Mennonites are not Dispensationalists, and would see the attempt to live by the Sermon on the Mount as normative.<sup>284</sup> The idea that the Sermon on the Mount is normative for Christians is prominent in Mennonite writing. For example, obedience to this passage is used as chief evidence for not employing the use of force:

A number of New Testament verses teach unqualified love for and nonresistance to evil men as the divine ethic for Christian believers. Among these passages are Matthew 5:38-48.<sup>285</sup>

Other examples of use of the Sermon on the Mount abound. For example, the 1963 Confession of Faith uses texts from

the Sermon on the Mount in support of a ministry for prayer (Article 8), nonconformity (Article 16), Christian integrity (Article 17), and nonresistance (Article 18).<sup>286</sup>

## APPENDIX TWO: NONCONFORMITY IN THE LARGER CHURCH

Books and articles that deal with nonconformity, or separation in as much as it results in nonconformity to the world, are few and far between. A search through most Christian bookstores is not likely to turn up a single book. A similar trip through the card catalog in most libraries yields similar results. The dearth of materials is also true of academic writing. Yet there is a concern with the subject that stretches across denominational boundaries. Mennonites are not the only Christians to have had a strong drive toward separation from the world, and to have expressed it with defined nonconformity. Obviously, for Roman Catholics monasticism has satisfied a similar impulse. Other Protestant denominations have defined nonconformity with rules concerning dress, entertainment and conduct of life, only to find those definitions rejected in the modern period. Other Christians have identified worldliness as a principal problem facing Christians, and shared the impulse toward nonconformity without much doctrinal elaboration.

Groups directly descended from sixteenth century Anabaptism have all struggled with the issue of nonconformity. Some of those groups were discussed in this thesis. Other related groups, most notably the Society of Friends and the

Church of the Brethren, have all dealt with this subject. Neither of these last groups is a direct descendant of Anabaptism, but both have travelled a similar path.

The Society of Friends, or the Quakers, whose impact on Mennonites is impressive both in Europe and the New World, followed a track very similar to Mennonites with regard to nonconformity. After an initial period of persecution, defined nonconformity became a prominent feature of Quakerism: "During the 18th century they came to regard themselves more and more as `peculiar people, laying great stress on outward observances in speech (use of thou and thee) and dress, cutting themselves off from the cultural life of the nation and rejecting art and music as frivolous."<sup>287</sup> The "peculiar people" phase of the Quakers belongs to the past. Gone are those days when "Members were disowned or dismissed for even minor infractions of the discipline; thousands were cut off for `marrying out of meeting.'"<sup>288</sup> After much uproar in the nineteenth century, most Friends "have adapted the habits of their contemporaries on dress, speech and other external matters."<sup>289</sup>

The Church of the Brethren, with its roots in German Pietism, has also travelled some of the same roads as Mennonites with regard to nonconformity: "Nonconformity in a broad sense set apart the Schwarzenau Brethren of 1708 from their friends and relatives and from the churches and government of their day."<sup>290</sup> From the middle of the nineteenth

century up to about the time of the Second World War, non-conformity was a driving issue in the church. Much as in Mennonite history, several "old order" groups have split from the main body to preserve specific forms of defined nonconformity. Nonetheless, in the modern era, the main group dropped its separatist emphasis: "Early in the 20th century the Church of the Brethren gradually abandoned its German, sectarian subculture and nonconformed identity to merge with the mainstream of American religious life and culture."<sup>291</sup> The transition to the new outlook has not taken place without some second thoughts. Some members have begun to question if the church did not discard too much: "In the later 20th century, some people . . . question whether earlier leaders discarded too much, whether there may be some intrinsic connections between the spirit of nonconformity and a personal attachment to basic Brethren belief."<sup>292</sup>

Nonconformity as the Church of the Brethren interpreted it can be seen in a 1941 statement deploring worldliness in the forms of immodest dress and conduct, dancing, theater attendance, card-playing, use of tobacco, alcoholic beverages, and narcotics. The old order groups with some variations would require beards on men, prohibit neckties, gold jewelry, and even wristwatches in some cases. They would also oppose political involvement, television and record players, etc.<sup>293</sup>

It is not just groups broadly related to Mennonites that have struggled to combat worldliness. Various Holiness, Wesleyan and Church of the Nazarene groups have had defined nonconformity similar to that of the Mennonite Church. As a matter of fact, one of the few books in the last twenty years to address the issue of worldliness directly was John White's Flirting with the World. This book reveals the ambivalence many feel who grew up with church rules that did not work very well, but who see the modern, ruleless church as not sufficiently on guard about worldliness. The book even includes a dialogue between Mennonites.<sup>294</sup>

It is hard, if not impossible, to find modern writers who address themselves to the issue of worldliness and nonconformity in general terms. Going back several decades, one finds a few books dedicated to the subject. E. J. Tuuk wrote As to Being Worldly in 1927. Tuuk's book gives an interesting glimpse of nonconformity outside Mennonite circles. Unlike many Mennonites of his era, he was not interested in creating church rules (defined nonconformity): "The New Testament does not legislate. It pronounces principles and leaves the decision to the individual conscience."<sup>295</sup> Yet his book revealed similar concerns to those of the Mennonites over the spiritual dangers of his time. His concern with questionable practices was very similar to Mennonite thinking of the same period. He listed eating and

drinking (excessively), intoxicants and smoking, auto and streetcar riding on Sundays, card-playing, dancing, theater attendance and public utility stock investment as concerns: "Where folks desire to live conscientiously these questions will arise. Their consideration is of value."<sup>296</sup>

Social dancing has been a controversy in many churches to this day. Tuuk's elaborate argument about dancing is revealing:

Observe the setting. Dancing is usually done at night. It is quite frequently indulged in by young people in public dance halls after a day of hard work. They come to the dance hall and glide and slip over the waxed floor for hours. Frequently they are scantily clad. At times they perspire freely and refreshment is sought in open air. Resistance is low. A cold is contracted. Many a young woman has broken her health in this fashion.<sup>297</sup>

Writing for the Southern Baptists, Mary Nance Daniel produced Worldliness Out in 1942. Her book questioned (and essentially condemned) several practices as inappropriate for Christians, including: social dancing, movies, and smoking as a past-time.<sup>298</sup> Daniel's book, like Tuuk's, was not a mere rule book. Her definition of worldliness was quite insightful: "Worldliness [is] the opposite of spirituality, an obsession with the temporal and material things to the detriment of spiritual growth and power."<sup>299</sup> Her concern was for Christians who were being seduced by supposedly innocent amusements: "Shame and despair are often the outgrowth of the doubtful, innocent, modern amusements which are corrupt movements in sheep's clothing."<sup>300</sup> Daniel's

book, again like Tuuk's, appears to have been somewhat of an isolated voice in the church.

One problem encountered in researching nonconformity is the lack of standardized language. The issue of nonconformity will always be on the mind of thoughtful believers trying to steer a course through the world, but it might not be easy to identify even in writing. The difference between separation and nonconformity as described in this thesis has already been discussed. Yet under the heading of separation the Evangelical Dictionary of Theology gives a good summary of nonconformity as considered among modern evangelicals. Commenting on church history, the article states:

Sometimes separation has been made a matter of external acts, so that lists of forbidden activities were compiled. While separation includes this, it also goes beyond. Jesus extended the Law by pointing to the importance of thoughts and attitudes.<sup>301</sup>

The comment that separation includes listing forbidden activities is something of a shock. It has been pointed out that although most congregations have something of a list, few spell it out. The Mennonites and Amish literally spelled it out and called it the Ordnung (order), Rules and Discipline, or restrictions.

Coming up to date, the article continued with a helpful list for the individual dealing with subjects that could not be, or simply are not, on the list of forbidden activities:

Some actions cannot be classified right or wrong by so simple a means as consulting a list, however. Here the Spirit-led believer will have to measure them against certain principles: whether they can be done to

the glory of God (I Cor. 10:31); whether they can be done in the name of Christ, on his behalf and working his blessing (Col. 3:17); whether this is what Christ would have been likely to do (I Jn. 2:6); whether this will contribute positively to the spiritual welfare of others (I Cor. 10:23-30).<sup>302</sup>

In summary, although nonconformity to the world is hardly an emphasis unique to Mennonites, the church at large has left little record of how it has dealt with the issue in and of itself. Undoubtedly, many Christians have shared that strong impulse to live differently from the world. Usually this drive was expressed in those issues stated explicitly in the Bible, or a tacit understanding of how to apply biblical principles to a situation. The history of individual nonconformity can be gleaned from biographies, but it is not always visible. Apparently few groups have gone as far as Mennonites, Quakers, Brethren and other groups from the radical Reformation in making nonconformity a central concern. In these latter groups it was a specific doctrine of the church, considered theoretically and in practical terms.

The seeds of this emphasis were planted and grew in the Reformation, and may well be the issue which made Anabaptism a third branch of that movement. Kenneth Davis, whose concern was the influence of asceticism in Anabaptism, wrote: "These dissenters held a definition of reformation which in essence was fundamentally different from that of the Magisterial Reformers: it was ascetically oriented and demanded, as the essential fruit of a true reformation, a

moral and spiritual purification of the church, a separation from the world."<sup>303</sup>

## ENDNOTES

1. All biblical quotations are from the New American Standard Bible.

2. J. C. Wenger, Glimpses of Mennonite History and Doctrine (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1947), 115-119.

3. Proceedings of the Thirteenth Mennonite General Assembly, July 25-30, 1995 (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Church General Assembly, n.d.), 36.

4. The Mennonite Church refers to that denomination alone. The Mennonite church, with "c" in lower case, will refer to the entire family of Mennonite churches. For those uninitiated in the complexities of Mennonite denominations, it is important to note another point with regard to the Mennonite General Assembly, which is the delegate and decision-making body of the Mennonite Church, as opposed to the General Conference Mennonite Church. A confusing problem arises in that the General Assembly called itself the Mennonite Church General Conference until 1971. Although it is awkward, in this thesis when the old term Mennonite Church General Conference is referred to, "Assembly" will appear in parentheses to distinguish it from the General Conference Mennonite Church.

5. Walter A. Elwell, ed. Evangelical Dictionary of Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), s.v. "Separation," by M. J. Erickson.

6. Del Fehsenfeld, "Separation Biblically Defined," Fundamentalist Journal 2 (1982): 14.

7. The Church Polity Committee of the Mennonite General Conference, Mennonite Church Polity (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1952), 86-87.

8. Just as this thesis was being typed the new Herald Press catalog arrived with a series of 12-page pamphlets called "What Mennonites Believe About..." addressing issues like dating, clothing, and automobiles. Unfortunately, these could not be reviewed in time.

9. J. C. Wenger, Separated Unto God (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1952).

10. Wenger, Glimpses; Cornelius J. Dyck, ed., Introduction to Mennonite History (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1987); Harold S. Bender and C. Henry Smith, Mennonites and Their Heritage (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1964).

11. Simons, Menno, Complete Writings of Menno Simons, ed. J. C. Wenger (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1956); Thieleman J. van Braght, Martyr's Mirror of the Defenseless Christians (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1950).

12. George H. Williams, The Radical Reformation (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962); Franklin Littel, Origins of Sectarian Protestantism (New York: Macmillan, 1964).

13. Christian Burkholder, Useful and Edifying Address to the Young on True Repentance, Saving Faith in Christ Jesus in Conversation on Saving Faith and a Confession of Faith of the Mennonites (Union Grove, PA: John Weaver, 1892 reprint).

14. Daniel Kauffman, ed., Doctrines of the Bible (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1928); John Horsch, Mennonite Church and Modernism (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1924).

15. The Church Polity Committee of the Mennonite General Conference, "Gospel Standard," in Mennonite Church Polity (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1952).

16. C. Henry Smith, "Mennonites and Culture," Mennonite Quarterly Review Vol. XII No. 2. (April 1938); Edward Yoder, "Need for Nonconformity Today," Mennonite Quarterly Review 11 (April 1937); Karl Baehr, "Secularization Among the Mennonite of Elkhart County, Indiana," Mennonite Quarterly Review, 3 (July 1942).

17. John R. Mumaw, "Current Forces Adversely Affecting the Life of the Mennonite Community," Mennonite Quarterly Review 19 (April, 1945): 106.

18. Paul Mininger, "Limitations of Nonconformity," Mennonite Quarterly Review 24 (April 1950).

19. Mary Ebersole, "Letter to the Editor," in Not By Might, ed. Daniel Hertzler (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1983), 20.

20. Amos Weaver, "The Old Paths and the New" Gospel Herald, 29 January 1974; Merle Good, "If not now--when?" Gospel Herald, 27 January 1988; Levi Miller, "'The Anabaptist Vision' and how it has changed the Mennonite Church," Gospel Herald, 26 April 1996.

21. Marlene Epp, "Carrying the Banner of Nonconformity: Ontario Mennonite Women and the Dress Question," Conrad Grebel Review (Fall 1990); Leonard Gross, "Reply to Carrying the Banner of Nonconformity," Conrad

Grebel Review (Winter 1991).

22. Gerald Schlabach, "Beyond Two-/vs One Kingdom Theology: Abrahamic Community as a Mennonite Paradigm for Christian Engagement in Society," Mennonite Quarterly Review, 3 (1993).

23. J. Daniel Hess, "Toward a Hermeneutics of Popular Culture," Mennonite Quarterly Review, 2 (1993).

24. J. Denny Weaver, Becoming Anabaptist (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1987); Richard MacMaster, Land, Piety and Peoplehood (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1985).

25. "Minutes of the Nonconformity Committee," 1955-1971 Lancaster Historical Society, Lancaster, PA. D [photocopy].

26. Dan Williams Forsyth, Motivational Bases for Conformity to Religious Norms (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1986).

27. Menno did condemn cursing, gambling and fencing schools, and generally despised pomp and indulgent living as can be seen in Menno Simons, The New Birth, in the Complete Writings of Menno Simons, ed. J.C. Wenger (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956), 100.

28. Mennonite Encyclopedia, s.v. "Nonconformity," by Harold Bender.

29. Sanford G. Shetler and George Brunk II, "Responses to Critical Issues Which Have Faced the Mennonite Church 1920-1997," Sword and Trumpet LXV, no. 3 (March 1997): 28-30.

30. "Unaffiliated Mennonite Congregations," Mennonite Yearbook and Directory 1994, 125.

31. Harold S. Bender and C. Henry Smith, Mennonites and Their Heritage (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1964), 104.

32. Oscar Burkholder, "The All Things of the Bible," Gospel Herald (1942): 194.

33. Wenger, Glimpses, 7.

34. For a discussion of this process see Leonard Gross's foreword in J. Denny Weaver, Becoming Anabaptist (Scottsdale: PA: Herald Press, 1987).

35. Littel, Origins, 46.

36. These types of restrictions can be found in much earlier Mennonite writing and continue to be held by conservative Mennonite groups to this day. For a general discussion see Kaufmann, Doctrines of the Bible, 490-504; Wenger, Separated Unto God, 113-124.
37. Littel, Origins, 90.
38. Ibid.
39. Wenger, Glimpses, 101.
40. Cornelius J. Dyck, ed., Introduction to Mennonite History (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1981), 48-49.
41. Dyck, 105.
42. Dyck, "Anabaptist-Mennonite Family Tree," in Introduction to Mennonite History, inside cover.
43. Mennonite Encyclopedia, s.v. "Nonconformity."
44. Bender and Smith, Mennonites and Their Heritage, 43.
45. Ibid.
46. Franklin Littel, The Anabaptist View of the Church (Boston: Stan King Press, 1958), 90.
47. Dyck, 56.
48. Mennonites and Their Heritage, 29.
49. Dyck, 56.
50. Wenger, Glimpses, 210.
51. Frederick A. Norwood, Strangers and Exiles (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969), 1:236.
52. Wenger, Separated Unto God, 74.
53. E. H. Broadbent, The Pilgrim Church (London: Pickering and Inglis, Ltd., 1931), 145.
54. Bender and Smith, Mennonites and Their Heritage, 47.
55. Wenger, Separated, 74.
56. Williams, The Radical Reformation, 804-805.
57. Broadbent, 204-205.

58. Ibid.
59. Justo Gonzalez, History of Christian Thought (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975), III:87.
60. Wenger, Glimpses, 6. For a discussion of the Roman Catholic view of authority see: Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989 reprint), 1:105-106.
61. J. C. Wenger, God's Word Written (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1966), 60.
62. Menno Simons, Instructions on Discipline to the Church at Franeker in Complete Writings, 1045.
63. Menno Simons, True Christian Faith in Complete Writings, 377.
64. Mennonite Encyclopedia, s.v. "Nonconformity."
65. Ibid., s.v. "Concept of Cologne."
66. Ibid., s.v. "Frisian Mennonites."
67. Ibid., s.v. "Flemish Mennonites."
68. Dyck, 126.
69. Wenger, Glimpses, 83.
70. Mennonite Encyclopedia, s.v. "Flemish Mennonites."
71. Dyck, 129.
72. Mennonite Encyclopedia, s.v. "Nonconformity."
73. Wenger, Glimpses, 83.
74. Bender and Smith, Mennonites and Their Heritage,  
56.
75. Wenger, Glimpses, 43.
76. Ibid., 214.
77. van Braght, 32.
78. Mennonite Encyclopedia, s.v. "Nonconformity."
79. Bender and Smith, Mennonites and Their Heritage,  
81.
80. Dyck, 188.

81. Wenger, Glimpses, 101.
82. Ibid., 101-102.
83. Ibid., 106.
84. MacMaster, 52.
85. Dyck, 246-247.
86. Ibid., 196.
87. Wenger, Glimpses, 107.
88. Handbook of Denominations, s.v. "United Brethren."
89. Wenger, Glimpses, 108.
90. Bender and Smith, Mennonites and Their Heritage,  
105.
91. Dyck, 300.
92. Wenger, Glimpses, 115.
93. Dyck, 252.
94. Wenger, Glimpses, 108.
95. Dyck, 208.
96. Ibid., 298.
97. Burkholder, 178.
98. Ibid., 237.
99. Ibid, 182.
100. Matthew Eshelman, Nonconformity to the World  
(Dayton: Christian Pub. Assoc., 1874), 35-36.
101. Wenger, Separated, 80-81.
102. Daniel Hertzler, ed., Not By Might (Scottsdale,  
PA: Herald Press, 1983), 20.
103. Dyck, 222.
104. Kauffman, 16.
105. Ibid., 490.
106. Ibid., 492.

107. Ibid., 496.
108. Ibid., 500.
109. J. Paul Graybill, Ira D. Landis, and J. Paul Sauder, Noah H. Mack (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, n.d), 97-99.
110. Ibid., 91.
111. Yoder, 137.
112. Ibid., 137.
113. Ibid., 137-138.
114. Ibid., 139-140.
115. Ibid., 140.
116. Horsch, 100.
117. Ibid., 92.
118. Ibid., 99.
119. Smith, "Mennonites and Culture," 83-84.
120. Ibid., 83.
121. In the summary editorial in the issue with Karl Baehr "Secularization Among the Mennonites of Elkhart County, Indiana" Mennonite Quarterly Review, 3 (July 1942): no page number.
122. Baehr, 151.
123. Ibid., 141.
124. Ibid., 153.
125. Ibid., 159.
126. Church Polity Committee of the Mennonite General Conference, "Christian Fundamentals" in Mennonite Church Polity (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1952), 63.
127. Ibid., 63
128. Ibid., 67.
129. Ibid., 86.

130. "Gospel Standard" in Mennonite Church Polity, 86.
131. Ibid., 88.
132. Ibid., 89.
133. John Ruth, "America's Anabaptists: Who Are They," Christianity Today, 22 October 1990, 26.
134. Hertzler, Not By Might, 92.
135. Ibid., 92.
136. Mininger, 164.
137. Ibid., 5.
138. Ibid., 166-168.
139. Ibid., 166.
140. Ibid., 167.
141. Ibid., 168-169.
142. Mumaw, 106.
143. Ibid., 111.
144. Ibid., 115.
145. Ibid., 116.
146. Ibid.
147. Wenger, Separated Unto God, 312.
148. Ibid., 312.
149. Ibid., xiii.
150. Christian Light Publications, 1997 Catalog (Harrisonburg, VA: Christian Light, 1997), 12.
151. Wenger, Separated Unto God, ix.
152. Ibid., 9.
153. Ibid., 21.
154. Ibid., 42.
155. Ibid., 40.

156. Ibid., 52.
157. Ibid., 69.
158. Ibid., 70.
159. Ibid., 76-77.
160. Ibid., 75.
161. Ibid., 86.
162. Ibid., 129-153.
163. Paul Erb, We Believe (Scottsdale, Pa: Herald Press, 1969), 70-71.
164. Paul Erb, ed., From the Mennonite Pulpit (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1965), 4.
165. Confession of Faith (1963), 22.
166. Ibid., 22.
167. Ibid.
168. Confession of Faith from a Mennonite Perspective (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1995), 65.
169. Ibid., 66.
170. Ibid.
171. Weaver, 90.
172. Good, 887.
173. Ibid.
174. Ibid.
175. Levi Miller, 1.
176. Ibid., 3.
177. Harold S. Bender, The Anabaptist Vision (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1944), 27-29.
178. Ruth, 25.
179. Jones, 34.
180. Epp, 257.

181. Ibid., 238.
182. Ibid., 241.
183. Gross, "Reply to Carrying the Banner of Nonconformity," 74.
184. Schlabach, 191.
185. Ibid.
186. Ibid., 192.
187. Ibid., 197,
188. Ibid., 198.
189. Hess, 124.
190. Ibid., 123.
191. Ibid., 126.
192. Ibid.
193. Weaver, 22.
194. Ibid., 126.
195. Ibid., 138.
196. MacMaster, 177.
197. J. Howard Kauffman and Leo Driedger, The Mennonite Mosaic (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1991), 90.
198. Ibid.
199. Ibid., 32.
200. Ibid., 91.
201. Ibid.
202. "Minutes of the Nonconformity Committee," 1-2.
203. Ibid., 3.
204. Ibid., 17.
205. Ibid., 21.
206. Ibid., 39.

207. Ibid., 41.
208. Ibid., 49.
209. Ibid., 51.
210. Ibid., 53.
211. Ibid., 58-59.
212. Ibid., 61.
213. Ibid., 66-67.
214. Ibid., 68.
215. Ibid., 82.
216. Ibid., 93.
217. Ibid., 98.
218. Ibid., 109.
219. Ibid., 106.
220. Ibid., 112.
221. Ibid., 121.
222. Ibid., 123.
223. Ibid., 123-124.
224. Ibid., 129.
225. Ibid., 130.
226. Ibid., 135-136.
227. Ibid., 136.
228. Ibid., 139.
229. Ibid., 145.
230. Ibid., 173.
231. Ibid., 175.
232. Ibid., 178.
233. Ibid.

234. Ibid., 179.
235. Ibid., no page number.
236. Ibid., October 15, 1970, no page number.
237. Ibid., January 21, 1971, no page number.
238. Ibid., January 21, 1971, no page number.
239. Nonconformity Committee, Preparing Applicants For Church Membership (n.p.: Bishop Board of Lancaster Conference, 1959), 9.
240. "Minutes," 21.
241. Youth Christian Service Activities Committee, Farm Shows? (n.p.: Bishop Board of Lancaster Mennonite Conference, 1961).
242. Ibid.
243. Youth Christian Services Activities Committee, Television Dangers to Your Spiritual Life (n.p.: Bishop Board of Lancaster Mennonite Conference, 1961).
244. Ibid.
245. Ibid.
246. Youth Christian Service Activities Committee, Public Bathing? (n.p.: Bishop Board of Lancaster Mennonite Conference, 1961).
247. Ibid.
248. Ibid.
249. Ibid.
250. Youth Christian Service Activities Committee, Bowling Right or Wrong? (n.p.: Bishop Board of Lancaster Mennonite Conference, 1962).
251. Ibid.
252. Ibid.
253. Ibid.
254. Ruth I. Buckwalter, Why a Christian Does Not Dance (n.p.: Nonconformity Committee of the Lancaster Mennonite Conference, 1966).

255. Ibid.
256. Ibid.
257. Ibid.
258. Youth Christian Service Activities Committee, Radio Dangers to Your Spiritual Health (n.p.: Bishop Board of Lancaster Mennonite Conference, 1961).
259. J. Irvin Lehman, Christian Attire (n.p.: Committee on Nonconformity, 1957), 12.
260. J. L. Stauffer, Godward or Worldward: Which? (n.p.: Nonconformity Committee of the Lancaster Mennonite Conference, 1966).
261. Wenger, Glimpses, 208.
262. "Responses to Critical Issues," Sword & Trumpet, 28.
263. David W. Bercot, Will the Real Heretics Please Stand Up (Henderson, TX: Scroll Publishing, 1989), 51.
264. Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, 1976 ed., s.v. "Holiness," by A. S. Wood.
265. R. C. Sproul, The Holiness of God (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1985), 56.
266. Ibid., 60.
267. Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, 1976 ed., s.v. "Holiness."
268. James Strahan, "Separation-Genesis 12:1," Sword and Trumpet, December 1991, 29.
269. Ibid., 30.
270. Ibid.
271. As the New Bible Commentary suggested. D. Guthrie and J. A. Motyer, eds., The New Bible Commentary Revised (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 223.
272. Menno Simons, Foundation of Christian Doctrine, in Complete Writings, 181.
273. Wenger, Separated Unto God, 9.
274. Kauffman, 495.

275. Ibid., 501.
276. Karen M. Johnson, Christian Modesty in the 20th Century (Crockett, KY: Rod & Staff, 1993), 12.
277. Wenger, Glimpses, 149.
278. Ibid.
279. Vine's, Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, n.d., s.v. "Assembly."
280. Ibid.
281. Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, abridged in one volume, 1985 ed., s.v. "Ekklesia."
282. Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, s.v. "Holiness."
283. International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), s.v. "Holiness."
284. Wenger, Separated, 31.
285. Wenger, Glimpses, 152.
286. Mennonite Confession of Faith (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1963), 14-24.
287. The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, 1963, s.v. "Friends, Society of."
288. Frank S. Mead, Handbook of Denominations, 7th ed., s.v. "Friends."
289. Oxford Dictionary, s.v. "Friends."
290. Brethren Encyclopedia, 1983 ed., s.v. "Nonconformity," by Fred W. Benedict.
291. Ibid., 940.
292. Ibid.
293. Ibid., 941.
294. John White, Flirting with the World (Wheaton: Harold Shaw, 1982), 36-37.
295. E. J. Tuuk, As to Being Worldly (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1927), 34.

296. Ibid., 127.
297. Ibid., 79.
298. Mary Nance Daniel, Worldliness Out (Nashville: Broadman, 1942), 63-66.
299. Ibid., 21.
300. Ibid., 42.
301. Evangelical Dictionary, 1984 ed., s.v. "Separation."
302. Ibid.
303. Kenneth R. Davis, Anabaptism and Asceticism (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1974), 295.