

**Keeping Faith Alive: Practical Concerns for Anabaptist Identity<sup>1</sup>**  
**Dale R. Stoffer**

I live in Ashland County, Ohio, which is home to a growing Amish population, many of whom are part of the very conservative Swartzentruber Amish. Their buggies have no windshields and they have stoutly resisted the usual red reflective slow moving vehicle signs as worldly. On any given day several Amish buggies can be seen on the streets of the main town in the county, also named Ashland. They may be heading toward Wayne Savings and Loan, or Hawkins Market, or Home Hardware, or even our WalMart. Though Ashland still retains the quaintness of small town America, the Amish buggies nonetheless provide a sharp contrast to the modern life that surrounds them.

There are, however, some very real similarities between the Amish and us English, especially those of us who still trace our roots back to the sixteenth century Anabaptist movement. We are both faced with questions of vital importance for our future. What effect does acceptance of various features of modern culture have upon our faith? Do we progress into modern culture only at the risk of forfeiting some essential features of our faith? Have some of us progressed so far that return to some of the core values of the Anabaptist faith will be impossible? Who decides how far and how fast we progress?

Several years ago I reviewed both Carl Bowman's *Brethren Society* and Donald Fitzkee's *Moving Toward the Mainstream*. Both tell the remarkable story of cultural change in the Church of the Brethren over the last 150 years during which the church "shed many of the peculiar trappings of its plain-sect heritage to plunge into the American Protestant mainstream."<sup>2</sup> But both also raise very unsettling questions, not only for the Church of the Brethren but for other progressive groups in the Anabaptist heritage as well. It seems the more we progress into the modern mainstream, the greater is our uncertainty about who we are and what our mission is.

In this article I will discuss some of the challenges posed by our modern and postmodern society and propose some responses that we as heirs of the Anabaptist tradition can make to strengthen our Anabaptist identity.

**Challenges Posed by Modern and Postmodern Society**

Traditionally, the Anabaptist/Brethren faith was more caught than taught. Our faith was not so much a set of beliefs or credal statements, but key

\*Dr. Stoffer (Ph.D. Fuller Theological Seminary) is Associate Professor of Historical Theology at A.T.S.

Gospel principles, as the Brethren used to call them, that were learned and lived out in the context of the community of faith. Principles such as heartfelt devotion to Christ, obedience to his Word, love of God and neighbor, nonconformity to the world, nonswearing, and nonresistance were modeled in the ebb and flow of everyday life. Without doubt the subculture formed by the Mennonites and Brethren in both Europe and America helped to reinforce these corporate values. This subculture was maintained well into the nineteenth century in America through the retention of German as the dominant language, the practice of settling near other plain people, and the reading of a common devotional literature derived from Anabaptist, Pietist, and Puritan traditions.

The education that was prized above all was the learning of the religious values by which the community lived its life at home, in the church, and in the world. There was no such thing as a privatized faith; Gospel principles were to govern life in all its facets. Formal education beyond a common school education was suspect because, it was feared, it might lead to pride and worldliness.

Though the entire socialization process of home, church, and community of faith ideally reinforced these values, the primary agency of teaching and modeling was the home. Parents generally took seriously their responsibility for training their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord through family devotions. Sunday Schools, in fact, were initially opposed in the mid-nineteenth century lest they preempt the primary parental role in spiritual education.

By the last decades of the nineteenth century, some Brethren and Mennonites were advocating that the church should move into the mainstream of American culture. Disagreement over this issue led to strife and division. Nonetheless, during this century, most Brethren and Mennonites have now made the plunge into the dominant culture in America. Differences among the Brethren groups derive especially from the form of Christianity with which they aligned. The Grace Brethren have been most influenced by fundamentalism; the Brethren Church has aligned itself with evangelicalism; the Church of the Brethren has generally followed the lead of mainline Christianity. In each case we have either left behind or modified important features of our historic faith. Carl Bowman's *Brethren Society* has thoroughly documented this transition in the Church of the Brethren.

Today all of us progressives among the Brethren and Mennonites face one of the most serious challenges in our history. This is probably as much due to developments in American culture as to developments in our churches. As long as American culture retained its historic foundations in the Judeo-Christian

tradition, the sense of dissonance between our faith and culture was minimized. But with the development of a post-Christian, truly secular culture, those of us most influenced by our culture are feeling increasing tension.

Our modern and, as some are calling it, postmodern culture indeed has certain characteristics that are especially destructive for our traditional Anabaptist faith. First, it has had an atomizing effect, so to speak, on the family. In just over three generations, the extended family has become the nuclear family, which has in turn become the fractured family, which in turn has become a family of singles. It is projected that by the year 2001 more than half of all American adults will be single.<sup>3</sup> It is little wonder that loneliness is one of the defining characteristics of our age. This trend has severely undermined the primary means of passing on our faith--stable, extended families which provided the spiritual and emotional nurturing necessary for training young people in the faith.

A second modern trait that is severely compromising our historic faith is pluralism. We need to distinguish between diversity and pluralism. Diversity is to be welcomed in the Christian faith, both because it recognizes that we do not all share the same gifts and abilities and because it allows for differences in such areas as worship, music, and dress which are peculiar to given cultures. But in the Christian context such diversity is unified around a common commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord. Pluralism, while celebrating the differences among people and cultures, has no common, normative center, but recognizes the right of people and groups to define truth for themselves. The focus of pluralism thus tends to be on the periphery, with each special interest group being given equal time and an equal voice for its distinctive message. Ironically, groups that believe in normative truth, typically religious groups, are silenced in public discourse; their religious beliefs, they are told, should be a matter of private conviction only. Another irony is that as the periphery is accentuated and the center weakens, greater polarization within society occurs. The result is not greater understanding but greater fracture and animosity.

Pluralism is detrimental to the Anabaptist heritage because the core of our faith has been uncompromising commitment to Christ and his Word. It is this that sent so many Anabaptists to their death. There is a normative center to our faith that cannot be compromised and that needs to define our lives in both private and public settings.

A third trait of our modern culture is related to the previous point. Authority increasingly rests in individuals. They alone have the right to determine the truth by which they will live their lives. Donald Fitzkee has shown how this characteristic has played out in the Church of the Brethren with

regard to corporate discipline:

Once the authoritative voice in the church, Annual Conference had ceded power to *districts* during the 1910s and 1920s. The 1931 decision [about transfer of membership] further transferred authority to *congregations*, who were freed to discipline as much or as little as they pleased. It also made it easier for members to “escape” to more forgiving congregations, presaging the day when *individuals* would become their own final arbiters of truth.<sup>4</sup>

Both Mennonites and Brethren historically believed that there could be no church without discipline. We progressives, however, directing the spotlight at the cases of abuse that such authority has led to in the past, have gradually dismantled the structures of accountability and discipline within our churches. Our tradition, however, tells us that growth in Christian maturity necessitates a disciplined life. Has placing all authority in the hands of individual Christians resulted in a stronger church today?

A fourth trait of modern culture that disturbs me as a historian is the tyranny of the present. Anything that has been around for more than one generation no longer needs to be taken seriously. Not only is the past forgotten, along with the lessons to be learned from it, but it is becoming increasingly acceptable to reconstruct or revision the past to support one’s own philosophical position. I can remember reading the story of the Pilgrims’ first Thanksgiving in my daughter’s second or third grade American history book. The book stated merely that the Pilgrims gave thanks on that day. There was no reference to whom they were giving thanks. Invariably in the English language thanks is directed to someone who is viewed as worthy of our gratitude. In omitting any mention of the historical fact that thanks were given to God on that day, the writers of the text were being politically correct but historically deceptive.

As heirs of the Anabaptist/Brethren heritage, we can discover much of who we ought to be today only in an accurate and honest reading of our past. Much of the confusion that present-day Brethren and Mennonites are experiencing is due to very different readings of our heritage, readings that are often diametrically opposed. Carl Bowman has demonstrated very thoroughly how, during the last sixty years in the Church of the Brethren, key Brethren principles were in fact turned against the heritage to teach something quite different from their original intent. At one point he states:

Respected leaders with mainstream leanings circulated a new version of Brethren tradition, imbuing traditional symbols with new meanings, compatible with emerging social and moral realities. This should not be construed as an intentional act of deception. These leaders simply read the pages of Brethren history from the perspective of their missionary and, later, ecumenical interests, latching naturally upon whatever blended with their evolving moral outlook.<sup>5</sup>

As long as modern philosophical and moral commitments serve as the hermeneutical touchstones for interpreting our heritage, confusion, conflict, and polarization are going to be the results.

I need to stress that the future of the Mennonites and Brethren does not lie in resurrecting the past. As much as we might like sometimes to return to the past, that is impossible. Our calling is to live in the present and to come to terms with the culture in which we live. This same reality is true even for the Amish and Old Order groups. But our heritage provides a trajectory to guide us through the shifting winds of doctrine and philosophy that can so easily blow us off course.

I am glad that I worked on my doctorate in the area of Brethren doctrine and practice before going into new church development. I was able to begin a new congregation in suburban Columbus, Ohio, with my concept of the church already formulated. I was committed to incorporating Anabaptist/Brethren principles from the very beginning, and these principles have guided the congregation throughout its development. Such commitments as wholehearted dedication to Christ as Lord, obedience to his Word, the cultivation of community, the practice of accountability and discipline, love of God and neighbor became the standards for determining program and structure.

In other new church starts in my denomination, the pastor frequently had not worked out a concept of the church. Without a clear vision of its calling and purpose, the young church and its leadership would often latch onto a succession of programs and structures that had worked in other churches. All this grab-bag approach to program did was to further confuse the situation. More often than not, such congregations foundered or died because they had no defining principles at their core.

I believe this is where many of us as Mennonites and Brethren are today. We have listened to the sirens of modern culture only to founder on the rocks of pluralism, individual autonomy, and historical myopia and reconstruction.

## **Proposals for Strengthening our Anabaptist Identity**

I would like to share some proposals that I believe can revitalize our Anabaptist/Brethren identity and provide clearer direction for our future. These proposals come out of my work both as a historian and theologian in the Anabaptist/Brethren tradition and as a former pastor in a Brethren congregation.

### **Cultivating an Anabaptist spirituality**

As you read the works of the Anabaptists and early Brethren, you are struck by the devotion of these people to their Lord Jesus Christ. This commitment formed the center of their faith. They were willing to risk everything, even life itself, for the sake of Christ and his Word. Typical are the convictions contained in this letter from Mennonite Jaques Mesdag to his wife two months before he was burned at the stake in 1567:

O my dear chosen sister whom I love so greatly with all my heart, I should not be able to describe to you, I think, with what true, unfeigned godly and brotherly love I love you. . . . [Yet] I am still willing to resign my life for Him who gave it me, if it shall come to this; and again, if it be His divine will, that I am to remain in iron bonds yet for a long time, I will also gladly suffer it for His holy name; for He suffered so much for us.<sup>6</sup>

This inner spiritual commitment to Christ gave reason and purpose to Anabaptist life and death.

This spiritual life was cultivated by the study of Scripture, by the singing of hymns that highlighted Anabaptist themes, and by the reading of devotional literature. Prior to the adoption of English as their primary language, both Mennonites and Brethren in America would have read devotional literature of late medieval mystical, Anabaptist, Pietist, and Puritan origin. This literature helped to reinforce the Mennonite and Brethren faith, for it provided the spiritual underpinnings for their distinctive lifestyle.

Significant changes occurred, however, for the Brethren, and I expect the Mennonites also, when they adopted the English language. The devotional literature that had fed their spiritual lives was, for the most part, not readily available in English. They adopted the devotional literature and language of revivalism, the Keswick movement, evangelicalism, and, eventually, in many Church of the Brethren circles, mainline Christianity. Several years ago a deaconess in the church I served in Columbus attended the funeral of the father of a member in the church. This man had been raised Amish but had later

joined a conservative Mennonite congregation outside Plain City, Ohio. The funeral was held in this fairly large Mennonite church. The deaconess shared with me that she was surprised that much of the music that was played and sung at the funeral was nineteenth and early twentieth century revivalist music. She had assumed that, unlike Brethren Church congregations which have been influenced by revivalism and evangelicalism for over a century, Mennonite congregations had remained insulated, for the most part, from forms of spirituality in the broader American church.

What we feed our hearts and souls is a powerful shaping tool for our Christian lives. Though Scripture probably remains the foremost source shaping our spiritual lives today, we all supplement Scripture with other materials that color our reading of Scripture and influence our spiritual outlook. At a conference held at Elizabethtown College in 1994 entitled "Whither the Anabaptist Vision? New Directions for a New Century," Sara Wenger Shenk gave a wonderful address which she called "Remember Who You Are," dealing with passing on our spiritual heritage to our children. In her remarks, she spoke about orienting our lives around determinative stories from Scripture and from our own heritage, such as those found in *The Martyrs Mirror*.<sup>7</sup>

There is a great need today for us in the Anabaptist tradition to reacquaint ourselves with our spiritual, devotional heritage. Both the Anabaptist/Mennonite and Brethren traditions have a rich devotional heritage that has largely been forgotten. A wonderful service to our communities of faith would be to develop a body of literature that can again inculcate those spiritual principles that are at the heart of our faith.

I am heartened by some excellent beginnings in this area. I am impressed with the publications made available through Good Books, notably *Readings From Mennonite Writings New & Old*. For several summers Eastern Mennonite Seminary has hosted a "Summer Institute for Spiritual Formation." One of the objectives for the institute is to "develop a spirituality rooted in scripture and the Anabaptist believers' church tradition." Another example is the dramatic presentation of "Dirk's Exodus," at Elizabethtown College in 1996. Written by James Juhnke, it tells the story of the Anabaptist martyr, Dirk Willems. Though the Brethren seem to be lagging behind the Mennonites in this area, I am aware of efforts by Brethren Church and Church of the Brethren laypeople in Indiana to develop a spiritual retreat program for Brethren patterned after the Catholic *Cursillo* movement. The initial retreat of the Brethren Way of Christ, as it is called, occurred in 1991. Individuals such as Phyllis Carter in the Church of the Brethren and Jerry Flora in the Brethren Church have also sought to provide both formal and informal experiences of

spiritual formation in their respective denominations as well as for the broader church.

Being nourished by a common devotional literature, with a common story, could serve as a powerful unifying force for us in the Anabaptist heritage. The Anabaptist/Brethren faith is to be lived from the inside out. Renewal among us must therefore begin from the inside with a renewed focus on discipleship to Christ and obedience to his Word.

Passing on the faith to our children

I have already alluded to the next issue of significance for the future of us in the Anabaptist heritage: passing on our faith to our children. Historically, the family served as the primary training ground for spiritual values. Until the last few generations, faith was learned primarily in the family, because it was modeled there.

Several factors have contributed to the weakening of the central role played by the family in the religious training of children. First, the fear held by Old Order groups that Sunday School would eventually supplant parental responsibility for the spiritual training of children has had some validity. Sunday School was originally meant only to supplement the education in the home, but many parents have abdicated this responsibility to the Sunday School. Christian education in the church can be highly effective, but only when it is viewed as a reinforcement to the values modeled in the home.

Second, the fracturing of the American family through divorce, abuse, and neglect has left its mark even in Brethren and Mennonite circles. Third, parents are giving less attention to family devotions than in previous generations. This is partly due to the hectic family schedules many of us lead as well as to a lessened commitment to spiritual values in general in our culture. Fourth, the socialization process for our children is being increasingly dominated by secular influences--peer pressure, schools, the media.

How have these factors affected Brethren and Mennonite congregations? One of the most obvious ways is the fact that we have a lower retention rate of our children than Old Order and Amish groups have. Have you ever wandered into one of the churches in our denominations and wondered where all the people 40 years and younger are?

Reversing the adverse cultural influences on our families is not going to happen overnight. We simply cannot turn back the clock to when the church was the social hub of life; when divorce was almost unheard of; when the Ozzie and Harriet family was the norm. We must realistically confront the realities of our contemporary culture on several fronts.

We need to minister to the growing number of single parent families in our congregations. Estimated at one-quarter of total families presently, the percentage of single parent families will probably continue to increase. A vital role which the church can serve in the lives of children in these settings is to function in a kind of foster parenting role by mentoring children one-on-one. For several years the youth pastor in the church I attend maintained a mentoring program in which adults volunteered to work with a young person who was in high school. The program involved meeting regularly for a time of devotions as well as for social activities, and building a friendship through sending cards, offering encouragement, and noting achievements.

Youth programs will continue to play an important role in our churches to provide positive Christian peer pressure to counteract secular pressures. Youth need both to have a good time and to be taught the spiritual values that we consider necessary as Christians and as Brethren and Mennonites.

But all of this will be for naught unless our families take seriously their God-given responsibility for the spiritual training of their children. This ties in with the previous discussion on developing an Anabaptist spirituality. We must pass on our spiritual heritage to our children if we hope to retain them for both Christ and his church. If they see dissonance between what is experienced in the home and what is taught in the church, you can guess which influence will usually win out.

Until several years ago, my family had been using the Herald Press Story Bible Series by Eve B. MacMaster in our devotional time with our children. However, when our children reached their teenage years, we faced the problems of hectic schedules and of finding age appropriate materials. Fortunately, they have found devotional materials that they now use in their own private devotions. I do miss, however, the times of shared devotional experiences. I share my own struggle both to say that I know the difficulties, especially as children grow older, but also to reinforce the fact that we need to continue to find appropriate means of sharing our heritage and faith with our children. There may be nothing more important to the future of our Mennonite and Brethren heritage than this.

Education that serves the faith community

I will focus my thoughts primarily on the Brethren in this section both because I am more familiar with their educational history and because I believe the Mennonites have done a better job in this area than we Brethren have. Both the Anabaptist and Pietist traditions viewed education traditionally with some

skepticism. They rebelled against a professional elitism that viewed the interpretation of Scripture as being the domain of clergy and academicians. They reacted strongly against a scholastic approach to theology that raised and debated questions of little or no relevance to the life of the church. The Brethren, in concert with the Pietists, had antipathy for the idea of autonomous reason. Alexander Mack, Jr., for example, maintained that the greatest honor for reason is when it is “in the bonds and shackles of the heavenly wisdom”; outside this captivity, reason is an “outlawed harlot” which seeks to control Scripture.”<sup>8</sup> For both the Anabaptists and Brethren, reason was to serve faith, and education had to benefit the community of faith.

Though the Brethren came to accept church related schools by the 1860s, the Brethren registered concern about the effect such education would have on the church and its ministry. There was fear that pushing for an educated ministry would lead to the end of the free ministry and to a salaried ministry as well as to a professional elitism. Some of these fears were well founded as both the Brethren Church and the Church of the Brethren moved toward a professional, salaried ministry. Annual Meeting likewise sought to stay out of the education business and insisted that “Brethren” not be included in the name of the schools being founded. Individuals, groups, and districts could found and operate schools, but the denomination itself should be kept from entanglements with these institutions.

The schools that developed among the Brethren therefore had a somewhat independent status from the beginning. Though Brethren control was maintained through the boards of trustees, the colleges were not owned and operated by the denomination. In time Brethren-related colleges have moved away from their church ties, a trend that is similar to what has occurred in many other American colleges begun originally with denominational ties.

One of the unfortunate developments that has occurred among Brethren-related colleges in general is a loss of any sense of responsibility for serving the needs of the church. This development has arisen both because of the origins of these schools outside of direct ties to the denomination but also because of the trends in higher education itself, which have steered educational institutions in increasingly secular directions.

One of the challenges that our colleges and seminaries in the Anabaptist and Pietist traditions need to take seriously is the call to see part of their reason for being as service to the church. There are several reasons for this. First, during the last several generations, educators in Brethren and Mennonite circles have played highly influential roles both in setting the course for their respective churches and in serving as role models for young people.

This position of influence lays upon us educators the responsibility to model a true love for the church and for the Lord that reinforces the faith of our students. I am frankly concerned that our brightest and best students no longer aspire to be pastors and missionaries but professors and church bureaucrats. This trend mirrors a shift that has taken place during the early decades of this century. Up to the first third of this century, the outstanding role models for youth were pastors, church leaders, and missionaries whose faithful testimony in life caused young people to want to emulate them. Since this time, educators have increasingly served as the main role models. In my own life, my professors have played central roles in my career choices. I don't see this trend reversing. I would challenge Brethren and Mennonite professors in our church-related colleges to view our roles, not in the secular academic model of being noncommittal on faith issues, but as encouragers by our life and words to students, especially from our own denominations, to view service to the Lord and his church as a noble calling. Whether this service is being an involved layperson or a pastor, missionary, or other church worker, our young people need to be challenged with that calling.

A second reason why our educational institutions need to consider part of their purpose as serving the church is because our Anabaptist/Brethren heritage is increasingly becoming history rather than present experience. Furthermore, as Carl Bowman has demonstrated, it is all too easy to distort this heritage to fit modern values and trends. The academy is best suited for preserving this heritage accurately and passing it on to coming generations. Retention of this heritage is so important because, without it, we will be at the mercy of the prevailing philosophies and fads of our culture. We will have no standards of discernment.

I commend both Bridgewater and Elizabethtown Colleges for their commitment to this very effort. The Young Center especially has served and, I trust, will continue to serve the Anabaptist and Pietist heritages by keeping alive our collective stories of faith and making these stories and their embodied truths available to our people. My own commitment to beginning a concentration in Anabaptism and Pietism at Ashland Theological Seminary has been an expression of this desire.

I encourage other educational institutions to create new models of education that are able to tie together church and academy. We have sought to do this in several ways at Ashland Theological Seminary. We hire new faculty based not only on their academic qualifications but also on their service to the church as pastors or missionaries. In a course I have taught on church planting, I involve the class in actually starting a new Brethren church as part of the

experience. We have also hired a person several years ago in the area of church growth and evangelism who works 3/4 time for the seminary and 1/4 time for the denomination. This aids the denomination by providing a very capable person to serve in this field, and it aids the seminary by keeping his skills honed. The seminary also works closely with the denomination in such areas as missions, church planting, examination of candidates for ordination, and a mentoring program for pastors and congregations.

We in Anabaptist and Pietist traditions, of all denominations, should be asking the question of how our educational institutions can serve the church. Part of our birthright is revolt against education that is divorced from the life of faith. One of our contributions to the larger American church is to model how bridges can be built between the academy and the church to strengthen the work of each.

Rediscovering the role of small groups in the church

Both the Anabaptists and Brethren were small group movements at their start, obviously more by their circumstances than by intentionality. Many of the dynamics that are enhanced by small groups, such as close community, mutual accountability, and application of Scripture to life, were fundamental to Anabaptist and Brethren identity. Though today, most Mennonite and Brethren congregations would be too large to be considered a small group, nonetheless, they often still perceive themselves to be one large family or cell.

As the pastor of a new congregation in suburban Columbus, Ohio, I came to recognize the value of small groups. We began the church with a commitment to small groups, so we didn't have to face the challenge of having to begin them within an existing congregation. I discovered that small groups could more effectively foster many of our Anabaptist/Brethren principles than could the usual Sunday School, worship, and prayer meeting format.

They could quickly develop a sense of community in which genuine sharing and caring could take place and the priesthood of believers could be lived out. We could be more serious about Bible study, not only delving into Scripture at a greater depth than most other church services would allow, but also being more intentional about application. Accountability is facilitated, for one is more ready to both give and receive counsel when relationships of trust have been built. Small groups also facilitate leadership training. In our groups each member was encouraged to lead sessions; thereby they were able to develop skills in leading prayer, Bible study, and group discussion.

Small groups can thus serve as a significant resource for renewal in our tradition. They are consistent with our heritage, they address many of the

felt and actual needs of Americans in general, and they can inculcate very effectively many of our Anabaptist/Brethren commitments.

### **Conclusion**

In his book, *Transforming Congregations for the Future*, Loren Mead shares his prescription for renewal in mainline denominations. He describes part of the renewal process as building a boundary between the community of faith and the world, “not for the purpose of separation but of service.” He elaborates:

We are called to reestablish the boundary between our congregations and the society around them, getting clear about the cultural distance between followers of the values of this world and followers of the gospel. We are powerless to change ourselves and the world if we are confused about what our community stands for.<sup>9</sup>

The powerlessness some of our communities of faith feel derives from confusion about what we stand for. Mennonites and Brethren have a rich faith heritage. It begins with the recognition of our need for new life in Jesus Christ through repentance, faith, and baptism. But this is but the first step in faithful discipleship to Christ, which is fostered through cultivating our spiritual lives through prayer and Bible study. Through this process of love of and obedience to Christ, we are increasingly, by the Spirit’s power, transformed into the image of Christ.

But our faith also affirms that this process is impossible outside of the body of Christ, the church. We need the mutual love, caring, and accountability afforded by other members of Christ’s body. It is likewise in the context of the body that such gospel principles as unity, love, forgiveness, forbearance, and respectful submission to others are to be lived out. As God’s people we also recognize that certain boundaries must be established between the values of the world and the church, not for physical separation, but for service and witness. These boundaries are maintained by nonconformity, nonswearing, and nonresistance.

I believe that we as heirs of Anabaptism and Pietism have much to offer a needy world today. We have a wonderful balance between the inner life and outward expressions of faith; between the individual and corporate dynamics of Christianity; between witness and social service. But we need to be clear about who we are. The proposals I have made in this article can serve an important role in helping us gain greater clarity about our identity. As we

give attention to a spirituality consistent with our own biblical heritage, we will develop a common story that can feed our hearts, minds, and souls. As we share our faith story with our children, we will ensure that our story will be told and lived in the future. As we build bridges between our academic institutions and the church, we will be able to more faithfully portray our story and develop role models who can funnel promising leaders back into the church. As we develop more small groups in our churches, we will be cultivating a resource that can serve as an entryway for renewal in our churches. Through these means we will be able to strengthen the core beliefs and commitments of our faith and thereby be better able to withstand the centrifugal forces of our culture that tear away at our faith.

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>This article was originally prepared as a lecture for the 1996 Durnbaugh Lectures at the Young Center, Elizabethtown, PA, February 28-29, 1996. It was part of a series of lectures entitled: "Anabaptist Identity: Theological and Practical Issues." This paper is very appropriate for this *Festschrift* for Jerry Flora, since he has modeled the type of faith called for in this paper throughout his service to the church as a pastor and professor.

<sup>2</sup>Donald R. Fitzkee, *Moving Toward the Mainstream: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Change Among the Brethren of Eastern Pennsylvania* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 1995), 9.

<sup>3</sup>Russell Chandler, *Racing Toward 2001: The Forces Shaping America's Religious Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 96.

<sup>4</sup>Fitzkee, *Mainstream*, 158.

<sup>5</sup>Carl F. Bowman, *Brethren Society: The Cultural Transformation of a "Peculiar People"* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 376.

<sup>6</sup>J. Craig Haas, *Readings from Mennonite Writings New & Old* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 1992), 294.

<sup>7</sup>Her address has been published in *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 69 (July 1995): 337-353 and in John D. Roth, ed., *Refocusing a Vision* (Goshen, IN: Mennonite Historical Society, 1995), 65-81.

<sup>8</sup>Donald F. Durnbaugh, comp. and ed., *The Brethren in Colonial America* (Elgin, IL: The Brethren Press, 1967), 520; see also 523, 567, 585-586.

<sup>9</sup>Loren B. Mead, *Transforming Congregations for the Future* (Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute, 1994), 116.