



Christian Dress & *Adornment*

by

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Essays

by

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and

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to all who choose to
follow the simplicity of Jesus' lifestyle
even in their clothes
and appearance

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INTRODUCTION

The story behind a book may sometimes be of as much interest to readers as the content of the book itself. This book began as a chapter of my larger study entitled *Christian Lifestyle*, where I examine vital aspects of Christian living such as devotional life, work and leisure, marriage, divorce, sex, music, sports, movies, dancing, abortion, dress, and adornments. While writing the chapter “Christian Dress and Adornment,” the conviction deepened within my heart regarding the need to publish this study separately in view of its relevance for our Seventh-day Adventist Church and for the Christian community at large.

Expansion of Original Manuscript. I asked several of my colleagues at Andrews University to evaluate the first draft of this book, which consisted of about 60 pages. Their comments were most valuable to me. They were all favorably impressed by the research I had done, but some of them encouraged me to expand some chapters by tracing historically the correlation between the use of costly jewelry, colorful cosmetics, finger rings, and suggestive clothes on the one hand, and the spiritual growth or decline of Christian churches on the other hand.

Being a church historian by training and profession, I gladly accepted the challenge. I felt that a historical survey of dress and ornaments in the Christian church in general and within some denominations in particular could offer us some valuable insights relevant to our contemporary situation. For several months I read extensively both primary and secondary sources dealing with past Christian attitudes toward dress and ornaments. The result was that my original 60-page manuscript grew threefold to the size of the present book.

A Difficult Book to Write. I must confess that of the ten books I have written, this has been the most difficult to write. This is so not merely because of the scarcity of scholarly studies dealing with this subject, but primarily because of the sensitive nature of the subject. Dress and ornaments are not merely external coverings; they touch the inner self. In fact, this study touched me and my wife in unexpected ways, causing us to re-think our position on certain things, including the wearing of the wedding ring. None of my previous books have caused me to do so much soul searching. It is thus in a spirit of humility that I present this study, not to condemn anyone, but to help fellow believers, including myself, to better understand and accept those principles that God has revealed to us in His Word regarding our outward appearance.

The subject of dress and adornment is sensitive because it touches what some people treasure most, namely, their pride and vanity. What we wear is very much a part of who we are. Our clothes and ornaments reveal not only our social, economic, and educational levels, but also our moral values. What we wear tells what we want the world to believe about us. Most people want the world to admire their outward appearance, not to criticize it. If you express your disapproval to some friends or church members for the suggestive clothes or glittering jewelry they wear, chances are that they will tell you, “What I wear is none of your business! If you don’t like it, don’t look at me!”

Such emotional outbursts can hardly encourage preaching or writing on this sensitive subject. This may explain why sermons and books on Christian dress and ornaments are rare. In view of this fact, you may be wondering how I could dare to write on this subject at all! Let me assure you that it was not because I have a “martyr complex.” I have learned from experience that writing on a controversial subject can be costly, emotionally and financially. One can become embroiled in endless controversies, lose the friendship of fellow believers, and suffer economic penalties.

Awareness of Felt Need. My criterion for deciding what to write about has never been the popularity or unpopularity of the subject, but rather my perception of its relevance and importance for the church today. The need to investigate the Biblical teachings regarding dress and ornaments has been brought home to me many times by what I have seen and heard in scores of congregations where I have ministered across North America and overseas. It is becoming a common sight in many congregations to see some members wearing miniskirts, low-cut blouses, casual slacks, earrings, necklaces, bracelets, finger rings, and heavy makeup.

When this issue comes up for discussion on Sabbath afternoon during the Question/Answer period of my seminars, there are always some members who will defend the immodest dress and jewelry they wear by making comments such as these: “What is wrong with wearing earrings, necklaces, bracelets, finger rings or fashionable clothes? Everybody wears them! Adventists should not look like scarecrows! Jewelry is part of the formal dress of a woman, like wearing a tie is part of the formal attire of a man. There is more to Christianity than arguing about jewelry and clothes. Adventists should not allow these minor things to obscure the more important truths of the Christian faith.”

These are real issues that confront every pastor and Christian concerned to help fellow believers follow the directives of the Word of God rather than the dictates of fashion. In fact, many times pastors have shared with me their sense of helplessness over the increased use of jewelry, cosmetics, and immodest clothes in their congregations. Some pastors concede that this permissive trend is here to stay and there is not much we can do about it; we might just as well learn to live with it.

Reasons for Hope. Frankly, I do not share this pessimistic view. My conviction is that most of the Christians who adorn their bodies with excessive cosmetics, costly jewelry, and eye-catching clothes are seeking for love, attention, and acceptance from God and from other people. When they discover that Jesus and the community of faith love them and accept them as they are, in their natural beauty, they gradually lose the desire to bedeck and bejewel their bodies. When they recognize that what Jesus loves most about them is not their outward glittering ornaments and costly clothing, but the inward adorning of the graces of the heart—the gentle and quiet spirit (1 Pet 3:4)—they are willing to follow the simplicity of Jesus’ lifestyle, even in their clothes and appearance.

It is this conviction that has motivated me to write this book. We cannot blame church members for wearing what is wrong if we as leaders do not help them to see the Biblical reasons for wearing what is right. There are many sincere members who are sincerely doing what is wrong. They sincerely believe that there is nothing wrong in premarital sex as long as they love their partner. They sincerely believe that Christians can watch violent or sex-filled movies as long as they do not become emotionally involved. They sincerely believe that they can listen to rock music as long as the beat is not too strong or the words are not too profane. They sincerely believe that they can divorce their marital partner if they no longer find fulfillment in their relationship. They sincerely believe that they can consume a moderate

amount of alcohol and drugs as long as they do not become addicted. They sincerely believe that they can wear different kinds of jewelry as long as it is not too gaudy or too expensive. These are the people who frequently ask me: “What is wrong with . . .?”

One wonders, How can so many Christians be sincere and yet be sincerely wrong on vital aspects of Christian living? It would seem to me that part of the problem is a lack of understanding of the Gospel’s claims on our daily lives. The prevailing concern of evangelical churches today is to teach people how to become Christians, rather than to train them in how to live the Christian life. There seems to be a reluctance to help people understand how accepting the Gospel affects the way we eat, drink, dress, adorn, and amuse ourselves. The result is, to use the words of Hosea, that “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hos 4:6).

Fear of Legalism. Perhaps it is the fear of being labeled as “legalists” that has kept many from addressing some of the specific aspects of Christian living, such as dress and adornment. There is a fear that such teaching can cause a sense of guilt and insecurity in the minds of those who do not live up to God’s expectations. To avoid troubling consciences, many writers and pastors choose to dwell on the “doing and dying” of Jesus, or to put differently, on His unconditional love and forgiveness. The message seems to be: “You do not need to feel insecure about your salvation because Christ has done it all. He accepts you no matter how you live or what you wear. Just trust in His doing and dying for you and you are saved.” This message is true but incomplete. The good news of the Gospel is that Jesus accepts us as we are *but* He will also empower us to become what we ought be.

To be faithful to the Biblical mandate, we must teach people not only how to profess their faith and love for Christ but also how to practice such faith and love in their daily living. This is my reason for writing this book on Christian dress and adornment. During the past 25 years of teaching and preaching around the world, countless times I have seen radical changes in the lifestyle of people who became convinced by Scripture and convicted by the Holy Spirit that certain habits or actions were wrong. There are many sincere Christians across denominational lines who want to know how to live according to the principles that God has revealed in the Bible. They appreciate someone taking time to show them from the Bible and from personal example how to live the Christian life. It is to these sincere Christians that this book is humbly dedicated.

Objectives of Book. The objective of this study is to develop some fundamental principles regarding dress and ornaments from a careful study of the Biblical examples, allegories, and admonitions regarding jewelry, cosmetics, and clothing. Chapters 5 and 6 address the specific questions of the wedding ring and unisex fashions in view of their relevance to Christian life today. The last chapter summarizes the highlights of this study by developing seven principles on dress and ornaments that emerged from the examination of the relevant Biblical material.

My ultimate objective for writing this book is to help individual believers and the church as a whole to win the battle against worldliness in dress and ornaments. I believe that this battle cannot be won by merely passing new resolutions. Ultimately this battle will be won when each Christian decides in his or her heart to live in harmony with the Biblical principles of modesty and simplicity. The purpose of this book is to help Christians win the battle through a deeper understanding and appreciation of such principles.

Procedure and Style. The procedure I have followed throughout the book consists of two major steps. First, I have examined all the relevant passages of the Old and New Testaments to establish which principles are found in the Bible regarding dress, cosmetics and jewelry. Second, I have endeavored to apply these principles to our contemporary situation. To gain a historical perspective, I have briefly surveyed the Christian attitude toward dress and ornaments in the major periods of the church and within a few denominations.

Concerning the style of the book, I have attempted to write in simple, nontechnical language. To facilitate the reading, each chapter is divided into major parts, and subdivided under appropriate headings. A brief summary is given at the end of each chapter. Unless otherwise specified, all the Bible texts are quoted from the Revised Standard Version, copyright 1946 and 1952.

An Overview of the Book. Out of consideration for those readers who appreciate an overview of the structure and content of a book, I will briefly summarize the highlights of each chapter. Since some chapters contain historical surveys which may be tedious to some readers, I will suggest which sections some may wish to skip.

Chapter 1 opens with a reflection on the importance of outward appearance, not only in the business world but also in the Christian life. Our clothes and appearance are most powerful nonverbal communicators not only of our socioeconomic status, but also of our Christian character. They serve as a frame to reveal the picture of the One whom we serve. The inner renewal

Christ has brought in the life of a Christian is reflected in the outward appearance.

Chapter 2 examines the most relevant Old Testament passages dealing with jewelry, cosmetics, and extravagant clothing. The study reveals a consistent association of the use of these articles with seduction, adultery, and apostasy. Such negative associations and the divine punishment resulting from the use of these things constitute a solemn warning for us. The removal of outward ornaments is a precondition to inward spiritual cleansing and reconciliation with God. In view of the fact that some people find support in certain Old Testament passages for a moderate use of jewelry, special attention is given to these passages and to the arguments drawn from them.

Chapter 3 builds upon the preceding chapter by examining the relevant New Testament passages. The chapter takes a close look first at the attire of the two symbolic women mentioned in the book of Revelation: the Great Harlot and the Bride of Christ. The contrast between the outward appearance of the two women has significant implications for the Christian standard of dress and ornaments. Then the chapter analyzes the apostolic admonitions of Paul and Peter regarding dress and adornment (1 Tim 2:9-10; 1 Pet 3:3-4). Both apostles contrast the appropriate adorning of Christian women with the inappropriate ornaments of worldly women. Both apostles give us essentially the same list of inappropriate ornaments for the Christian woman. Both apostles recognize that the outward glittering ornaments of the body are inconsistent with the inward ornaments of the heart, the quiet spirit and benevolent deeds. On the basis of these apostolic admonitions the study develops some fundamental principles relevant for Christians today.

Chapter 4 surveys the Christian attitude toward dress and ornaments in the major periods of church history. Not all readers find historical material engaging; some may wish to skip the first two parts of the chapter, which deal with dress and ornaments in the Early Church and Middle Ages, and read only the third part which surveys the period from the Reformation to our times. The survey shows that Christians have not been immune from the extravagant fashions of their time, yet in every age there have been Christians who have adorned themselves modestly, soberly and decently as befits Christian godliness. An important lesson that emerges from this historical survey is that the spiritual revival or decline of the church is often reflected in the dress reform or dress extravagance of its members. The history of dress and ornaments in many ways illustrates the human struggle between pride, lust, and greed on the one hand and humility, modesty, and generosity on the other hand.

Chapter 5 examines the whole question of the wedding ring from a broader historical, cultural, and Biblical perspective. The chapter provides some basic information about the evolution of the meaning, usage, and influence of finger rings both in pagan Rome and Christian history. Some readers may wish to skip the first part of the chapter which deals with finger rings in pagan history. The chapter gives special attention to the religious impact of the wedding ring in the history of the Methodist, Mennonite, and Seventh-day Adventist churches. This survey provides a basis for reflecting at the end of the chapter on whether or not it is advisable for Christians to wear a wedding ring today.

Chapter 6 examines the philosophical undergirding of the unisex fashion promoted today and the latter's impact in the home, in the work place, and in the church. The study shows that the driving force behind the unisex fashion of our time is the feminist vision of a new genderless society, where the clothes and roles of men and women are undifferentiated and interchangeable. Such a vision of a genderless society is clearly condemned in the Bible. The Scriptures clearly teaches us to respect gender distinctions in dress as well as in functional roles, because they are part of the order of creation. Gender distinctions are fundamental for our understanding of who we are and what role God wants us to fulfill. The chapter closes urging Christians to respect their God-given masculinity and femininity by clothing themselves in a way that affirms their gender identity.

Chapter 7 brings into sharper focus the relevance of the Biblical teachings on dress and ornaments for our time, by formulating seven basic statements of principle which summarize the highlights of this study. This brief review is designed to help the reader gain a better overview of the fundamental Biblical teachings on dress and adornment which emerged in the course of our investigation.

Chapter 8 is contributed by Laurel Damsteegt who offers insightful practical applications of the principles of dress and adornment set forth in the preceding chapters. With her gripping style she articulates ten practical principles showing how Christians can dress for God's glory. She notes that dressing for God's glory is not something horribly difficult, but it does take willingness on our part to let Him change our attitudes. She closes with an appeal to follow Jesus in such *little* things as dress and ornaments, which will silently tell the world that we live to glorify God and not ourselves.

Chapter 9 is contributed by Hedwig Jemison who applies to pastors recent research done for corporations on the importance of clothing and appearance. Her essay was first published in *Ministry*, July 1980. She shows

that the way a minister dresses can make the difference between a favorable or unfavorable reception of his message. Prior to her retirement she served as director of the White Estate Branch Office at Andrews University. I respect Hedwig Jemison as a real spiritual mother in Israel.

Acknowledgments. It is most difficult for me to acknowledge my indebtedness to the many persons who have contributed to the realization of this book. Indirectly, I feel indebted to the many evangelical authors who have written on practical aspects of Christian living. Though very few of them have addressed the question of Christian dress and ornaments, their books and articles on related areas have stimulated my thinking and broadened my approach to this subject.

Directly, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to those who took time in their busy schedules to read my manuscript attentively and to offer me valuable suggestions on how I could improve it. Some of them wrote several pages of constructive suggestions, while others chose to meet with me and discuss their observations personally. To all of them I wish to express my deep gratitude for their valuable comments which challenged me to amplify and, in some cases, rectify the contents of this book. While I am grateful for the many suggestions and comments I received, the views expressed in this book are my own, and for them I take full responsibility.

The following list of names may not be inclusive, but it does represent those who stand out in my mind for the valuable feedback they provided me: Dr. Jon Paulien, Dr. Humberto Rasi, Dr. Woodrow Whidden, Dr. Ben Schoun, Dr. Rex D. Edwards, Dr. Elmer L. Malcolm, Elder Leo Ranzolin, Pastor Larry L. Lichtenwalter, Elder Joel O. Tompkins, Elder Thomas J. Mostert, Elder Bruce Johnston, Elder Herman Bauman, and Chaplain David G. Rand.

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Particular thanks to Laurel Damsteegt for contributing the eighth chapter, "A Practical Look at a Christian's Clothing." I feel that Mrs. Damsteegt's chapter adds balance to this study by offering readers practical principles and suggestions on how to dress for God's glory. Mrs. Damsteegt has broad experience. Academically, she has earned a Master of Divinity degree and a Master of Science in Public Health. Practically, she has served with her husband as a missionary overseas and as a pastor's wife in the United States. She has contributed with her husband to the preparation of the book

Seventh-day Adventists Believe. . . She has authored numerous articles and conducts seminars on healthful living. Above all, Mrs. Damsteegt is a deeply committed Christian who radiates the love of Christ. Her willingness to contribute to this project is greatly appreciated.

A heartfelt thanks to Mrs. Hedwig Jemison for her unrelenting motherly interest and support shown toward me. She allowed me to reprint as chapter 9 her article “Clothing Men of the Cloth,” first published in *Ministry*, July 1980. Above all, she spent much time reading, correcting and reacting constructively to this manuscript.

My daughter-in-law, Michelle Bacchiocchi, deserves special mention for being willing to serve as the model for the cover of the book. I really appreciate her willingness to expose herself to undesirable criticism for posing as a model of modest *and* immodest attire. Our youngest son, Gianluca, deserves recognition for designing the cover of the book.

Last but not least I need to express my special thanks to my wife, who has been my constant source of encouragement and inspiration for the thirty-four years of our married life. Her good taste in dressing modestly and yet elegantly has made it easier for me to understand and write about Christian dress and ornaments.

Author’s Hope. It is my fervent hope that this study, the fruit of dedicated research, may help many Christians to follow the simplicity and unpretentiousness of Jesus’ lifestyle, even in their clothes and appearance. As Christians we reveal the loveliness of His character by dressing modestly, decently, and becomingly, avoiding glittering ornaments. Our outward appearance is a constant silent witness of our Christian identity. It tells the world that we live to glorify God and not ourselves.

Chapter 1

THE IMPORTANCE OF OUTWARD APPEARANCE

When you meet people for the first time, before they open their mouths, can you tell by their outward appearance if they are Christians? I frequently find myself in airports waiting for someone to pick me up and take me to the place where I am to present my weekend seminars. In most cases, the only thing I know about the person meeting me is that he or she is a Christian belonging to the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

As I come out of the gate and look at the people standing and waiting to meet their party, I ask myself, “Who could be the one waiting for me? Who is there that looks like an Adventist?” If among those waiting I see a man with long hair and wearing a T-shirt saying “Hard Rock Cafe,” I am pretty sure that he is not waiting for me. By the same token I automatically eliminate the woman wearing a short dress and jewelry, or the man with an open shirt, a gold chain, and hair reaching his shoulders. By the process of elimination I usually find the person waiting for me among those neatly and modestly dressed.

You Are What You Wear. Our outward appearance and bearing tell much more about who we are than many of us realize. William Thourlby, an acclaimed clothing consultant who advises executives and presidents on “how to package yourself for success,” says that when people meet you for the first time they will make ten judgments about you based solely on your appearance. These relate to:

1. Your economic level
2. Your educational level
3. Your trustworthiness
4. Your social position
5. Your level of sophistication
6. Your economic heritage
7. Your social heritage
8. Your educational heritage
9. Your success
10. Your moral character¹

Note that our appearance reveals not only our social, economic, and educational levels, but also our “moral character.” This means that clothes and appearance should be of particular concern to Christians committed to living by Biblical moral values. “Consciously or unconsciously,” writes Thourlby, “the clothing we wear reveals a set of beliefs about ourselves that we want the world to believe.”² The hippie mode of dress shows rejection of the traditional values of society. The sexy mode of dress which leaves little to the imagination expresses the desire to seduce. The executive mode of dress, with combed hair, business suit, and shining shoes, reflects authority, dignity, and reliability.

The business world has long recognized the importance clothing and appearance have in marketing products, services, and the very image of companies. Major corporations such as airlines, which sell their services to the general public, engage the services of renowned dress consultants to design the wardrobes of their ticket agents, flight attendants, and pilots. They know that through the appearance of their employees they can project to the general public such images of their corporation as respectability, reliability, and professional competence.

What is true for corporations is also true for individuals. John T. Molloy, named “America’s first wardrobe engineer” by *Time* magazine, spent seventeen years collecting data on the remarkable impact the way we dress has on the people we meet and work with. In his best-seller *Dress for Success*, Molloy tells us that he early discovered how important clothes and appearance are in determining credibility and acceptance. He found that well-dressed people receive preferential treatment in almost all their social and business encounters.³

Molloy conducted research also on the impact of a dress code in a large corporation with two branches, one of which enforced a dress code while the other did not. After one year, the secretaries and workers in the branch that had a dress code improved their performance in every area, stayed at their desks longer, and reduced their tardiness by 15 percent.⁴

It is fascinating to think that our outward appearance influences the reactions not only of those we meet, but also of ourselves. In *You Are What You Wear*, William Thourlby has a chapter entitled “You Can Become What You Wear.”⁵ Obviously one does not become a pilot by dressing like a pilot. But if a pilot looks unkempt and messy, he may generate suspicion about his trustworthiness in the eyes of the passengers ready to board the plane. What this means is that if we look successful and professional, we can control the

impression we make on people. In turn, the favorable reactions we receive challenge us to live up to the expectations of those who see us, or to use Thourlby's words, "you can become what you wear." If we look competent and professional we are challenged to act accordingly.

Implications for the Christian Life. This extensive recent research, exploring how to package our outward appearance to influence people to view us and the organization we represent favorably, has profound implications for the Christian life. After all, as Christians we are also in "the business of marketing." The difference is in the product we market. Our Christian commitment is to market not merely our skills or the products of the company we work for, but primarily our faith and love for Christ. We are committed to revealing Christ's character in our own life so that others will be attracted to Him and accept Him as their personal Savior.

If, as recent research has shown, clothes and appearance are most powerful nonverbal communicators not only of our socioeconomic status but also of our moral values, as Christians we should ponder: How can we best show our Christian values to others through outward appearance? What principles of dress and adornment should we follow to ensure that our outward appearance will give a visible and silent testimony of our relationship with Christ?

To find an answer to these questions, I spent considerable time in libraries, searching for books and articles dealing with Christian dress and adornment. What a disappointment to find very little material on this subject! The major studies were produced in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by such renowned evangelical leaders as John Wesley, Richard Baxter, Phoebe Palmer, and Charles Finney. Before giving up, I called some of the leading publishers of Christian literature to find out if perchance they had published some new studies on Christian dress and adornment which had not yet reached the libraries. The result was again a disappointment.

The scarcity of recent literature, as well as of teaching and preaching on Christian dress and adornment, shows that these are no longer viewed as an important index of Christian character. Many Christians sincerely believe that Christianity does not consist in outward forms. Thus they feel they can dress and adorn their bodies as they please because this has nothing to do with their spirituality. It is not uncommon to see people even in the church dressed immodestly or casually.

The relaxation of the Christian code of dress and adornment must be seen as part of the gradual shift that has taken place during this past century

away from a theistic view of the world in which God is the ultimate reality from whom we derive and to whom we are morally accountable, *toward a materialistic view of the world* in which matter is the ultimate reality from which we derive and to which we are *not* morally accountable.

This shift has produced the secular, humanistic, hedonistic values prevailing in our society today. The criterion for what is right or wrong is no longer divine revelation but human feelings and pleasure. If wearing extravagant dresses and ornaments makes you feel good and gives you pleasure, people say, then it must be right. Unfortunately, this hedonistic mentality is influencing many sincere Christians. To resist this pervasive thinking, Christians urgently need to understand and accept the principles of dress and adornment which God has revealed in His Word. The awareness of this urgent need is what motivated me to undertake this research.

Conclusion. Clothes and appearance are most powerful nonverbal communicators not only of our socioeconomic status, but also of our moral values. We are what we wear. This means that our outward appearance is a visible and silent testimony of our Christian values. As Christians we cannot say, “What I look like is no one’s business!” because what we look like reflects on our Lord. My house, my car, my personal appearance, my use of time and money, all reflect how Christ has changed my life from inside out. When Jesus comes into our lives, He does not cover our blemishes with cosmetic powder, but He cleanses us wholly by working from within. This inner renewal is reflected in the outward appearance.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

1. William Thourlby, *You Are What You Wear* (New York, 1980), p. 1.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
3. John T. Molloy, *Dress for Success* (New York, 1975), p. 32.
4. *Ibid.*
5. William Thourlby (note 1), pp. 52-59.

Chapter 2

DRESS AND ORNAMENTS

IN

THE OLD TESTAMENT

Sometimes church members will remove colorful cosmetics and jewelry simply “because the church says so” rather than because they understand the principles that God has revealed to ensure a healthy relationship with Him. Such members are prone to ask, “What is wrong with my earrings or necklace? They are inconspicuous and inexpensive! What is wrong with wearing my miniskirt to church? It is only four inches above the knee! I am still young, and this is what everybody else wears!”

My heart has been troubled on many occasions by these questions because they reveal a negative attitude toward God. The concern seems to be: “How much adornment and body exposure can I get by with and still be accepted by God?” This attitude reflects a desire to do only the minimum necessary for salvation.

But a genuine Christian will not ask, “How little can I do and still remain a child of God?” but rather, “How much can I do to show my faith, love, and commitment to Christ through my outward appearance?” This is the positive approach springing from a heart so full of love for God that it wants to know how best to glorify Him in all aspects of lifestyle, including outward appearance. Christians with this positive and loving attitude are eager to know what God has revealed in Scripture regarding dress, jewelry, and cosmetics. It is with this attitude that we shall conduct our study, beginning from the Old Testament.

Objective of Chapter. This chapter examines the most relevant Old Testament passages dealing with jewelry, cosmetics, and extravagant clothing. We shall discover a consistent association of the use of these articles with seduction, adultery, and apostasy. We shall see that the removal of outward ornaments is a precondition to inward spiritual cleansing and reconciliation with God. In view of the fact that some people find support in certain Old Testament passages for a moderate use of jewelry, we shall give special attention to these passages and to the arguments drawn from them.

The Robe of Light. The human body was the crown of God's creation, most marvellous in design, most beautiful in form and features, and most charming in expression. God expressed His total satisfaction over His creation of Adam and Eve, declaring it "very good" (Gen 1:31). In their Edenic state man and woman wore only the garment of their innocence. "A beautiful soft light, the light of God, enshrouded the holy pair. This robe of light was a symbol of their spiritual garments of heavenly innocence. Had they remained true to God it would ever have continued to enshroud them. But when sin entered, they severed their connection with God, and the light that had encircled them departed. Naked and ashamed, they tried to compensate for the loss of the heavenly garments by sewing together fig leaves for a covering."¹

In the Bible, clothes or their absence (nudity) serve to represent the spiritual condition of human beings before God and His glory. When Adam and Eve sinned, they suddenly discovered that they "were naked" (Gen 3:7) because they had lost the robe of light. Their nakedness resulted not from removing physical garments. They had never worn any garment until that time. Rather, they became aware of their nakedness the moment they sinned and sensed their separation from the glorious presence of God which had been their covering.

Redemption is often represented in the Bible as the restoration of the original robe of light emanating from God's glorious presence. Isaiah speaks of the restoration of the robes of light in the Messianic kingdom: "The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light by night, but the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory" (Is 60:19). Similarly, John the Revelator compares the church waiting for Christ's coming to a bride adorned for the wedding: "It was granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure" (Rev 19:8). The Greek term for "bright" is *lampron* which literally means "shining, resplendent" like a lamp. The robe of light, lost because of sin, is finally regained. The light of God's glory will clothe not only the redeemed but the city itself: "And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb" (Rev 21:23).

The imagery of clothing extends beyond creation and restoration to include the time in-between. To receive the robe of Christ's glory at His Return, we need now to "put off the old nature" (Eph 4:23) and to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 13:14). The white robe of righteousness we are called to wear in this present life is not a garment woven by our efforts, but offered to us by Christ: "I counsel you to buy from me . . . white garments to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen" (Rev 3:18). The nakedness of sin is covered by the glistening white garments offered by Christ. His promise to those "who have not soiled their garments" is that "they shall walk with me in white" (Rev 3:4).

The above sampling of references suffices to show how rich is the symbolism of clothing in the Bible. From the creation to restoration, God's creative and redemptive activity is often represented as covering the nakedness of His children with the garments of His righteousness. In his recent book *The Symbolism of Clothing in the Bible*, the French scholar Edgar Haulotte notes that "the importance of clothing is not minimized in the Bible. On the contrary, God's revelation gives to it spiritual significance."² The rich spiritual symbolism of clothing helps us to appreciate the importance that God attaches to clothing in the life of His people.

Fall and Fashion. Fashion began as our guilty parents were expelled from the Garden of Eden. Innocence was gone, the robe of light had faded, and Adam and Eve, shivering and cringing in the nakedness of sin, sewed together fig leaves to cover themselves. Their temporary covering was soon replaced by skin garments provided by God Himself (Gen 3:20). As people became increasingly corrupt, they tried to replace the beautiful simplicity of their innocence with inventions of fabrics, fashions, and ornaments of gold, jewels, and pearls. The more depraved people became, the more extravagant became their clothes and ornaments.

The original function of clothes was to protect the body from changing climate and lustful desires. Soon, however, people made clothing and ornaments the expression of pride and sex. Self-respect was turned into vanity. The desire for recognition led people to load themselves with showy apparel and costly ornaments. Thus, dress and ornaments soon became the index of spiritual decline and apostasy.

Removal of Ornaments at Bethel. This development helps us understand why in the Old Testament God often calls His people to repentance and reformation by removing their ornaments. The first episode is found in Genesis 35:1-4. God instructed Jacob to move his family members from Shechem to Bethel in order to lead them to a spiritual reformation by building

an altar in the very place where He appeared to him when he fled from his brother Esau.

Jacob realized that there was much work to be done before his family members would be ready to meet with God at Bethel. Out of consideration for his wives Jacob had tolerated idols and jewelry. These items probably included the idols that Rachel had stolen from her father (Gen 31:19), as well as the jewelry that Jacob's sons had captured as part of the spoils of Shechem (Gen 34:27-29).

To lead his family members to an inward moral and spiritual purification, Jacob summoned them to an outward cleansing: "Put away the foreign gods that are among you, and purify yourselves, and change your garments; then let us arise and go up to Bethel, that I may make there an altar to the God who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone" (Gen 35:2-3).

It is significant to note that Jacob sensed that his family members needed the outward cleansing of their bodies and the change of their garments before they could experience the inward cleansing at the altar that he was about to build. Presumably the change of garments meant putting on clothes which were not only clean but also appropriate for this special encounter with God. We saw earlier how research has shown that we become what we wear. This is true in the spiritual as well as the professional life. A clean and new outward appearance challenges us to be clean and new inwardly through the purification of our minds and hearts. This may explain why similar directives are given later to the Israelites at Sinai as they prepared to meet with God (Ex 19:10).

The response of Jacob's household is commendable: "So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods that they had, and the rings that were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was near Shechem" (Gen 35:4). Note that they delivered to Jacob not only their idols, but also their *jewelry* ("the rings that were in their ears"). They recognized that these also would have been a barrier to acceptance with God.

Idols as Jewelry. Some commentators think that the earrings themselves were amulets, little idols worn as charms. This is altogether possible because many articles of jewelry were associated with idol worship (Is 3:18-21). Often people wore what they worshiped. In its article on "Hebrew Dress and Ornament," *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* explains: "A jewel was at the same time an amulet. According to the ancient Oriental view, metals and precious stones belonged to certain gods of the mineral world and possessed, therefore, a mysterious

magic power. Aside from this, any trinket that diverts attention from the wearer to itself still serves as a protection against the evil eye. For this reason every one in the Orient wears an abundance of jewelry. Traces of this superstition are found in the Old Testament. In Isaiah 3:20 a piece of woman's jewelry is designated as an amulet (cf. Gen 35:4); and it is evident that the ornaments on the camels of the Midianites were charms (Judg 8:21)."³

This is true even today, especially in Catholic countries, where many people like to wear as pendants what they worship: crosses, hearts (of Jesus or Mary), and even small relics. It is also true in many new age and satanic cults, whose followers wear the objects they worship, namely, amulets, charms, talismans, and various kinds of pendants. Usually the function of these articles of jewelry is to ward off evil spirits or spells.

Judges 8:24 suggests that the wearing of earrings was native to the Ishmaelites: "For they had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites." The phrase suggests that earrings were a trademark of the Ishmaelites and not of the Israelites. We would say today that they were the trademark of worldly people and not of Christians.

The members of Jacob's household had adopted the idolatrous pagan lifestyle, but now Jacob was bringing them before God at Bethel to make an atonement for their sins. It was a time of heart searching and repentance. They recognized that strange gods and jewelry were to be removed before God's blessings could come upon them. To ensure that his family members would not be tempted to fall back into idolatry, Jacob wisely buried the idols and the earrings near the oak at Shechem, thus leaving them behind before proceeding to Bethel.

A Relevant Principle. This story contains a valuable principle for Christians today. *If we want to experience an inner cleansing from our sinful past and wish to have a Bethel-type ("House of God") experience with God, we need to remove all the outward besetting objects of idolatry, including ornaments worn for the glory of self rather than of God. To ensure that we will not be tempted to use them again, it is best to dispose of them permanently rather than to preserve them as keepsakes.*

Removal of Ornaments at Mount Horeb. A similar reformation involving the removal of ornaments is reported in Exodus 33:1-6. The context is the great apostasy that occurred while Moses was up on the mountain to receive the Ten Commandments. Tired of waiting for Moses and anxious to have a visible god to go before them in the place of Moses, some of the Israelites brought their golden ornaments to Aaron, who used them to make a molten calf in imitation of the gods of Egypt (Ex 32:2-4). While still up in

the mountain, Moses was warned by God of the apostasy in the camp and hastened to come down, only to find the people dancing and shouting around their idol.

To show disdain for their rebellion, Moses threw down the tables of stone, breaking them in the sight of the people, thus signifying that they had broken their covenant with God. He then proceeded to destroy the golden calf with fire and, with the help of the Levites, to punish those who persisted in their rebellion (Ex 32:15-29). Then Moses went up again to the mountain to plead that God would forgive the people's sin. God reassured Moses that He would remain true to the promise made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to bring them to the land of Canaan, but He Himself would not go with them. Presumably the reason is that should they again rebel, His direct presence would mean their complete destruction.

When the Israelites learned that God would no longer guide and protect them with His personal presence, they deeply repented of their transgression, "and no man put on his ornaments" (Ex 34:4). The men were probably wearing armlets, bracelets, and anklets like those worn by men in Egypt. This shows that the temptation to wear ornaments affects men as well as women.

In response to Israel's apparent repentance, God offered to reconsider His threat, but He requested that the Israelites give proof of the depth of their repentance by permanently removing their ornaments: "So now put off your ornaments from you, that I may know what to do with you" (Ex 33:5). The response was positive. "Therefore the people of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Mount Horeb onward" (Ex 33:5).

The story suggests that penitent Israelites recognized that their ornaments were a serious obstacle to their reconciliation with God. So they decided to strip "themselves of their ornaments from Mount Horeb onward." The phrase "from Mount Horeb onward" implies that sincere Israelites made a commitment at Mount Horeb to discontinue the use of ornaments in order to show their sincere desire to obey God. This experience resembles that of Jacob's family members at Shechem. In both instances the removal of ornaments is preparatory to a renewal of a covenant commitment to God.

Relevance for Today. What can we learn from this experience? In referring specifically to the wilderness experience of the Israelites, Paul reminds us that "these things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come" (1 Cor 10:11). Like the Israelites of old, we also are journeying to the promised land. God's command to the Israelites to remove their ornaments

before going into the land of Canaan applies to us who are journeying to the heavenly Canaan. If the wearing of ornaments contributed to the Israelites' rebellion against God and their removal facilitated reconciliation with God, could not the same be true for us today?

Some readers may wonder: Why were ornaments such a stumbling block to the spiritual life of the Israelites, and why is jewelry detrimental to our spiritual life today? Part of the answer is that *we wear what we worship, and we worship what we wear*. We wear what we worship in the sense that we wear what best reveals our idols: beauty, wealth, social status, or level of sophistication. We worship what we wear in the sense that we adore those clothes, ornaments, and gadgets that best nurture our ambitions (idols).

Have you ever heard people say, "I adore this dress or necklace! It adds so much to my appearance and personality"? Such comments reveal that the ultimate concern of such people is not the worship of God, but the cult of their own personality. The latter is idolatry. To the extent that clothes, ornaments, cars, homes, professional goals, and wealth become the priorities (the idols) of our lives, to the same extent God is displaced from our lives and consciousness. This is a fundamental reason why outward ornaments are a stumbling block to the spiritual life.

The Haughtiness of the Daughters of Zion. Another revealing example of how extravagant clothes and adornments fostered pride and self-glorification rather than the worship of God, is found in Isaiah 3:16-26. This passage is most significant because it contains not only the most detailed descriptions of the various articles of jewelry and fine clothing worn by wealthy women in Jerusalem, but also the most scathing denunciation of the pride and haughtiness displayed through such articles.

The context of the passage is the announcement of God's judgment upon His people, which will result in their utter humiliation and destruction. The reason for the divine judgment is that the people have forsaken God: "For Jerusalem has stumbled and Judah has fallen; because their speech and their deeds are against the Lord, defying his glorious presence" (Is 3:8).

Isaiah places the blame for the apostasy of the nation squarely on the negative influence both of its leaders and of its wealthy women. Regarding the leaders, the prophet says: "O my people, your leaders mislead you, and confuse the course of your paths. . . . The Lord enters into judgment with the elders and princes of his people: 'It is you who have devoured the vineyard, the spoil of the poor is in your houses'" (Is 3:12, 14). Instead of being the keepers of the vineyard, that is, the nation of Israel (Is 5:7; 1:8; 2:1, 3), the civil and religious leaders have devoured it by enriching themselves at the expense of the poor.

Isaiah continues his scathing rebuke by shifting the focus from the negative influence of the leaders to that of the upperclass women, most likely the wives and daughters of the leaders themselves. Apparently the reason is, as Joseph Jensen points out, that “like Amos, Isaiah seems to see the women sometimes responsible for the oppression practiced by their men.”⁴ This is suggested also by the comment that “women rule over them” (Is 3:12). The prophet, observes Carl Nagelsbach, condemns “the prevalent excess of female luxury, not only as sinful in itself but also as a chief cause of the violence and social disorder previously mentioned, and therefore to be punished by disease, widowhood, and shameful exposure.”⁵

Isaiah first describes how the daughters of Zion display their haughty pride: “The women of Zion are haughty, walking along with outstretched necks, flirting with their eyes, tripping along with mincing steps, with ornaments jingling on their ankles. Therefore the Lord will bring sores on the heads of the women of Zion; the Lord will make their scalps bald” (Is 3:16-17, NIV). The inward pride of the women of Zion is shown outwardly by the way they walk, with “head stretched sideways”⁶ to see if they are admired, and with ogling eyes, mincing steps, and coy glances, seeking to attract attention to themselves by the tinkling sound of small bells fastened to their ankles.

The Removal of the Symbols of Pride. Such pride provokes the Lord’s punishment, which is meted out by humiliating the women of Zion through the removal of all the symbols of their pride and through their subjection to harsh treatment: “In that day the Lord will take away the finery of the anklets, the headbands, and the crescents; the pendants, the bracelets, and the scarfs; the headdresses, the armlets, the sashes, the perfume boxes, and the amulets; the signet rings and the nose rings; the festal robes, the mantles, the cloaks, and the handbags; the garment of gauze, the linen garments, the turbans and the veils. Instead of perfume there will be rottenness; and instead of a girdle, a rope; and instead of well-set hair, baldness; and instead of a rich robe, a girding of sackcloth; instead of beauty, shame. Your men shall fall by the sword and your mighty men in battle. And her gates shall lament and mourn; ravaged she shall sit upon the ground” (Is 3:18-26).

In this passage we find the most inclusive enumeration of female ornaments and fine clothing to be found anywhere in the Bible. This is surprising, because as Franz Delitzsch pointed out, it is not customary for Isaiah “to enter into such minute particulars.”⁷ Even Ezekiel, who tends to give details of women’s ornaments (Ez 16:8-14), has nothing comparable to this detailed description. The explanation is to be found in Isaiah’s concern to expose “the boundless love of ornaments which had become prevalent in the time of Uzziah-Jotham,”⁸ as well as the tragic consequences of humiliation, suffering and destruction.⁹

We should note that the passage includes legitimate articles of clothing such as “mantles, cloaks, handbags, scarfs, linen garments.” Isaiah lumps these together with all the pagan ornaments worn by wealthy Jewish women, because all of them were used to show off their pride. His intent is to show how the pride of the women of Jerusalem, manifested through all their outward clothes and ornaments, provoked God’s judgment and made destruction necessary.

Relevance for Today. This passage teaches us at least two important lessons. First, luxurious clothes and ornaments reveal inner pride and desire for self-exaltation, which can result in idolatry, adultery, and apostasy. There is a close connection between dress and behavior. Immodesty breeds impurity. The seductive look of the daughters of Zion misled the leaders and eventually led the nation into disobedience and divine punishment. Thus, an important reason to avoid ornaments is not simply their cost, but especially their negative influence upon others.

Second, God abhors the pride manifested in wearing ornaments. “When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion . . . by a spirit of burning” (Is 4:4). Wealthy Jewish women adorned their bodies from head to foot with expensive ornaments to make themselves beautiful outwardly, but God saw their inner pride. Evidently the beauty that counts in the sight of God is not the one *obtained outwardly* with ornaments of gold and fine clothing, but the one *attained inwardly* with the “imperishable jewel of a gentle and quiet spirit” (1 Pet 3:4).

Literal or Allegorical? Some reject our conclusions by interpreting the passage allegorically. Madelynn Jones-Haldeman, for example, argued that the removal of women’s ornaments represents not a condemnation of the ornaments per se (“not one of the ornaments is banned”), but God’s rejection of Judah as his people: “Actually, the removal of women’s adornment indicates God’s displeasure and lack of acceptance of Judah as his people. Judah is a sad, unadorned woman, unbetrothed, without a husband.”¹⁰

This interpretation fails to recognize that the passage is not an allegorical representation of God’s rejection of Judah, but a literal description of what caused God’s rejection of Judah, namely, the negative influence of its leaders and of its wealthy women. The latter are blamed for their pride and haughtiness manifested through their boundless love of ornaments. These they used to seduce men, and thus they led the people into apostasy. In view of this fact, God’s judgment is manifested by taking away from the women all their ornaments. Evidently God saw the ornaments as part of the problem and consequently dealt with them by taking them away. God’s action can hardly be interpreted as an endorsement of the use of ornaments.

Judgment and Ornaments. The judgment context of the two passages we have just examined (Ex 33:4-6; Is 3:16-26) led Richard M. Davidson to suggest that “it is not that the wearing of jewelry is wrong.”¹² Rather, what is wrong is wearing ornaments at a time of corporate repentance and judgment. “It appears that in a time of corporate investigative and/or executive judgment God regularly asks His people to remove their ornaments as an outward symbol of the special judgment setting.”¹¹

Davidson found two principles in the Bible regarding the use of ornaments. On the one hand, “Jewelry in ancient Israel, when mentioned favorably, is almost always connected with bridal ornaments.”¹² Yet on the other hand, God regularly asks His people to remove their ornaments at a time of corporate repentance and judgment.

By putting these two principles together, Davidson comes up with a very creative interpretation. “Is it possible that since 1844 Seventh-day Adventists have the privilege of refraining from wearing jewelry as a special outward sign of the unique present truth that they are Laodicea, ‘people of the Judgment;’ that they live in the time of the investigative judgment? Is it possible that Adventists adopt this posture also because, although the church is spiritually espoused to Christ (Eph 5; 2 Cor 11:2), the wedding is not yet consummated (Rev 19:7, 8)? For those who understand the deeper issues, taking on bridal ornaments before the wedding is the posture of Babylon the harlot (Rev 17:4, 5), not the true church (Rev 12:1). It is not that wearing jewelry is wrong—but we have the privilege of waiting to do so until the wedding feast, when Jesus Himself will adorn His bride with jewels.”¹³

This interpretation is creative, to say the least. It represents a sincere and praiseworthy attempt to reconcile those allegorical passages that speak favorably of jewelry with those passages that condemn its use. Under closer scrutiny, however, one finds that it is based on several mistaken assumptions.

First, the true church, represented in Revelation by a bride, makes herself ready for the “marriage of the lamb” by adorning herself not with gold, jewels, and pearls, but “with fine linen, bright and pure” (Rev 19:8). Not only the bride, but even the multitude of the redeemed who stand before the throne of God are adorned not with ornaments of gold and silver, but with pure “white robes” (Rev 7:9). John’s prophetic vision of the bride (the church) and of the redeemed clothed in white linen without outward ornaments, suggests that ornaments are not part of the attire of God’s children, whether in the present world or in the world to come. We noted earlier that at creation and at the final restoration God covers His children not with jewelry, but with a robe of light emanating from Himself.

Second, if God asks His people to remove their ornaments at the time of corporate repentance and judgment, it is hard to believe that He would approve their use at other times. If outward ornaments are a stumbling block to repentance and reconciliation with God at the time when God calls His people to repent, then they must be an impediment to our spiritual life all the time.

Descriptive Rather Than Prescriptive. Third, a careful study of those passages which speak favorably of the use of ornaments, reveals that such passages are *descriptive of the prevailing cultural understanding of beauty*, and *not prescriptive of how God wants His people to beautify themselves through the use of ornaments*. Failure to make this distinction can lead to fanciful conclusions. Walter Kaiser, a renowned Old Testament scholar, rightly pointed out that “reporting or narrating an event in Scripture is not to be equated with approving, recommending, or making that action or characteristic normative of emulation by all subsequent readers.”¹⁴ *A descriptive or allegorical passage must be interpreted in the light of explicit Biblical teaching and not vice versa.*

This principle must be kept in mind when interpreting passages such as Ezekiel 28:13. This is a *descriptive* allegorical passage which is often used to sanction the wearing of jewelry: “You were in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, carnelian, topaz, and onyx, sapphire, carbuncle, and emerald; and wrought in gold were your settings and your engravings. On the day you were created they were prepared.” The reasoning is that since this passage speaks of the way God created and covered Lucifer with every precious stone, then God must approve the wearing of precious stones for human beings as well.

This interpretation fails to account for the highly symbolic language of the passage. The description occurs in the context of Ezekiel’s lamentation over the pride and arrogance of the king of Tyre, which God brought to a dreadful end (“you have come to a dreadful end” Ez 28:19). By means of the prophetic perspective, that is, the capacity of the prophets to merge the present with the past or the future, Ezekiel describes the beauty, pride, and destruction of the king of Tyre by alluding to the beauty, pride, and future destruction of Lucifer who after all is the instigator of all sinful pride.

The imagery of decking with precious stones is used to convey the beauty of Lucifer before his rebellion and expulsion and, by virtue of the typological correspondence, the beauty of the king of Tyre before his downfall. We know that kings used precious stones to deck not only their garments, but even the walls of their palaces. The dual application is evidenced by such phrases as “in the abundance of your trade you were filled

with violence, and you sinned” (Ez 28:16). This is an obvious reference to the dishonest trade of Tyre. There are no indications in the Bible that Lucifer fell because of dishonest trade practices in heaven.

A Symbol of Beauty. In the same way the imagery of the covering made with precious stones can hardly be taken literally to refer to an actual jewel-studded garment that God made to cover Lucifer. Why would Lucifer need such a garment in the first place? Was it cold in heaven? Nowhere does the Bible suggest that angels wear clothes or jewels. If it were true, as the title of a booklet puts it, that *God Believes in Jewelry* and uses it to beautify His creatures¹⁵, why didn't He adorn the bodies of Adam and Eve with jewels?

We have found that the covering of the first pair at creation and of the redeemed at the final restoration is a robe of light emanating from God Himself. Clothes were introduced to cover the nakedness revealed by sin (Gen 3:9, 21), but there was no need to cover Lucifer's nakedness on the day he was created (Ez 28:13). If there was no need of clothes for the holy pair before their sin, why would Lucifer have such? Moreover, why would God use *earthly* mineral stones (presumably before the creation of this earth with all its minerals) to decorate a garment designed for a *spiritual* heavenly being?

In the light of these considerations it is evident that the imagery of the covering with precious stones is designed to convey the original beauty of Lucifer as well as of his counterpart, the king of Tyre. In both instances, beauty led to pride and to downfall. The imagery of precious stones is used not to legitimize their use as ornaments, but simply to express the notion of beauty in a language that people understood. Precious stones are beautiful. God made them to beautify this world, but I find no indication in the Bible that God uses them to beautify human bodies.

The idea of God beautifying a created being with jewels presupposes the recognition of a need for improvement, making up for existing deficiencies. But God's original creation of human and heavenly beings was perfect in function, design, and beauty. There was no need of cosmetic “makeup” or ornaments to cover up or improve the outward appearance of His creatures.

The Holy City Adorned as a Bride. A similar allegorical passage often cited to support the legitimacy of wearing ornaments is Revelation 21:2, where John saw in vision “the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, *prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.*” The city is further described as “having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates. . . . He also measured its wall, a hundred and forty-four cubits by a man's measure, that is, an angel's. The wall was built of jasper, while the city was of pure gold”(Rev 21:2, 11, 12, 17, 18).

In this allegorical passage the new Jerusalem is compared to “a bride adorned for her husband,” not to make a moral statement about the legitimacy of wearing ornaments, but simply to help people understand the beauty of the new world through the analogy of an adorned bride. God uses the known to communicate glimpses of the unknown.

The same is true of the description of the wall of the city, which was 144 cubits wide (about 212 feet) and “twelve thousand stadia” (Rev 21:16—about 1500 miles) high. Its height is apparently the same as the length and breadth of the city, because it says that “its length and breadth and height are equal” (Rev 21:16). The purpose of this imagery is not to teach us to protect ourselves by building high walls, but rather to assure us that the new world will be a place of perfect security. God used the imagery of a city with an incredibly high wall because that was the most effective way to communicate to people of New Testament times the perfect security that will prevail in the world to come. In interpreting allegorical imagery, we must focus on the truth being communicated rather than on the details of the allegory.

The Breastplate of the High Priest. In a personal letter, a respected fellow believer, church leader, and friend, who graciously took time to evaluate the first draft of this book, argued at some length that the ephod and breastplate of the high priest strongly suggest to him that God approves gold and jewels as ornaments when properly used. After all, it was God Himself who gave to Moses the design for the construction of these two most sacred articles of the priestly vestments. We need to briefly address this argument since other Christians may think along the same line.

The ephod was a waistcoat consisting of two parts, one to cover the chest and the other the back. The two were joined together by two “shoulder pieces” (Ex 28:7). The primary function of the ephod was to hold the breastplate, which was attached to it by means of four rings (Ex 28:23). The breastplate was an elaborately decorated piece made of gold, blue, purple, scarlet, and fine linen folded double into a square of about 10x10 inches. On the front were four rows of three precious stones. On each stone was inscribed the name of one of the twelve tribes (Ex 28:29). It was indeed the centerpiece of the high priest’s vestments.

Does the fact that God instructed Moses to construct such an elaborate breastplate, with twelve precious stones, suggest that God approves the proper use of jewelry for all of His people? To put it differently, if the high priest, who served as a role model for the people, could be decked with jewels when ministering in the sanctuary before God, does that mean that ordinary believers may also wear jewelry, provided they do it humbly and reverentially?

My answer is No! The reason is that this argument fails to recognize the highly symbolic function of the ephod and breastplate. These articles were not ordinary garments worn by the priests or the high priest in everyday life. Only the high priest could wear them, and only when he went inside the sanctuary. The common priest serving at the sanctuary wore a simple white linen uniform (Ex 28:40-42). According to *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, “It is significant that the simple attire of the common priest, a robe of white linen, was to be ‘for glory and beauty,’ as well as that of the high priest (Ex 28:2). White is used in the Scriptures as the symbol of purity (Rev 4:4; 7:9, 14; 19:8).”¹⁶ In other words, the beauty of the priests’ attire was in the simplicity of their white linen garments.

The function of the twelve precious stones was not to beautify the high priest, but to reveal God’s concern for each of the twelve tribes. As the same commentary explains: “Each stone would have on it the name of one of the 12 tribes. These names engraved on the 12 jewels aptly illustrate the value of men and women in the sight of our heavenly Father. God regards His people as precious gems in the jewel box of His love (Mal 3:17). He thinks of His church as a bride adorned ‘with her jewels’ (Is 61:10). She is His ‘peculiar treasure’ (Ex 19:5).”¹⁷

Similar imagery is used in Revelation where the twelve gates and the twelve foundation are also made of precious stone. These too are engraved with the names of the twelve tribes and the names of the twelve apostles (Rev 21:12, 14). The fact that each tribe and each apostle has their names engraved on a gem of their own does not mean that each believer has the right to wear jewels, but rather that “every individual Christian has his own distinct personality, his own beauty in Heaven’s sight. . . . Each name on a separate jewel also suggests that God thinks of His people as distinct individuals, known, loved, and cared for by Him (Ps 87:5, 6; Is 57:15; Matt 25:40; Luke 15:3-10).”¹⁸ This is the meaning of the jewels of the breastplate and of the foundations/gates of the Holy City. To extract from these passages a justification for wearing jewelry is to force them to say what they were not intended to.

The Bride Adorned by God. Another allegorical passage used to support God’s alleged approval of outward ornaments is found in Ezekiel 16. In this chapter the prophet uses the allegory of a foundling child to illustrate God’s dealing with His people. The baby girl was abandoned in an open field on the day she was born. The Lord passed by and said to the dying child, still weltering in her blood, “Live and grow up like a plant of the field” (vv. 6, 7).

Later, when the girl became of age, God proposed to her and she became His bride. To show His love, God washed off her blood, clothed her

with “embroidered cloth,” and adorned her with bracelets on her arms, a chain on her neck, a ring on her nose, earrings on her ears, and a beautiful crown on her head (vv. 8-16).

Unfortunately, as the woman became “exceedingly beautiful,” she came to trust in her beauty and used all the gold and silver she had received from God to make idols and to bribe men to have sex with her (vv. 15-34). Finally, God judged His unfaithful spouse by delivering her into the hands of her lovers, who stripped her of her clothes and jewels and cut her to pieces (Ez 16:39-40).

Again, can this allegory legitimately be used to sanction the use of ornaments because it pictures God profusely decking this maid? The answer is No. Why? Primarily because the episode, like the previous one, is a highly figurative allegory borrowed from ancient cultural understanding of abandonment, beauty, unfaithfulness, and punishment. As John the Revelator described the new Jerusalem as “a bride adorned for her husband,” so Ezekiel described Israel as an abandoned maid adorned and adopted by God as His bride. In both instances the prophets utilized a contemporary understanding of beauty—an adorned bride—to illustrate God’s gracious acts toward His people. The references to the adorning of the bride were designed not to teach the legitimacy of wearing ornaments, but to illustrate the beauty of God’s redemptive love.

A similar situation is found in Jesus’ parable of the rich man and Lazarus, which was based on a popular misconception that at death the saved went into Abraham’s bosom and the unsaved into the ever-burning hell (Luke 16:19-31). In the parable Jesus utilized that misconception not to teach about the life of the saved and unsaved after death, but to emphasize the importance of using the opportunities God gives us in this present life to determine our future destiny.

In interpreting parables or allegorical speech, it is important to remember two things. First, we must look for the fundamental truth, remembering that the details often function as “props” to the story. In the case of Ezekiel 16 the fundamental teaching is that Israel prostituted the blessings (ornaments) God gave her and consequently provoked His judgment. Second, details of parables or allegories should not be used to formulate doctrines. Only their fundamental teaching, confirmed by the general tenor of Scripture, should be considered as a basis for doctrine.

Progressive Revelation. Another important principle to remember is the progressive nature of God’s revelation. Even if some allegorical Old Testament passages seem to speak favorably of the wearing of jewelry, it does

not necessarily mean that God approved the practice. We must remember that not everything that was allowed in Old Testament times is reflective of God's ideal for His people.

Typical examples are polygamy and divorce, which were allowed in Old Testament times because of the insubordination and stubbornness of the Israelites. We do not find explicit condemnation of such practices in the Old Testament. It is only when we come to the New Testament, where Christ reveals to us more fully God's plan for our lives, that we find explicit condemnation of divorce and polygamy as contrary to God's ideal for His people. We shall see that the same principle of progressive revelation applies to the wearing of ornaments—a practice condemned implicitly in the Old Testament (Gen 35:1-4; Ex 33:1-6; Is 3:16-21) and explicitly in the New Testament (1 Tim 2:9-10; 1 Pet 3:3-4).

“Painted Up Like Jezebel.” Several passages in the Old Testament speak of the use of cosmetics, especially the painting of the eyes. Such cosmetics were usually worn to attract illicit lovers. Perhaps the most well-known passage concerning the use of colorful cosmetics is found in 2 Kings 9:30, where we are told what Jezebel did in the final hour of her life: “When Jehu came to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it; and she painted her eyes, and adorned her head and looked out of the window.” From this text derives the proverbial expression, “painted up like Jezebel.”

The context of the passage is the arrival of King Jehu at Jezreel after he had killed Jezebel's son, Joram, king of Israel, and her grandson, Ahaziah, king of Judah. Jezebel had heard the news, and she knew that her turn was next. Defiantly she prepared herself for her final hour by painting her eyes and adorning her head. She decked herself with all her ornaments, because she wanted to look her seductive best. Then she took her position at a window, probably overlooking the inner court of her palace, and waited for Jehu to enter the gate. But Jehu was not fooled. When he dashed into the courtyard and saw Jezebel at the window greeting him contemptuously, he told her eunuchs to throw her down, which they did (2 Kings 9:33). What an ignominious death!

Jezebel's outward adorning was of no avail before Jehu or before God's tribunal. “Powder and paint do not cover up the inner corruption of the heart, nor do silks and satins hide the ugly stains of the soul. Jezebel was corrupt within in spite of all her efforts at outward beautification. God looks at the heart and asks for inward adorning rather than outward (1 Peter 3:3).”¹⁹ Jezebel's final seductive look, obtained with cosmetics and jewelry, is consistent with the determined effort of her whole life to seduce the Israelites into idolatry. Because of this her name has become a symbol of seduction in Biblical history (Rev 2:20).

The Allegory of Two Women. Another Old Testament passage that speaks of the use of cosmetics is the allegory of two women related in Ezekiel 23. The name of one woman is Oholah, who represents Samaria, and of the other is Oholibah, who represents Jerusalem (Ez 23:4). Both women are harlots who are not satisfied with their own husband (Jehovah), so they send for other men (false gods). “They even sent for men to come from afar, to whom a messenger was sent, and lo, they came. For them you bathed yourself, painted your eyes, and decked yourself with ornaments” (Ez 23:40). When the men arrived, “they put bracelets upon the hands of the women, and beautiful crowns upon their heads. . . . Thus they went in to Oholah and to Oholibah to commit lewdness” (Ez 23:42, 44). The allegory closes announcing God’s judgment upon the women and their families.

Like Jezebel, Oholah and Oholibah painted their eyes and decked themselves with ornaments to be seductive and to entice men to commit adultery with them. In this allegory the purpose of cosmetics and ornaments is to seduce others to commit adultery, which results in apostasy.

A Desolate Woman. Like Ezekiel, Jeremiah uses the allegory of a seductive woman dressed in scarlet, with ornaments and painted eyes, to represent the politically abandoned Israel vainly trying to attract her former idolatrous allies. “And you, O desolate one, what do you mean that you dress in scarlet, that you deck yourselves with ornaments of gold, that you enlarge your eyes with paint? In vain you beautify yourself. Your lovers despise you; they seek your life” (Jer 4:30).

The examples cited above from the Old Testament reveal a consistent pattern. Women who painted their faces with cosmetics were always trying to seduce men into adulterous acts. They did not wish to play clean. They were not satisfied with their own husbands, so they painted their faces and decked themselves with ornaments to seduce other men. “If Israel cannot attract the kind of attention she wants by being her God-given best, then she will distort her true beauty by painting on a false face. Her enlarged eyes will lure spiritual adulterers into her tent.”²⁰

The seductive and excessive use of cosmetics in the above mentioned examples should not be interpreted as an outright condemnation of the use of any form of makeup. The women in these passages painted their faces excessively to appear seductive and sensual. This does not mean that a Christian woman should not use any kind of cosmetic to cover blemishes. The key is the intention. If cosmetics are used excessively to paint the face to create an unnatural look which is seductive and sensual, then their use is obviously wrong. But if cosmetics are used judiciously to cover blemishes and bring out the natural look, then their use is acceptable.

Conclusion. The Old Testament frequently associates the use of jewelry and excessive cosmetics with seduction and adultery. Such association implicitly reveals God's condemnation of their use. We must remember that in the Bible God reveals to us His will for our lives not only by precepts, but also by examples. The many negative examples of seduction, adultery, apostasy, and divine punishment resulting from the use of jewelry, excessive cosmetics, and luxurious clothes constitute a solemn warning for us. They warn us against covering up our sinful bodies with jewelry and extravagant or seductive clothes. When Jesus comes into our lives, *He does not cover up our skin* with perishable ornaments, but *He restores our total being* with the imperishable riches of His grace.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 2

1. Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, D.C., 1940), pp. 310-311.

2. Edgar Haulotte, *Symbolism du Vêtement selon la Bible* (Lyons, France, 1966), p. 7.

3. *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, 1970 edition, s. v. "Dress and Ornament, Hebrew" (vol. 4, p. 5). For a discussion of the New Age cults and their ornamental symbols, see Texe Marrs, *New Age Cults and Religions* (Austin, Texas, 1990); see also the relevant entries in George A. Mather and Larry A. Nichols, eds., *The Dictionary of Cults, Sects, Religions and the Occult* (Grand Rapids, 1993).

4. Joseph Jensen, *Isaiah 1-39*, Old Testament Message Commentary (Wilmington, Delaware, 1984), p. 69.

5. Carl Wilhelm Eduard Nagelsbach, *The Prophet Isaiah Theologically and Homiletically Expounded* (New York, 1906), p. 73.

6. The meaning seems to be not so much walking "with head high" but "with head stretched sideways" to see if their elegance is noted or not. For a discussion, see John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, Texas, 1985), p. 45.

7. Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, 1960), p. 144.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 145.

9. John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33* Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, Texas, 1985), p. 46.

10. Madelynn Jones-Haldeman, "Adorning the Temple of God," *Spectrum* 20 (December 1989), p. 50.

11. Richard M. Davidson, "The Good News of Yom Kippur," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 2 (Autumn 1991), p. 18.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

14. Walter C. Kaiser, *Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids, 1983), p. 283.

15. R. E. Francis with George E. Vandeman, *God Believes in Jewelry* (Boise, Idaho, 1984).

16. *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington, D. C., 1954), vol. 1, pp. 650-651.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 648.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington, D. C., 1954), vol. 2, p. 909.

20. David Neff, "How to Be a Christian and Look Good, Too," *Insight*, March 5, 1974, p. 8.

Chapter 3

DRESS AND ORNAMENTS

IN

THE NEW TESTAMENT

Men who complain that women today spend too much time before the mirror making up, jewelizing up, and dolling up their bodies, might be comforted to know that in New Testament times the situation was worse. Why? Simply because middle and upper-class women had little else to do to pass the time. They could not hold public offices, they usually had no jobs outside the homes, they received no awards for academic or professional accomplishments. So they spent their time beautifying themselves, putting all their hopes in their appearance.

The Roman poet Lucius Valerius responded to the moralists who denounced women for their extravagant dresses and ornaments, by asking: “Why should men grudge women their ornaments and their dress? Women cannot hold public offices, or priesthoods, or gain triumphs; they have no public occupations. What, then, can they do but devote their time to adornment and to dress?”¹ These questions reveal a fundamental truth, namely, people who indulge in excessive self-adornment usually have no greater goal to occupy their mind.

It was into this world of luxury and moral decadence that Christianity was born. A new middle class had emerged, made rich by the booty of war. They wanted to affirm their new social status by wearing costly clothes and an abundance of jewelry. This was equally true of men and women. In fact, as we shall see in chapter six, some men had all their fingers so filled with rings that they could use their hands only to give orders to their servants. It was in this social context and contrast of luxury and poverty that Christians were called to live their faith. It is not surprising to find New Testament admonitions to seek the inner beautification of the heart with a gentle and quiet spirit, rather than outward adorning of the body with elaborate hairstyles, gold, pearls, and costly attire.

Objective of Chapter. In this chapter we want to take a close look at the apostolic admonitions of Paul and Peter regarding dress and adornment. We shall see that their admonitions contain fundamental principles relevant for Christians today. Before examining the apostolic admonitions, we want to pause for a moment to look at the attire of the two symbolic women mentioned in the book of Revelation: the Great Harlot and the Bride of Christ. We shall reflect upon the contrast between the outward appearance of the two women and its implications for the Christian standard of dress and ornaments.

The Great Harlot. In the book of Revelation John offers us a contrast between two types of outward adorning through the symbolism of two women, one pure and the other a “great harlot.” The pure woman represents the true church, who is the “bride” of the Lamb. She makes herself ready for the bridegroom and invites others to prepare themselves for “the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rev 19:9). By contrast, the great harlot represents the end-time apostate religious-political power; she lures the inhabitants of the earth to commit spiritual fornication with her. Like Jezebel, she takes a sadistic joy in pouring out the blood of the martyrs like a drunkard pours out wine to drink (“I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints” Rev 17:6).

The contrast between the two women is dramatically portrayed by their outward appearance. John saw the great harlot “arrayed in purple and scarlet, and bedecked with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurity of her fornications; and on her forehead was written a name of mystery: ‘Babylon the great, mother of harlots and of earth’s abominations.’ And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the martyrs of Jesus” (Rev 17:4-6).

This vivid description of the great harlot reminds us of the prophetic portrayal of apostate Israel decked with ornaments as an adulterous woman and “whoring” after heathen gods (Ez 23:30; 16:15; Is 23:17). She is clothed in purple and scarlet, royal colors of luxury and splendor. Scarlet in the Bible is also the color of sin (Is 1:18; Rev 17:3). She is lavishly adorned with gold, jewels, and pearls. In her hand she holds a golden cup, with which she makes her lovers drunk. The attractive golden cup serves to entice people to join the glittering harlot in her evil ways.

The woman is said to have a name on her forehead. Roman authors like Seneca² and Juvenal³ tell us that on their foreheads prostitutes wore a frontlet giving their names. These name-bearing frontlets were the trademarks of prostitutes. This is another vivid detail used to build up the picture of the depravity of the great harlot.

Revelation's portrayal of the use of ornaments of gold, jewels, and pearls by the great harlot to accomplish her seductive purposes represents an implicit condemnation of their use. This is consistent with the pattern we have found in the Old Testament. The prevailing negative association of ornaments with a seductive and adulterous lifestyle should serve as a deterrent against their use by Christians today.

The Bride of Christ. In contrast to the great harlot heavily decked with gold, jewels, pearls, and luxurious clothes, the bride of Christ is attired modestly in pure and fine linen without outward ornaments: "Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure, for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints" (Rev 19:7-8). John explains that the fine linen of the bridal dress represents the acts of faithful obedience of the saints.

The idea of being clothed with "righteous deeds" is very suggestive; we shall see below that Paul uses the same imagery to describe the appropriate ornaments of the Christian woman (1 Tim 2:10). The meaning of the imagery is not that the redeemed have clothed themselves in the pure and white bridal dress by their own righteous deeds. The wedding garment was given to them ("it was granted her to be clothed"), not provided by them. Yet it should be noted that the wedding garment is given as a divine gift to those who have exercised steadfast endurance, who have kept the commandments of God and have persevered in the faith of Jesus (Rev 14:12).

The internal purity of character of the saints is revealed outwardly not with ornaments of gold, jewels, and pearls, but with a pure and fine linen dress. Note that not only the bride, but even the great multitude of the redeemed who stand before the throne of God are "clothed in white robes" (Rev 7:9), without outward ornaments. The white robes are not provided by the righteous acts of the redeemed, but are the result of being washed in "the blood of the Lamb."

Relevance for Today. We can hardly miss the lesson to be learned from the outward appearance of the two women. God saw fit to represent their character by their dress, because, as we noted earlier, our clothes reveal who we are. The impure woman is dressed extravagantly and adorned with costly ornaments, simply because such attire fittingly represents her internal pride and seductive schemes. By contrast, the pure woman is dressed with simplicity and modesty, without outward ornaments, simply because such apparel fittingly represents her internal humility and purity.

The question that comes down to us today is: Which of the two women should serve as the role model for our Christian dress code? If we choose to pattern our lives after Christ's bride, which represents His church to which we belong, then like her we will show our inner purity and godliness by the simplicity and modesty of our outward appearance.

Paul and the Adornment of the Christian Woman. The contrast between the apparel of the apocalyptic great harlot and that of Christ's bride appears also in the pastoral exhortations of Paul and Peter. Both apostles emphasize the contrast between worldly and Christian adorning. Their exhortations deserve close attention not only because they give us some fundamental principles of appropriate Christian dress but also because they provide us with *explicit condemnation* of the use of jewelry and extravagant dress.

Paul addresses the question of the adornment of Christian women in the context of his instruction about conduct in public worship. After instructing men to pray publicly, "lifting holy hands without anger and quarreling," that is, sincerely and with good will toward others, Paul shifts his attention to the conduct of women in public worship: "[I desire] also that women should adorn themselves modestly and sensibly in seemly apparel, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly attire, but by good deeds, as befits women who profess religion" (1 Tim 2:9-10).

Some question the relevance of these instructions for Christians today because they assume that they were intended exclusively for the local situation existing at Ephesus. Since I have addressed this question in the sixth chapter of my book *Women in the Church*, I will refer any interested reader to that study. For the purpose of this study I will simply say that even a cursory reading of 1 Timothy suffices to show that Paul's instructions were meant not merely for the local church at Ephesus, but for the Christian church at large. While the epistle was occasioned by the disruptive influence of certain false teachers (1:3-6; 6:3-5), Paul's concern was not to launch a detailed rebuttal of their false teaching, but rather to explain to the congregation, its leaders, and to Timothy himself, how Christians ought to live godly lives in the face of heretical teachings and a depraved pagan environment.

The Right Adorning. The contrast in this passage is between the adorning of Christian women who profess religion and that of worldly women whose only concern is to attract attention to themselves. The phrase, "Women *should adorn* themselves" suggests that Paul is not opposed to adorning *per se*, providing it be of the right kind. The desire to appear well in the sight of others is not wrong when properly regulated.

God does not condemn real ornaments. He has filled this world with things that are not only useful but also beautiful. The hues of the flowers, the plumage of the birds, the fur of the animals, the beauty of the human body with its lovely cheeks, dainty lips, and sparkling eyes—these things are of the nature of ornaments, because they are superadded to what would be merely useful. God could have designed all the fruits and vegetables to be green, but He chose for them to exist in a variety of colors so that they would give us not only food but also beauty.

True adornment or adorning is that which enables a person to express the real self. There must be a consistency between the inward life and outward appearance. To pretend to come humbly before God while adorned extravagantly and ostentatiously is hypocrisy. The apparel we wear should be reflective of our profession to seek first God’s kingdom and righteousness in our lives.

Paul clarifies the nature of appropriate adorning by using three significant words: “modestly and sensibly in seemly apparel.” The NIV reads: “modestly, with decency and propriety.” A closer look at these three words in the original Greek can help us appreciate more fully Paul’s fundamental principles of appropriate Christian dress which are relevant for Christians today.

Dress Modestly. The first Greek word Paul used to characterize the appropriate adorning of the Christian woman is *kosmios*, which is rendered in most translations as “modestly.” The essential idea of *kosmios* is well-ordered, becoming, dignified. It derives its meaning from the *order* manifested in the *kosmos*, that is, in God’s universe. God’s well-ordered adorning of the universe is a role model for us to follow in our outward appearance. With reference to clothing, *kosmios* “means that which is *well-ordered, decorous, becoming*.”⁴

The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* explains that *kosmios* “describes one who disciplines himself and who may thus be regarded as genuinely moral and respectable.”⁵ The inner self-discipline and humble attitude of the Christian woman is reflected outwardly in well-ordered, dignified, and becoming attire. “Paul was shrewd enough to know,” wrote Donald Guthrie, “that a woman’s dress is a mirror of her mind. Outward ostentation is not in keeping with a prayerful and devout approach.”⁶ In a similar vein Ellen White wrote, “A person’s character is judged by his style of dress. A refined taste, a cultivated mind, will be revealed in the choice of simple and appropriate attire.”⁷

In her book *Personality Unlimited*, Veronica Dengel commented on good taste in clothes in a way that resembles Paul’s admonition. “Good taste

in clothes starts with simplicity, proceeds to becomingness, and culminates in appropriateness for the occasion. . . . Loud flashy colors, poor fabrics and workmanship, and inharmonious combinations all contribute to bad taste. Your clothes should fit properly. If too loose, they are no longer smart; if they are too tight, the seams rip and fabric pulls. Simplicity should border on plainness, but with the distinction that is achieved by perfect fit, beautiful lines, fine tailoring, and complete suitability to the figure type. Absence of ornamentation helps to bring out the beauty of fabric and cut.”⁸

Paul’s admonition to dress in a modest, orderly, and becoming way is most relevant for Christian men and women today, when modesty is out and exposure is in. His admonition challenges us to pay due attention to our apparel to ensure that it may be truly neat, dignified, orderly, and reflective of our inner moral values. It reminds us that what we wear not only reflects our tastes and moral values, but also affects our demeanor and conduct. Appropriate dress tends to encourage appropriate deportment.

Modesty Preserves Intimacy. God calls us to dress modestly, not only to prevent sin, but also to preserve intimacy. People who want to sin will sin no matter how modestly dressed they are. The Puritans and Victorians were dressed extremely modestly, but it did not prevent their sinning. They just had to be a little more determined and take more time to undress, but they managed to sin. The purpose of modesty is not only to prevent lustful desires, but also to preserve something which is very fragile and yet fundamental to the survival of a marital relationship: the ability to maintain a deep, intimate relationship with one’s spouse.

God’s call to dress modestly is in reality a call to preserve and protect our intimacy. This is a delicate and precious ability that we can easily lose if we do not protect it. If marriage is going to last a lifetime, as God intended it, then husband and wife must work together to preserve, protect, and nurture the intimacy. When all is said and done, modesty will preserve the joy of intimacy long after the ringing of the wedding bells.

Proud of Modesty? Paul’s admonition to dress in a modest, orderly way suggests that there is no special merit in ignoring personal appearance by wearing shabby clothes, any more than there is in wearing gold, jewels, or pearls. A person can violate the Christian dress code of modesty by neglecting personal appearance as well as by giving excessive attention to it.

Some dress to show off their beautiful clothes because they are proud of their appearance. Others dress extremely plainly because they want to convince the world of their humility. Both classes are proud. One class is

proud of clothes, while the other is proud of humility. To avoid both extremes, we need to heed the first principle of Christian adorning given by Paul: *The outward appearance should be neat, orderly, and becoming so that no one will be offended by it.*

Dress Decently. The second Greek word Paul used to characterize the appropriate adorning of the Christian woman is *aidos*, translated “with decency” (NIV), “sensibly” (RSV), “with shamefacedness” (KJV). The term *aidos* occurs only in this text in the New Testament, but its usage is frequent in the literature of Hellenistic (Greek) Judaism. Its essential meaning is “reverence” or “respect.” The term is used to express respect for God, the king, old age, the neighbor, and justice.⁹

How can a Christian woman show *reverence* and *respect* toward God, others, and herself through her attire? By dressing *with decency* (NIV), *sensibly* (RSV), without causing shame or embarrassment to God, herself, and others, or as the KJV puts it, *with shamefacedness*. Each of the three renderings found in these major versions adds a nuance to the basic meaning of reverential adorning. The three renderings complement one another and help us understand more fully what it means to dress reverently.

Paul’s admonition to dress reverently is especially relevant for us Christians today, when modern dress fashions reject reverence and respect as the basis for constructive human relations. The concern of modern fashion is to sell its product by exploiting the powerful sex drive of the human body, even if this means placing on the market immodest clothing that only feeds pride and sexual appetite.

The Christian woman is called to dress decently not to be less attractive, but to preserve and protect something fragile which can easily be lost: her ability to be intimate with her husband, an experience that enriches both lives. The reason for dressing modestly and decently is similar to the reason for locking the house. We lock the house to protect what is inside by keeping people out. Similarly, Christians will act and dress modestly and decently to protect and preserve the intimacy of the marriage relationship by preventing intrusion from outside. Clothes can evoke intimate responses: our deepest feelings of love, the passionate expression of our sexuality, the revelation of our inner being. Such responses belong to the marriage relationship.

The purpose of modesty and decency in dress is not to hide ourselves from the view of others, but to preserve our intimacy for our spouses. Modesty and decency are to be respected even between husband and wife. Indecent exposure even within marriage can destroy mutual respect and the capacity to enjoy the intimate union of mind, body, and soul.

Indecent Exposure. Mary Quant, the mother of the miniskirt and Britain's most successful designer of women's ready-to-wear clothes, says that her aim is "to dress women so men would feel like tearing the wrapping off."¹⁰ She designs clothes to shock, because she believes, "If the clothes don't make you noticed, then I think they're a waste of money."¹¹ She coined the dictum, "Good taste is death; vulgarity life."¹² When asked, "What is the point of fashion, where is it leading?" Mary Quant promptly replied, "Sex."¹³

In an interview published in *Newsweek* Mary Quant explained, in words almost too raw to quote, what the miniskirt represents to her: "Am I the only woman who has ever wanted to go to bed with a man in the afternoon? Any law-abiding female, it used to be thought, waits until dark. Well, there are lots of girls who do not want to wait. Mini-clothes are symbolic of them."¹⁴ Seduction is also the goal of the line of cosmetics she designs: "All this decoration is put on in order to seduce a man to bed, so what's the sense of taking it all off?"¹⁵

This unabashed admission by a leading designer that the goal of modern fashion in clothing and cosmetics is to seduce and to appeal to sensuality, makes it imperative for Christians to heed Paul's admonition to dress with decency, sensibly, without causing shame or embarrassment to God, ourselves, or others. *A Christian woman needs to remember that her charm lies not only in what she reveals but also in what she conceals.* A woman who dresses to show her physical and sexual appeal encourages men to treat her as a sex object. By dressing modestly and decently a woman can avoid being treated as a sex object and can enhance those spiritual qualities which our sinful world needs so much to see.

This is a time for courage: courage to fight the vulgarity in fashion; courage to affront the bad taste of our time; courage to distinguish between the capricious mode that changes and the sensible style that remains; courage to recognize that "obedience to fashion . . . is doing more than any other power to separate our people from God;"¹⁶ courage to reject the seductive dictates of fashion and to accept God's counsel to dress reverently. It is a time for Christians to have the courage to accept Paul's second principle of Christian adorning: *The outward appearance should be decent, dignified, showing respect for God, ourselves, and others.*

Dress Soberly. The third Greek word Paul used to characterize the appropriate adorning of the Christian woman is *sophrosune*, which is rendered as "soberly" (NEB), "with sobriety" (KJV), "with propriety" (NIV), "in seemly apparel" (RSV). The different renderings reveal the difficulty translators encounter in conveying the meaning of a Greek word which has no exact counterpart in the English language.

The word *sophrosune* is a compound of two words, “sound (*sos*)” and “mind (*phrenes*).” Essentially it denotes mental vigilance, that is, the use of the mind to exercise restraint, self-control. In this context of Christian adorning, the word is used to mean that Christian women should show self-control by restraining any desire to wear attention-getting clothes or jewelry. As Albert Barnes explains, “The word used here means, properly, *sanity*; then sobermindedness, moderation of the desires and passions. It is opposed to all that is frivolous, and to all undue excitement of the passions. The idea is, that in their apparel and deportment women should not entrench on [violate] the strictest decorum.”¹⁷

It is not surprising that in the Greek world *sophrosune*, that is, *sobriety, mental self-control*, was regarded as “one of the cardinal virtues.”¹⁸ After all, it is the mental attitude of self-control that determines all the other virtues. Also it is not surprising that, like Paul, Greek moralists frequently associate *sophrosune* (mental self-control) with *aidos* (decent, respectful behavior).¹⁹ The reason is obvious. All decent, respectful behavior derives from the exercise of self-control.

This information helps us to appreciate why Paul admonishes women to dress not only with modesty (*kosmios*) and decency (*aidos*), but also with sobriety, sobermindedness (*sophrosune*). Like the Greek moralists, the apostle recognizes that an orderly and decent outward appearance is the result of mental self-control, that is, a willful, rational restraint of the sinful desire to exhibit our pride through ostentatious adorning.

The way we live the Christian life is largely determined by the way we think. “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Prov 23:7). Paul recognizes the determinative role of the mind for the Christian lifestyle. In his epistle to the Romans he urges Christians to resist conformity to the world and to be transformed in God’s image through “the renewing of your mind” (Rom 12:2). The renewing of the mind is essential to resisting the pressure to conform to the seductive fashion of our time.

Paul pictures the converted Christian woman as one who exercises self-control (*sophrosune*) in her adorning. Her desire is not to exhibit herself, but to reflect the selflessness of Christ. Her dress does not say, Look at me, admire me, but rather, Look at how Christ has changed me from the inside out.

This apostolic vision of the Christian woman—one who shows self-restraint by rejecting attention-getting clothes and ornaments and by wearing instead neat, becoming, decent, and dignified clothes—is particularly relevant to our times. Today fashion reigns supreme, and the vast majority of men and women worship at her altar. Many Christians follow so closely the seasonal

changes of fashion that they are willing to deprive themselves even of basic necessities in order to wear fashionable clothing and ornaments. They want to look like those slick models appearing on the covers of women's magazines. By so doing they reveal inner insecurity. They are not satisfied to be their real selves, so they want to look like someone else they admire. What they seem to forget is that the image of women portrayed in women's magazines is not the image of the kingdom of God. Guiding our lives by the dictates of changing fashion is not seeking first the kingdom of God.

To resist the tyranny of seductive fashion, we need to heed Paul's third principle of Christian adorning: *Dress soberly, restraining any desire to wear attention-getting clothes or jewelry.*

The Inappropriate Ornaments. To leave no doubt as to what he meant by his admonition to dress orderly, decently, and soberly, Paul added a list of four types of inappropriate ornaments for the Christian woman: "not with elaborate hair styles, not decked out with gold or pearls, or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, as befits women who claim to be religious" (1 Tim 2:9-10, NEB).

The list begins with "elaborate hair styles" because in the Jewish and Roman world of the time, women plaited their hair with great care, arranging it in various forms according to the prevailing fashion. They adorned their hair with spangles or gold wire or interwoven tissue. We are told that Roman women liked to wear elaborate eight-inch-long hairpins with intricate Corinthian designs. "There were as many ways of dressing the hair as there were bees in Hybla. Hair was waved, and dyed, sometimes black, more often auburn. Wigs were worn, especially blonde wigs . . . Hairbands, pins and combs were made of ivory, and boxwood, and tortoiseshell; and sometimes of gold studded with gems."²⁰

What Paul condemns here is not fixing the hair in an orderly, becoming manner, but "elaborate hair styles" interwoven with ornaments that are designed to attract flattering attention to the wearer. Such a style contravenes the principles of Christian adorning that Paul here sets forth.

The next two inappropriate ornaments mentioned by Paul are "gold and pearls." Plentiful were the glittering rings, bracelets, anklets, and earrings made with pearls and worn by fashionable women. The apostle speaks expressly against their use, because they reflect personal vanity and self-centeredness, which are not consonant with his plea for Christian modesty, decency, and sobriety in outward adorning.

The last inappropriate ornament mentioned by Paul is “expensive clothes.” Some types of clothes were extremely expensive in Paul’s time. “Purple was the favorite color for clothes. One pound weight of the best Tyrian purple wool, strained twice through, cost 1,000 *denarii*.”²¹ Considering that an unskilled worker earned one *denarius* a day, it would take approximately three years of wages to buy one pound of Tyrian purple wool to make a dress. Such high cost did not deter wealthy women from buying expensive clothes and ornaments. “In Rome, Pliny tells us of a bride, Lollia Paulina, whose bridal dress cost the equivalent of £432,000 [about \$1,600,000].”²²

It is not surprising that moralists condemned extravagant and costly dresses as much as Paul and Peter did. For example, Quintillian, the Roman master of oratory, wrote: “A tasteful and magnificent dress lends added dignity to the wearer; but effeminate and luxurious apparel fails to adorn the body, and only reveals the sordidness of the mind.”²³

Paul spoke against the wearing of expensive clothes because they reflect personal vanity, self-centeredness, and sometimes a desire for improper attention from the opposite sex. Such attitudes are not consonant with his plea for Christian modesty, decency, and sobriety in dress.

The mention of *expensive* clothes suggests attire that can hardly be afforded. Expenditures that go beyond one’s means are incompatible with the principles of Christian stewardship. This does not mean that expensive clothes are appropriate for those who can *afford* them, because as John Wesley emphasizes, “No Christian can *afford* to waste any part of the substance which God has entrusted him with. . . . Every shilling which you save from your own apparel you may expend on clothing the naked, and relieving the various necessities of the poor, whom ye ‘have always with you.’ Therefore every shilling which you needlessly spend on your apparel is in effect stolen from God and the poor.”²⁴

The Appropriate Ornaments. After listing four inappropriate ornaments for the Christian woman, Paul hastened to mention the appropriate ones, namely, “good deeds, as befits women who claim to be religious” (1 Tim 2:10). The idea of “good deeds” as the appropriate Christian ornament reminds us of the “righteous deeds of the saints” that clothe the bride of Christ (Rev 19:8). The notion of being adorned with “good deeds” is suggestive, for a life of selfless deeds of benevolence toward others may well enhance the outward appearance. Christians like Mother Teresa, who devote their lives to minister to the needy, develop an outward attractiveness that even a truckload of pearls cannot produce. “A woman’s adornment, in short, lies not in what she herself puts on, but in the loving service she gives out.”²⁵

The outer beauty of loving service (“good deeds”) is appropriate for women professing *to be religious*, because their values are higher than those of non-Christian women. Christian women have fixed their hearts, not on decorating their bodies externally with costly ornaments, but on beautifying their souls internally with the love of God. They profess to have fixed their affection on Christ, their Savior. They follow Him “who went about doing good” by adorning themselves with deeds of benevolence. These alone will bring the satisfaction of being loved and respected. No amount of expensive clothes and sophisticated jewelry can hide the ugliness of a self-centered personality.

Paul sought consistency between the inward profession and the outward practice. To profess faithfulness to Christ and yet dress extravagantly and immodestly is a form of hypocrisy. Faithful Christian women are most fittingly adorned in the good deeds that correspond to their inner commitment to Christ.

Peter and the Adorning of the Christian Wife. Paul’s teaching on the adorning of Christian women is largely repeated by Peter, although in a different context. While the context of Paul’s teaching on Christian adornment is the conduct of women in the church, the context of Peter’s teaching is the conduct of women in the home. The striking similarity between the two teachings goes to show that the principles of modesty and decency in outward appearance apply equally to the home and to the church.

Peter offered wives a twofold admonition to help them maintain a happy relationship with their husbands, and win them to Christ if they are unbelievers. The first admonition is to have a submissive attitude toward their husbands by maintaining pure and respectful behavior. “Likewise you wives, be submissive to your husbands, so that some, though they do not obey the word, may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, when they see your reverent and chaste behavior” (1 Pet 3:1-2).

Like Paul (1 Cor 7:13-16), Peter does not advise the wife who became brave enough to become a Christian, to leave the husband, but to win him by a *submissive* attitude. She is to manifest submission not by preaching, nagging, or arguing for equal rights, but by the silent testimony of the loveliness of her life. In this way she can break down the barrier of prejudice and hostility and win her husband to Christ.

Submissive Attitude. The notion of a wife’s submission to her husband is unpopular today, especially among feminists who view it as equivalent to inferiority. But the submission enjoined is of function, not of moral or physical status. Functional submission does not mean inferiority.

Jesus was equal with God in nature (ontologically), yet functionally He submitted himself by becoming a servant. The submission of the wife to the husband is not out of fear or inferiority, but from perfect love. She does it because she loves Christ, she loves her husband, and she gladly accepts her role and the role of her husband as the head of her home (see Col 3:18; Eph 5:22-23).

The passage suggests that some husbands, particularly those hostile to the Christian faith (“who do not obey the word”), may be difficult to please. In such circumstances the wife’s faith and devotion to Christ will help her to be submissive to her husband. Since her husband does not accept *the Word* (the Gospel), she witnesses to him without *a word*, that is, without preaching at him. She lives the Word before her husband by her pure and respectful behavior.

The Inappropriate Ornaments. Peter’s second admonition is for wives to win their husbands to Christ not through outward luxurious ornaments, but through the inner adorning of a gentle and quiet spirit. “Let not yours be the outward adorning with braiding of hair, decoration of gold, and the wearing of fine clothing, but let it be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable jewel of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious” (1 Pet 3:3-4).

In this passage Peter followed the pattern of Paul in 1 Timothy 2:9-10, contrasting the outward adorning of the body by worldly women with the inward adorning of the heart by Christian women. The negative outward adorning of worldly women consists of “braiding of hair, decoration of gold, and the wearing of fine clothing.” This list corresponds essentially to that given by Paul, which we have already examined. Thus it will suffice to note that both of the apostles recognize that eye-catching hair styles, glittering ornaments, and costly dresses are not appropriate for Christian women.

The Ornaments of the Heart. The positive inward adorning of the Christian woman consists of the graces of the heart, the gentle and quiet spirit which is precious in God’s sight. This is the adorning of a calm temper, a contented mind, and a heart free from the pride, vanity, and agitation of those who seek recognition through external adorning. This is the adorning that will commend a woman to God, to her husband, and to others. This is the adorning which is not lipstick-deep, nor skin-deep, but soul-deep.

Peter is not implying that a Christian wife should ignore her outward appearance and concentrate on the inner beautification of her soul. No wife can hope to secure the permanent affection of her husband if she is not attentive to her personal appearance and neat in her habits. But what a man

appreciates most in his wife are the ornaments of her heart: her gentle words, her patient spirit, her calmness in trouble, her pure affection. Thus, a woman who wishes to win the permanent affection of her husband should seek to have not only a neat outward appearance but also a gentle, calm, and benevolent inward disposition.

Peter concludes his admonition by setting before Christian wives the worthy example of the outstanding wives of Old Testament times who, like Abraham's wife Sarah, cultivated the inner adorning of the heart and "were submissive to their husbands" (1 Pet 3:5). Sarah showed her deference to Abraham by "calling him lord" (1 Pet 3:6).

It is noteworthy that both Peter and Paul spoke about the adorning of Christian women in the context of a submissive attitude. Peter appealed to a "submissive" attitude immediately before and after mentioning the adorning of Christian wives, while Paul did so right after discussing the adorning of Christian women (1 Tim 2:11). This suggests that both apostles recognized that outward adorning is determined by the inner attitude of the heart. A submissive, humble attitude will be reflected in modest, becoming, and sober apparel, while an insubordinate, proud attitude will be manifested in an immodest, extravagant, seductive appearance.

Conclusion. The New Testament teaches how Christians should dress by means of indirect allegories and direct admonitions. Indirectly, we have found a revealing contrast between the attire of the two symbolic women in the book of Revelation, the Great Harlot and the Bride of Christ. The impure woman is dressed extravagantly and adorned with costly ornaments, simply because such attire fittingly represents her internal pride and seductive schemes. By contrast, the pure woman is dressed with simplicity and modesty, without outward ornaments, simply because such apparel fittingly represents her internal humility and purity. As Christians, we follow the example of Christ's bride, which is the church to which we belong, by showing our inner purity and godliness through the simplicity and modesty of our outward appearance.

Directly, we have found that both Paul and Peter contrast the appropriate adorning of Christian women with the inappropriate ornaments of worldly women (1 Tim 2:9-10; 1 Pet 3:3-4). Both apostles recognize that the outward glittering ornaments of the body are inconsistent with the inward ornaments of the heart, the quiet spirit and benevolent deeds.

A close analysis of the terms used by Paul has revealed three important principles: (1) Christian should dress in a modest, becoming way, avoiding extremes. (2) Christians should dress in a decent, dignified way, showing

respect for God, themselves, and others. (3) Christians should dress soberly, restraining any desire to exhibit themselves by wearing eye-catching clothes, cosmetics, or jewelry. The outward appearance is a constant silent witness of our Christian identity. It tells the world that we live to glorify God and not ourselves.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

1. Lucius Valerius as cited by William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter* (Philadelphia, 1960), p. 261.
2. Seneca, *Controversies* 1.2.
3. Juvenal, *Satires* 6.123.
4. Albert Barnes, *Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, Notes on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, 1955), p. 135.
5. Herman Sasse, “*kosmios*,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Gerhard Kittel, ed. (Grand Rapids, 1965), vol. 3, p. 895.
6. Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, 1983), pp. 74-75.
7. Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, California, 1953), p. 248.
8. Veronica Dengel, *Personality Unlimited* (New York, 1968), pp. 366-367.
9. For examples, see Rudolf Bultman, “*aidos*,” *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Gerhard Kittel, ed. (Grand Rapids, 1964), vol. 1, p. 171.
10. Steve Dougherty, “As the Hemline Rises, so do the Fortunes of Mini Mogul Mary Quant,” *People Weekly*, April 4, 1988, p. 108.
11. “The Name That Spells Mod Fashions,” *Business Week*, June 8, 1968, p. 119.
12. *Ibid.*, p.108.
13. “Mary Quant: London’s Kooky Success Story,” *Reader’s Digest*, June 1967, p. 112.
14. “Anything Goes: Taboos in Twilight,” *Newsweek*, November 13, 1967, p. 76.

15. Ibid.

16. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, California, 1984), vol. 4, p. 647.

17. Albert Barnes (note 3), p. 135.

18. Ulrich Luck, “*sophrosune*,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Gerhard Friedrich, ed. (Grand Rapids, 1971), vol. 7, p. 1099.

19. Ibid., p. 1098

20. William Barclay (note 1), p. 262.

21. Ibid.

22. William Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus and Philemon* (Philadelphia, 1960), p. 78.

23. William Barclay (note 1), p. 261. Barclay cited several other moralists who condemned undue luxury in dress.

24. Albert C. Outler, ed., *The Works of John Wesley* (Nashville, 1986), pp. 254, 256.

25. Donald Guthrie (note 6), p. 75.

Chapter 4

DRESS AND ORNAMENTS

IN

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

What have been the standards of Christian dress and adornment during the course of Christian history? Have Christians generally followed the dictates of fashion or the directives of the Word of God? To what extent have Christians upheld the principles of modesty and simplicity in dress and adornment which we have found in Scripture? How does the attitude toward dress and ornaments affect the sense of identity and mission of the church?

Objective of Chapter. This chapter seeks to find answers to these questions by briefly looking at the Christian attitude toward dress and ornaments in the major periods of church history. Our survey will show that Christians have not been immune from the extravagant fashions of their time, yet in every age there have been Christians who have adorned themselves modestly, soberly, and decently as befits Christian godliness. An important lesson that will emerge in the course of this historical survey, is that the spiritual revival or decline of the church is often reflected in the dress reform or dress extravagance of its members. The history of dress and ornaments in many ways illustrates the human struggle between pride, lust and greed on the one hand and humility, modesty, and generosity on the other hand.

PART I: DRESS AND ORNAMENTS

IN THE EARLY CHURCH

A World of Luxury. Christianity arose during the golden age of the Roman Empire. In 31 B. C. Emperor Augustus unified the empire by defeating his eastern competitors Anthony and Cleopatra and ushered in a period of unprecedented peace and prosperity. The wealth accumulated from the booty of wars gave rise to a new middle class that displayed its wealth

through luxurious attire and ornaments. The ancient Roman virtue of modesty had disintegrated under the ravishment of imported Eastern luxury, and the emperors themselves led in the procession of debauchery. The extravagant luxury of the time was condemned by Roman moralists such as Cato, Seneca, Quintillian, Epictetus, and Lucius Valerius.¹

For example, the famous Roman orator Quintillian commented on the extravagant fashion of the time, saying: “A tasteful and magnificent dress lends added dignity to the wearer: but effeminate and luxurious apparel fails to adorn the body, and only reveals the sordidness of the mind.”² Adorning the body was a laborious and expensive process. A wealthy matron possessed several slaves trained as hairdressers who would work on her with heated steel pincers and tongs. Hair was dressed in different ways with hairbands and pins and braided with gold and gems. Wigs were worn, especially blond. The favorite color for clothes was purple, which was extremely expensive.

“Diamonds, emeralds, topazes, opals and sardonyx were favourite stones. . . . Pearls were loved most of all. Julius Caesar bought for Servilia a pearl which cost him £21,250 [about \$80,000]. Earrings were made of pearls, and Seneca spoke of women with two or three fortunes in their ears. Slippers were encrusted with them; Nero even had a room whose walls were covered with them. Pliny saw Lollia Paulina, wife of Caligula, wearing a dress so covered with pearls and emeralds that it had cost £450,000 [about \$1,600,000].”³

Silk was regarded as the most potent weapon of seduction, because it was made into a fine, transparent, clinging material that could arouse interest at a time when low neck line did not exist. The effect of silk clothes may be judged by Seneca’s outraged reaction: “There I see silken cloths, if they can be called cloths, which protect neither a woman’s body nor her modesty, and in which she cannot truthfully declare that she is not naked. These are bought for huge sums of money . . . so that our women may show as much of themselves to the world at large as they show to their lovers in the bedroom.”⁴

Christians: Similar and Yet Different. It was in this world of luxury and moral decadence that the earliest Christians were called to live and share their faith. They were called to show the purity and simplicity of their Christian faith by being similar and yet different from the rest of the society. They were similar because they dressed, spoke, and lived like ordinary people. Tertullian (160-225), an influential church leader who is known as the father of Latin Christianity, responded to the charge that Christians were antisocial (misanthropic): “We are not Indian Brahmins or Gymnosophists, who dwell in woods and exile themselves from ordinary life. . . . We sojourn with you in this world, abjuring neither forum, nor shambles, nor bath, nor

booth, nor workshop, nor inn, nor weekly market, nor any other place of commerce. We sail with you, and fight with you, and till the ground with you; and in like manner we unite with you in your traffickings—even in the various arts we make public property of our works for your benefit.”⁵

Yet, as Tertullian himself explained at great length in his numerous moral treatises, Christians were different because of their allegiance to Christ. They were called to live in this world without becoming part of its immoral practices. This meant, for example, that Christians could not engage in occupations inconsistent with their faith. In his *Apostolic Tradition*, Hippolytus of Rome (about 215), mentioned some of the occupations forbidden to Christians such as: sculptors and painters of idols, actors and producers of shows, gladiators and trainers, huntsmen and wild-beast shows, priests and guardians of idols, soldiers involved in combat, military commanders, civil magistrates, prostitutes of both sexes, enchanters, astrologers, diviners, users of charms, and maker of amulets.⁶ These occupations were excluded because they had to do with idolatry, magic, killing, bloodshed, and sexual immorality.

The difference of the Christians’ lifestyle was evidenced especially through their dress code of modesty and simplicity. Both Peter and Paul, as we have seen, urged Christians not to conform to the worldly fashions of their day by embellishing themselves “with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly attire,” but to show their separation from the world by adorning “themselves modestly and sensibly in seemly apparel . . . as befits women who profess religion” (1 Tim 2:9-10; cf. 1 Pet 3:1-6).

Tertullian’s Admonitions to Modesty. The New Testament dress code of modesty and simplicity taught by the apostles was enforced by church leaders in early Christianity. A few examples will serve to illustrate this fact.

In 202 Tertullian wrote a treatise *On the Apparel of Women*, in which he urged women to “cast away earthly ornaments if we desire heavenly. Love not gold; in which (one substance) are branded all the sins of the people of Israel. You ought to hate what ruined your fathers; what was adored by them who were forsaking God Go forth . . . arrayed in the cosmetics and ornaments of prophets and apostles; drawing your witness from simplicity, your ruddy hue from modesty; painting your eyes with bashfulness, and your mouth with silence; implanting in your ears the words of God; fitting on your neck the yoke of Christ. . . . Clothe yourselves with the silk of uprightness, the fine linen of holiness, the purple of modesty. Thus painted, you will have God as your Lover!”⁷ He approved women wearing nice, becoming dresses and giving attention to their hair and skin. What he condemned were seductive clothes and ornaments designed to attract attention.

Tertullian acknowledges that men are not excluded from the “deceptive trickeries” of vain adornment. He mentions specifically the practice of some pagan men “to arrange the hair, and disguise its hoariness by dyes; to remove all the incipient down all over the body; to fix (each particular hair) in its place with (some) womanly pigment; to smooth all the rest of the body by the aid of some rough powder or other.”⁸ He condemns the men’s desire “to please by means of voluptuous attraction” as being “hostile to modesty, for where God is, there modesty is; there is sobriety, her assistant and ally.”⁹

Clement’s Warnings Against Embellishing the Body. Similar denunciations of extravagant dress and ornaments are found in the writings of Clement of Alexandria (150-215), a contemporary of Tertullian who headed the catechetical (baptismal) school of Alexandria from 190 to 202. In his treatise *The Instructor*, Clement went into great detail to describe the luxurious clothes, the sandals with golden ornaments, the elaborate hair styles, and the multitude of ornaments worn by women. He listed the array of female ornaments as given in the catalogue of a Greek satirist: “Snoods, fillets, natron, and steel; pumice-stone, band, back-band, back-veil, paint, necklaces, paint for the eyes . . . Ear-pendants, jewelry, earrings; mallow-colored cluster-shaped anklets; buckles, clasps, necklets, fetters, seals, chains, rings, powders, bosses, bands, olisbi, Sardinian stones, fans, helicters.”¹⁰

Clement wondered “how those who bear such a burden are not worried to death. O foolish trouble! O silly craze for display! To these the Spirit prophesies by Zephaniah: ‘And their silver and their gold shall not be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord’s anger.’ But for those women who have been trained under Christ, it is suitable to adorn themselves not with gold, but with the Word, through whom alone the gold comes to light.”¹¹

According to Clement, Christians should not say, “I possess, and possess in abundance: why then should I not enjoy?” but rather they should say, “I have: why should I not give to those who need?”¹² Continuing, he expounded on the principle of responsible stewardship: “It is monstrous for one to live in luxury, while many are in want. How much more glorious is to do good to many, than to live sumptuously! How much wiser to spend the money on human beings, than on jewels and gold! How much more useful to acquire decorous friends, than lifeless ornaments!”¹³

Like Tertullian, Clement also warned against the practice of pagan men embellishing their bodies like women by adorning their locks, by engaging servants to smooth their bodies by pulling out their hair with pitch-plasters, and by clothing themselves “in fine and transparent garments” smelling of perfume. He admonished Christian men to avoid such pagan

vanities and to exhibit the real beauty which comes by plucking out not hairs, but lust. Our Christian calling, Clement said, is to put off “the old man (not the hoary man, but him that is) corrupt according to deceitful lust; and be renewed (not by dyeing and ornaments), but in the spirit of your mind; and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.”¹⁴

Cyprian’s Exhortation to Modesty. Similar exhortations are found in the writings of Cyprian (died 258), bishop of Carthage. In his small treatise *On the Dress of Virgins*, he urged women to be modest and becoming in their appearance. He maintained that an immodest woman cannot rightfully claim to belong to Christ. “Having put on silk and purple, they cannot put on Christ; adorned with gold, and pearls, and necklaces, they have lost the ornaments of the heart and spirit.”¹⁵

Cyprian appealed to women “as a parent,” saying: “Let your countenance remain in you incorrupt, your neck unadorned, your figure simple; let not wounds be made in your ears, not let the precious chain of bracelets and necklaces circle your arms or your neck; let your feet be free from golden bands, your hair stained with no dye, your eyes worthy of beholding God.”¹⁶

These exhortations reveal that many Christians in the second and third centuries were influenced by the extravagant and immodest fashion of their time, in spite of the constant appeals of their church leaders to be modest and sober in their appearance. The same is true in our own time. Many Christians follow more closely the dictates of immodest fashion than the Biblical directives of modesty, decency and sobriety.

The conformity of many Christians to the worldly fashion of their time should not obscure the fact that some Christians had the courage to reject it, dressing instead according to the Biblical principles of modesty and decency. The pagans noticed the modest way in which Christians clothed themselves. In fact, we read in *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* that Perpetua and other newly baptized Christian women were forced to wear pagan clothes and ornaments prior to their execution in the arena of Carthage, North Africa on March 7, 203.¹⁷ Presumably by this act the pagans wanted to make a mockery of Christian modesty.

Chrysostom’s Relentless Appeals to Modesty. The fourth century opened a new chapter in the history of Christianity. The Edict of Milan, issued in 313 by the newly “converted” emperor Constantine, brought to an end the age of persecution and inaugurated instead the age of imperial protection and financial prosperity for the church. Suddenly millions of pagans clamored to enter the church while still clinging to their pagan lifestyle.

One can sense the enormity of the problems by reading the sermons of church leaders of the time. For examples, John Chrysostom, known as the greatest expository preacher of the early church, delivered a series of sermons between 386 and 403 in the nominally Christian cities of Antioch and Constantinople. In his sermons Chrysostom frequently appealed to men and women to dress modestly and soberly, avoiding costly clothes and ornaments.¹⁸

In a sermon on Hebrews 11:37-38, Chrysostom, renowned for his practical illustrations, brought his appeal for Christian modesty home by comparing Christian dress and pagan dress to two different sets of actors playing in two different theaters. “To those on stage these things [extravagant clothes and jewelry] are fitting, [because] this apparel belongs to them, to harlots, to those who do everything to be looked at. Let her beautify herself, who is on stage or the dancing platform. For she wishes to attract all to her. But a woman who professes godliness, let her not beautify herself thus, but in a different way. Thou hast a means of beautifying thyself far better than that. Thou also hast a theater, for that theater make thyself beautiful: clothe thyself with those ornaments. What is thy theater? Heaven, the company of Angels. I speak not of Virgins only, but also of those in the world. All who believe in Christ have that theater. Let us speak such things that we may please those spectators. Put on such garments that thou mayest gratify them.”¹⁹

Chrysostom must have been greatly distressed by the extravagant dress and ornaments of some members of his congregations, because in his sermon on 1 Timothy 2:9-10, he went into considerable detail to expose their use of gold, pearls, costly attire, paint, coloring of the eyes, and elaborate hair styles to beautify themselves. Then he exclaimed, “Why dost thou not wear the ornament that is pleasing to Him: modesty, chastity, orderliness, and sober apparel? This is meretricious and disgraceful. We can no longer distinguish harlots and virgins, to such indecency have they advanced. A virgin’s dress should not be studied, but plain, and without labor; but now they have many artifices to make their dress conspicuous. O woman, cease from this folly. Transfer this care to thy soul, to the inward adorning. For the outward ornaments that invest thee, suffer not that within to become beautiful.”²⁰

Chrysostom stands out for his courage to denounce the pomp and the extravagance of the rich and powerful, including the empress Eudoxia, renowned for her outrageous public display of ornaments and costly dresses. Unable to silence his denunciations through special grants to his church, Eudoxia resorted to ridiculous charges to have Chrysostom condemned and banished into exile in 403. The story of Chrysostom reminds us that it can be costly for any preacher or writer to denounce extravagant dress and ornaments, because such preaching or writing wounds what some people treasure most, namely, their vanity and pride.

Apostolic Constitutions' Rules on Modesty. Denunciations of immodesty in apparel appear also in the writings of other church leaders such as Cyril of Jerusalem and Basil of Caesarea.²¹ For the sake of brevity we will mention only one additional document of the fourth century, namely, a collection of ecclesiastical laws dating from the latter part of the fourth century and known as *The Apostolic Constitutions*. Here we find rules for men and women about adornment.

The rules for men include the following: "Do not permit the hair of thy head to grow too long, but rather cut it short . . . Neither do thou wear over-fine garments to seduce any; neither do thou, with an evil subtlety, affect over-fine stockings or shoes for thy feet, but only such as suit the measure of decency and usefulness. Neither do thou put a gold ring upon thy fingers; for all these ornaments are signs of lasciviousness, which if thou be solicitous about in an indecent manner, thou will not act as becomes a good man."²² It is noteworthy that men are enjoined not to wear a gold ring on their fingers. In view of the fact that in earlier documents, as we shall see in chapter 6, Christians were allowed to wear the marital ring, this prohibition suggests that by this time the simple marital ring had given way to ornamental rings and consequently their use was proscribed.

Women were instructed to be faithful to their husbands, avoiding seductive clothes and ornaments: "If thou desirest to be one of the faithful, and to please the Lord, O wife, do not superadd ornaments to thy beauty, in order to please other men; neither affect to wear fine broidering, garments, or shoes, to entice those who are allured by such things. . . . Do not paint thy face, which is God's workmanship; for there is no part of thee which wants ornament, inasmuch as all things which God has made are very good. But the lascivious additional adorning of what is already good is an affront to the bounty of the Creator."²³

The testimonies just cited from the first four centuries reveal a consistent concern on the part of church leaders to encourage Christians to resist the pressure of conformity to the immodest fashion of their time. It was not easy in the pagan society of early Christianity to uphold the Christian standard of modesty and decency in dress and ornaments. And it is not easy to uphold such a standard today in our hedonistic society where modesty is out and exposure is in. The Good News of the Gospel is that we can do it through Christ who strengthens us (Phil 4:13).

**PART II: DRESS AND ORNAMENTS DURING
THE MIDDLE AGES**

With the occupation of Western Europe by Germanic tribes, the Roman culture was submerged or destroyed. The period from the fifth to the tenth century is almost a total vacuum as far as the knowledge of Christian dress and ornaments is concerned. Two significant developments stand out in this period. First, the dress of the clergy became different from that of the laity. Second, extravagance in dress and ornaments became the problem of the clergy and nobles, rather than of ordinary Christians. The latter were generally too poor to indulge in costly clothes and ornaments.

Clerical Dress. During the first five Christian centuries the dress of the clergy was not different from that of the laity. An important reason is the democratic nature of early Christianity in which there was no class distinction between clergy and laity. But in the sixth century the civil dress of the clergy automatically became different from that of the laity. The reason is that while the people adopted the short tunic, trousers, and cloak of the Teutonic invaders, the clergy retained the long tunic and toga (or pallium) of the Romans.

Pope Gregory the Great (pope from 590-604) would not permit any person around him to be clad in the “barbarian” dress. He enforced on his *entourage* the garb of old Rome. From the sixth century onward we find canons forbidding the clergy to wear the secular dress. Some have sought to derive the Catholic priestly dress from the priestly dress of the Old Testament, but, as even *The Catholic Encyclopedia* acknowledged, “they have rather developed from the secular dress of the Greco-Roman world.”²⁴

The evolution of priestly vestments reflects the development of the sacramental power of the priest at the altar. The teaching that the priest at the altar transforms the elements of the Lord’s Supper into the actual body and blood of Christ gives to the priest supernatural powers and prestige. By putting on the liturgical vestments for the celebration of the mass, the priest is able to impress the congregation with his alleged divine power. “With the vestment the priest puts on a ‘character’ of divinity. By the change of vestment he multiplies the divine force while showing its different aspects.”²⁵ In essence, then, liturgical vestments exalt the superiority of the priest in the eyes of the congregation.

Clerical Extravagance. The use of liturgical vestments to enable priests to project an aura of divinity may well have contributed also to their extravagant use of expensive ornaments and clothes. If the priest is clothed

with costly vestments adorned with gold and jewels at the altar, why shouldn't he display such luxury on the street as well? This new trend helps us understand why from the sixth century onward the admonitions to modesty in dress and ornaments are most often given to the clergy rather than to the laity. In other words, while during the first five centuries the clergy admonished the laity to dress modestly, beginning from the sixth century it is the clergy that is often admonished to be modest in their attire.

The *Dictionary of Christian Antiquity* notes that "the second council of Nice, in the year 787, condemns (canon 15) bishops and clerics who distinguish themselves by the richness and brilliant colors of their dress. So Tarasius, patriarch of Constantinople (died 806), bade his clergy abstain from golden girdles, and from garments bright with silk and purple, prescribing girdles of goat's hair, and tunics decent but not gorgeous. The council of Aix, in the year 816 (canon 124), inveighs against personal ornament and splendor of dress in the clergy, and exhorts them to be neither splendid nor slovenly."²⁶

To gain an idea of the extravagance in clerical clothes, one only needs to look at some illuminated manuscripts of the Middle Ages where clerics are arrayed in garments covered with gold, jewels, and costly furs. In his book *Historic Dress of the Clergy*, Geo Tyack wrote: "The number and magnificence of the copes [ecclesiastical vestments] which accumulated in the Cathedrals and great Abbey Churches of England in the Middle Ages is almost incredible. At Canterbury, in 1315, there were more than sixty copes in regular use; and Exeter, in 1327, had seventy-four. Several of these were of cloth of gold. . . . Conrad, Abbot of Canterbury, gave to that Cathedral, in 1108, a magnificent cope, embroidered with gold, and having a fringe of one hundred and forty silver bells."²⁷

What was true of England was also true of the rest of Western Europe. A visit to the museum *Tesori Vaticani*—Vatican Treasures—can be an eye-opening experience for anyone who has never seen such a priceless collection of gold-embroidered priestly garments covered with jewels. While the common people lived in poverty and wore coarse and uncouth clothes, the clergy lived like princes, indulging in luxurious clothes and jewelry. If the clothes we wear are an index of our character, then the luxurious and extravagant clothes and ornaments of the medieval clergy give us a good indication of their spiritual apostasy. In the course of this historical survey, we will have occasion to see other instances where the spiritual revival or decline of the church is reflected in the dress reform or extravagance of its members.

New Middle Class Extravagance. The economic and social situation began to change in the eleventh century with the Crusades, which failed

to recapture the Holy Land from the Moslems but succeeded in breaking down the feudal system at home and opening up the trade routes abroad. The result was the emergence of a new social class made up of merchants and craftsmen who soon became wealthy. Until then there were two social classes, the rich made up of nobles and clergy, and the poor made up of everybody else. The new class of “merchant princes” were eager to prove their nobility through their wealth, since they could not do it through their blood lines. They adopted the luxurious lifestyle of the nobles, which included extravagance in clothing and jewelry.

In his book *Italy in the Thirteenth Century*, Charles Sedwick described this extravagance in clothing: “Fashionable women wore fine linen, silks, and brocades, trinkets of silver and gold, jewelry of all sorts, trimmings and gewgaws. Their gowns were cut low in the neck, to the scandal of the austere; they wore false hair and painted and powdered to a most reprehensible degree; they laced and they fasted in order to make their figures fashionably slim.”²⁸ With minor changes this could be an accurate description of the fashionable women of today.

Sumptuary Laws. The extravagance became so universal and the railing of the church against inordinate display so vociferous, that certain laws, called Sumptuary Laws, were passed in European countries and the New England colonies to curb the ostentatious display of the newly rich class.²⁹ These laws regulated personal appearance by dictating the kind of garments and ornaments people could wear. Penalties were enforced by state or church bodies. The church exercised powerful control in the matter of extravagance, because it was intricately involved with the affairs of state as well as the daily lives of the people.

The paradox of the Roman Catholic Sumptuary Laws is that they were promoted by church leaders who were themselves very sumptuous and extravagant in dress and ornaments. The primary concern of the church was not to uphold the Biblical principle of modesty in dress, but rather to maintain class distinctions.³⁰ The church’s support for a class hierarchy with a ruling class, has resulted in frequent conflicts between revolutionaries and the church.

PART III: DRESS AND ORNAMENTS

FROM THE REFORMATION TO OUR TIMES

The Reformation brought about radical reforms not only in the theological understanding of salvation, but also in the practical lifestyle of people. The Reformers denounced the sumptuousness of the Roman Catholic

Church and sensitized the conscience of the people regarding the Biblical principles of modesty and simplicity. They believed that extravagant dress and ornaments lead to the sins of pride and sensuality, while modesty reveals humility and purity.³¹

Calvin wrote: “Dress should be regulated by modesty and sobriety; for luxury and immoderate expense arise from a desire to make a display either for the sake of pride or of departure from chastity.”³² Calvin believed that the solution to the problem of immodesty in dress lies not in promulgating legislation but in developing a humble disposition, because “where ambition reigns within, there will be no modesty in outward dress.”³³

Calvin’s teachings undoubtedly influenced the Sumptuary Laws that were promulgated in various Swiss cities. In his book *Costume and Conduct in the Laws of Basel, Bern, and Zurich*, John M. Vincent offered an informative survey of such laws. For example, an ordinance of Basel in 1637 detailed in nearly twenty pages the type of dress and ornaments that were permitted or forbidden.

“Women of all classes are to avoid gold and half-gold embroidery, passementerie trimming, cords, lace, embroidery, gold, silver, pearls, or precious stones anywhere on their clothing, waistcoats, trimming, girdles, shoes, slippers, rosettes (on headdress), garters, ribbons, and so on. . . . In these troublous times men and women are to avoid chains of pearls, or wear openly gold chains, necklaces, or bracelets. Garments ornamented with pearls, such as ruffs, shirts, handkerchiefs, napkins, headdresses, pendant buttons, neckcloths, are not to be worn.”³⁴

Ordinances such as this were common throughout most of Europe. To understand how people could accept the interference of the church and the government into their own private lives, we must remember that both the church and the government were viewed and accepted as paternal institutions working together for the welfare of the people. Whatever we may think of the right of the church and the government to legislate the private life of people, the fact remains that these laws reveal a respect for the Biblical principles of modesty in dress and a concern to help people live in accordance with them.

The Anabaptists and Modest Apparel. The reformatory movement started by Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli was taken a step further by the Anabaptists, who are the forerunners of the Mennonites, Baptists, Hutterites, Brethren, and Amish. Their aim was to recapture the simple lifestyle of apostolic Christianity. They believed that it was not enough to reform the church theologically by cleansing it from all the heresies contradicted by the Scriptures. It was necessary also to reform the church practically by putting

into practice the neglected commands of the New Testament. Among these they found the command to dress in modest apparel and to avoid ostentatious ornamentation.

Menno Simons, the greatest sixteenth-century Dutch leader of the Anabaptists, wrote repeatedly on the necessity of practicing simplicity in life, especially in dress and ornaments. In describing those Christians who did not take the ideal of New Testament simplicity seriously, he wrote: "They say that they believe, and yet, alas, there are no limits nor bounds to their accursed haughtiness, foolish pride and pomp; they parade in silks, velvet, costly clothes, gold rings, chains, silver belts, pins and buttons, curiously adorned shirts, shawls, collars, veils, aprons, velvet shoes, slippers, and such like foolish finery."³⁵

These comments must be understood not only in relationship to the Biblical principle of modesty, but also in the context of the extravagant dress and ornaments of the richer classes. This was the age of the Renaissance, characterized by extravagant lifestyle, especially in dress and ornaments. The Anabaptists were committed to uphold the Biblical ideal of modesty and simplicity of dress. This commitment has been preserved to this very day among their main descendents, namely the Mennonites.

In his most informative study, *Mennonite Attire Through Four Centuries*, Melvin Gingerich showed how faithfulness to the Biblical teaching and Christian tradition of modesty and simplicity of dress, has enabled the Mennonites to retain their sense of identity and mission. He closed his book by noting that the "concepts of simplicity are still present among the Mennonites of Europe and America. . . . If Mennonites remain true to their heritage they will continue to stress the principle that all of life, including its expression in the kind of clothing worn, must be brought under the scrutiny of New Testament standards relating to humility, stewardship, modesty, and simplicity."³⁶

A Lesson from the Mennonites. For the sake of accuracy, we must note that the pressure of cultural conformity has been felt even among the Mennonites. John C. Wenger, a respected Mennonite historian, observed that not all the groups of Mennonites have been able to maintain a nonconformist attitude toward worldly fashions and practices. Both in Europe and in America, there are groups of Mennonites called "Progressive," who have gradually lost the sense of nonconformity to the world.

According to Wenger within such groups "much of the internal vigor" has disappeared as a result of the process of cultural conformity, especially in the areas of dress and jewelry. "They have allowed the process of cultural

accommodation to go on with little or no resistance, sincerely believing that Christianity does not consist in outward forms, but they have often tended to underestimate the power of the forces in contemporary society to mold the members of the brotherhood into the same types of character, belief, and practice, as are current in America in general. *This has resulted in a loss of sense of unique mission as well as the partial surrender of basic Mennonite doctrines. . . . They tend to become more like American Protestants than the Mennonites have historically been.*"³⁷

The loss of identity and mission that "Progressive" Mennonites are experiencing as a result of their relaxation of Christian standards, especially in the area of dress and adornment, constitutes a warning for any church experiencing "cultural accommodation." To put it simply, what has happened to the "Progressive" Mennonites could also happen to "Progressive" Adventists or any other religious group. The survival of our identity and mission is largely dependent upon the way we live our distinctive beliefs. This is because what we practice has a way of reinforcing what we believe. When individuals or churches become permissive in the use of jewelry and immodest dress, they also tend to relativize the validity and relevance of the Biblical principles governing these areas, and ultimately they may have very little left to affirm their identity.

Dress and Ornaments in Colonial America. The reformatory movement started by Luther and Calvin was taken a step further not only by the Anabaptists, but also by the Puritans and Pietists. The Puritans sought to purify the Church in England along the lines of the Calvinistic reformation in Geneva. Their "purification program" was similar to that of the Anabaptists in the sense they opposed popish aspects of worship such as pompous vestments, crosses, and statues, and they promoted preaching and sober lifestyle, avoiding luxury and outward ornaments. Some of them migrated to America, hoping to be able to follow more closely the practices of the New Testament, without undue interference from the English government. From the Puritan tradition arose great preachers like Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield, who played a leading role in the Great Awakening.

Pietism grew out of the Lutheran tradition in Germany as a reaction to the lifeless Lutheran dogmatism. The concern of the movement was to bring new life into Lutheranism by leading Christians into an experience of salvation through personal devotion, Bible study, prayer, and simple lifestyle. Pietism made a tremendous spiritual impact in Europe as thousands of Christians joined together in small devotional circles of Bible study and prayer. On May 24, 1738, John Wesley attended one of these cottage meetings on Aldersgate Street, where his "heart was strangely warmed," and his life was radically changed.

Many Pietists, like the Puritans, came to America and settled in the New England colonies. They brought with them their religious convictions, which included modesty and simplicity of dress. Leigh Eric Schmidt surveyed the roles that clothes played in the social and religious life of colonial America: “Clothes in early America helped order religion and society: they contributed to the notion of authority, hierarchy, community, and gender. At the same time, dress evoked significant spiritual and theological meanings within the religious culture of early America. Images of the Sabbath, of ritual, of sin, of good works, of purity, of eschatology, of redemption—all were made vivid through the medium of dress.”³⁸

The impact of dress reform in colonial America was such that Pennsylvania, for example, became known as the “Plain State.” Melvin Gingerich noted that “during recent years thousands of American tourists have visited Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, to observe the life of a segment of America’s ‘Plain People’ and possibly many have gone back to New York and other cities with only a superficial understanding of why these fellow citizens, whose ancestors have been in this country for over two centuries, have not been completely absorbed in the American Melting Pot but instead have retained their simple dress and their simple style of life.”³⁹

John Wesley’s Six Reasons for Modesty in Dress. John Wesley stands out among the many Pietists and Puritans who made the question of extravagant dress and adornment a pressing moral issue. His clear and compelling teachings on dress served as the basis for early American Methodist policies on the matter. In fact, his teachings had a considerable influence on the dress reform adopted by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, since several of our pioneers, including Ellen White, came from a Methodist background.

Early Adventists greatly respected Wesley’s teachings on dress and adornments. This is indicated, for example, by the publication of the article, “On Dress, From Mr. Wesley’s Advice to the People Called Methodists,” in the July 10, 1855, issue of *Review and Herald*, the official Adventist church paper. In this article Wesley appeals to Methodists to observe plainness and neatness in dress, avoiding gold or pearls or costly apparel.

In a sermon, “On Dress,” delivered on December 30, 1786, John Wesley presents six specific reasons why Christian Methodists should not adorn themselves “with gold, or pearls, or costly array.”⁴⁰ I will briefly summarize these reasons because they are still relevant for us today.

Wesley’s first reason is that wearing luxurious clothes and ornaments “engenders *pride*, and where it is already, increases it. . . . Nothing is more

natural than to think ourselves better because we are dressed in better clothes.” Wesley illustrates this point by pointing to the many thousands of people in England, not only lords, but also “honest tradesmen,” who infer “the superior value of their persons from the value of their clothes.”⁴¹

Wesley’s second reason is that “costly apparel tends to breed and to increase *vanity*. By vanity I here mean the love and desire of being admired and praised. . . . The more you indulge this foolish desire, the more it grows upon you. You have vanity enough by nature, but by thus indulging it you increase it a hundredfold. O stop! Aim at pleasing God alone, and all these ornaments will drop off.”⁴²

Wesley’s third reason is that “costly apparel naturally tends to beget *anger*, and every turbulent and uneasy passion. And it is on this very account that the Apostle places this ‘outward adorning’ in direct opposition to ‘the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit.’” By “anger” Wesley apparently means inner tension, for he explains that the “outward adorning” makes it impossible to experience the “inward quietness of spirit.”⁴³

Wesley’s fourth reason is that “costly apparel tends to create and *inflame lust*.” Apparently Wesley is thinking of immodest dress, which can inflame “base appetite.” “You kindle a flame which at the same time consumes both yourself and your admirers.”⁴⁴

Wesley’s fifth reason may be called *irresponsible stewardship*. The money spent to buy costly adornments cannot be used to adorn oneself with such good works as clothing the naked. To those who argued, “I may be as *humble* in cloth of gold as in sackcloth,” Wesley responded, “If you could be as *humble* when you choose costly as when you choose plain apparel (which I flatly deny), yet you could not be as *beneficent*, as plenteous in good works. Every shilling which you save from your own apparel you may expend in clothing the naked, and relieving the various necessities of the poor.”⁴⁵ Wesley expanded on this reason far more than on the previous ones, presumably because he recognized the importance of Christian stewardship, which is negated by the outlandish expenditure of money for personal adornment. To those who argued, “But I can *afford* it,” Wesley replied, “O lay aside for ever that idle, nonsensical word! No Christian can *afford* to waste any part of the substance which God has entrusted him with.”⁴⁶

Wesley’s sixth reason is that outward adorning undermines “the whole nature of *inward holiness*.” “All the time you are studying this ‘outward adorning,’ the whole inward work of the Holy Spirit stands still; or rather goes back, though by very gentle and almost imperceptible degrees. Instead of growing more heavenly-minded, you are more and more earthly-

minded. If you once had fellowship with the Father and the Son, it now gradually declines; and you insensibly sink deeper and deeper into the spirit of the world, into foolish and hurtful desires, and groveling appetites. All these evils, and a thousand more, spring from one root—indulging yourself in costly apparel.”⁴⁷

One cannot help but admire Wesley not only for his forthright preaching on the sensitive subject of dress, but also for his insights on how the outward adorning affects the inward work of the Holy Spirit. The influence of Wesley’s powerful preaching was felt not only in England, but also in America. Wesley himself tells us that during his brief sojourn in Savannah, Georgia, he ministered to a congregation that was as well adorned with gold and costly apparel as those he had seen in London. But as a result of his powerful preaching on the gospel of plainness, a radical change occurred. “All the time that I afterward ministered in Savannah, I saw neither gold in the church, nor costly apparel; but the congregation in general was almost constantly clothed in plain, clean linen or woollen.”⁴⁸

Phoebe Palmer: Dress Reformer. The dress reform begun by Wesley was continued by Phoebe Palmer (1807-74). She was an influential Methodist who began a revival that gave rise to some of the leading evangelical denominations of today and set the stage for the emergence of modern Pentecostalism. A definitive study of her contributions to American Christianity has been produced recently by Charles Edward White.⁴⁹

Like Wesley, Phoebe Palmer believed that fancy dress and ornaments were a *hindrance to holiness*. She crusaded for dress reform because she believed that extravagant dress and adornments betrayed a divided heart and wasted money. She preached that those who wear fancy dresses and ornaments are “lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God” (2 Tim 3:4). Their lives reveal that “they are friends of the world and at enmity with God (James 4:4).”⁵⁰

She knew of “Christian” women who wore jewelry costing up to five thousand dollars. She called such an expenditure of the Lord’s money a “heathen” practice. “Quoting from Judges 8:24, ‘They had golden earrings because they were Ishmaelites,’ she said that all who wore gold or other jewelry were not true Israelites but Ishmaelites. They should purify themselves by getting rid of these relics of heathendom’ by burying them as Jacob’s household buried their idols and earrings at Shechem (Gen 35:4).”⁵¹ Her preaching led to a great spiritual revival and contributed to the origin of the Holiness Movement.

The Decline of Dress Reform. Unfortunately, the contributions to dress reform made by revivalists like John Wesley and Phoebe Palmer have been largely forgotten. Most of the evangelical churches which trace their roots to these pioneers no longer uphold the standard of modesty in dress taught by their founders. They no longer regard outward appearance as being an important index of Christian character. This change of attitude can be seen by comparing older church manuals with newer ones.

For example, the 1856 edition of *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church* has the following section on dress: “Question: Should we insist on the rules concerning dress? Answer: By all means. This is no time to encourage superfluity in dress. Therefore, let all our people be exhorted to conform the spirit of the apostolic precept, ‘not to adorn themselves with gold, and pearls, and costly array’ (1 Tim 2:9).”⁵² The same statement is repeated and expanded in the 1880 edition of *The Discipline of the Wesleyan Methodist Connection of America*. The additional sentence reads: “Therefore let none be received into the Church until they have left off the wearing of gold and superfluous ornaments.”⁵³

No such statements are found in the editions of these church manuals published since the 1940s.⁵⁴ In fact the section on dress found in the nineteenth century editions is omitted altogether in the recent manuals. I asked some Methodist ministers the reason for the abandonment of their church policy on dress and ornaments. They told me that the omission reflects the process of cultural accommodation affecting not only Methodists but Christian churches in general. The result of this trend is that more and more Christians today adorn their bodies with extravagant dresses and costly jewelry, without realizing the damaging effect of these things on their own inward spirituality, as well as on their outward witness for Christ to others.

Dress Reform in the Adventist Church. Interest in dress reform in the Seventh-day Adventist Church developed out of two major concerns: the first, spiritual commitment to Christ, and the second, physical health. Ellen White, one of the leading founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, repeatedly emphasized in her writings this dual function of dress. “In dress, as in all things else, it is our privilege to honor our Creator. He desires our clothing to be not only neat and healthful, but appropriate and becoming.”⁵⁵

Ellen White grew up as a strict Methodist, believing that the outward appearance is an index of the inward spiritual condition. As she put it, “The dress and its arrangement upon the person is generally found to be the index of the man or the woman. We judge of a person’s character by the style of dress worn.”⁵⁶ When she first denounced the use of the hoop skirt in the early 1860s,

her reason was that God wants us to be a “peculiar” people.⁵⁷ It was after her 1863 vision on health that she began associating the subject of dress with health.

The need for dress reform was self-evident. Fashionable women wore layers of long skirts and petticoats, weighing as much as fifteen pounds. The long skirts dragged in the dust and filth of the street, collecting germs of which people were happily ignorant. Vise-like corsets tortured the midriffs into an exaggeratedly small waist, causing frequent faintings and internal damage. To add insult to injury, in the mid-1850s the steel-wired hoop skirt staged a revival, making American women even more uncomfortable and immobile. A woman in hoops needed four to five feet of standing space, and when sitting in a railroad car or public place, the hoop often caused indecent exposure. In spite of its impracticality and health hazards, the hoop was viewed as so highly feminine that reform was most difficult.

As early as 1861 Ellen White wrote that hoops were “one of the abominations of the land that God would have us utterly discard.”⁵⁸ In 1865, with the help of some sisters in Battle Creek, Ellen White designed a style of dress which was intended to retain its femininity while at the same time freeing the hips and waist from the dragging skirts. It consisted of slender trousers neatly tapering at the ankle, to provide warmth for the legs. Over the trousers was a skirt reaching about the boot top, and a blouse. The skirt hung by straps from the shoulders, or buttoned to a waist, thus eliminating hoops, corsets, and constricting bands.

Ellen White recommended this attire, but did not insist upon it. It was never intended to be a uniform, but a sample of a modest and comfortable dress. Many Adventists adopted it, but others opposed it, because they were too attached to the current styles. There was constant quibbling over the exact length of the dress. After four or five years Ellen White recognized that dress reform had become divisive and was detracting from more important causes. She dropped the idea of promoting any particular style, urging instead that Adventist women “adopt a simple, unadorned dress, of modest length, . . . free from needless trimmings, free from the looped-up, tied back over skirts.”⁵⁹

Ellen White’s counsels on dress are typical of her balance and ultimate concern to do all things to the honor of God. She appealed to Adventist women saying, “Let our sisters dress plainly, as many do, having the dress of good, durable material, appropriate for this age, and let not the dress question fill the mind. Our sisters should dress with simplicity. They should clothe themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety. Give to the world a living illustration of the inward adorning of the grace of God.”⁶⁰

Conclusion. This brief historical survey has shown that dress and ornaments have been an important index of the spiritual decline or revival of the church during the course of its history. We have found that at times of prosperity and moral laxity, many Christians have adopted the extravagant fashions of their time, reasoning that the Christian faith does not consist in outward appearance. They have underestimated the power of worldly fashion to mold their characters in accordance with the secular values of society. The result of this cultural accommodation has been the disappearance of internal spiritual vigor, a surrender of Biblical doctrines such as modesty in dress, and a loss of the identity and mission of the church.

Over a century ago Ellen White described with prophetic insight what has emerged from this brief historical survey, namely: “In every age, a majority of the professed followers of Christ have disregarded those precepts which enjoin self-denial and humility, which require modesty and simplicity of conversation, deportment, and apparel. The result has ever been the same,—departure from the teachings of the gospel leads to the adoption of the fashions, customs, and principles of the world. Vital godliness gives place to a dead formalism. The presence and power of God, withdrawn from those world-loving circles, are found with a class of humble worshipers, who are willing to obey the teachings of the Sacred Word. Through successive generations, this course has been pursued. One after another, different denominations have risen and, yielding their simplicity, have lost, in a great measure, their early power.”⁶¹

Throughout the centuries the line of demarcation between the church and the world has often been blurred as Christians have conformed to the world in eating, drinking, dressing, adorning, entertainment, divorcing, and remarrying. This is particularly true today, because, as Robert St. Clair noted, “Our distorted culture makes a fetish of such idols as perfection of beauty and talent, and it worships status, superiority of prestige and the lofty heights of money-power. When the church adapts to a righteous-coated paganism, the line between church and world becomes increasingly hazy.”⁶²

Unless the line of demarcation between the world and the church is maintained, the church can easily become a Hollywood-type of mutual-admiration society in which members meet once a week to compliment one another on their latest fashionable clothes, jewelry, cars, hobbies, and vacations. But the church exists not to give the world a pat on the back, but rather to save the world.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 4

1. For their comments, see William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter* (Philadelphia, 1960), pp. 261-263.
2. Quintillian as cited William Barclay (note 1), p. 261.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 262-263.
4. Cited by Michael and Ariane Batterberry, *Fashion, The Mirror of History* (New York, 1982), p. 52.
5. Tertullian, *Apology* 42, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, eds., Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids, 1973), vol. 3, p. 49.
6. Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* 15, 10-12, as discussed by Robert M. Grant, *Augustus to Constantine. The Thrust of the Christian Movement into the Roman World* (New York, 1970), p. 264.
7. Tertullian, *On the Apparel of Women* 13, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, 1972), vol. 4, p. 25.
8. Tertullian, *On the Apparel of Women* 8, *ibid.*, p. 22.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor* 2, 13, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, 1979), vol. 2, p. 269.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 269.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 268.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 268.
14. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor* 3, 3, (note 10), pp. 275-276.
15. Cyprian, *On the Dress of Virgins* 12, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Alexander Roberts and J. Donaldson, eds., (Grand Rapids, 1971), vol. 5, p. 433.
16. Cyprian, *On the Dress of Virgins* 21 (note 15), p. 435.
17. *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* 18.
18. See for example, *Works of St. Chrysostom*, Homily 89 on Matthew 27:62-64, *A Selected Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Philip Schaff, ed. (Grand Rapids, 1978), vol. 10, p. 528. Also Homily 8 on 1 Timothy 2:8-10, vol. 13, pp. 433-434.

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19. Chrysostom, *Works of St. Chrysostom*, Homily 38, Hebrews 11:37-38, *A Selected Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Philip Schaff, ed. (Grand Rapids, 1978), vol. 14, p. 496.
 20. Chrysostom, *Works of St. Chrysostom*, Homily 8, 1 Timothy 2:9-10, *A Selected Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Philip Schaff, ed. (Grand Rapids, 1979), vol. 13, p. 434.
 21. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses* 4; Basil of Caesarea, *Reg. fusius Tract.* Interrog. 22.
 22. *The Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* I, 2, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Alexander Roberts and J. Donaldson, eds. (Grand Rapids, 1970), vol. 7, p. 392.
 23. *The Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* I, 3 (note 22), p. 395.
 24. *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1908 ed., s. v. "Vestments."
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 28. Charles Sedgwick, *Italy in the Thirteenth Century*, cited by Frank Alvah Parsons, *The Psychology of Dress* (New York, 1922), pp.25-26.
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 33. *Ibid.*
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39. Melvin Gingerich (note 36), p. 1.
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41. *Ibid.*, p. 251.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 252.
43. *Ibid.*
44. *Ibid.*, pp. 253-254.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 254.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 256.
47. *Ibid.*, pp. 256-257.
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50. *Ibid.*, p. 150.
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52. *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York, 1856), p. 87.
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54. There is no section dealing with dress on the 1944 and subsequent editions of the *Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Church*.

55. Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance* (Nashville, 1954), p. 413.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 413.

57. Ellen G. White, *My Christian Experience, Views and Labors* [*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 2] (Battle Creek, 1860), pp. 13-14.

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62. Robert James St. Clair, *Neurotics in the Church* (Westwood, New Jersey, 1963), p. 20.

Chapter 5

A LOOK AT THE WEDDING RING

Should Christians wear a marriage ring? Does a plain marriage band fall in the category of the inappropriate ornaments of gold and pearls mentioned by Paul and Peter (1 Tim 2:10; 1 Pet 3:3)? These questions have engendered endless controversies in my own Seventh-day Adventist church, as well as in other churches.¹

Part of the problem is that the debate on the wedding ring has largely been based on strong personal feelings rather than on a clear understanding of the issues involved. Those who favor wearing the wedding ring feel strongly that for them the ring is a valuable symbol to affirm their marital status and commitment, as well as a protection from uninformed suitors. On the other hand, those who oppose wearing the wedding ring feel strongly that a golden ring is an ornament forbidden by the apostolic admonitions against wearing “gold or pearls or costly attire” (1Tim 2:10; cf. 1 Pet 3:3).

Objective of this Chapter. My objective in this chapter is not to sit in judgment upon those who wear or do not wear a marital ring, but rather to look at the whole question of the wedding ring from a broader historical, cultural, and Biblical perspective. This chapter attempts to provide some basic information about the evolution of the meaning, usage, and influence of finger rings both in pagan Rome and Christian history. We shall give special attention to the religious impact of the wedding ring in the life of Christian churches. These data will provide a basis for reflecting at the end on whether or not it is advisable for Christians to wear a wedding ring today.

I must confess that this chapter has caused me to do much soul searching. Coming from Italy, a country where wearing the marriage ring is considered imperative, a sign of fidelity to one’s spouse, I approached this study with strong personal convictions conditioned by my cultural upbringing. I must admit that my convictions have been altered as a result of reading

and reflecting upon the evolution and socio-religious impact of the wedding ring in both pagan and Christian history. I submit my findings and reflections, not to cast judgment on anyone, but to provide a broader basis to better determine what the Christian's attitude toward the wedding ring should be.

1. FINGER RINGS IN PAGAN HISTORY

Origin of the Finger Ring. The story of the finger ring is in a way like the ring itself, without beginning and without end. No one can tell for certain how far back the ring goes. Finger rings appear to have originated with the ancient Egyptians, evolving from the seal or signet. Because the seal was a sign of power, the wearer of a portable seal, a signet ring, was regarded as a person of great authority. A royal personage wishing to delegate his power to one of his officials, would hand him his signet ring. This would enable the subordinate to issue commands with full royal authority. We find a good example of this practice in Genesis 41:42: "Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph's hand" (cf. Esth 8:2).

The transformation of the signet ring into an ornament appears to have occurred also in Egypt. Wealthy Egyptian women wore gold rings on different fingers. The poorer classes wore rings of less costly materials, such as silver, bronze, glass, or pottery covered with a siliceous glaze and colored blue or green with various copper oxides.²

Greeks, Etruscans, and Romans refined the art of making ornamental rings. Throughout the period of the Roman Republic (449-31 B.C.), however, only iron finger rings were worn by most of the citizens. Slaves were forbidden to wear rings on their fingers. This policy of austerity came to an end at the beginning of the Imperial period (about 31 B. C.). Gold finger rings appeared but the right to wear them was restricted to ambassadors, then extended to senators, consuls, and chief officers of state.

Different laws were passed during Imperial Rome to govern the wearing of finger rings. Pliny informs us that Emperor Tiberius required that those who were not of free descent be owners of large property before having the right to wear gold finger rings.³ Emperor Severus extended the right to wear gold finger rings—*jus annuli aurei*—first to Roman soldiers and then to all free citizens. Silver finger rings were worn by freedmen, that is, slaves who had become free. Iron finger rings were worn by slaves. Under Emperor Justinian these restrictions were abolished. It is interesting to note that during Imperial Rome gold, silver, and iron finger rings were worn in accordance with the social class to which one belonged. The finger ring, so to speak, tied a person down to his or her social class.⁴

“Binding” Finger Rings. The use of a ring to “tie” a person to a social class may have derived from the legendary origin of the finger ring. In his *Natural History* Pliny tells us that the ring first entered Greek mythology when Prometheus dared to steal fire from heaven for earthly use. For this wanton crime Zeus chained him to a rock up in the Caucasus Mountains for thirty thousand years, during which time a vulture fed daily on his liver. After straining at the chain for many years, Prometheus finally succeeded in breaking away, taking a chunk of the mountain with the chain. Eventually Zeus relented and liberated Prometheus from the chain. However, to avoid a violation of the original judgment, Prometheus was ordered to wear a link of his chain on one of his fingers as a ring. On the ring was set a piece of the rock to which he had been chained as a constant reminder that he was bound to the rock.⁵

Apparently Pliny’s legend became a superstition which eventually evolved into a custom. “When a Roman slave was allowed his liberty,” wrote James McCarthy, “he received, along with cap and white vest, an iron finger ring. The slave had been fastened, so to speak, by a Caucasian chain of bondage. When granted his freedom he still had to wear, as Prometheus wore, an iron ring by way of remembrance. He was not permitted to have one of gold, for at that time that was a badge of citizenship.”⁶

Betrothal Ring. The Romans were also the first to use finger rings to “tie” people not only to their social classes, but also to their marital partners. During the betrothal ceremony the bridegroom gave a plain iron finger ring to the family of the bride as a symbol of his commitment and financial ability to support the bride. Marriages were not made in heaven but over a negotiating table. Originally the betrothal ceremony was more elaborate and important than the marriage rite, which was a simple fulfillment of the betrothal commitment. It was only much later in Christian history that the ring was made part of the wedding ceremony.

In his book *How It Began* Paul Berdanier claims that the binding use of the ring for betrothal ceremonies developed from an older superstitious practice in which a man tied cords around the waist, wrists and ankles of the woman he had fallen in love with, to make sure that her spirit would be held under his control.⁷ The pagan superstitions surrounding the origin of the Roman betrothal ring did not deter early Christians from adopting its use. Before looking at the Christian use of the finger ring, it may be well to mention a few pagan superstitions associated with the finger ring. This will help us place the wedding ring in its historical context.

The “Magic Power” of Finger Rings. Many legends have come down to us about the magic powers of finger rings. According to a popular

legend, King Solomon had a finger ring that transported him every day at noon into the firmament, where he heard the secrets of the universe. This explains his unfathomable wisdom. Another legend claims that Solomon had his ring set with unusual precious stones which served as a magic mirror in which he was able to see reflected the image of any place or person he wished. "Chronicles of long ago say this ring explained his uncanny gift of jurisprudence, as in the case of the two women who claimed a child as their own. Gazing into the depth of the mirror he was apprised of things to come."⁸ Allegedly Solomon's ring was later found and used by Jewish exorcists to drag demons out through the noses of sick people.⁹

There are also many stories about the healing power of finger rings. "The Greek physician Galen, of the 2nd century A. D., wrote of the Egyptian king's green jasper amulet that had the design of a dragon surrounded by rays. Galen held that it was a potent remedial agent for maladies of the digestive organs. Numbered among the medicinal rings are the royal 'cramp rings.' These were believed to offer protection against cramps and other ailments. Edward the Confessor, king of England in the 11th century, supposedly began the practice of using curative rings. When the king was accosted one day by an aged pilgrim, the story goes, he had no money but gave the pilgrim a ring as alms. The pilgrim, the Apostle John in disguise, returned the ring to the king, saying that he had blessed it and had given it curative powers. From that time on, up to the reign of Queen Mary I in the 16th century, on Good Friday, English kings and queens blessed and distributed rings held to be a cure for the 'falling sickness' (epilepsy)."¹⁰

Poison Finger Rings. In Roman times finger rings were worn not only to effect healing but also to poison oneself or others. Poison rings carried a liquid poison in a small cavity in the bezel. A spring was connected to the cavity in such a way that the murderer could give a fatal scratch while shaking the hand of the enemy. This device was probably suggested by the poison fang of a snake.

The Carthaginian general Hannibal took a fatal dose of poison from his ring (183 or 182 B. C.) rather than surrender to the Romans. The sixteenth-century Borgia family in Italy, known for its treachery, supposedly used poison rings to murder its enemies.

Astrological Finger Rings. Astrology, the belief that the stars influence the destinies of people, was popular among the Chaldeans, the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Romans, and it has flourished in the Western world even to our time. Until the seventeenth century astrological finger rings were very popular. These rings developed out of the belief that heavenly bodies have a

special influence over nations, cities, and individuals. They can affect the personal appearance, temperament, disposition, character, health, and fortune of people. To court the help of the planetary deities, it was important to wear rings formed of the gems and metals assigned to each of the seven planetary gods:

- “The Sun: a diamond or sapphire set in a ring of gold.
- The Moon: a crystal in silver ring.
- Mercury: a ‘magnet’ set in quicksilver.
- Venus: an amethyst in copper ring.
- Mars: an emerald in an iron ring.
- Jupiter: a cornelian set in tin.
- Saturn: a turquoise set in lead.”¹¹

These various rings set with different precious stones were worn according to the preference of the planetary god whose help was sought. A related development occurred just before the beginning of Christianity, when the Romans adopted from the Jews the seven-day week we use today. Prior to that time the Romans had used an eight-day week, known as *numdinum*. When the Romans adopted the seven-day week, they decided to name each day of the week after the planet-god which allegedly controlled the day (Sunday for the Sun god, Monday for the Moon god, etc.). The Jewish custom was to designate the days of the week by number (that is, first day, second day, etc.).

This belief that each day of the week was controlled by a planet-god, led to the development of finger rings set with the stone favored by the planet-god controlling the day. Wealthy people wore a different ring each day in accordance to the stone preference of the planet-god controlling that day. Apollonius of Tyana, a Pythagorean philosopher of the first century, offers the following list of finger rings set with different precious stones, to be worn on the proper planetary day of the week to ensure the favor of celestial influences:

<i>Day</i>	<i>Gem of the Day</i>	<i>Talismanic Gem</i>	<i>Astral Control</i>
Sunday	Diamond	Pearl	Sun
Monday	Pearl	Emerald	Moon
Tuesday	Ruby	Topaz	Mars
Wednesday	Amethyst	Turquoise	Mercury
Thursday	Cornelian	Sapphire	Jupiter
Friday	Emerald	Ruby	Venus
Saturday	Turquoise	Tourmaline	Saturn ¹²

Implications of Ring's Pagan Origin. The few examples cited above about the various superstitious and idolatrous use of finger rings are far from being exhaustive. The major encyclopedias I have consulted have lengthy articles describing the superstitious use of finger rings as charms, amulets, talismans, and as aids to the worship of various pagan gods.¹³ What has been mentioned should suffice to show that the origin of the finger ring is to be found in pagan superstitions and idolatrous practices.

The pagan origin and meanings of the finger ring raise questions about the legitimacy of its adoption by Christians to represent marital commitment. In the Bible the value of symbols is determined by their origin and meaning. The Sabbath, the Passover lamb and blood, the Lord's Supper, baptism, and footwashing are all valuable symbols, because they have been established by God to help us conceptualize and internalize spiritual realities. Their value is derived from their divine origin, meaning, and function. By contrast, the meaning of the wedding ring as a symbol of marital commitment finds its origin not in Scripture, but in pagan mythology and superstitions. To invest a pagan symbol with a sacred Christian meaning, can easily lead to a secularization of the symbol itself. As we shall see, this is exactly what has happened with the use of the wedding ring.

A case in point is the adoption of Sundaykeeping in early Christianity. As I have shown elsewhere,¹⁴ an important contributory factor to the Christian adoption of Sunday was the pagan veneration of the Sun god on its Sun-day. The attempt that Christians made to transform Sunday from a pagan holiday into a Christian Holy Day, was never successful. In spite of all the attempts that have been made throughout the centuries by church councils, popes, and Puritans to make Sunday into a holy day, the historical reality is that Sunday has largely remained a holiday, a day in which most people seek for personal pleasure and profit rather than for the presence and peace of God.

To a large extent the same has been true of the wedding ring. As we shall now see, in spite of the attempts made by church leaders to restrict the use of rings only to one plain marital ring, the historical reality is that many Christians throughout the centuries have given in to the temptation of wearing all sort of rings to adorn themselves rather than to express their marital commitment.

A Lesson from Ancient Rome. The trend to multiply the use of rings began in ancient Rome. In fact, the story of the betrothal ring in ancient Rome can be instructive for us today. Originally, as mentioned earlier, the betrothal ring was a plain iron ring, but it soon evolved into elaborate golden rings. *The Encyclopedia Britannica* states: "The giving of a ring to mark a betrothal was an old Roman custom. The ring was probably a mere pledge, *pignus*, that the

contract would be fulfilled. In Pliny's time [about 70 A. D.] conservative custom still required a plain ring of iron, but the gold ring was introduced in the course of the second century. This use of the ring, which was thus of purely secular origin, received ecclesiastical sanction, and formulae of benediction of the ring exist from the eleventh century."¹⁵

Tertullian (about 160-225), a pagan lawyer who became an influential church leader, lamented the extravagance in dress and ornaments that was evident among the Romans in his time. He commended the ancient Romans for encouraging modesty by condemning the wearing of gold, except the marital ring: "I see now no difference between the dress of matrons and prostitutes. In regard to women, indeed, those laws of your fathers, which used to be such an encouragement to modesty and sobriety, have fallen into desuetude, when a woman had yet known no gold upon her save on the finger, which, with the bridal ring, her husband had sacredly pledged to himself."¹⁶

The "laws of your fathers," which restricted the use of gold to the bridal ring, presumably were laws passed in the early part of the second century; as we just noted, at the time of Pliny (about A. D. 70) only the wearing of a plain betrothal iron ring was permitted. In other words, what began in the first century as a plain iron betrothal ring to express conjugal commitment, developed by the end of the second century into elaborate gold rings to display wealth, pride, and vanity. We shall see that the same thing happened in the Christian church.

James McCarthy noted the reason for this development: "The trouble with the Romans, as with others enamored of anything, was that they began to overdo the wearing of rings. They covered their fingers with them. Some even wore different rings for summer and winter. They were immoderate not only in the number of rings worn but also in their size. Even on the little finger extremely heavy rings of gold were worn during the twilight days of the Empire. Thumb rings of even more gigantic size were sported. It would seem as though the flash of rings paralleled the inevitable fall of the Roman Empire."¹⁷

McCarthy continues noting that in spite of the moralists' denunciations of their own countrymen for wearing too many rings, "rings continued to be worn and Rome continued to decline. Rome fell and the rings continued on. Whether there is a moral here I cannot say."¹⁸ Indeed there is a moral, because what happened in the history of imperial Rome, has been largely repeated in the history of Christianity.

2. THE WEDDING RING IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Rings in the Bible. The Bible gives no indication that finger rings were used as betrothal or nuptial rings. The signet ring is the earliest type of ring mentioned in the Bible. When Tamar disguised herself as a harlot to entice her father-in-law, Judah, she asked him for his signet, cord, and staff as a pledge for his promise to send her “a kid from the flock” (Gen 38:17-19). Jeremiah informs us that the Israelites wore the signet ring on the right hand (Jer 22:24). The signet ring was used to seal various contracts. It was a symbol of authority, dignity, and social status (James 2:2). Pharaoh gave his signet ring to Joseph as a symbol of authority (Gen 41:42). Likewise, Ahasuerus gave his signet to Haman to seal a royal decree (Esth 3:10, 12). Upon his return the prodigal son received a ring from his father as a symbol of dignity (Luke 15:22).

The finger rings mentioned in the Bible are signet rings used as symbol of authority and dignity. The Romans are credited for pioneering the use of the signet ring as a betrothal ring. The Jews and the Christians borrowed the practice from the Romans. Since the betrothal ceremony usually involved the groom giving a sum of money or a valuable object to the bride, it was a natural transition to make this object a ring.

Betrothal Rings in Early Christianity. How early the Christians adopted the Roman custom of the betrothal ring is unknown. There is no mention of betrothal rings in the New Testament, apparently because their use had not yet begun. The earliest Christian betrothal rings have been found in the Roman catacombs, underground burial-places dug outside the city of Rome from about A. D. 200.¹⁹ From about the same time we have the testimonies of Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria about the Christian use of the betrothal ring. In the light of these archeological and literary evidences we can assume that Christians adopted the use of betrothal ring in the latter part of the second century.

The most common material of the betrothal ring found in the catacomb is bronze, though a few iron rings have survived. “As a rule, early Christian rings of gold are rare. This might be expected, as the use of rich and numerous ornaments was not in accordance with the teaching of the early church.”²⁰ Contrary to the pagan fashion of wearing a “ring on nearly every joint,” the early Christians wore *only one* ring, the marital ring.²¹

It is interesting to note that the early Christians followed the Roman custom of using the ring for the betrothal ceremony rather than the wedding service. The reason appears to be that originally the wedding was not an elaborate ceremony as it is today, “but a simple affirmation of mutual love and

obedience.”²² In other words, betrothal rituals were more elaborate than wedding services. Even the betrothal, as Joseph Bingham explains, “was an innocent ceremony, used by the Romans before the beginning of Christianity, and in some measure admitted by the Jews, whence it was adopted among the Christian rites of espousal without any opposition or contradiction.”²³

Purpose of the Marital Ring. The reason Christians did not oppose the adoption of the betrothal ring is because they perceived it to be not an ornament but a symbol of marital commitment. They did not anticipate that the betrothal ring would eventually tempt Christians to follow the example of the pagans in wearing all sorts of ornamental rings.

Tertullian (about 160-225), though known as a “rigorist” for promoting strict standards of Christian conduct and for condemning the use of jewelry, seems to have approved the use of the marital ring. We noted earlier that Tertullian lamented the adoption by Roman women of seductive ornaments, but he commends the ancient Romans for teaching women “modesty and sobriety” by condemning the wearing of gold “save on the finger, which, with the bridal ring, her husband had sacredly pledged to himself.”²⁴ This passage suggests that Tertullian viewed the marital ring not as an improper adornment, but as an evidence of modesty and a symbol of a sacred pledge to one’s spouse.

A similar view was expressed by Clement of Alexandria (about 150-215), a contemporary of Tertullian who headed the catechetical (baptismal) school of Alexandria from 190 to 202. In his book *The Instructor*, Clement went to considerable length to explain why Christian women should not wear luxurious clothes, rings, earrings, or elaborate hair styles, and “smear their faces with the ensnaring devices of wily cunning.”²⁵ In the midst of his treatment of the various inappropriate Christian ornaments, he wrote approvingly of the signet ring as the only permissible one. “The Word [Christ] permits them [women] a finger-ring of gold. Nor is this for ornament, but for sealing things which are worth keeping safe in the house, in the exercise of their charge of housekeeping.”²⁶

The “sealing” function of the ring suggests that it was a signet ring that apparently functioned also as a marital ring. It is evident that by the time of Clement (about 200) the ring was made of gold. This represents a departure from the first century custom of wearing only plain iron betrothal rings. “Even now,” wrote Pliny the Elder in his *Natural History* at about A. D. 70, “the bridal ring is made of iron and without jewels.”²⁷

The purpose of the ring for Clement was not ornamental (“Nor is this for ornament”), but practical and protective. It is *practical* because the wife

used the signet ring the husband gave her to seal those goods “worth keeping safe in the house.” If a servant ran away with some household goods, the seal on them would prove the ownership. The signet ring worn by the wife represented the authority her husband had delegated to her to manage all the household goods.

It was *protective* because it served as “a band of chaste modesty, lest through giddiness they [women] slip away from the truth.”²⁸ The signet ring was the only ring allowed to Christian women: “He [Christ] allows us a signet for this purpose only. Other finger-rings are to be cast off, since, according to the Scripture, ‘instruction is a golden ornament for a wise man’”²⁹

Rings in Wedding Ceremonies. The use of rings in wedding ceremonies is traced back to the early part of the fourth century.³⁰ However, the first explicit description of the ring’s usage seems to come from Isidore of Seville, who became archbishop of that city in 595. He wrote: “The ring is given by the espouser to the espoused either for a sign of mutual fidelity or still more to join their hearts by this pledge; and therefore the ring is placed on the fourth finger because a certain vein, it is said, flows thence to the heart.”³¹

The belief that the fourth finger (counting from the thumb), has a *vena amoris*—a love vein running directly to the heart—is obviously pure superstition. The annular (ring) finger shares the same “route” to the heart as the other fingers. In spite of its superstitious origin, the custom of wearing the wedding ring on the fourth finger of the left hand has prevailed in most Christian countries to this day.

Episcopal Rings. Knowing the attraction that rings have exerted upon the laity, it is not surprising that the clergy also adopted the use of rings. The most famous ecclesiastical rings are the “episcopal ring” that was conferred upon the newly elected bishop and the “fisherman’s ring” worn by the pope. The latter derives its name from the gemstone which carries an engraving of Peter in a boat pulling up a fishing net.

The episcopal ring, as *The Catholic Encyclopedia* explains, “was strictly speaking an episcopal ornament conferred in the rite of consecration, and it was commonly regarded as emblematic of the betrothal of the bishop to His Church.”³² The Gregorian formula, still used today in delivering the ring, says: “Receive the ring, that is to say the seal of faith, whereby thou, being thyself adorned with spotless faith, may keep unsullied the troth which thou pledged to the spouse of God, His holy Church.”³³ The idea of conjugal fidelity is symbolically present also in the episcopal rings.

It is noteworthy that the same encyclopedia traces the origin of the episcopal ring back to the golden ring worn by ancient pagan priests consecrated to the worship of Jupiter: “Knowing as we do, that in the pagan days of Rome every flamen Dialis (i.e., a priest specially consecrated to the worship of Jupiter) had, like the senators, the privilege of wearing a gold ring, it would not be surprising to find evidence in the fourth century that rings were worn by Christian bishops.”³⁴ The same source, however, questions the validity of the fourth century’s evidence, arguing instead that the first unmistakable evidence comes to us from a Decree issued by Pope Boniface IV in 610, requiring monks elevated to the episcopal dignity to wear the ring.³⁵

Bishops and popes came to love their rings so much that they wanted to be buried with them. This explains why splendid collection of episcopal rings have been found in papal sarcophagi (coffins) and have come down to us. The influence of paganism is evident in many of the episcopal rings since they are set with ancient pagan gems engraved with pagan symbols. Referring to episcopal rings, *The Encyclopedia Britannica* says: “In many cases an antique gem was mounted in the bishop’s ring, and often an inscription was added in the gold setting of the gem to give a Christian name to the pagan figure.”³⁶ In other cases, according to the same source, no change was made to the pagan engraving and “the gem appears to have been merely regarded as an ornament without meaning.”³⁷

Leavening Influence. The pagan influence on the Christian use of the finger ring is evident, not only in the pagan engravings on the episcopal rings, but also in the proliferation of ornamental rings on the fingers of both laity and clergy. What happened in pagan Rome was repeated in the Christian church. As in pagan Rome so in the Christian church the betrothal ring began as a single plain iron ring to express conjugal fidelity, but it soon evolved into elaborate gold rings set with gems to display wealth, pride, and vanity. This was true not only for the laity but also for the clergy.

The Encyclopedia Britannica states: “In the 15th and 16th centuries bishops often wore three or four rings on the right hand in addition to a large jewel which was fixed to the back of each glove.”³⁸ This image of church leaders bedecked and bejeweled with gold rings, precious stones and gold embroidered vestments stands in stark contrast to the apostolic call to dress modestly, without “gold or pearls or costly attire” (1 Tim 2:9; cf. 1 Pet 3:3).

It is obvious that when church leaders became enamored with gold rings, jewels, and costly vestments, they could no longer in good conscience admonish the people to be modest in their outward adornment. This explains why, as we saw in chapter three, during the Middle Ages the admonitions to modesty in dress and ornaments are most often given to the clergy rather than to the laity.

Looking back from the vantage point of history, one cannot help but see the leavening influence of the wedding ring. The concession that church leaders made for Christians to wear only the marital ring, soon became a pretext for wearing all kinds of ornamental rings. By the fourth century the proliferation of rings must have assumed such alarming proportions that the so-called *Apostolic Constitutions* outlawed the use of finger rings: “Neither do thou put a gold ring upon thy fingers; for all these ornaments are signs of lasciviousness, which if thou be solicitous about in an indecent manner, thou will not act as becomes a good man.”³⁹ Apparently this ecclesiastical law was soon forgotten, because, as we have just seen, even the very church leaders decked themselves with gold rings set in gems.

History Repeats Itself. The saying that “history repeats itself” applies in a special way to the history of the wedding ring. What happened in the early church and during the Middle Ages has been repeated in the internal history of several denominations which grew out of the Reformation. We have found that in the early church the use of the marital ring evolved through three main stages. In the first stage of the apostolic period, there was no apparent use of the marital ring. In the second stage of the second and third centuries, there was a restricted use of only one plain inexpensive conjugal ring which served also as signet ring for sealing purposes. In the final stage from the fourth century onward there was a proliferation of all kinds of ornamental rings and jewelry.

This pattern of no marital ring in the first stage, plain marital ring in the second stage, and all kinds of ornamental rings and jewelry in the final stage, has recurred in the internal history of various denominations that grew out of the Reformation. To appreciate more fully the recurrence of this pattern, we shall briefly look at the history of the wedding ring within the Methodist, Mennonite, and Seventh-day Adventist churches.

The Wedding Ring in the Methodist Church. From the very beginning of the Methodist movement John Wesley (1703-1791) advocated plainness of dress and avoidance of jewelry in general and rings in particular. In his *Advice to the People Called Methodists, with Regard to Dress*, he wrote: “Wear no gold, no pearls, or precious stones . . . I do not advise women to wear rings, earrings, necklaces.”⁴⁰ Wesley went to great length to give Scriptural support for his position, quoting among other scriptures the words of Peter, “Let not yours be the outward adorning with braiding of hair, decoration of gold, and the wearing of fine clothing, but let it be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable jewel of a gentle and quiet spirit” (1 Peter 3:3).

Wesley's preaching brought results. Both in England and America the Methodists dressed as "plain people," without jewelry or rings. At the organizing conference of the Methodist Episcopal church in 1784 the question was asked "should we insist on the Rules concerning Dress?" The answer was, "By all means. This is no time to give encouragement to superfluity of apparel. Therefore give no ticket to any, till they have left off superfluous ornaments . . . Allow no exempt case, not even of a married woman. . . Give no admission to those who wear rings."⁴¹ Tickets were given for the admission to the communion service. Those who did not comply with the very high standard of the church were not admitted to this service. Such a strict policy sounds unreasonable to many today. We must understand this policy in the social context of eighteenth-century America where the church regulated the lifestyle of its members.

The original rule regarding dress and ornaments became part of the Methodist church manual, known as *Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Church* and continued in this form until 1852. The early Methodists took the admonitions of their founder seriously. They lived a plain lifestyle, avoiding gambling, dancing, cosmetics, and jewelry, including rings.

The Adoption of the Wedding Ring. The first mention of the wedding ring as an option in a marriage ceremony, occurs in the 1872 manual of the Methodist Church, known as *Discipline*: "*If the parties desire it, the man shall here hand a ring to the minister, who shall return it to him and direct him to place it on the third finger of the woman's left hand. And the man shall say to the woman, repeating after the minister, 'With this ring I thee wed, and with my worldly goods I thee endow, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.'*"⁴²

One year later, in 1873, the Presbyterian Church followed the example of the Methodists by changing their manual to allow for the use of the ring in the marriage ceremony: "*If they desire to pass a ring, the minister, here taking the ring, may deliver it to the man, to put it upon the fourth finger of the woman's left hand.*"⁴³ Gradually other denominations relaxed their standards of dress and ornaments, allowing the wearing of rings and jewelry in general.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, the use of the ring in wedding ceremonies became very popular in America. A book on etiquette published in 1881 says: "All the churches at present use the ring, and vary the sentiment of its adoption to suit the custom and ideas of their own rites."⁴⁴ This statement is not quite accurate, because there were churches which did not use the ring in the wedding ceremony. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is a case in point.

It must be recognized, however, that even those churches which did not approve the wearing of the wedding ring had difficulty in preventing its use among their members. In writing about his own Mennonite church, Melvin Gingerich mentioned “instances of wedding rings being worn by wives in the church during the latter part of the nineteenth century from eastern Pennsylvania to Iowa and Missouri, although this was not the usual practice.”⁴⁵

The Methodist Church upheld Wesley’s standard on dress and ornaments until 1852.⁴⁶ After that date the Methodist manual no longer regulates the dress and jewelry of the clergy or the people. Several Methodist clergymen I consulted about this question have confirmed to me that jewelry has not been an issue in their church for many years now. No disciplinary measures are taken toward those who wear excessive jewelry. Dean Kelly, a Methodist scholar, goes as far as to say that “for decades there hasn’t been anything you could do that would get you drummed out of the Methodist Church.”⁴⁷

Wesley’s Law. The result of the relaxation of church standards in such areas as dress, ornaments and amusements is usually a loss of sense of identity and mission of the church. The reason is that members identify more with the secular values of society than with the religious values of their founding fathers. It appears that to the degree that churches become prosperous and permissive in lifestyle, to the same degree they experience decline in spirituality and membership.

In his classic book *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing*, Dean Kelly calls this cycle “Wesley’s Law.” “John Wesley, the founder of the [Methodist] movement, has summed up this process in what might be called Wesley’s Law. ‘*Whenever riches have increased, the essence of religion has decreased in the same proportion.* Therefore, I do not see how it is possible, in the nature of things, for any revival of religion to continue long. For religion must necessarily produce both industry and frugality, and these cannot but produce riches. But as riches increase, so will pride, anger, and love of the world in all its branches. . . . *Is there no way to prevent this—this continual decay of pure religion?*’”⁴⁸

Wesley understood with amazing clarity what causes the growth or decline of a church. The fulfillment of his “prophetic” insight can be seen in the history of many churches, including his own Methodist Church. In fact, The United Methodist Church is one of the six major Protestant churches which in recent years have experienced a consistent significant decline in membership, church school enrollment, and number of overseas missionaries.⁴⁹

To reverse the trend, Kelly proposed three steps which can be summarized as follows: First, a church must clarify her goals, central

convictions, and standards of lifestyle. Second, a church must decide how to enforce her standards. Third, a church must communicate effectively “its beliefs, its standards, to members (internal) and to others (external).”⁵⁵

A Warning for the Adventist Church. What has happened in the Methodist Church can serve as a warning to the Adventist Church. Kelly, though himself a Methodist, made this point in an article entitled, “How Adventism Can Stop Growing.” His answer is simple and yet profound: “Be like the Methodists.”⁵¹ According to Kelly all that Adventists need to do to stop growing and begin declining is to emphasize that church standards of abstinence, dress, diet, tithing, etc., are “not really essential to salvation.” Such an emphasis causes the decline of the church because it “deprives faith of its unique and necessary texture and practice and cost.”⁵²

In the light of the above observations, it is evident that church standards affecting such sensitive areas as dress and jewelry can contribute to the growth or decline of the church. Believers who observe high standards are constantly reminded of their calling and mission in the world.

Jewelry in the Mennonite Church. Like the early Methodists, the Mennonites have maintained historically a strong stand against the wearing of jewelry, including the wedding ring. In his book *Mennonite Attire Through Four Centuries*, Melvin Gingerich noted that “at least thirty-nine conference resolutions against wearing of jewelry were passed in the years 1864-1949, half of which came after 1918.”⁵³ The articles of jewelry to be avoided included “wedding rings, gold rings, pearls, bracelets, broaches, pins, necklaces, and engagement rings.”⁵⁴ “In some instances an attempt was made to distinguish between the ornamental and the utilitarian [jewelry], only the former being prohibited.”⁵⁵

Gingerich admitted that it has not been easy for the Mennonite Church to enforce her policy against jewelry, especially regarding the wedding ring. He writes: “*Perhaps the most difficult struggle in enforcing the above regulations has to do with the wedding ring. . . .* As long as the (old) Mennonites remained a rural people and lived in almost solid communities, there was not much need for wives to declare their marital status to the public. But when men began to enter the professions and move to the cities away from their solid communities, often the couples became convinced that the use of the wedding band both as a symbol and as a protective device was essential.”⁵⁶

The wearing of the wedding ring among the Mennonities has accelerated since World War II, according to Gingerich. “Since World War II the increasing urbanization of Mennonites has made it more difficult for them to maintain their distinctive costumes, including the practice of not wearing

wedding rings, and as a result in many congregations the practice of wearing it is now common, not only for wives but also for husbands.”⁵⁷

Historically we have found that the acceptance of the wedding ring has opened the door for the use of all kinds of jewelry. Gingerich acknowledges this trend in his own Mennonite church: “Along with this [wedding ring] has come an increasing use of other forms of jewelry.”⁵⁸ Recognizing the implication of this trend for the Mennonite Church, Gingerich urges his church to continue to stress the importance of bringing the whole Christian life “under the scrutiny of the New Testament standards relating to humility, stewardship, modesty, and simplicity.”⁵⁹

3. THE WEDDING RING IN THE HISTORY OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

Pressure to Conform. The wedding ring has been a sensitive issue in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is important to remember that Ellen White and other Adventist leaders came out of the Methodist Church and other churches which had a firm stand against wearing jewelry, including rings. As these churches relaxed their stand in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Adventists felt the pressure to follow the trend.

The situation which confronted Adventists is reflected in an article entitled “The Practice of Wearing Gold,” published in the *Review and Herald* in 1869. The author, Daniel Bourdeau, a French-speaking American who labored among the French people in Canada, the United States, and Europe, wrote: “Not many years since it was considered a sin by Baptists, Methodists, and other denominations, to wear gold; and I well remember when the Baptists, to whom I belonged, and who used to enjoy more of the spirit of God than they now do, made it a rule to take up a labor, in love, with those members who put on gold. But for quite a number of years the different denominations have undergone a great change on this point, and have almost universally adopted the practice of wearing gold and other vain ornaments.”⁶⁰

A factor which contributed to this new trend was the successive waves of immigrants arriving on the American shores in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Understandably, these immigrants brought with them their customs, including that of wearing jewelry, especially the wedding band. Various denominations adapted to the new situation by assuming a permissive attitude toward the wearing of jewelry.

The new and growing Adventist Church felt the same pressure. Thus it is not surprising that Ellen White had to address the encroachment of

jewelry. She told the story of a recently baptized lady who had given up her costly jewelry. During a visit to Battle Creek this new convert was surprised to see her sisters in the faith wearing various kinds of jewelry. One day she visited with a sister who occupied a responsible position at an Adventist institution in Battle Creek. In the course of the conversation she expressed her intent to dispose of some jewelry she kept in her trunk and “put the proceeds in the Lord’s treasury.” The sister of more experience tried to dissuade her, saying: “Why do you sell it? I would wear it if it were mine.” To demonstrate that she meant what she said, she “displayed a gold ring on her finger, given to her by an unbeliever.” And then she commented, “We are not so particular as formerly.” The new convert was astonished but decided to adhere to the Biblical principles of modesty and simplicity she had accepted upon joining the Adventist Church.⁶¹

Negative Influence Upon Others. This story reveals a fundamental reason Ellen White counseled Adventists against wearing jewelry, namely, the negative influence upon others. In 1881 she wrote: “Here the Lord, through His apostle, speaks expressly against the wearing of gold [1 Timothy 2:9-10]. Let those who have had experience see to it that they do not lead others astray on this point by their example. That ring encircling your finger may be very plain, but it is useless, and the wearing of it has a wrong influence upon others.”⁶²

To call a plain ring “useless” may sound harsh, but we must understand this comment in the context of that time. In America rings were still worn primarily as ornaments. The use of the ring in wedding ceremonies, as we have seen, was still an option in most American churches. As we shall see, Ellen White did not condemn wearing a wedding ring “in countries where the custom is imperative.”⁶³ Consequently the “plain ring” she had in mind most likely was an ornamental ring. Such rings were “useless” because they did not fulfill any utilitarian function. Wearing ornamental rings or other kinds of jewelry was for Ellen White not only a departure “from the plain teachings of the Bible,”⁶⁴ but also a negative influence upon others.

Ellen White understood the important truth that Christianity is more easily caught than taught. Throughout her ministry she appealed for simplicity and modesty, in order to influence people for Christ. “Let us dress in such a modest, becoming way that we will be received wherever we go. Jewelry and expensive dress will not give us influence, but the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit—the result of devotion to the service of Christ—will give us power with God.”⁶⁵

Negative Influence Upon Self. A second important reason Ellen White counseled Adventists against wearing jewelry and extravagant clothes

is that they encourage vanity and pride. “Those who cling to the ornaments forbidden in God’s word cherish pride and vanity in the heart. They desire to attract attention. Their dress says: Look at me; admire me. Thus the vanity inherent in human nature is steadily increasing by indulgence. When the mind is fixed upon pleasing God alone, all the needless embellishments of the person disappear.”⁶⁶

Indulgence in vanity and pride by displaying jewelry and costly apparel “stifles the desire to do good,”⁶⁷ because when people become obsessed with beautifying the body, they have less interest, time, or money for the needs of others.

Responsible Stewardship. This leads to the third reason Ellen White admonished Adventists not to wear jewelry, namely, responsible stewardship. She rightly believed that God calls us to be responsible stewards of our time, health, and money. “Every dollar saved by denying one’s self of useless ornaments may be given to the needy or may be placed in the Lord’s treasury to sustain the gospel, to send missionaries to foreign countries, to multiply publications to carry rays of light to souls in the darkness of error. Every dollar used unnecessarily deprives the spender of a precious opportunity to do good.”⁶⁸

Like Wesley, Ellen White was very conscious of the needs of the poor and of the fledging church. She stretched every dollar to meet the many needs of the expanding programs of the church. She viewed her money as God’s money to be spent judiciously. “How much money [have you] expended to please your fancy and win the admiration of hearts as vain as your own? It was God’s money. How much good you might have done with it!”⁶⁹

The Wedding Ring Statement. Ellen White’s concern for responsible stewardship helps us understand her position about the wedding ring. It should be noted that, contrary to what many Adventists think, the wedding ring was not a burning issue in Ellen White’s mind. This is shown by the fact that in all her writing of about 100,000 pages, we find only one single explicit statement about the wedding ring.

This important statement first appeared in a letter she wrote in 1892 from Melbourne, Australia, addressed to “My Dear Brethren and Sisters.” The statement was later published in 1923 in the compilation entitled *Special Testimonies to Ministers and Workers*, under the chapter “Economy to be Practiced in All Things.”⁷⁰ At that time Ellen White was in Australia guiding the beginning of the Adventist work on that vast continent. The members were few, 376 to be specific,⁷¹ but the needs were many. The church was in financial distress as the building program was getting started with the construction of a publishing house.

The financial situation was so tight that every penny was needed to alleviate the situation. She lamented the fact that in spite of the financial crunch, some members were spending their money for extravagant furniture, food, and clothes, instead of placing it in the church's treasury. American missionaries who struggled to live on a meager salary were also carried away and buying expensive wedding rings just to comply with customs.

In the context of this difficult and complicated situation Ellen White penned her statement about the wedding ring: "Some have had a burden in regard to the wearing of a marriage ring, feeling that the wives of our [American] ministers should conform to this custom. All this is unnecessary. Let the ministers' wives have the golden link which binds their souls to Jesus Christ, a pure and holy character, the true love and meekness and godliness that are the fruit borne upon the Christian tree, and their influence will be secure anywhere. The fact that disregard of the custom occasions remark is no good reason for adopting it. Americans can make their position understood by plainly stating that the custom is not regarded as obligatory in our country. We need not wear the sign, for we are not untrue to our marriage vow, and the wearing of the ring would be no evidence that we were true. I feel deeply over this leavening process which seems to be going on among us, in conformity to custom and fashion. Not one penny should be spent for a circlet of gold to testify that we are married."⁷²

This statement is clearly addressed to American missionaries serving in Australia who had not worn marital rings before, because in America it was not obligatory. Ellen White felt that there was no need for American missionaries to buy rings. Her counsel was based on four major considerations. First, it was not difficult for American missionaries to explain why they did not wear a wedding ring, since it was not their national custom. Second, the custom was irrelevant, because wearing a ring was not a proof of marital fidelity. Third, the money spent to buy rings could be used to meet the urgent financial needs of the church. Fourth, wearing marriage rings could have "a leavening process" by encouraging "conformity to custom and fashion." These were legitimate considerations which to a large extent are still relevant today.

Gradual Reform. It is important to note that Ellen White respected, without endorsing, the custom of wearing the wedding ring in countries where it was regarded as imperative. Her statement continues: "*In countries where the custom is imperative, we have no burden to condemn those who have their marriage ring; let them wear it if they can do so conscientiously; but let our missionaries feel that the wearing of the ring will increase their influence one jot or tittle. If they are Christians, it will be manifest in their*

Christlikeness of character, in their words, in their works, in the home, in association with others.”⁷³

The phrase “*if they can do so conscientiously*” suggests that Ellen White did not give a blanket endorsement to the wearing of the marital ring even in countries where it was a social imperative. The “if” suggests that even in such countries some may have difficulty reconciling the wearing of the ring with their conscience. This may be true when the conscience is enlightened by a fuller understanding of the origin, meaning, and spiritual impact of the marriage ring.

Personally I must confess that I could have worn a wedding band conscientiously until now (though I have never done so) because I viewed it solely through the glasses of my Italian culture as a symbol of marital status. For the same reason I have never dissuaded my wife from wearing her wedding band. However, now that I have learned about its pagan origin, its negative impact on the history of Christianity, and its potential leavening influence upon my spiritual life and that of others, I could never consider wearing a marriage ring in good conscience. I am pleased that my wife also has come to view the wedding band from a different perspective.

Ellen White understood this important truth: to be successful reforms must be conducted no faster than people can understand new truths. This is why she did not object to our members wearing the wedding ring in Europe or Australia. She understood that it would take time for them to understand “the leavening process” of the wedding ring. Her philosophy is well expressed in the counsel she gave about diet reform, which is applicable to reform in dress and jewelry: “*We must go no faster than we can take those with us whose consciences and intellects are convinced of the truths we advocate. We must meet the people where they are.* Some of us have been many years in arriving at our present position in health reform. It is slow work to obtain a reform in diet. We have powerful appetites to meet. . . . *In reforms we would better come one step short of the mark than to go one step beyond it. And if there is error at all, let it be on the side next to the people.*”⁷⁴

Ellen White’s Respect for Local Custom. William C. White, son of Ellen White, related two episodes which illustrate his mother’s respect (but not endorsement) for the local custom of wearing the marriage ring. The first is from Europe, where Ellen White served from 1885 to 1887. Late in 1885 in Basel an Adventist minister was preaching one night against the wearing of jewelry, including rings. A lady interrupted the preacher to ask if the wedding ring was included. Without hesitation, he responded, “Yes, everything.” The incident stirred up considerable controversy, because in Europe the wedding band was not viewed as an ornament.

When the matter was reported to Ellen White, according to her son W. C. White, who was present at the meeting, “She [Ellen White] said that where the wearing of the wedding ring was demanded by custom as a matter of loyalty, our preachers should not press the matter of its being laid aside.”⁷⁵ Referring to the same episode in a place where wearing the ring was considered imperative, W. C. White wrote again in another letter: “She [Ellen White] said that it was right for us to discern a difference between wearing rings as a matter of adornment and wearing the wedding ring as a token of loyalty to the husband.”⁷⁶ It should be noticed that such difference applies to countries where the wearing of the marriage ban was demanded by custom.

The second episode involves W. C. White himself. While he was in Australia working with his mother, he met a young lady, Ethel May Lacey, with whom he fell in love. She was a Britisher, living in Tasmania. Her father had retired in Australia from the British police service. Her family and friends viewed wearing the wedding ring as essential. Knowing Ellen White’s objection to American missionaries wearing the wedding band, May decided to talk the matter over with her future mother-in-law (Ellen White). Shortly afterwards she reported the conversation to her fiance, “Willie,” saying: “She [Ellen White] says she has no objection whatever to my wearing one.”⁷⁷ After they settled in their new home, and everyone knew them, she removed the ring and never wore it again, because she did not feel comfortable with it.⁷⁸

In the light of this experience W. C. White explained that his mother did not object to “wearing a ring as token of loyalty in those countries and among those people where such a custom is so thoroughly established, [that] the departure from that custom will be universally misunderstood.”⁷⁹

These considerations lead us to conclude that Ellen White never envisioned that her counsel on the wedding ring should become a rule by which every Adventist member around the world had to live. In countries where wearing the marriage ring was imperative, she left it to the individual conscience to decide whether or not to follow the custom. However, she did not hesitate to express her strong concern that wearing a ring does contribute to a “leavening process” by encouraging conformity to fashion. Her strong concerns were not without merit. We have found historically that allowing the wedding ring has given to many the pretext for wearing ornamental rings, earrings, necklaces, bracelets, etc. We shall see that this “leavening process” has also affected the Adventist Church.

Adventist Views Since 1925. The use of the ring in wedding ceremonies became well established in most American Protestant churches during the early part of the twentieth century. Not surprisingly, some

Adventists also wanted a “ring ceremony.” To discourage such practice, which would have sanctioned the widespread use of the wedding ring and eventually of ornamental rings, at the 1925 Autumn Council church leaders voted an action which would later be included in the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*: “Resolved . . . that we look with disfavor upon the ring ceremony and upon ministers officiating at marriages of believers and unbelievers or with those not of our faith.”⁸⁰ This statement appeared in several editions of the *Church Manual* until 1951.

The disapproval of the “ring ceremony” by the *Church Manual* did not curtail the use of jewelry, especially rings. This led church leaders in North America to address the question again three years later at the 1935 Autumn Council. This time they expressed themselves more explicitly: “Our church members have from the beginning been a plain people. Our standard calls for discarding of jewelry, especially those articles mentioned in the Scriptures and the Spirit of Prophecy, such as rings, earrings, bracelets, and necklaces; we appeal for a greater loyalty to these important and divinely given standards.”⁸¹

This statement makes no specific mention of the wedding ring, apparently because at that time the problem in the church was more the wearing of jewelry in general than of the wedding ring in particular. The situation soon changed. As the wedding ring gained popularity in the American society during World War II for reasons to be mentioned below, an increasing number of Adventists in North America also began wearing the wedding band.

To discourage the growing custom of wearing marriage rings a new statement specifically mentioning the wedding ring, was introduced in the 1951 edition of the *Church Manual*. The statement is largely based on the counsel given by Ellen White in 1892 and restricts the wearing of the wedding band to those countries where such custom is imperative: “In some countries the custom of wearing the marriage ring is considered imperative, having become, in the minds of the people, a criterion of virtue, and hence it is not regarded as an ornament. Under such circumstances we have no disposition to condemn the practice.”⁸²

Approval of Marriage Band in North America. The restrictive policy of the 1951 *Church Manual* remained in effect in North America until 1986. In that year the North American Division Annual Council voted to lift the restriction and to allow church members in North America the possibility of wearing a plain marriage band as in other countries. The statement reads: “Voted to recognize that, in harmony with the position stated in the *Church*

Manual (pp.145-146), some church members in the North American Division as in other parts of the world feel that wearing a simple marriage band is a symbol of faithfulness to the marriage vow, and to declare that such persons should be fully accepted in the fellowship and service of the church.”⁸³

Several factors have contributed to lifting the restriction on the wearing of the marriage band in North America. Since 1951 large numbers of Adventist members have come to America from countries where wearing a wedding band is socially indispensable. In many cases these members have continued wearing the marriage band in America. There are also American Adventists who believe that wearing a marriage band has become imperative in North America as it has been in other countries. Consequently, they maintain that Ellen White’s 1892 concession for “countries where the custom is imperative” is now applicable to North America as well.

There is no doubt that the custom of wearing the wedding ring has gained momentum in the United States since World War II. In his book *Rings Through the Ages*, James McCarthy gives a reason for this development: “With the coming of war [World War II], home never seemed so precious to the young man; never did he cling so poignantly to home and wife and all that his marriage meant. Bridegrooms began insisting on the double-ring ceremony. A ring was about all of home they could carry off to war. The young bride demanded that her soldier husband have some appropriate reminder of his marital status while gallivanting around the globe.”⁸⁴

The popularity of wedding rings has steadily increased in the United States since World War II, giving rise to a new industry dedicated exclusively to designing new styles of rings. Today most wedding rings are no longer plain golden bands without jewels but come in all kinds of shapes, often studded with diamonds and other precious stones. According to several jewelers I consulted, about 90% of the wedding rings they sell are set with diamonds or other precious stones. This means that only about 10% of the people buy and wear plain wedding bands. The jewelers told me that plain wedding bands are fast falling out of fashion, and it will not be long before they will be a thing of the past. Thus, it can no longer be said that wedding rings are not an ornament, because most of them are set with diamonds or other gems. Bejeweled wedding rings are costly ornaments, not in keeping with the Biblical principles of modesty and simplicity.

A “Leavening Process.” The increasing popularity of rings is influencing Adventists both in North America and overseas. My itinerant ministry in many parts of the world exposes me constantly to the reality of the “leavening process” of conformity to fashionable jewelry. In our large

churches it is becoming a common experience for me to greet church members wearing not only diamond wedding rings, but also earrings, bracelets, and necklaces.

I recall that when I was growing up in Italy our sisters wore only a plain marital band. How different it is today! Recently I preached in some of the largest churches in Northern Italy, Austria, Switzerland, Denmark, Norway, and England. Everywhere I saw an increasing number of members profusely adorned with jewelry, including ornate marital rings. The situation is not much different in North America. The comment that I often hear is that jewelry is not an issue anymore.

The intent of these observations is not to judge the motives of those members who wear diamond rings and other types of jewelry. My experience has been that many of these members are very sincere and do not attach much importance to the jewelry they wear. They wear it to dress up for formal occasions, as expected by social etiquette. They do not necessarily make an “idol” of the jewelry they wear and they are willing to remove it when they understand the principles of modesty, simplicity, and stewardship.

Rather, my intent is to show that Ellen White had reason to “feel deeply over this leavening process”⁸⁵ of conforming to the world in such small things as a plain marital band. This survey of the marriage ring in the history of some Christian churches has shown how such a small thing as a plain marital band can open the door to much greater compromises by tempting people to wear other kinds of jewelry.

Conclusion. We asked two questions at the outset: (1) Should Christians wear a marriage ring? (2) Does a plain marriage band fall into the category of the inappropriate ornaments of gold and pearls mentioned by Paul and Peter? We have sought for an answer to these questions by tracing the history of the ring first in ancient Rome, and then in Christian churches. What we have learned from this historical survey can be summarized in five major points.

First, the origin of the finger ring is shrouded in pagan mythology and idolatrous practices. To invest a pagan symbol with a sacred Christian meaning can easily lead to the secularization of the symbol itself. A case in point has been the Christian adoption of the Day of the Sun as the Lord’s Day, which soon became a holiday rather than a Holy Day.

Second, the Romans introduced the use of a plain iron ring to “tie” the betrothal commitment of two lovers. However, we have found that the plain iron betrothal ring soon evolved into elaborate gold rings used to cover all the fingers.

Third, what happened in pagan Rome was repeated in the Christian church. We have found that in the early church the use of the marital ring evolved through three main stages. In the first stage of the apostolic period, there was no apparent use of the marital ring. In the second stage of the second and third centuries, there was a restricted use of only one plain inexpensive conjugal ring. In the final stage from the fourth century onward there was a proliferation of all kinds of ornamental rings and jewelry.

Fourth, what happened in the early church has been repeated in modern denominations. The two examples we have considered, namely, the Methodist and Mennonite churches, show the same pattern. In the first stage, no jewelry or wedding rings were allowed. In the second stage, a concession was made for wearing the wedding ring. In the final stage, the concession to wear the marital ring became a pretext for wearing all kinds of jewelry, including ornamental rings.

Fifth, what has happened in the Methodist and Mennonite churches has occurred also in the Adventist church. The pattern is similar. In the first stage of the early days of Adventism, no jewelry or marriage rings were worn. In the second stage, a concession was made for wearing the marriage ring only in those countries where the custom was imperative. In the final stage, the concession was extended to church members in North America. The result of this evolution is a steady rise in the wearing of various kinds of jewelry, including ornamental rings.

In summary, the lesson of history is evident. Both in ancient Rome and in Christian history, marital rings have exercised a leavening influence by tempting people to wear ornamental rings and other types of jewelry. Rings seem to exercise almost a fatal attraction. People can become so enamored with their marriage ring as to be easily tempted to increase the number of rings on their fingers and “improve” their style.

In the light of these findings, what should be our answer to the first question, “Should Christians wear a plain marriage ring?” The answer is: Christians can wear a plain marriage band, if they can do so conscientiously, in those cultures where the custom is imperative. To the second question, “Does a plain marriage band fall into the category of the inappropriate ornaments of gold and pearls mentioned by Paul and Peter?” the answer is: Historically the plain wedding band has not been regarded as an ornament, but history also teaches us that the plain wedding band did not remain plain for very long. The plain wedding band evolved into elaborate rings, set with precious stones.

A Final Warning. Rapid cultural changes are taking place today. In many Western countries the old view of marriage as a sacred, indissoluble, lifelong commitment is being challenged and replaced by the new secular view of marriage as a social contract easily dissolved through the legal process. Truly, divorce is no longer an American disease. It is spreading fast in most developed Christian countries. The result is that the marriage band is gradually losing its meaning of mutual fidelity “till death do us part,” and is becoming more and more a mere ornament.

Furthermore, people today are no longer satisfied with a plain gold wedding band, but want more elaborate rings, with diamonds or other gems. The plain marriage band is fast becoming a relic of the past. This means that wedding rings are becoming a costly ornament, not in keeping with the Biblical principles of modesty and simplicity. In the light of these trends, wearing the wedding ring may soon become inappropriate for Christians even in countries where traditionally it has been a sign of virtue.

Many insist that jewelry in general and rings in particular are a minor thing that should not obscure more important matters. I agree. There is more to Christianity than jewelry and rings. This is why they receive limited coverage in the Bible. On the other hand, both the Bible and history reveal that the love and use of jewelry have consistently resulted in spiritual decline and apostasy. Since a wedding ring is such a minor thing, why not play it safe and remove it altogether, unless it is a social imperative? Why not wear instead “the golden link which binds [our] souls to Jesus Christ, a pure and holy character, the true love and meekness and godliness that are the fruit borne upon the Christian tree, and [our] influence will be secure anywhere”.⁸⁶

NOTES TO CHAPTER 5

1. On the relaxation of the standard regarding jewelry among some Mennonite groups, see Melvin Gingerich, *Mennonite Attire Through Four Centuries* (Breinigsville, Pennsylvania, 1970), pp. 142-144. For the same trend among the Methodists, see *The Encyclopedia of World Methodism*, 1977 ed., s.v. "Dress."
2. For further information, see *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1926 ed., s. v. "Ring."
3. Pliny, *Natural History* 23, 8.
4. See *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1926 ed., s. v. "Ring."
5. Ibid.
6. James Remington McCarthy, *Rings Through the Ages* (New York, 1945), p. 5.
7. Paul Berdanier, *How It Began*, as cited by James Remington McCarthy (note 6), p. 154.
8. James Remington McCarthy (note 6), p. 6.
9. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 8, 2, 5. For a lengthy discussion of the use of rings and other amulets as charms, see *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, 1914 edition, James Hastings, ed., s. v. "Charms and Amulets (Christian)," (vol. 3, pp. 413-430).
10. *The Encyclopedia Americana*, 1994 ed., s. v. "Ring," (vol. 23, p. 531).
11. James Remington McCarthy (note 6), p. 26.
12. As cited by James Remington McCarthy (note 6), p. 30.
13. Besides the encyclopedias already mentioned above, see *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Mircea Eliade, ed., 1987 edition, s. v. "Jewelry;" also *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, James Hasting, ed., 1913 edition, s. v. "Charms and Amulets."
14. See my doctoral dissertation, *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Origin of Sunday in Early Christianity* (Rome: The Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1977), chapters 8 and 9.
15. *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1926 ed., s. v. "Ring," (vol. 23, p. 351).

16. Tertullian, *Apology* 6, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds. (Grand Rapids, 1973), vol. 3, p. 22.
17. James Remington McCarthy (note 6), p. 66.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
19. Churchill Babington, "Rings," *A Dictionary of Christian Antiquities* (London, 1908), vol. 2, p. 1794.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*
22. James Remington McCarthy (note 6), p. 152.
23. Joseph Bingham, *The Antiquities of the Christian Church*, book 22, 3, 5, as cited in *A Dictionary of Christian Antiquities* (note 1), p. 1807.
24. Tertullian, *Apology* 6, (note 16), vol. 3. p. 22. See also Tertullian, *On Idolatry* 16, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, 1973), vol. 3, p. 71.
25. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor* 3, 11, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, 1979), vol. 2, p. 285.
26. *Ibid.*
27. Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 33, 1.
28. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor* 3, 11, (note 24), vol. 2, p. 286.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 285.
30. For examples, see *A Dictionary of Christian Antiquities* (note 1), vol. 2, pp. 1807-1808.
31. Isidore of Seville, *De Ecclesiasticis Officiis* 2, 20, cited in *A Dictionary of Christian Antiquity* (note 19), vol. 2, p. 1808.
32. *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1908 edition, s. v. "Rings" (vol. 9, p. 59).
33. *Ibid.*
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Ibid.*
36. *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1926 ed., s. v. "Ring" (vol. 23, p. 350).
37. *Ibid.*
38. *Ibid.*, p. 351.

39. *The Constitutions of the Holy Apostles I, 2, The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds. (Grand Rapids, 1970), vol. 7, p. 392.

40. Cited in *The Encyclopedia of World Methodism*, 1977 edition, s. v. "Dress" (vol. 2, p. 717).

41. *Ibid.*, p. 718. See also *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Church* (New York, 1835), p. 88.

42. *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York, 1872), p. 272, emphasis supplied.

43. *Manual of Presbyterian Law and Usage* (Washington, D. C. 1873), p. 285, emphasis supplied.

44. *Our Deportment* (Detroit, 1881), p. 19.

45. Melvin Gingerich (note 1), p. 143.

46. *The Encyclopedia of World Methodism*, 1977 edition, s. v. "Dress" (vol. 2, p. 718).

47. Dean M. Kelly, "How Adventism Can Stop Growing," *Adventists Affirm* (Spring 1991), p. 56.

48. Dean M. Kelley, *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing* (New York, 1972), p. 55.

49. *Ibid.*, pp. 1-10. Kelly provides informative charts showing the decline in membership, church school enrollment, and overseas missionaries. More recent statistics are found in *The World Christian Encyclopedia* (New York, 1982).

50. Dean M. Kelley (note 48), p. 57.

51. Dean M. Kelly, "How Adventism Can Stop Growing," *Adventists Affirm*, Spring 1991, p. 49. The article was originally published in *Ministry*, February 1982.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

53. Melvin Gingerich (note 1), p. 142.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 143.

55. *Ibid.*

56. *Ibid.* Emphasis supplied.

57. Ibid., p. 144.

58. Ibid.

59. Ibid., p. 158.

60. Daniel T. Bordeau, "The Practice of Wearing Gold," *Review and Herald* (October 5, 1869), p. 117.

61. Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* Book 3, (Hagerstown, Maryland, 1980), pp. 246-247.

62. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, California, 1948), vol. 4, p. 630.

63. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers* (Mountain View, California, 1958), p. 180.

64. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (note 64), vol. 4, p. 630.

65. Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, Book 3 (note 61), vol. 3, p. 249.

66. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (note 64), vol. 4, p. 645.

67. Ibid.

68. Ibid., pp. 645-646.

69. Ibid., p. 646.

70. Eventually the statement was published in *Testimonies to Ministers* (note 63), pp. 180-181.

71. *General Conference Bulletin*, 1889, pp. 47-50.

72. Ellen White, *Testimonies to Ministers* (note 63), pp. 180-181.

73. Ibid., p. 181, emphasis supplied.

74. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (note 62), vol. 3, pp. 20, 21.

75. William C. White letter to D. C. Babcock, August 6, 1913, p.1.

76. William C. White letter to J. W. Siler, August 9, 1916.

77. Ethel May Lacey letter to William C. White, February 13, 1895.

78. Ibid.

79. W. C. White letter to W. E. Ingle, Sanitarium, California, April 14, 1913.

80. The statement first appeared in *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (Washington, D. C., 1932), p. 175.

81. *Actions of Autumn Council Committee from the General Conference*, Louisville, Kentucky, October 29-November 5, 1935, p. 24.

82. *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (Washington, D. C., 1951), p. 202. This statement has appeared with no change of text on all the editions of the *Church Manual* from 1951 to 1990.

83. *1986 Year-end Meeting of the North American Division* (November 5-11, 1986), pp. 24-25.

84. James Remington McCarthy (note 6), p. 182.

85. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers* (note 63), pp. 180-181.

86. Ibid., p. 180.

Chapter 6

UNISEX CLOTHES

A significant trend in our times is the blurring of gender distinctions in clothing. “Ever since Eden,” wrote Charles Winick in his book, *The New People: Desexualization in American Life*, “the most provocative thing about each sex has been that it looked and smelled so different from the other. Women liked men whose tweeds made them look stronger and bigger Men responded to women whose softly clinging dresses discreetly hinted at curves beneath and whose perfume was promise.”¹

Vive la Similarité. Today the world of fashion no longer shouts “Vive la différence!” but rather “Vive la similarité!” In fact, the similarity between men’s and women’s hair styles and clothing has become so great that some people are amused over the fact that one cannot always be sure whether two young people walking down the sidewalk are both boys, both girls, or one of each.

Winick illustrated the similarity of styles by referring to the play, “Lady in the Dark,” in which the hero notices that the heroine’s tailored costume is very similar to his own. “We must go to the same tailor,” he says.² Winick commented, “Each sex has increasingly been adopting the fashions and secondary external characteristics of the other in the quarter-century since Moss Hart’s play. If clothing becomes much more intersexual, we may need ‘His’ and ‘Hers’ on clothing to be able to tell the players apart without a score card.”³

Objective of Chapter. This chapter examines the philosophical undergirding of the unisex fashion being promoted today and this fashion’s impact on the home, the work place, and the church. We shall consider what the Christian response should be to the unisex fashion, and how to apply the Biblical principle of gender distinctions to the selection of clothing.

The Androgynous Vision. The driving force behind the unisex fashion of our time is the feminist vision of a new genderless society, commonly known as the *androgynous society*. The term *androgynous* combines the Greek words *andros* (male) and *gune* (female). It describes an individual that integrates both male and female characteristics.

The feminists contend that men and women are essentially the same, except for the differences in reproductive organs. Other perceived differences are all said to be culturally induced. The reason little girls play with dolls and little boys with toy cars is not nature but nurture. To achieve a truly authentic humanity, according to feminists, it is necessary to destroy sexual stereotypes, including gender distinctions in clothing. This ideal is the new androgyny, which for feminists holds the promise of a new society where the roles of men and women are undifferentiated and interchangeable. Feminists see this utopian genderless society as imperative in order to achieve the liberation of women from their submissive role. "Although those who argue for unisex are few," according to Roland Martinson, "there are many women who follow a male road toward what they believe to be liberation."⁴

Feminists have been very successful in selling their revolutionary vision of an androgynous society. We see this not only in the popular unisex fashion, but in other areas as well. Allan Carlson documents the impact of the androgynous vision in four segments of our society: "(1) As of 1980, 72 percent of the mental health professionals . . . described a healthy, mature, socially competent adult as androgynous. (2) School textbooks have absorbed the feminist revolution and promote the androgynous ideal. (3) Theologians in the mainline Protestant denominations now identify with androgyny. Leading feminist theologian Rosemary Reuther advocates this boldly in *Sexism and the God-talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*. For years now the sectional gatherings of the Society of Biblical Literature have devoted many of their scholarly papers to promotion of aspects of feminism as androgyny. (4) Androgyny has now made some headway in corporate management and even in our military services."⁵

Unisex Appearance. Feminists are exploring different ways to create a genderless society. For example, Sandra Bem, a Cornell University psychologist, has attempted to raise her own children "gender asexually," that is, without gender consciousness. In an interview with Don Monkerud, a reporter for *Omni* magazine, Bem said that she and her husband "tried to eliminate sexual stereotyping from their own behavior by sharing household chores, bathing children, making dinner together, and giving them trucks and dolls irrespective of their sex."⁶

“At the age of four, Bem’s son, Jeremy, wore barrettes [clasps used to hold the hair in place] to nursery school. One day a boy repeatedly told him that ‘only girls wear barrettes.’ Jeremy tried to explain that wearing barrettes didn’t make a boy or a girl: Only genitalia did. Finally, in frustration, he pulled down his pants” to show that he was a boy. This did not change the thinking of his friend who kept on saying, “only girls wear barrettes.”⁷

This humorous episode illustrates the confusion deriving from pushing for a unisexual appearance. Feminists believe that this confusion is part of the price to be paid for achieving a genderless society which allegedly will permit a fuller expression of the human potential. At the 1970 Paris spring fashion that promoted the unisex fashion, Diana Trilling wrote in *Saturday Review*: “And gone—or going—. . . is the social-sexual differentiation between men and women in terms of dress and hairstyle. While I confess to having no love for the shared slovenliness of so many young men and women, since I see in it a depreciation of their pride in themselves as persons, I welcome the unisexual appearance of the sexes if only for its criticism of a culture in which sexually differentiated styles of hair and dress, designed not by God but by man, were treated as if they were biological actualities. As I see it, or at least as I hope it, whatever reduces the false separations between men and women is bound to reduce their suspicions and hostilities, and thus permit them a fuller expression of their human potentiality.”⁸

Unisex to Achieve Equality. The underlying assumption is that gender-differentiated clothes and hairstyles are not God’s intent and contribute to male dominance. Consequently, it is imperative to eliminate such gender distinctions to achieve the emancipation of women. James Laver maintains, “In a patriarchal society—one in which the man is dominant—the clothes of men and women are vastly different. But in a matriarchal society [one in which the woman is dominant] the clothes worn by the two sexes become more and more alike.”⁹

The unisex fashion which became popular in America in the sixties reflects the women’s attempt to achieve equality with men. In her book *Historic Costume*, Katherine Lester wrote about the emerging unisex fashion during the sixties: “With many women wearing pants and many men enjoying more adventuresome clothes and hairstyles, fashions for both sexes became similar. This trend, termed ‘unisex,’ went with the move toward sexual and economic equality of men and women, and the blurring of the traditional male and female roles in society.”¹⁰

To achieve equality with men, feminists have promoted masculine fashions for women. “The notorious Dr. Mary Walker dressed in men’s

clothes all her life and promoted the equality of the sexes by founding a female colony called ‘Adamless Eve’ to prove that the anatomy of a woman was similar to that of a man.”¹¹ Men also have adopted feminine styles. During the sixties, men adopted “clothing and hairstyles that were formerly thought to be feminine. In part, this was a mechanism for gaining attention, for being noticed. Not only such singing groups as the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, but also males in the arts and theater favored this feminine look.”¹² “By 1984,” wrote Don Monkerud, “Boy George could blithely address national TV saying, ‘I want to thank America for knowing a good drag queen when they see one.’”¹³

The Importance of Gender Distinctions. In spite of its popularity, the attempt to eliminate gender distinctions in clothes as well as in roles is clearly condemned in the Bible. The Scriptures teach respect for gender distinctions in dress as well as in functional roles, because they are part of the order of creation. It is not funny for a man to dress and adorn himself as a woman, or vice versa, because God intended that there should be a clear distinction between the outward appearance of men and that of women. This is plainly taught in Deuteronomy 22:5: “A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor a man put on a woman’s garment; for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord your God.”

Some interpret this law as directed against a simulated change of sex for immoral purposes. Most commentators question this interpretation because “no historical data have been found to back up this assumption.”¹⁴ As Keil and Delitzsch noted, “The immediate design of this prohibition was not to prevent licentiousness, or to oppose idolatrous practices . . . but to maintain the sanctity of that distinction of the sexes which was established by the creation of man and woman, and in relation to which Israel was not to sin. Every violation or wiping out of this distinction . . . was unnatural, and therefore an abomination to the Lord.”¹⁵ This interpretation is supported by the stipulations of verses 9-11, which prohibit the amalgamation of different kinds of seeds or animals, to avoid their confusion and to preserve them intact as God created them.

The Bible attaches great importance to the preservation of gender distinctions, not only in dress, but also in functional roles. The reason, as I have shown in previous studies,¹⁶ is that this is fundamental for our understanding of who we are and what role God wants us to fulfill. There are profound interrelationships between clothing and behavior which are built into our very language. A *costume* embodies *custom*, and the *habit* we wear is related to the *habits* we have.

Nature or Nurture? The attempt to eliminate gender distinctions in clothes and functional roles stems from the assumption that such distinctions are largely the result of nurture rather than nature, learned behavior rather than biology. To put it differently, gender distinctions are cultural rather than creational. Thus it is necessary to modify or eliminate those cultural and social factors, such as clothes, that foster sex differences in behavior in order to realize an androgynous society.

It is noteworthy that the credibility of this popular androgynous vision is being discredited today even by feminist scientists. “The awful truth about this androgynous revolution,” wrote Allan Carlson, “is that it is theoretically and scientifically unsound. Honest research over the last decade has shown conclusively that psychological androgyny is a hoax.”¹⁷ Carlson supported this devastating assessment by well-documented scientific sources, including a vast array of articles, research reports, and abstracts.

One of the authors Carlson mentioned is Melvin Konner, who has given us a comprehensive treatment of the subject. Though a convinced evolutionist, sympathetic to the feminist androgynous aspirations, Konner acknowledged that sex differences in behavior are more biological than cultural.¹⁸

Sexes Are Irremediably Different. Konner listed the names of eleven “distinguished women scientists who devote their lives to the study of brain, hormones or behavior, human and animal.”¹⁹ Each of these women have been involved in the feminist movement on the level of scholarly research, yet each of them “without exception” agrees that “sex differences in behavior . . . have a basis that is in part biological.”²⁰

According to Konner, “These women are doing a balancing act of formidable proportions. They continue to struggle, in private and in public, for equal rights and equal treatment for people of both sexes; at the same time, they uncover and report evidence that the sexes are irremediably different—that after sexism is wholly stripped away, after differences in training have gone the way of the whalebone corset, there will still be *something* [italics his] different, something that is grounded in biology.”²¹

Helen Block Lewis is a good example of a feminist scholar who recognizes that sex differences in behavior derive more from biological than from cultural factors. In addressing a conference of leading feminist scholars at a meeting of the Academy of Sciences on January 29, 1977, Lewis said: “I am aware that the notion of genetically determined differences between sexes is not fashionable, especially since the differences are used to promote the subjugation of women. But it seems to me useless to make the mistake of ignoring genetics just because their import has been distorted. I, for example,

used to believe that it was impossible in the present climate of women's social inferiority to obtain any meaningful results about genetically determined behavior differences between the sexes After doing research for my book, I changed my mind."²² The reason she said, is that "when it comes to the difference between the sexes, the difference between having an XX or an XY as the 23rd pair of chromosomes is tremendously powerful."²³

Need to Recover Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. It is encouraging to note that some feminist scholars recognize that the gender differences in behavior, which the Bible describes and prescribes as part of God's order of creation, derive more from biology than from nurture and training. We did not need to wait for feminist scientists to discover this truth. After all, this is a fundamental Biblical teaching that historically has been accepted. Men and women are biologically, psychologically, and functionally different. The Bible teaches us to respect these differences. The attempts to eliminate such differences must be seen as a perversion of God's creational order.

As Christians we must reject the incoherent feminist ideal that, as Elisabeth Elliot put it, "flattens all human beings to a single level—a faceless, colorless, sexless wasteland where rule and submission are regarded as a curse, where the roles of men and women are treated like machine parts that are interchangeable, replaceable, and adjustable, and where fulfillment is a matter of pure politics, things like equality and rights."²⁴ This is not the Biblical vision of manhood and womanhood, nor is it the vision that has inspired poets and the literature of the ages. The Christian vision springs from the mysterious way in which God created man and woman different and yet complementary. When we accept this Biblical vision we cannot swallow the view that femininity and masculinity are a matter of cultural conditioning, of stereotypes perpetrated by tradition.

It is unfortunate that gender distinctions have been abused to promote the subjugation of women. We deplore the abuses perpetrated by men against women—and, let us not forget, by women against men, because all have sinned. This shows that we live in a fallen world where sin has marred the harmonious gender distinctions and relationships that God created. As Christians we must work redemptively to correct gender injustices. We must do this, however, not by eliminating the gender distinctions in clothes or roles, but rather by eradicating the abuses introduced and perpetrated by fallen human beings. What men and women need today is not to become genderless, unisex in appearance and behavior, but rather to rediscover the Biblical ideal of manhood and womanhood.

Elisabeth Elliot wisely observes, “The world looks for happiness through self-assertion. The Christian knows that joy is found in self-abandonment. ‘If a man will let himself be lost for My sake,’ Jesus said, ‘he will find his true self.’ A Christian woman’s true freedom lies on the other side of a very small gate—humble obedience—but that gate leads out into a largeness of life undreamed of by the liberators of the world, to a place where God-given differentiation between the sexes is not obfuscated but celebrated, where our inequalities are seen as essential to the image of God, for it is in male *and* female, in male as male and female as female, not as two identical and interchangeable halves, that the image of God is manifested.”²⁵

Genderless Clothing and Identity Confusion. Tampering with gender distinctions can have unfathomable consequences. When we deal with masculinity and femininity, we are dealing, as C. S. Lewis put it, with the “live and awful shadows of realities utterly beyond our control and largely beyond our direct knowledge.”²⁶

Historically clothes have served to define our masculinity or femininity. We noticed in chapter I that clothes not only define our identity (“you are what you wear”) but also help us develop a new identity (“you become what you wear”). This means that when we blur gender distinctions in clothing, we gradually lose our male or female identity and experience an identity crisis.

Michael Levin, a professor of philosophy at City College of New York, asserted: “There is a deep and abiding difference between the sexes and much of modern unhappiness comes from attempts to transform women into pseudo-men. . . . Nobody sits down to choose his personality. That is an idiotic way of putting it. You are given your personality for the most part when you are born.”²⁷

Charles Winick pointed out that the confusion about our identity is projected in the blurring of gender distinction in clothing. “Today’s preferred shape for both men and women is loose fitting and formless which expresses and reinforces our blurring of maleness and femaleness. Clothing further deepens the internal conflict and confusion of each sex in fulfilling its role.”²⁸

It is interesting to note that as women become more masculine in their appearance, men become more feminine. The result is that some men want to be courted by women rather than doing the courting themselves. According to Winick, “Contemporary men may wear gaily colored clothing, perfumes, and jewelry as one reflection of their increasing tendency to become the objects, rather than the initiators, of courtship.”²⁹

Over a century ago Ellen White recognized the serious social and moral implications of genderless clothing. In 1867 she wrote: “God designed that there should be a plain distinction between the dress of men and women, and has considered the matter of sufficient importance to give explicit directions in regard to it; for the same dress worn by both sexes causes confusion and great increase of crime.”³⁰

Confusion in the Home. Confusion begins in the home when children can no longer tell who is supposed to “wear the pants,” mom or dad. “After all the jokes about who wears the pants in an American family, there is suddenly nothing to smile at. Perhaps only the pants’ manufacturers are laughing, now that women’s clothing stores may sell more trousers than skirts.”³¹

Over thirty years ago when unisex fashion was still in its infancy, Eloise Curtis, a designer of junior dresses and gowns, warned of the problem of confusion in the home: “In many homes there is no longer an externally visible difference between the sexes. A woman donning pants subconsciously dons a few masculine characteristics in her approach to her baby. The baby, seeing nothing but pants around, becomes confused as to where his mother begins and his father leaves off.”³²

Confusion in the Work-place and the Church. Confusion continues in the work place, where in many occupations women are dressed like men and are expected to perform with the same physical strength as men. It troubles me when, for example, the parcel service company sends a woman to my place to pick up a large consignment of books for overseas, sometimes consisting of over 100 cartons, each weighing about 40 pounds. Personally I think that this is more weight than one woman should have to lift and move around. When I ask, “Why doesn’t your company send a man to pick up so many heavy cartons?” the answer is simple: “If we want the job, we are expected to perform like men.” And to prove it, they wear the same brown pants and shirts worn by the men. But the fact remains that women are not men. They are biologically, psychological, and physically different from men. As Christians, we are called to respect these distinctions established by God at creation by treating women as women and not as men.

Confusion is also present in the church, where some women wear pant suits to church like men and, not surprisingly, some women want to serve in the male role of “elders,” a word which literally means “older men.” I found it distressing and amusing at the same time to discover that in some Italian Adventist churches I visited, some women had been ordained as “anziano,” rather than as “anziana,” that is, as a male elder rather than as a female elder.

In our Italian language, as in all Latin languages, adjectives can be masculine or feminine, depending on the ending. This means that an older man is *anziano*, with an “o” ending, while an older woman is *anziana*, with an “a” ending. Grammatically speaking, then, the masculine adjective *anziano* cannot be used for a woman. Thus to ordain a woman to be a male *anziano* is not only unbiblical but also a contradiction of genders. When I asked, “Why are you using the masculine form *anziano* for women?” the answer was, “Because women want to serve in the church in the headship role of men and not in the submissive role of women.”

A Sign of Rebellion. All this goes to show that we live in a world in rebellion against God, a world in which men and women want to find fulfillment in trying to assume roles God never intended them to have. The result of this rebellion is gender confusion not only in roles, but also in clothing. A woman who wants to function as a man most likely will dress like a man because, as we have seen, clothes are a mirror of the mind. What we wear reveals who we are or what we want to be. Crossing the gender line in clothing causes gender confusion. Many no longer seem to know where a man ends and a woman begins.

In my book *Women in the Church*, I have examined at some length those Bible passages that teach us to respect the sexual and functional role distinctions between men and women, both in the home and in the church. These distinctions are reflected and reinforced by a difference in attire between men and women. Christians must recognize today’s attempts to abolish these distinctions through the popularity of genderless clothing as Satan’s attempt to destroy the order and beauty of God’s creation.

Unisex clothes are an index of the moral malaise of our society. Winick noted: “Silhouettes tend to be sharply defined, broad-shouldered, and small-waisted when morality is rigid, as in the days of the Spartans, Saxons, Cromwell, and Victoria. In times that are less moral but more uncertain and complex, like those of Louis XIV, the Edwardian period, the 1920s, and the post-World War II years, a more blurred silhouette seems preferred by both men and women.”³³

The moral and social confusion of our time is projected in genderless clothing. This trend explains why “interest in wearing clothes of the opposite sex is growing rapidly, and a number of magazines (e.g., *Transvestia* and *Turnabout*) are devoted to the subject.”³⁴ Transvestism is becoming more visible and acceptable today, because, as Winick explained, “normal costumes already contain so much that is borrowed from the other sex. The existence of a substantial group that wants to wear even more clothes of the

opposite sex, at a time when each sex looks like a transvestite parody, suggests that genderless clothing is meeting important contemporary needs.”³⁵ Unfortunately, it is meeting the needs of those whom, to use the graphic words of Paul, “God gave up to dishonorable passions. . . . [because they] exchanged natural relations for unnatural” (Rom 1:26).

A Christian Response. What should be the Christian response to the unisex fashion, which represents, if not the abolition of gender distinctions, the closest we have ever come to it? Let us consider pants, as an example, since they are the most visible adaptation of men’s clothing by women in our western culture. It should be noted that there are cultures today, especially in the orient, where trousers are worn more by women than by men. Historically also, according to Bernard Rudofsky, more women than men have worn trousers.³⁶

In the western culture for several centuries trousers have been associated with men. In the past, women have made some attempts to wear trousers, but this did not last long. For example, in the 1850s the trouserslike bloomers were promoted as “a symbol of female attempts to achieve equality with men.”³⁷ This effort, however, did not last long, and bloomers “were followed by feminine-type garments . . . wide sweeping skirts.”³⁸

Today the situation is different. Pants have become a permanent article of women’s clothing. This is indicated by the impressive list of pants women wear: pantsuits, hot pants, stretch pants, bermuda shorts, ankle-length pants, slacks, culottes, slim jims, bell bottoms, minipants, wide-legged pants, pantaloons, jumpsuit pants, or blue-jeans. In the light of this trend, should a Christian woman never wear any type of pants, whether it be around the house, on a family outing, on a camping trip, or during cold winter days? Does it make a difference what kind of pants a woman wears?

To propose that no kinds of pants should ever be worn by women for any occasions would imply that pants are sinful *per se*, no matter in what shape or form they come. If that were true, nobody should wear pants, including men. But the problem is not with pants, since in some cultures they are a feminine article of clothing. The problem is not the pants but their intended use.

A woman may wear warm woolen pants during cold winter days to protect herself from the bitter cold, or she may wear cotton Bermuda pants during a summer family outing because they are more practical than skirts. On the other hand, a woman may wear hot pants or tight stretch pants to be seductive. Or she may choose to wear pantsuits most of the time because she wants to project a masculine, executive type of personality.

Clothes in the Bible. The intent of the Deuteronomic law (Deut 22:5) was not to prohibit the wearing of articles of clothing that resemble the clothing of the other sex, but rather to maintain the distinction between the sexes. A study of clothing in Biblical times reveals that there was a striking similarity between the clothing of men and women. In fact, both sexes wore the same two basic articles of clothing: an undergarment (Hebrew *kethoneth*; Greek *chiton*) and an outer garment (Hebrew *simlah*; Greek *himation*).

The distinction between the two articles of clothing may be noted in Matthew 5:40, where Jesus says: "If any one would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well." Jesus is speaking of a legal act. The claimant was supposed to claim only the coat (*chiton*), that is, the less expensive undergarment. However, Jesus advises the defendant to let him have even the cloak (*himation*), which was the more costly outer garment.

The Undergarment and the Outer Garment. The undergarment was a long tunic or coat worn by both sexes in Bible times. This was the basic garment that men and women wore every day. The famous Beni-hasan color painting provides a good illustration of this garment. A color reproduction of it appears on the inside cover of the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary*. The painting shows a clan of 37 Palestinians arriving in Egypt to trade black eye-paint for grain. Their apparel is probably much the same as that worn by Abraham and his family. The leader and two of the men accompanying him are shown wearing colorful tunics that cover their bodies from the shoulder to the knees, but leave the arms and one shoulder free.

The four women shown in the picture wear very colorful garments similar to the costume of the men. The major differences are that the women's dresses are a few inches longer, reaching below their knees. They extend farther up around the neck than the men's garments, thus covering the body more fully. And they show intricate patterns of blue and red figures woven into the cloth. In other words, the women wore the same kind of tunics, but they were more colorful, a few inches longer, and covered their bodies more fully than did those of the men.

The outer garment was a robe or more commonly a mantle, similar to a modern shawl, that was wrapped around the body. The outer robe was worn on special occasions (1 Chron 12:27; 1 Sam 15:27; 24:4, 11). We are told that Tamar, Absalom's sister, "was wearing a long robe with sleeves; for thus were the virgin daughters of the king clad of old" (2 Sam 13:18). This appears to have been a special robe designed for the king's daughters. The purple robe the Roman soldiers placed on Christ was an outer garment (Matt 27:28, 31; John 19:2, 5). There does not seem to have been a substantial difference between the outer garments worn by men and women.

In view of the striking similarity between the clothing of men and women in Bible times, it seems fair to conclude that the concern of the Deuteronomic law was not to condemn any resemblance in style between the clothes of men and women, but rather the wearing of what was regarded as the clothing of the opposite sex. The style difference between the tunic worn by men and women may have been small, at least from our perspective, but still it was sufficient to maintain a distinction between male and female clothing.

Applying the Principle of Gender Distinction. The Bible does not tell us what style of clothing men and women should wear. It recognizes that the style of clothing is dictated by climate and culture. What the Bible does teach us, however, is to respect the gender distinctions in clothing as they are known within any given culture. This is the principle that should guide us in the selection of clothing today.

In view of the trend of modern fashion to eliminate gender distinctions in clothing (a trend which is an abomination in God's sight; see Deut 22:5), it is imperative for Christians to ask when buying clothes: Does this article of clothing help me to affirm my gender, or does it make me look as though I belong to the opposite sex? Anytime you feel that a certain type of clothing does not belong to your gender, follow your conscience: Don't buy it, even if it is fashionable.

The Example of Women's Pants. How does the Biblical principle of respecting gender distinctions in clothing apply to the question we raised earlier about pants? Three points need to be taken into consideration.

First, we need to remember that until recent times in western culture trousers were exclusively a male garment. I do not recall ever having seen a girl wearing pants while I was growing up in Rome, Italy. In spite of their popularity, pants in western culture are still seen as "the most visible adaptation of men's clothing by women."³⁹ This means that pants still have a masculine connotation and do not affirm the gender distinctions. Thus, as a general rule in western countries, pants should not be worn by Christian women as formal wear, especially for church service.

Second, there are circumstances in which it is more practical and convenient for Christian women to wear pants. This may be true, for example, during cold winter days, when working around the house, on a family outing, when riding a bicycle or playing sports. In these circumstances pants can provide more comfort and protection than skirts, without necessarily endangering the gender distinction. Thus in these circumstances the wearing of pants should not be condemned, provided they be modest and appropriate for the occasion.

Third, Christian women should choose pants that affirm gender distinctions and look decent. The trend today is to make women's trousers as masculine as possible. For example, the zipper of women's trousers is often relocated from the left to the front as in men's trousers. "Today, pants are even more masculinized than Courrèges' hard geometry, with American designers featuring trousers designed to be worn with double-breasted blazers, side vents, and brass buttons."⁴⁰ Another trend is to make women's pants seductive. For example, hot pants and the tight stretch pants, which leave little to the imagination. A Christian woman must resist these trends by choosing to wear only such pants as are modest and feminine. A woman's beauty lies not only in what she reveals but also in what she conceals.

It is not easy today to follow the Biblical principles of gender distinctions in clothing, when modern fashion seems bent on abolishing such distinctions. But to live by Biblical principles has never been easy. Yet this is our Christian calling, not to conform to the perverted values, styles, and practices of our hedonistic society, but to be a transforming influence in this world through the enabling power of God.

Conclusion. The driving force behind the unisex fashion of our time is the feminist vision of a new genderless society, where the clothes and roles of men and women are undifferentiated and interchangeable. Feminists consider this utopian genderless society essential to achieving the liberation of women from their submissive role.

We have found that the feminist vision of a genderless society is clearly condemned in the Bible. The Scriptures clearly teach us to respect gender distinctions in dress as well as in functional roles, because they are part of the order of creation. The reason is that gender distinctions are fundamental to our understanding of who we are and what role God wants us to fulfill.

As Christians we should be thankful to God for the masculine or feminine gender He has given us. A woman should be thankful that God has made her a woman, remarkably different from man, and yet of great value in God's plan for the family, society, and the world. Similarly, a man should be thankful that God made him a man, remarkably different from a woman, yet of great value in God's plan for the family, society, and the world.

At a time when modern fashion is bent on eliminating gender distinctions in clothing and functional roles, it is imperative for Christians to respect their God-given masculinity and femininity by clothing themselves in a way that affirms their gender identity.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 6

1. Charles Winick, *The New People: Desexualization in American Life* (New York, 1968), p. 262.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 263.

3. *Ibid.*

4. Roland Martinson, "Androgyny and Beyond," *Word and World*, Fall, 1985, p. 373.

5. Allan Carlson, "The Androgyny Hoax: On the Blending of Men and Women and the Corruption of Science by Ideology," in *Persuasion at Work* (Rockford, 1986). The four points are summarized by Robert D. Culver, in "Does Recent Scientific Research Overturn the Claims of Radical Feminism and Support the Biblical Norms of Human Sexuality?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (March 1987), p. 42.

6. Don Monkerud, "Blurring the Lines: Androgyny on Trial," *Omni* October 1990, p. 83.

7. *Ibid.*

8. Diane Trilling, "Female Biology in a Male Culture," *Saturday Review*, October 10, 1970, p. 40.

9. James Laver, *Taste and Fashion* (London, 1937), p. 29.

10. Katherine Morris Lester and Rose Netzorg Kerr, *Historic Costume* (Peoria, Illinois, 1977), p. 288.

11. Quoted in Mary Lou Rosencranz, *Clothing Concepts: A Social-Psychological Approach* (New York, 1972), p. 202.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 175.

13. Don Monkerud (note 6), p. 86.

14. J. Ridderbos, *Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, 1984), p. 223. See also *The Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville, 1981), vol. 2, p. 464; *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, 1992), vol. 3, p. 135.

15. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, 1952), vol. 4, p. 409. In a similar vein J. Ridderbos wrote: "These prohibitions are designed to instill respect for the God-given order of creation and for the distinction between sexes and kinds it presents" (note 14, p. 135).

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16. Samuele Bacchiocchi, *The Marriage Covenant* (Berrien Springs, Michigan, 1994), pp. 120-154; also *Women in the Church* (Berrien Springs, 1992), pp. 110-141.
 17. Allan Carlson (note 5), p. 6.
 18. Melvin Konner, *The Tangled Wing: Biological Constraints on the Human Spirit* (New York, 1982), pp.100-106.
 19. Ibid., p. 106.
 20. Ibid.
 21. Ibid., p. 107.
 22. Helen Block Lewis, "Psychology and Gender," in *Genes and Gender*, E. Tobach and B. Bosoff, eds, (New York, 1978), p. 72.
 23. Ibid.
 24. Elisabeth Elliot, "The Essence of Femininity: A Personal Perspective," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, eds., John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, Illinois, 1991), p. 397.
 25. Ibid., pp. 398-399.
 26. C. S. Lewis, "Priestesses in the Church?" in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, 1970), p. 239.
 27. Michael Levin as cited by Don Monkerud (note 6), p. 83.
 28. Charles Winick (note 1), p. 264.
 29. Ibid.
 30. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, California, 1948), vol. 1, p. 460.
 31. Charles Winick (note 1), p. 229.
 32. *San Francisco Chronicle* September 26, 1961, p. 9.
 33. Charles Winick (note 1), pp. 263-264.
 34. Ibid., p. 267.
 35. Ibid.
 36. Bernard Rudofsky, *Are Clothes Modern?* (Chicago, 1947), p. 156.

37. Mary Lou Rosencranz (note 11), p. 170.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid., p. 227.
40. Ibid., p. 229.

Chapter 7

PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIAN DRESS AND ADORNMENT

In every age men and women have bedecked and bejeweled their bodies. The desire to adorn the body with colorful cosmetics, costly jewelry, and eye-catching clothes has left few untouched. Thus, it is not surprising that our survey found, throughout Biblical and Christian history, frequent calls to dress modestly and decently, without glittering jewelry or luxurious clothes. Such a call is especially relevant today when modesty and decency are out, and nudity and sensuality are in.

To bring into sharper focus the relevance of the Biblical teachings on dress and ornaments for our time, I shall endeavor to formulate seven basic statements of principle which summarize the highlights of this study. This brief review will help the reader to gain a better overview of the fundamental Biblical teachings on dress and adornment that have emerged in the course of our investigation.

PRINCIPLE ONE: Dress and appearance are an important index of Christian character. Clothes and appearance are most powerful nonverbal communicators not only of our socioeconomic status, but also of our moral values. We are what we wear. This means that the outward appearance is an important index of Christian character. The Bible recognizes the importance of dress and ornaments as indicated by the numerous stories, allegories, and admonitions that we have found regarding appropriate and inappropriate adorning.

Our outward appearance is a visible and silent testimony of our Christian values. Some people dress and adorn their bodies with costly clothes and jewelry to please themselves. They want to be admired for their wealth, power, or social status. Some dress in accordance with certain fashions to please others. They want to be accepted by their peers by dressing

like them. The Christian, however, dresses to glorify God. Clothes are important for Christians because they serve as a frame to reveal the picture of the One whom the Christian serves. “In no better way,” wrote Ellen White, “can you let your light shine to others than in your simplicity of dress and deportment. You may show to all that, in comparison with eternal things, you place a proper estimate upon the things of this life.”¹

As Christians we cannot say, “What I look like is no one’s business!” because what we look like reflects on our Lord. My house, my car, my personal appearance, my use of time and money, all reflect how Christ has changed my life from the inside out. When Jesus comes into our lives, He does not cover our blemishes with cosmetic powder, but He cleanses us wholly by working from within. This inner renewal is reflected in the outward appearance.

The most effective witness to the change that Christ has wrought within is not a painted smile on the face of a seductively dressed woman, but a radiant smile on the face of a clean, becomingly dressed woman. A too-sophisticated, coiffured, and made-up appearance, with glittering jewels and extravagant clothes, reveals not the spontaneous radiance of a God-centered personality, but the studied, artificial image of a self-centered individuality.

PRINCIPLE TWO: Adorning our bodies with colorful cosmetics, glittering jewelry, and luxurious clothes reveals inner pride and vanity, which are destructive to ourselves and to others. We have found this truth brought out implicitly by several negative examples and explicitly by the apostolic admonitions of Paul and Peter. Isaiah reproves wealthy Jewish women for their pride shown by adorning their bodies from head to foot with glittering jewelry and expensive clothes. They seduced the leaders, who eventually led the whole nation into disobedience and divine punishment (Is 3:16-26).

Jezebel stands out in the Bible for her determined effort to seduce the Israelites into idolatry. The inner corruption of her heart is revealed by the attempt she made even in her final hour to look her seductive best by painting her eyes and adorning herself for the arrival of the new king, Jehu (2 Kings 9:30). But the king was not fooled, and she died an ignominious death. Because of this her name has become a symbol of seduction in Biblical history (Rev 2:20).

Ezekiel dramatizes the apostasy of Israel and Judah through the allegory of two women, Oholah and Oholibah, who, like Jezebel, painted their eyes and decked themselves with ornaments to entice men to commit adultery with them (Ezek 23). In this allegory again we find cosmetics and ornaments associated with seduction, adultery, apostasy, and divine punishment.

Jeremiah also uses the allegory of a seductive woman dressed in scarlet, with painted eyes and decked with jewelry, to represent the politically abandoned Israel, who is vainly trying to attract her former idolatrous allies (Jer 4:30). Here again cosmetics and jewelry are used to seduce men into adulterous acts.

The prophetic portrayal of apostate Israel as an adulterous woman bedecked, bejeweled, and whoring after heathen gods recurs in John the Revelator's description of the great harlot "arrayed in purple and scarlet, and bedecked with gold and jewels and pearls" (Rev 17:4). This impure woman, who represents the end-time apostate religious-political power, lures the inhabitants of the earth to commit spiritual fornication with her. By contrast, the bride of Christ, who represents the church, is attired modestly in pure and fine linen without outward ornaments (Rev 19:7-8).

In both the Old and New Testaments we have found a consistent pattern of the use of colorful cosmetics, glittering jewelry, and eye-catching clothes to accomplish seductive purposes. Such a pattern implicitly reveals God's condemnation of their use. What is taught implicitly through negative examples is reiterated positively by the two great apostles, Paul and Peter, in their condemnation of the use of jewelry and luxurious clothes.

We have found that both apostles contrast the appropriate adorning of Christian women with the inappropriate ornaments of worldly women. Both apostles give us essentially the same list of inappropriate ornaments for the Christian woman. They include eye-catching hair styles, glittering jewelry, and costly clothing (1 Tim 2:9-10; 1 Pet 3:3-4). Both apostles recognize that the outward ornaments of the body are inconsistent with the appropriate inward ornaments of the heart, the quiet spirit and benevolent deeds.

PRINCIPLE THREE: To experience inner spiritual renewal and reconciliation with God, it is necessary to remove all outward besetting objects of idolatry, including jewelry and ornaments. We have found this truth expressed especially through the experience of Jacob's family at Shechem and of the Israelites at Mount Horeb. In both instances ornaments were removed to effect reconciliation with God.

At Shechem Jacob summoned his family members to remove their outward idols and ornaments (Gen 35:2-3) as a means of preparing themselves for an inward spiritual cleansing at the altar he intended to build at Bethel. The response was commendable: "So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods that they had, and the rings that were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was near Shechem" (Gen 35:4).

At Mount Horeb God requested the Israelites to remove their ornaments as proof of their sincere repentance for worshiping the golden calf: “So now put off your ornaments from you, that I may know what to do with you” (Ex 33:4). Again the response of the people was positive: “Therefore the people of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Mount Horeb onward” (Ex 33:5). We noted that the phrase “from Mount Horeb onward” implies that repentant Israelites made a commitment at Mount Horeb to discontinue the use of ornaments in order to show their sincere desire to obey God. Both at Shechem and Mount Horeb the removal of ornamental jewelry was preparatory to a renewal of a covenant commitment to God.

These experiences teach us that wearing ornamental jewelry contributes to rebellion against God by fostering self-glorification, and that removing it facilitates reconciliation with God by encouraging a humble attitude. Thus it is important for us to remember that to experience spiritual renewal and reformation, we need to remove from our hearts the idols we cherish, whether they be jewelry, cosmetics, immodest clothes, professional goals, cars, or homes, and replace them with devotion to God.

PRINCIPLE FOUR: Christians should dress in a modest and decent way, showing respect for God, themselves, and others. This principle is found in Paul’s use of the terms *kosmios* and *aidos*—“well-ordered” and “decent”—to describe the appropriate adorning of the Christian woman (1 Tim 2:9). With reference to clothing, the terms mean that Christians must dress in a *well-ordered, decorous, decent manner*, without causing shame or embarrassment to God, themselves, or others.

We can violate the Christian dress code of modesty by neglecting personal appearance as well as by giving excessive attention to it. “Dress neatly and becomingly,” Ellen White counseled, “but do not make yourself the subject of remarks either by being overdressed or by dressing in a lax, untidy manner. Act as though you knew that the eye of heaven is upon you, and you are living under the approbation or disapprobation of God.”²

To dress modestly and decently implies that clothing must provide sufficient covering for the body so that others are not embarrassed or tempted. This principle is especially relevant today when modern dress fashions reject modesty and decency as the basis for constructive human relationships. The concern of the modern fashion industry is to sell clothes, jewelry, and cosmetics by exploiting the powerful sex drives of the human body, even if it means marketing immodest products that only feed pride and sensuality.

The Bible explicitly condemns the lustful look: “Every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart”

(Matt 5:28). The revealing clothes promoted by the modern fashion industry awaken lustful passions in the heart of the beholder and contribute immeasurably to the depravity of our time. By dressing modestly, the Christian woman plays a key role in maintaining public morality.

God calls us to dress modestly and decently, not only to prevent sin, but also to preserve intimacy. People who want to sin will sin no matter how modestly dressed the people they see are. The purpose of modesty is not only to prevent lustful desires, but also to preserve something which is very fragile and yet fundamental to the survival of a marital relationship: the ability to maintain a deep, intimate relationship with one's spouse. If marriage is going to last a lifetime, as God intended it to, then husband and wife must work together to preserve, protect, and nurture the intimacy. When all is said and done modesty will preserve the joy of intimacy long after the ringing of the wedding bells.

The apostolic admonition to dress modestly and decently summons us to reject the seductive dictates of fashion, choosing instead to reflect in our outward appearance the natural beauty of simplicity and of elevated purity.

PRINCIPLE FIVE: Christians should dress soberly, restraining any desire to exhibit themselves by wearing eye-catching clothes, cosmetics, or jewelry. This principle is found in Paul's use of the term *sophrosune*—"soberly,"—to describe appropriate Christian adorning (1 Tim 2:9). We have found that the term denotes a mental attitude of self-control, an attitude that determines all other virtues. Paul recognized that self-control is indispensable for a Christian to be able to dress modestly and decently. The reason is that modest and decent attire derives from the exercise of self-control.

Paul pictures the converted Christian woman as one who dresses soberly by restraining her desire to exhibit herself through wearing *elaborate hair styles, gold, pearls, or expensive clothes* (1 Tim 2:9). Her appearance does not say, 'Look at me; admire me,' but rather, "Look at how Christ has changed me from the inside out." A Christian woman who has been freed from the abiding concern to be the object of admiration will not be afraid to wear the same dress too often, if it is well-made, conservative, and wears well.

The apostle's call to dress soberly by shunning elaborate hair styles, glittering jewelry, and extravagant clothes is particularly relevant today, when fashion reigns supreme and many worship at her altar. Ellen White reminded us that "those who worship at fashion's altar have but little force of character . . . They live for no greater purpose, and their lives accomplish no worthy end. We meet everywhere women whose mind and heart are absorbed in their love of dress and display. The soul of womanhood is dwarfed and belittled, and her thoughts are centered upon her poor, despicable self."³

Paul's admonition to restrain the desire to buy or wear "expensive clothes" (1 Tim 2:9) also points to the practice of Christian stewardship. Expenditures that go beyond our means are incompatible with the Christian principle of stewardship. Even if *we can afford to buy* expensive clothes, *we cannot afford to waste* the means that God has given us at a time when there are many crying needs to reach the unreached with the gospel and to help the needy.

"Practice economy," Ellen White wrote, "in your outlay of means for dress. Remember that what you wear is constantly exerting an influence upon those with whom you come in contact. Do not lavish upon yourselves means that is greatly needed elsewhere. Do not spend the Lord's money to gratify a taste for expensive clothing."⁴

PRINCIPLE SIX: Wearing finger rings is not compatible with the Biblical principles of modesty; historically, they have tempted people to wear all kinds of jewelry. This principle is derived from the Biblical disapproval of wearing ornamental jewelry (1 Tim 2:9; 1 Peter 3:3-4; Gen 35:2-4; Ex 33:3-5). The only finger ring mentioned in the Bible several times is the signet ring (Jer 22:24; Gen 41:42; Esth 3:10, 12; Luke 15:22), which was used to seal various documents and contracts. The wearing of the signet ring is not condemned in the Bible, presumably because it was regarded as an instrument of authority rather than an ornament.

We have found the betrothal ring was first a plain iron ring used by the Romans to "tie" the betrothal commitment of two lovers. Soon the betrothal ring evolved into elaborate ornamental golden rings worn on practically all the fingers. What happened in ancient Rome was later repeated in the history of Christianity. In the early church the use of the marital ring evolved through three main stages. In the first stage, the apostolic period, there was no apparent use of the marital ring. In the second stage, the second and third centuries, there was a restricted use of only one plain, inexpensive conjugal ring. In the final stage, from the fourth century onward, there was a proliferation of all kinds of ornamental gold rings set with gems to display wealth, pride, and vanity. This was true not only for the laity but also for the clergy. Church leaders bedecked and bejeweled themselves with gold rings, precious stones, and gold embroidered vestments.

What happened in the early church was later repeated in modern denominations. The two examples we have considered, namely, the Methodist and Mennonite churches, show the same pattern. In the first stage, no jewelry or wedding rings were allowed. In the second stage, a concession was made for wearing the wedding ring. In the final stage, the concession to wear

the marital ring became a pretext for wearing all kinds of jewelry, including ornamental rings.

The pattern in the Seventh-day Adventist church is very similar. In the first stage of the early days of Adventism, no jewelry or marriage rings were worn. In the second stage, a concession was made for wearing the marriage ring only in those countries where the custom was imperative. In the final stage, the concession to wear a plain marriage band was extended in 1986 to church members in North America. The result of this evolution is a steady rise among Adventists in the wearing of different kinds of jewelry, including ornamental rings.

The lesson of history is evident. Rings seem to exercise an almost fatal attraction. People can become so enamored with their finger ring that they are easily tempted to wear all kinds of jewelry. To play it safe, it is advisable not to wear a wedding ring, unless it is a social imperative. Instead we can wear “the golden link which binds [our] souls to Jesus Christ, a pure and holy character, the true love and meekness and godliness that are the fruit borne upon the Christian tree, and [our] influence will be secure anywhere.”⁵

PRINCIPLE SEVEN: Christians should respect gender distinctions in clothing by wearing clothes that affirm their male or female identities. This principle is plainly taught in the law found in Deuteronomy 22:5, which prohibits wearing the clothes of the opposite sex. We have found that the Bible attaches great importance to preserving gender distinctions in dress as well as in functional roles, because these are fundamental to our understanding of who we are and what role God wants us to fulfill.

Clothes define our identity and help us develop a new identity. Not only is it true that we are what we wear, but also that we become what we wear. A woman who wants to function as a man will most likely dress like a man. Similarly a man who wants to be treated as a woman will most likely wear feminine items like jewelry, perfume, and ornate clothing. This means that when we blur the gender distinctions by wearing genderless clothing, we gradually lose our male or female identity and experience an identity crisis and confusion of roles.

We have found that role confusion is present today in the home, in the workplace, and in the church, making it increasingly difficult to tell where the role of a man ends and that of a woman begins. Christians must recognize today’s attempts to abolish male and female distinctions, especially through the popularity of genderless clothing, as Satan’s effort to destroy the order and beauty of God’s creation.

The Bible does not tell us what style of clothing men and women should wear, because it recognizes that style is dictated by climate and culture. The Bible does teach us to respect the gender distinction in clothing as it is known within our own culture. This means that as Christians we need to ask ourselves when buying clothes: Does this article of clothing affirm my gender identity, or does it make me look as though I belong to the opposite sex? Whenever you feel that a certain type of clothing does not belong to your gender, follow your conscience: Don't buy it, even if it is fashionable.

At a time when modern fashion seems bent on abolishing gender distinctions in clothing, it is not always easy for Christians to find clothes that affirm their gender identity. But it has never been easy to live by Biblical principles. Yet this is our Christian calling, not to conform to the perverted values and styles of our society, but to be a transforming influence in this world through the enabling power of God.

Conclusion. Clothes do not make a Christian, but Christians reveal their identity through their clothes and appearance. The Bible does not prescribe a standardized dress for Christian men and women to wear, but it calls us to follow the simplicity and unpretentiousness of Jesus' lifestyle, even in our clothes and appearance.

To follow Jesus in our dress and adornment means to stand apart from the crowd by not painting up, jewelizing up, and dolling up our bodies as do the rest. This takes courage. Courage not to conform to the seductive dictates of fashion, but to be transformed by the sensible directives of the Word of God (Rom 12:2). Courage to distinguish between the capricious mode that changes and the sensible style that remains. Courage to reveal the loveliness of Christ's character, not by the external decoration of our bodies "with gold or pearls or expensive clothes" (1 Tim 2:9, NEB), but by the internal beautification of our souls with the graces of the heart, the gentle and quiet spirit which is precious in God's sight (1 Pet 3:4). Courage to dress, not to glorify ourselves by wearing glittering jewelry and eye-catching clothes, but to glorify God by dressing modestly, decently, and soberly.

Our outward appearance is a constant silent witness of our Christian identity. May it always tell the world that we live to glorify God and not ourselves.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 7

1. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, California, 1948), vol. 3, p. 376.
2. Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance* (Nashville, 1954), p. 415.
3. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, California, 1948), vol. 4, p. 644.
4. Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance* (Nashville, 1954), p. 421.
5. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers* (Mountain View, California, 1954), p. 180.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Laurel Damsteegt was born in Bangkok, Thailand of missionary physicians, Ethel and Roger Nelson. She spent most of her childhood in Bangkok but went to Singapore for her first two years of secondary education.

Laurel graduated with a B.A. in Theology from Atlantic Union College. In the summers she gained experience working at New England Memorial Hospital as a hospital chaplain. One summer she was interim pastor of the New England Memorial Hospital Church.

Mrs. Damsteegt earned an M.Div. from Andrews University in 1977 and an M.S.P.H. from Loma Linda University in 1978. While at the Seminary she met her husband, P. Gerard Damsteegt (who was finishing a doctoral dissertation), and they were married in 1976.

The Damsteegts have worked together in team ministry in several different places and capacities. They served first in the Potomac Conference as a pastoral couple, then in Bangkok, Thailand as chaplains, health educators, and pastors, and finally in Seoul, Korea setting up a Soul Winning Institute.

In 1985 the Damsteegts returned from mission service and Mrs. Damsteegt assisted her husband in his work on the book *Seventh-day Adventists Believe. . .*

When, in 1988, Dr. Damsteegt began teaching Church History at the Andrews University Theological Seminary, Mrs. Damsteegt focussed her active ministry on rearing their two children, Joelle and Pieter. Her present employment she considers the highest calling of all.

Chapter 8
A PRACTICAL LOOK
AT
A CHRISTIAN’S CLOTHING
by
Laurel Damsteegt

The way we dress is such a sensitive matter. Few issues are more personal than what we eat and what we wear. Both become who we are. Over no issues do we raise more resistance than in the very personal habits that surround our daily being.

We may not necessarily feel good about what we wear or eat, yet feel highly protective. A critical remark about diet or dress we perceive as aiming directly at the very core of who we are because we are unable to separate “ourselves” from our exterior. Here is a classic example of why the philosophy of the wholistic person—body, mind, and soul are one—is true. The body expresses the soul, the soul the body. Here is no dichotomy. Sensitivity over clothing has existed ever since the garments of light disappeared and we began sewing our own fig leaves.

Objective of Chapter. The aim of this essay is twofold. First, I will endeavor to articulate a Christian philosophy of dress and adornment. Second, I will propose some practical principles of dress. In many ways this essay endeavors to apply in a practical way the principles of dress and adornment that have emerged in the preceding chapters.

PART I: A CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY OF DRESS

Dressing to Please Others. Is dress strictly a personal matter? Is how I dress my business alone? Not really. Even though we are personally accountable for how we dress, there is no doubt that we dress more for the affect on others than for ourselves. Why would a woman ever subject her-

self to three-inch, pinching high heels? Probably not because she really loves their comfort but because she feels they project a certain look she is trying to achieve. If one finds that one's date likes blue, a fuzzy blue sweater becomes choice for the next occasion together. Job interviews demand a certain professionalism and normally one would never consider wearing well-worn blue jeans and a faded sweatshirt no matter how clean, warm or comfortable they might be. Most dressing is not just personal preference. We do dress to please others.

Dressing to Please the Lord. Christians dress to please not only others, but Someone special. Because we have chosen Jesus as Lord (Col 2:6), we aim to please God in every aspect of our lives—even in our clothing. Some say, “God does not *care* how I look. He loves me, not my clothes.” Of course God loves people, no matter how poorly dressed or undressed they are. God's love is not dependent on what we wear (or who we are)! We cannot make Him love us more by what we wear.

We come to Him “just as we are” but we do not stay that way! Because we love the Lord we long to please Him in every possible way. We give ourselves to Him unconditionally for Him to work these transformations in us. This involves radical changes that have *nothing to do with His acceptance of us, but with our acceptance of Him*. Because we love God so very dearly we wish to please Him in *whatever* we do, including our outward appearance.

Learning to Please the Lord. We discover what delights the Lord by examining His Word and submitting ourselves to His revealed will. This is not dreary work. In fact, because we have given our heart to Him, He returns it all changed (Ezek 11:19, 20; 36:26, 27).

Things we used to adore we find inappropriate. Our new heart *delights* in doing exactly what He likes anyway. Our tastes are changed, our nature altered (Ps. 40:8). Then if He so much as intimates that He likes something, I rush to do exactly His bidding. Not out of fear and not from force, but because I myself really prefer it that very way now anyway! So, in doing what I like, I ultimately do His will. “If we consent, He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses. The will, refined and sanctified, will find its highest delight in doing His service.”¹

This is the miracle of the new heart, the essence of the New Covenant. And what is more, I am *enabled* to do exactly as He asks. Nothing is too hard for God! “As the will of man cooperates with the will of God, it

becomes omnipotent. Whatever is to be done at His command may be accomplished in His strength. All His biddings are enablings.”²

Of course, if our hearts have not been changed, His wishes are hard, they are work. We have to struggle against ourselves (what we really prefer) to please Him. This, of course, is legalism. So here is a test. Do you find something in the Scriptures that is terribly disagreeable to you? This may indicate that you need to go back to square one and ask yourself some very basic questions: Have I truly given my heart to Jesus? Is He Lord of my life? “There is no use in telling you that you must not wear this or that, for if the love of these vain things is in your heart, your laying off your adornments will only be like cutting the foliage off a tree. The inclinations of the natural heart would again assert themselves. You must have a conscience of your own.”³

This is why dress and ornaments (and other “incidental” standards) can become an index to what is really going on inside. Not submitting to minor points can be symptomatic of divided loyalties that need to be reexamined honestly. Clothes can affect our devotion in subtle and quiet ways. It is best to listen to promptings when the Holy Spirit whispers a hushed request.

Avoid Judging People by their Appearance. To believe that our outward appearance is an index of *our* character does not give us the right to judge others by *their* outward appearance. Jesus tells us, “Judge not.” We can never know how the gentle Shepherd is leading another. What He asks of you may be more than He has led me to understand so far. We have not been called to be conscience for anyone else. The same God who has led you on your pilgrimage can lead your friend or colleague also.

“There are many who try to correct the life of others by attacking what they consider are wrong habits. They go to those whom they think are in error, and point out their defects. They say, ‘You don’t dress as you should.’ They try to pick off the ornaments, or whatever seems offensive, but they do not seek to fasten the mind to the truth. Those who seek to correct others should present the attractions of Jesus. They should talk of His love and compassion, present His example and sacrifice, reveal His Spirit, and they need not touch the subject of dress at all. There is no need to make the dress question the main point of your religion. There is something richer to speak of. Talk of Christ, and when the heart is converted, everything that is out of harmony with the Word of God will drop off.”⁴

We cannot afford to judge people by their dress and ornamentation. Where did Jesus look when He feasted with the harlots and publicans? Certainly not on external appearance. We need to learn to focus on hearts just as

Jesus did! He saw longing needs and ministered to hurts with a tender love that exemplified no phoniness. He saw potential for God's kingdom everywhere and looked beyond the external flags—He ministered to hearts (Matt 21:31, 32).

People Judge Us By Our Appearance. Our Christian calling is not to judge others by their outward appearance, but we do have an obligation to reveal Christ to others by our own outward appearance. This is the paradox of the Christian lifestyle. *We dare not judge others* by their appearance, yet *we dare not become a stumblingblock to others* by our appearance. Though others cannot read our heart they can read our clothes, hairstyle, makeup. Our outward appearance makes a powerful statement for Christ. If we profess to be Christians, then people have a right to see the modesty and simplicity of Christ's life reflected in every aspect of our lives, including our appearance. We cannot afford to present a confusing picture.

To sum it up, we do not have a license to judge others by their appearance, but others have the right to expect to see Christ's ideals reflected in our behavior and appearance. We may not like it, but this is the way the Christian life works.

The Need for Dress Standards. Does a community of faith need a standard of dress and adornment, or should this matter be left up to the individual conscience?

To have unity among a body of believers one needs a commonness of standards. Seventh-day Adventists have chosen to define their standard by the teachings of the Word of God. Thus, respect for the Biblical standard of dress and ornaments is imperative to preserve our Adventist identity and unity. "All matters of dress should be strictly guarded, following closely the Bible rule. Fashion has been the goddess who has ruled the outside world, and she often insinuates herself into the church. The church should make the Word of God her standard, and parents should think intelligently upon this subject."⁵

Often, large companies have corporate dress codes because they realize that their image is reflected in the appearance of their employees. They believe that people act as they dress and that the company's reputation is not only established by its product but by its representatives. These large corporations uphold a standard for their employees. No one has to be an employee, but should one wish to be one, compliance is required.⁶

Similarly, we must uniformly uphold Biblical dress standards in our church if we want to reflect the image of our Master. But here is a problem. Concern for external appearance without the correct internal motivation, has

led some into the trap of legalism. So, how do we as Christians handle the sensitive issue of dress and ornaments? Should the church define in detail what church members should wear at home, at work, at play, or in the church? Such an approach was used by the Pharisees and the result was a hollow, loveless religion. Let us consider three possible alternatives.

1. We Can Educate. Many Christians know very little about what the Bible teaches regarding how to live, including how to dress for Christ. One reason is today's tendency to reduce Christianity to a profession rather than a practice. It is easier for a pastor to preach about the love of Christ than about the claims of Christ on the lives of His followers.

This is precisely what this book is all about, namely, to help Christians understand how to reflect Christ in their outward appearance. Incidentally, when pastors do preach on subjects like the Christian standards of dress and adornment, they are educating and not indicting us. We should not cringe over instructional sermons. We should welcome them. Let us give our pastors the freedom to educate us on how to follow Jesus in practical aspects of Christian living like dress, diet, stewardship, health, amusements, work ethics, and devotional life.

2. We Can Ask For a New Heart. Education is not enough. Sometimes people will accept intellectually but not existentially the validity of Biblical principles of dress and ornamentation. With their mind they say, "What the Bible teaches me in this area is true," but with their heart they say, "I am not prepared at this point to give up my jewelry or seductive clothes."

The remedy is to be willing to have God recreate a new heart within us, daily, hourly so that we are eager for His nudgings on any account. "And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the Lord: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart" (Jer 24:7).

We must pray for inner renewal so that we may truly live by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Until we experience this inner renewal we cannot witness effectively for Christ. People hate hypocrisy but appreciate the consistent reflection of Christ's image in our life.

"If we would humble ourselves before God, and be kind and courteous and tenderhearted and pitiful, there would be one hundred conversions to truth where now there is only one. But, though professing to be converted, we carry around with us a bundle of self that we regard as altogether too precious to be given up. It is our privilege to lay this burden at the feet of Christ and in its place take the character and similitude of Christ. The Saviour is waiting for us to do this."⁷

3. We Can Love “Immature” Christians. Not everyone will see things the way we do. Some people do not see anything wrong with wearing earrings, necklaces, bracelets, finger rings, or miniskirts. They reason that there is more to Christianity than jewelry and clothes. How should we relate to these people? The answer is simple. We love them anyway, because we have Jesus' heart. Jesus often disagreed with His people but tears flowed freely as He looked over hardened Jerusalem. We can pray to become an extension of His loving heart, even toward those who do not live according to Christ's ideal for their lives.

PART II: TEN PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIAN DRESS AND ADORNMENT

Jesus really does have some preferences for the way we clothe and adorn our bodies. The preceding chapters have shown that the Bible repeatedly calls us by precepts and examples to dress modestly and decently, without glittering jewelry or luxurious clothes. From the teachings of Scripture we can create a picture of how we can please Jesus even in the details of our outward adornment. In this picture I find ten practical principles which I will attempt to describe.

PRINCIPLE ONE: The Christian motive for dressing is not to please self or others, but to glorify God. People dress for different reasons, even if they are not conscious of it. *Some dress for self.* This insidious motive is basic to most motives today. Some dress and adorn their bodies because they want to be admired as persons of distinction. Others crave for extra attention to bolster their self-confidence. To get attention, a few will go to extremes by wearing quirky little items of dress. They want to alert people to the fact that they are individualists.

One may wear a lovely blouse to be noticed, another may leave a shirt largely unbuttoned over skintight pants to invite whistles. All point to the same motive. Self longs to be appreciated or at least noticed. But Paul admonishes, “If then you have been raised with Christ, . . . set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. . . . Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness which is idolatry” (Col 3:1, 2, 5).

Some dress to please others. Peer pressure is not found only among children and teens. Adults of all strata participate. Fashion is a hard mistress. Whether it is the size of a collar or the width of a tie, the length of a skirt, the uniformity of slacks at a picnic, pressure is there and we succumb to it in varying degrees.

A Christian dresses to glorify God. Christians are concerned about clothing because it frames their character and displays a beautiful picture of the One they serve. As the hymn-writer said, we wish to merely be “the transparent medium, Thy glory to display.”⁸ The Christian goal is to “do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31).

We are “living epistles” that can be known and read of all (2 Cor 3:2,3). If the outward appearance does not match the inward condition of the soul, we breed confusion. Beware of becoming an excuse for someone else to follow their rebellious detour (Matt 18:6; Rom 14:13-15; 1 Cor 10:33). You may have a pure heart and love Jesus but if you dress suggestively with a low-cut shirt and tight short pants, you can be sure that the men looking at you will not be thinking of Jesus.

On the other extreme, even a well-groomed preacher can become a distraction if expensive clothes are always well-matched, always at the peak of fashion, and changed each week in infinite variety. Some of the congregation will notice clothing more than hear the message preached. We need to beware of displaying self in any form.

If there is nothing of self on display in a Christian's attire beholders will come to believe that there is More to their life than meets the eye.

PRINCIPLE TWO: A Christian should dress and act in a modest way, sufficiently covering the body to avoid embarrassment or temptation (1 Tim 2:9). God created Adam and Eve with coverings of light which they lost when they sinned. With the coldness and the darkness came the recognition of nakedness and they immediately felt a need to cover themselves (Gen 3:7). Nakedness in Scripture became a symbol of emptiness, of sin, of apostasy, of attempting to save oneself (Ex 32:25; Deut 28:48; 2 Chron 28:19; Job 1:21; Is 2:2-4; Hos 2:3; Matt 25:36; Rev 3:17,18). Scripture does not use nakedness in a positive way.

God made the first durable garments—fig leaves were rather disposable—and clothing became a symbol of God's willingness to cover our emptiness and destitution with Himself (Ruth 3:9; Eze 16:8; Matt 22:11, 12; Rev 3:18).⁹

Careful instructions are given in various places to cover one's body so nakedness does not appear (Ex. 20:26; 28:42). Yet body exposure has become characteristic of modern fashion. Designers attempt through cut and fit to show off the body in an infinite variety of ways. Even persons who are covered completely can be immodest, if their clothing is tight or sheer and exposes anyway.

Whose fault is sexual harassment? Is the person at fault who wears suggestive clothing? Or the harasser? Sometimes we do not take responsibility for the lust we evoke. Often women are totally naive to the way clothing affects men. Short skirts attract attention to the legs, slits in skirt or blouse are suggestive and play "peek-a-boo." Low necklines leave little to the imagination. Possibly a few Christian men may be able to resist lustful thoughts, but men of the world do not even try.

One once said he could not understand "why a woman would say wearing a miniskirt makes her feel more like a woman yet not expect me to feel more like a man. I believe that women have the right to wear anything they want, wherever they want, but help me understand why I am still supposed to look them in the eye. In this age of the 'new man,' let it be known that just because a woman does not hear lewd and obscene utterances does not mean that men aren't thinking lewd and obscene thoughts."¹⁰

For Christians this is serious! Jesus said, "Every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt 5:28). Think of the damage of defrauding a brother by wearing skimpy clothing! Who harasses whom?

So what is modesty? It certainly includes covering our bodies adequately, in a well-ordered, pleasant, decorous, and decent attire. But modesty must include even our behavior. We can be modest in clothing and immodest in our deportment.

For instance, wedding bands do not insure chaste behavior. All manner of flirting and inappropriate behavior take place by persons wearing wedding rings all the time. How can a Christian deal with flirtation and passes? By careful behavior that encourages no playful small talk.

When I am put into a new situation (say on an airplane) where someone may question whether I am married or not because I do not wear a wedding ring, I make a practice of casually speaking about my husband and my children. It is commendable to be kind and friendly or helpful, but maintaining a careful decorum is vital. This type of modesty is protection.

PRINCIPLE THREE: The outward adornment of a Christian should reflect the simplicity, naturalness, and consistency of Christ's life. The highest ideal in Jesus' picture of a lovely Christian is the beauty of simplicity. As Jesus spoke on the Mount, He reached over and plucked a simple flower. As He looked deep into its throat of varying hue and intensity, the form was exact, the line perfect. Jesus noted that Solomon in all his extravagant, impressive garb could not begin to express the loveliness of that simple wildflower.

Then Jesus gave one of His “enabling” promises. God is much more interested in you and me than in the flowers of the field. Just as He takes care of their design and needs, “shall he not *much more* clothe you?” (Matt 6:30). God has promised to provide for our clothing, not in a fussy way, but with simplicity and adequacy. Sometimes God provides through sudden unexpected gifts of things we could never afford (sometimes used); a marvelous sale; or making clothes last almost as long as the Israelites’ shoes. God does provide, and every gift needs to be acknowledged as directly from Him, the Author of all good things!

A discussion on the use of cosmetics falls under the principle of simplicity. The Creator made us with our own special hues and coloring. Healthful vigor brings color to our cheeks and luster to our hair. One that uses a consistent covering of makeup blocks the natural color. On an “off-day,” her skin looks sallow and white, the lips pale, the eyes line-less. Not only are we not used to seeing her that way, she actually is paler than she would otherwise be if she left off the coverings and allowed her Maker to naturally paint her. Men do not normally use cosmetics and are colored just fine.

The woman who does not wear cosmetics never has to worry about harsh lighting, evening lighting, or fluorescent lighting. She need not worry about rain or snow marring the foundation and rouged cheek, or wiping lipstick off while eating, or messing up mascara should a few tears flow. She is herself always. And who minds a few cheerful crinkles of happiness around the eyes or pleasant wrinkles around the mouth? Neither need she worry about embarrassing hair roots that show every week or two. Gray hair speaks of experience and growth (Prov 16:31). It is beautiful!

Being natural, one’s self, allows one to show joy and inner peace that bubble over. Being artificial covers up all that simple naturalness. And it certainly is more healthy on the skin pores not to be consistently covered over.¹¹ Simple clothing, plain hairstyles, a God-painted face can be lovely, even if they are not likely to catch the onlooker’s eye. If that bothers us perhaps we need to ask why we crave attention. Not having a high profile can be safer—both literally and spiritually. But natural does not mean dowdy.

PRINCIPLE FOUR: The clothes and appearance of a Christian should be neat and clean. Sometimes we get the idea that simplicity is tackiness. It is not. Nor is it slovenliness. Taking time to run a quick iron over a shirt is important (imperative if cotton!) Sewing on a button takes minutes. Make a repair box and put it near your favorite chair where you can pick it up when you are talking on the phone or otherwise just sitting. We are not to look like scarecrows, even around home.

“Sisters, when about their work, should not put on clothing which would make them look like images to frighten the crows from the corn. It is more gratifying to their husbands and children to see them in a becoming, well-fitting attire than it can be to mere visitors or strangers. Some wives and mothers seem to think it is no matter how they look when about their work and when they are seen only by their husbands and children, but they are very particular to dress in taste for the eyes of those who have no special claims upon them. Is not the esteem and love of husband and children more to be prized than that of strangers or common friends?”¹²

Cleanliness is not an option either. As the old adage goes, “Cleanliness is next to godliness.” We do not represent Jesus well with dirty, messy clothes. Of course, if you are on a construction job, or working in the garden there is place for dirtiness. But when you come in, shower and look your best—for Jesus’ sake.

PRINCIPLE FIVE: A Christian can shun extravagance yet choose nice-looking clothes that are of good quality, superb fit, and durable. We are the stewards of the little or much God has entrusted to us. We are called to live on what we need to and to channel the rest into whatever He guides us to support.

Some shop around and buy the most inexpensive clothing they can find. For some this may be the best way. For example, children outgrow clothing so quickly it hardly pays to buy top quality unless the item can be worn for two or more seasons (or be handed down to a sibling).

Adult buying is different. Provided we do not have drastic body change (go through a pregnancy, for instance), we can wear clothes for years. Especially in seasonal climates where clothing is used for only a few months out of a year one can wear the same clothing year after year, if it has taste and quality. “Our clothing while modest and simple, should be of good quality, of becoming colors, and suited for service. It should be chosen for durability rather than display.”¹³

If one spends a little more time doing a comparative search of what is available, one can find clothes that look good, feel wonderful, and are durable. First, choose quality cloth that does not require high upkeep, and a style that is classic. Such clothing may be more expensive up front, but it will save time and money over the years.

Extravagance emerges from excess. It is not extravagant to have good quality clothes that fit well and are pleasant and comfortable to wear. But if the wardrobe is so filled with beautiful, good quality clothes that we have

not been able to wear some items for months or even years, then it is time to stop buying more and perhaps start thinking of someone in your size with whom you might share some of God's blessings.

If you have everything you need, do not buy again until your need is real. Resist the temptation to buy because there is a good bargain. Do not tempt yourself by window shopping or looking at endless catalogues. You will always see one more thing that you just *must* have. Do not spend the Lord's money to satisfy extravagant desires. "Self-denial in dress is a part of our Christian duty. To dress plainly and abstain from display of jewelry and ornaments of every kind is in keeping with our faith."¹⁴

PRINCIPLE SIX: The clothing should ensure the health of the body by protecting it, rather than injuring it. God designed our bodies in a marvelous way. The organs interrelate and function so smoothly we rarely consider them unless we have health problems. This is highly ungrateful. Attention to personal health is far from being selfish; it is a way of paying gratitude to God for His workmanship and redemption.

Clothing should promote excellent circulation. The body is an intricate system of organs and a network of complex nerves all fed by oxygen via fresh blood. Because our circulatory system is largely involuntary, we take it for granted. Tight clothing constricts and causes not only immediate discomfort (the body saying, "Listen to me!"), but sometimes internal long-term injury to organs or blood vessels.

Last century corsets and waists were largely responsible for dysfunction of abdominal organs. These days we do not go to those extremes but occasionally we have a tight waist or a tight elastic, such as top elastic of some hosiery or socks or very snug undergarments. Have mercy on your system! Give it room to circulate. It is most important that clothing be comfortable. Choose waistlines that have some "give" built in, sweaters that are warm and washable, jackets that do not constrict arm movement or rumple, coats that amply cover and are very warm. These are all excellent choices for health.

Staying warm in cold weather is a very important consideration for the circulation as well. Extremities should stay as warm as the trunk.¹⁵ Yet how often do we venture out in the snow with thin hose and sling-back heels! These days hosiery companies are beginning to make sensible, warmer hosiery as warm as thermal underwear! Take advantage of staying warm! Legs should be adequately clothed and can be done so easily under some of the casual longer skirts employing some of these modern underwears. Then with

warm, high boots, a wool scarf tucked snugly about the neck and thick warm mittens, one can truly enjoy the wonders of winter without suffering its bite.¹⁶

Covering the head is another important (old-fashioned?) consideration. In winter tremendous amounts of heat are lost off of the head. The face and ears can suffer severe exposure, too. Choose a winter hat that can cover the head without destroying the tresses. (Some coats have a handy hood that can be pulled up.) In summer a shading hat helps to keep the head cool while working outside. Treat your brain to some respect!

Shoes, most of all, should be comfortable. Pinched toes, carbuncles, corns, calluses, bad backs, all are the body's way of saying, "Treat me well, make me comfortable, and I will give you stamina for all day!" Shoes that are soft and have good arch support may initially be very expensive but are well worth it for they make such a difference in endurance when walking and standing. They help prevent general fatigue.

PRINCIPLE SEVEN: A Christian should wear clothes that are appropriate for the occasion. "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven," Solomon once said (Eccl 3:1). A better summary of appropriateness could not be given. One wears in the garden what one would not think of wearing to church or a business meeting. What is appropriate in the dead of winter would certainly not be sensible in the sweltering heat of summer. Flying down the road on a bicycle one would probably wear something different than to a dinner party. Appropriateness implies common sense and pulls together all the other principles into a balanced picture. One could be so healthful in dress that simple grace and beauty are lost.

Culture of different countries does play a part in determining what is appropriate dress. In Middle Eastern countries where women are still largely covered except for eyes, one might need to be extremely careful and respectful. In some countries people dress so elegantly that sloppy, T-shirt-and-jeans-loving Americans often become a laughingstock. Here we need good judgment.

What is appropriate for men is not always for women, even though common culture allows it. A blurring of these distinctions is currently trendy. As Christians we need to consistently make certain that there is a clear distinction between men's wear and women's clothing. As shown in chapter six, the Scripture clearly teaches us to respect gender distinctions in dress as well as in functional roles, because they are part of the order of creation. Gender distinctions are fundamental for our understanding of who we are and what role God wants us to fulfill. We must not allow ourselves to eliminate them.

“There is an increasing tendency to have women in their dress and appearance as near like the other sex as possible, and to fashion their dress very much like that of men, but God pronounces it abomination. ‘In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety.’ 1 Tim 2:9 God designed that there should be a plain distinction between the dress of men and women, and has considered the matter of sufficient importance to give explicit directions in regard to it; for the same dress worn by both sexes would cause confusion and great increase of crime.”¹⁷

PRINCIPLE EIGHT: Christian clothing is to be becoming and beautiful, revealing style and grace. Christian clothing is to be nice-looking. It can be beautiful. We should not dress to be ugly so that people are not attracted to us. This would detract from God also!¹⁸ No one should ever say, “I would sure hate to be a Christian! Look what hideous clothes their God makes them wear!”

Careless dressers may note that God loves the beautiful or He would not have filled this world with such a variety of beautiful colors. He loves the orderly or He would not have created the universe so intricate in its design and movements. He loves the simple or He would not have provided us with the simple beauty and taste of fruits, grains, and vegetables.

Beauty in clothes starts with style rather than fashion. Some people mistakenly believe that fashion is just style. It is not, though it permeates the whole essence of society.¹⁹ Fashion comes and goes but style remains. Someone once said, “Fads are traps! Fashion is exciting, transient, faddish; style is poised, lasting, consistent; good design is ageless.” *Fashion* is almost synonymous with *temporary*. If designers should fashion immortal styles they would soon work themselves out of their lucrative jobs. The fashion industry is highly fraught with consumerism. Its aim is to satisfy the fancy of the moment.

On the other hand clothes with style do not easily become outdated. They are like pieces of art. They say something, they have purpose. While we cannot condone here-today-gone-tomorrow fashion, we can commend sensible style. Classic or traditional styles have been appropriate for years and will never go out of fashion.

PRINCIPLE NINE: Develop a practical wardrobe that is tailored to you and your lifestyle. The first step in developing a practical, but tasteful wardrobe is to decide how one's time is used. Is a majority of the week spent in an office as a CEO? Do you spend most of your time minding

babies at home? Are you a hard-working, physical laborer? Do you spend a fair share of time in physical activity, at spas or playing tennis?

If you are minding babies all day you probably do not need six suits. But neither should you condescend to “sweats” day and night. Dress nicely even for babies! Families love to see well-kept parents around the home (not just nice when going out); it makes children feel important too.

One should aim for a classic look to avoid fads. For women, a very basic wardrobe can consist of a skirted suit, a basic dress, a basic casual, an after-five dinner dress, a basic coat, and a pair of shoes and purse that match. If thought through carefully, the suit jacket can be worn over other items and act like a blazer. It is better to buy one quality classic per season (or one every other season) than to settle for less than the best.

So what is basic? A very basic wardrobe consists of simple lines, traditional styles with a central coordinating color. These basic colors are black, brown, navy, gray, and beige. Color and line are vital to communicating presence and authority. In the 70s John T. Molloy wrote classic volumes *Dress for Success* and *Women's Dress for Success Book*. Though nearly twenty years ago, the principles are still cited as valid for business dressing today. Many, though not all, of the principles apply to Christian dressing—stick to classic quality, and simple clothing.

Since Molloy's extensive research was published, color analysis came into vogue in the 80s. Color analysis can be useful in helping different complexion types find colors that best complement them.²⁰ As one finds which basic color (s) look(s) best, then stick with that color family and coordinate from there. The advantage of this is that one need not have dozens of shoes and handbags to hold a wardrobe together. Shoes in a basic color can help hold one to one's color palette. Do you find that no shoes match an article of clothing you are trying on? Do not buy it because it is probably not in your color scheme. If you look best in earth tones (browns) do not be tempted by navys and blacks. If you look most striking in black tones, then do not meddle with browns.

After you own a basic wardrobe, choose coordinating accent colors to add variety. You need not stay with only basic colors. Just make sure that all you choose will still coordinate with the foundation you have laid with your basics, and your wardrobe will hang together.

Some of the same principles also apply to men as far as color and coordinating a basic wardrobe. Men might begin with one or two good looking, well-fitting suits, add two white dress shirts (white is still the classic),

and choose two other striped or pastel shirts (never red or pink). An excellent quality blazer and a couple of well-constructed trousers that contrast will help stretch the selection possibilities. A London-Fog type trenchcoat in beige seems to have tested best for years despite color analysis. Shoes in brown or black should be kept polished nicely. Most important is the tie which more than any other clothing item determines how people view a “man’s status, credibility, personality and ability.”²¹

Dressing for church depends largely on the type of activities one does at church. If a woman is up on the platform her skirt length needs to be easy enough so she does not have to tug. If one spends time helping in the children’s division, washable, non-wrinkling clothing can be a help.

The main function of clothing in church is not to attract attention to one’s self, but to facilitate worship. “All should be taught to be neat, clean, and orderly in their dress, but not to indulge in that external adorning which is wholly inappropriate for the sanctuary. There should be no display of the apparel; for this encourages irreverence. The attention of the people is often called to this or that fine article of dress, and thus thoughts are intruded that should have no place in the hearts of the worshipers. God is to be the subject of thought, the object of worship; and anything that attracts the mind from the solemn, sacred service is an offense to Him.”²²

Distractions from another worshiper’s clothing can be a hindrance to worship. On the other hand, Sabbath is a special day and we show respect for God by wearing our very best—not to look good for our own sakes but as a very act of worship.²³

PRINCIPLE TEN: In dressing children, Christian parents should choose age-appropriate clothing that is comfortable, neat, simple, but handsome. The principles for dressing children are the same as for adults, with a very few exceptions. Choose clothing that is comfortable, neat, simple, but handsome. Encourage a child in habits of neatness and order when young, because such habits are more difficult to develop in later years.

Along in the teens children begin wanting to look more like adults. And these days that line is being pushed earlier and earlier. Mere children are wearing high heels, or makeup, or decidedly adult fashions. As they do, they begin sporting adult behaviors and this can become problematic for a child’s development and morality. “The little ones should be educated in childlike simplicity . . . The children should not be forced into a precocious maturity, but should retain as long as possible the freshness and grace of their early years.”²⁴ Blessed is the child who can remain a child and enjoy childhood as long as possible.

David Elkind, in *The Hurried Child* explains how dress affects the maturing process: “Three or four decades ago, prepubescent boys wore short pants and knickers until they began to shave; getting a pair of long pants was a true rite of passage. Girls were not permitted to wear makeup or sheer stockings until they were in their teens. For both sexes, clothing set children apart. It signaled adults that these people were to be treated differently, perhaps indulgently; it made it easier for children to act as children.”²⁵

Today the fashion industry has targeted children. Even preschool children have miniature adult clothing. “From overalls to LaCoste shirts to scaled-down designer fashions, a whole range of adult costumes is available to children. (Along with them is a wide choice of corresponding postures such as those of young teenagers modeling designer jeans.)”²⁶

Most of society thinks this is just “cute.” However, the precocious clothing invites adult innuendo. Burdened at a young age with the overtones of adult culture the child has no retreat but to grow up too young and to find behaviors that are beyond their years.

“When children dress like adults they are more likely to behave as adults do, to imitate adult actions. It is hard to walk like an adult male wearing corduroy knickers that make an awful noise. But boys in long pants can walk like men, and little girls in tight jeans can walk like women. It is more difficult today to recognize that children are children and not miniature adults, because children dress and move like adults.”²⁷

Children need to also realize the value of money. Designer-labeled clothing seems so vital to children that they do not realize the financial strain on a limited family budget. They should be encouraged to appreciate simple, sensible clothing. It will help them become individuals—not victims of peer pressure.²⁸

The Inward Adorning. Maybe we have spoken of so much minutia that the larger picture is in danger of being lost. It is the inward adorning of the gentle and quiet spirit that is of great value in God’s sight (1 Pet 3:1-8). “If the heart is reformed, it will be seen in the outward appearance. If Christ be in us the hope of glory, we shall discover such matchless charms in Him that the soul will be enamored. It will cleave to Him, choose to love Him, and in His admiration self will be forgotten. Jesus will be magnified, adored; and self, abased and humbled.”²⁹

Often it is said that what we are is more important than what we wear. But, can we really separate the two? Do we not reflect *who* we are by *what* we wear? Does God really care about what I wear? If He has given us

directives, it is evident that He cares! “But, since clothing is such a tiny aspect of the Christian life,” some say, “why be picky? Let us stick with the great essentials of salvation and not concern ourselves with nit-picking.”

Such thinking ignores God's interest in small directives. It was a small thing that God asked of Adam and Eve: please do not eat of this one tree (there were many other trees from which to eat). When Naaman went to Elisha to be healed he was enraged because he was asked to wash in a dirty, local river. When a servant dared, he asked a question that rings through to today. “My father,” he respectfully began, “if the prophet had bid thee do some *great thing*, wouldest thou not have done it?” (2 Kings 5:13). If he had asked for large sums of money, a pilgrimage, something very difficult, you would have complied. Here he asks something so easy.

Conclusion. Dressing for God's glory is not something horribly difficult. But it does take willingness on our part to let Him change our attitudes. We need be willing to be made willing. He wants us to wear *His* gold. “I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see” (Rev 3:18, KJV). He wants to cover us, He wants to decorate us *inside* with His own charms and beauty. But our willingness is paramount to His ability to work.

“The apostle presents the inward adorning, in contrast with the outward, and tells us what the great God values. The outward is corruptible. But the meek and quiet spirit, the development of a beautifully symmetrical character, will never decay. It is an adornment which is not perishable. In the sight of the Creator of everything that is valuable, lovely, and beautiful it is declared to be of great price.”³⁰

Someday Jesus will swing open those pearly gates and admit His precious ones. What will He say? “Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over *a little*, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master” (Matt 25:21, RSV). May we be willing to follow Jesus in such *little* things as dress and ornaments, which silently tell the world that we live to glorify God and not ourselves.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 8

1. Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, California, 1940), p. 668.
2. Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Takoma Park, MD, 1942), p. 333.
3. Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, May 10, 1892.
4. Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, D.C., 1970), p. 272; cf. Ellen G. White in *Child Guidance* (Washington, D.C., 1982), p. 429: "Talk of the love and humility of Jesus, but do not encourage the brethren and sisters to engage in picking flaws in the dress or appearance of one another. Some take delight in this work; and when their minds are turned in this direction, they begin to feel that they must become church tinkers. They climb upon the judgment seat, and as soon as they see one of their brethren and sisters, they look to find something to criticize. This is one of the most effectual means of becoming narrow-minded and of dwarfing spiritual growth. God would have them step down from the judgment seat, for He has never placed them there."
5. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5 (Mountain View, California, 1948), p. 430. See also, Ellen G. White, *Messages to Young People* (Nashville, 1930), p. 354: "Human reasoning has ever sought to evade or set aside the simple, direct instructions of the Word of God. In every age, a majority of the professed followers of Christ have disregarded those precepts which enjoin self-denial and humility, which require modesty and simplicity of conversation, deportment, and apparel. The result has ever been the same—departure from the teachings of the gospel leads to the adoption of the fashions, customs, and principles of the world. Vital godliness gives place to dead formalism. The presence and power of God, withdrawn from those world-loving circles, are found with a class of humble worshipers, who are willing to obey the teachings of the Sacred Word. Through successive generations, this course has been pursued. One after another different denominations have risen and, yielding their simplicity, have lost, in a great measure, their early power."
6. John T. Molloy, *New Dress for Success* (New York, 1988), p. 33.
7. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*, vol.. 9 (n. 5), p. 189, 190.
8. Frances Ridley Havergal, "Live Out Thy Life Within Me," *Seventh-day Adventist Church Hymnal*, (Washington, D.C., 1985), p. 316.

9. Ellen G. White, in *Christ's Object Lessons* (n. 2), p. 311, 312, blends the description of Genesis 3 and Matthew 22. There, fig leaves are shown to be a symbol of human works and God's clothing is a symbol of the righteousness of Christ. "When we submit ourselves to Christ, the heart is united to His heart, the will is merged in His will, the mind becomes one with His mind, the thoughts are brought into captivity to Him; we live His life. This is what it means to be clothed with the garment of His righteousness. Then as the Lord looks upon us He sees, not the fig-leaf garment, not the nakedness and deformity of sin, but His own robe of righteousness, which is perfect obedience to the law of Jehovah."

10. Courtland Milloy, "A Lecher's Prayer," *Washington Post*, September 29, 1987, p. B3.

11. "Many are ignorantly injuring their health and endangering their life by using cosmetics. They are robbing the cheeks of the glow of health, and then to supply the deficiency use cosmetics. When they become heated . . . the poison is absorbed by the pores of the skin, and is thrown into the blood" (Ellen G. White, *Review*

11. "Many are ignorantly injuring their health and endangering their life by using cosmetics. They are robbing the cheeks of the glow of health, and then to supply the deficiency use cosmetics. When they become heated . . . the poison is absorbed by the pores of the skin, and is thrown into the blood" (Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, vol. 38, No. 18, Oct. 17, 1871, p. 110).

12. Ellen G. White, *Adventist Home* (Nashville, 1952), pp. 252, 253.

13. Ellen G. White, *Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, California, 1942), p. 288.

14. Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance* (n. 4), p. 428. "We should dress neatly and tastefully; but, my sisters, when you are buying and making your own and your children's clothing, think of the work in the Lord's vineyard that is still waiting to be done . . . Practice economy in your outlay of means for dress. Remember that what you wear is constantly exerting an influence upon those with whom you come in contact. Do not lavish upon yourselves means that is greatly needed elsewhere. Do not spend the Lord's money to gratify a taste for expensive clothing." *Ibid.*, pp. 420-421.

15. "Another evil which custom fosters is the unequal distribution of the clothing, so that while some parts of the body have more than is required, others are insufficiently clad. The feet and limbs, being remote from

the vital organs, should be especially guarded from cold by abundant clothing. It is impossible to have health when the extremities are habitually cold; for if there is too little blood in them there will be too much in other portions of the body. Perfect health requires a perfect circulation; but this cannot be had while three or four times as much clothing is worn upon the body, where the vital organs are situated, as upon the feet and limbs." White, *Ministry of Healing* (n.13), p. 293.

16. "The dress should fit easily, obstructing neither the circulation of the blood nor a free, full, natural respiration. The feet should be suitably protected from cold and damp. Clad in this way, we can take exercise in the open air, even in the dew of morning or evening, or after a fall of rain or snow, without fear of taking cold." White, *Child Guidance* (n. 4), p. 425. See also, *Ministry of Healing* (n. 13), pp. 290-293.

17. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 1 (n. 5), pp. 457-460.

18. Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance* (n. 4), p. 413: "In dress, as in all things else, it is our privilege to honor our Creator. He desires our clothing to be not only neat and healthful, but appropriate and becoming."

19. Ellen G. White, see *Ministry of Healing* (n. 13), p. 291. "It was the adversary of all good who instigated the invention of the ever-changing fashions. He desires nothing so much as to bring grief and dishonor to God by working the misery and ruin of human beings. One of the means by which he most effectually accomplishes this is the devices of fashion that weaken the body as well as enfeeble the mind and belittle the soul."

20. Some of the more popular color analyses are by Carole Jackson, *Color Me Beautiful* (New York, 1980). See pages 153-162 on the women's basic wardrobe. Also *Color for Men* (New York, 1984). See pages 97-102 for basic "survival wardrobe" for men with appropriate colors. "Taste should be manifested as to colors. Uniformity in this respect is desirable as far as convenient. Complexion, however, may be taken into account." Ellen G. White in *Healthful Living* (Battle Creek, Michigan, 1897), p. 120.

21. John T. Molloy (n. 6), p. 93. For more detail in buying and choices see pp. 41-149.

22. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 5 (n. 5), p. 499.

23. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6 (Mountain View, California, 1948), p. 355: "Many need instruction as to how they should appear in the assembly for worship on the Sabbath. They are not to

enter the presence of God in the common clothing worn during the week. All should have a special Sabbath suit, to be worn when attending service in God's house. While we should not conform to worldly fashions, we are not to be indifferent in regard to our outward appearance. We are to be neat and trim, though without adornment. The children of God should be pure within and without."

24. Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students* (Mountain View, California, 1943), p. 142.

25. David Elkind, *The Hurried Child* (Reading, Mass., 1981), p. 8.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid, pp. 8, 9.

28. "Teach them [your children] to distinguish between that which is sensible and that which is foolish in the matter of dress, and furnish them with clothes that are neat and simple. As a people who are preparing for the soon return of Christ we should give to the world an example of modest dress in contrast with the prevailing fashion of the day. Talk these things over, and plan wisely what you will do; then carry out your plans in your families. Determine to be guided by higher principles than the notions and desires of your children" (Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance* (n. 4), pp.424-425).

29. Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 2 (Battle Creek, Michigan, 1945), p. 263.

30. Ellen G. White, *My Life Today* (Washington, D.C., 1952), p. 123.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hedwig Jemison was an assistant secretary of the Ellen G. White Estate and served as director of the White Estate Branch Office at Andrews University until her retirement.

She was born in Portland, Oregon, and studied at Pacific Union College and Columbia Union College in the field of business administration and religion. In 1980 she received an honorary Master of Divinity degree from the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary in the Philippines.

Before becoming director of the White Estate Branch Office at Andrews University, Mrs. Jemison served as a secretary to Arthur L. White of the Ellen G. White Estate in Washington, D.C., and to W. G. C. Murdoch, dean of the Seminary at Andrews. Involved in extensive travel representing the White Estate, Mrs. Jemison set up Ellen G. White Research Centers in England, Australia, Mexico, Argentina, Philippines, India, South Africa.

Mrs. Jemison has compiled four morning watch devotional books from the writings of Ellen White entitled, *My Life Today*, *Sons and Daughters of God*, *Reflecting Christ*, and *Lift Him Up*. She has also written various articles for denominational publications and presented a paper on the role of women in the church for the General Conference at Camp Mohaven in 1974.

She was made an honorary member of the S. D.A. Dietetic Association in 1977 and received the Charles Elliott Weniger Award for Excellence in Education in 1980.

Currently Hedwig Jemison lives in Berrien Springs where she is actively involved in various community and church-sponsored programs. She has one daughter, Barbara Jemison Myers, who lives in Greeneville, Tennessee.

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Chapter 9

CLOTHING MEN

OF

THE CLOTH

Do you realize that clothing is one of the important factors that affect your ministry? “Clothing? Preposterous!”

But before you discard the idea, consider this statement—“When you meet a person for the first time, before you open your mouth, that person judges you on your appearance and bearing.”—Forrest H. Frantz, Sr., *The Miracle Success System* (West Nyack, N.Y.: Parker Publishing Co., Inc.). After all, first impressions are made in an amazingly short period of time—perhaps thirty seconds—and in that interval there is really little else to use in evaluation.

Today, reliable research can document down to the last detail how men’s clothing affects our perceptions of its wearer. John T. Molloy, author of the best-selling *Dress for Success* (for men), spent seventeen years collecting such data. His research includes the opinions and subconscious opinions of more than fifteen thousand people, constituting a wide cross section of the general public.

“We are preconditioned by our environment,” says Molloy, “and the clothing we wear is an integral part of that environment. The way we dress has a remarkable impact on the people we meet and greatly affects how they treat us.”

How can we avoid making mistakes in choosing the clothing we wear? The solution, says Molloy, a former teacher turned management consultant, is to let research choose your clothing.

Studies of verbal and nonverbal communication show the nonverbal has stronger effects. Thus clothes and appearance (nonverbal communicators) either reinforce verbal impressions or contradict (and often overwhelm) them. The business executive who dresses conservatively doesn’t have to

explain his authority. His clothes do it for him. In fact, those who adopt the conservative look assume the authority that goes with it. Molloy early discovered that the *value* of a man's clothing is important in determining his credibility and acceptance. People who are well dressed receive preferential treatment in almost all social and business encounters. If you don't believe it, try it when you go shopping.

Molloy, named "America's first wardrobe engineer" by *Time* magazine, did extensive research with the raincoat. There are two standard colors of raincoats sold in this country—beige and black. Molloy tested 1,362 persons by showing them almost identical pictures of two men assuming the same pose and in the same suit, shirt, tie, and shoes. The only difference was the color of their raincoats. Those being tested were asked to choose the most prestigious of the two. The beige raincoat was the choice of 1,118 people, or 87 percent.

Following this test, Molloy and two friends wore beige raincoats for a month. The next month they wore black raincoats. At the end of each period they catalogued the attitudes of people toward them. The three men agreed that the beige raincoat created a distinctly more favorable impression upon waiters, store clerks, and businessmen they met.

Finally, Molloy picked a group of twenty-five business offices and went to each with a copy of *The Wall Street Journal*, asking the secretary to allow him to deliver it personally to the individual in charge. When he wore a beige raincoat, he delivered the papers in a single morning. Wearing the black raincoat, he spent a day and a half to deliver the twenty-five papers.

Molloy conducted further research in a large corporation that had two branch offices. One office enforced a dress code; the other did not. Secretaries in the office that had no dress code were late or absent 3 to 5 percent more often than those in the office that had a dress code, stayed at their desks 4 percent less, and spent 5 percent less time at their typewriters!

After a dress code had been enforced for a year at the office that didn't have a code, the workers were found to have improved their performance in every area. They stayed at their desks longer, and their lateness record dropped 15 percent!

When Molloy first began testing, he photographed a dozen men in conservative, well-matched colors and patterns. Then he photographed another dozen men in a more contemporary style of clothing such as is generally seen in fashion magazines. When these photographs were mixed

together, 70 to 80 percent of those tested chose the men in the conservative dress as more tastefully attired than those in the more modern dress, even though as many as half the men being interviewed did not dress conservatively themselves! Even when 70 to 80 percent of the men being questioned themselves dressed in more modern color combinations and style, their answers never changed significantly!

The fact that the colors, patterns, and combinations of clothing that score the highest positive results among the largest majority of the population are all traditional and conservative came as no great surprise to Molloy. The most successful businessmen have worn conservative clothing for years, and most likely will for many years to come.

When Molloy confirmed this “familiarity effect,” he tested it further, using shirts and ties. He asked three hundred people to judge a grouping of traditional shirts and ties and another grouping that, although nontraditional, were not gaudy. The subjects were to score each combination as exhibiting good taste, poor taste, or as being neutral. Eighty-seven percent chose the traditional combinations as in good taste. Seventy percent chose the more modern combinations as being in poor taste.

Molloy conducted more experiments testing the necktie than any other article of clothing. “Whether you like it or not, or believe it or not,” he says, “your tie, more than any other aspect of your appearance, will determine how people view your credibility, personality, and ability.” His surveys leave no question that the tie symbolizes respectability and responsibility. Hundreds of tie patterns exist, but only a few are suitable for professional wear. Illustrations of these appear in the new edition (1988) of Molloy’s book, *New Dress for Success*. When properly tied, the tip of the tie should come just to the belt buckle. Thus your height will determine the length of tie you will need and how to knot it. For business wear, bow ties give off several negative effects. If bow ties are worn as sports attire, the same patterns are recommended as for all other ties.

In all tests, the most acceptable dress shirts are, and will continue to be, white and solid pale colors. These evoke the best responses for credibility and effectiveness. Properly color-coordinated solids go with every suit and tie. Pale-blue is still the most popular of the solid colors for shirts. Pink and lavender shirts are too feminizing and have negative masculine reactions. And according to Molloy, research shows that a man should *never* wear a solid red shirt, no matter who he is or what he does.

What about shirt-sleeve length? Molloy gives the following all-embracing caution: “You will never, ever, as long as you live, wear a short-sleeve shirt for any business purpose, no matter whether you are the office boy or the president.” Research shows that men who wear short sleeves have secretaries who arrive late 125 percent more often and come back from lunch late 130 percent more often than secretaries of those who wear long-sleeved shirts.

Molloy is frequently asked whether there are any traits common to all successful executives. He answers, “There most definitely are: they always have their hair combed and their shoes shined. And they expect the same of other men.”

Molloy makes two important statements in his book: “If I have conveyed nothing other than the message that clothing should be used as a tool, then I have fully succeeded in my goal.

“If the reader has accepted my second message, that beauty is not the name of the game, efficiency is—then I’m a perfectly happy man.”

Fortunately, cost is not a significant factor in dressing for success. Molloy states that if a man knows how to choose his clothing, he can, without substantial increase in his clothing expenditure, look right on all occasions. After years of tabulation, he has devised a simple set of do’s and don’ts that make it possible for any man to dress in a way that will greatly improve his effectiveness. Many men have already done so through their own innate knowledge of good taste.

Some of Molloy’s research involved ministers and their clothing. He showed pictures of men in various outfits and asked the respondents to identify the clergymen. Their image of a clergyman was a man in a conservatively cut two-piece black, navy, or dark-gray suit with a white shirt and conservative tie. They seldom identified men in a three-piece business attire as clergymen.

This information is significant, because of the role of expectation. If people expect a man in a particular profession to dress in a certain manner, they are more likely to believe him and trust him if he appears in the expected garb.

The research also included pictures of several dozen men identified as clergymen wearing everything from traditional clerical attire to leisure suits. Molloy asked his subjects which ministers they considered most effective, sympathetic, best educated, et cetera. Then he had them choose the pictures of the men they would most like to have as their minister and the men they would least like to have. In both tests they chose men in conservative, two-

piece suits as their favorites. Surprisingly, as many businessmen rejected “clergymen” wearing three-piece pin-striped suits as they did those wearing leisure suits.

Earlier research showed that the clergy who did not wear the conservative clergy garb were less effective in their ministry than were those who wore the identifiable clothing. Could it be that the way the minister dresses has some bearing even on his soul-winning activities?

William Thourlby wrote recently: “Aside from the glamour professions like entertainment and advertising, the top executives in most conservative corporations wear traditional clothing that does not call attention to itself. Quiet reliability is part of the look. In fact, be wary of any item of clothing that you are complimented on—unless you sell clothing! You want to show that your mind is on *business*, not your clothes” (*Sky*, January, 1980).

However, we must remember that most clergymen on any given day perform a variety of tasks and deal with a cross section of the public. Obviously, they would not wear a suit to help with church construction or when accompanying a group of young people to the beach. The first rule of dress is common sense.

The following words were penned in 1871, long before Molloy and his research: “It is important that the minister’s manner be modest and dignified, in keeping with the holy, elevating truth he teaches, that a favorable impression may be made upon those who are not naturally inclined to religion. Carefulness in dress is an important item. . . .

“Black or dark material is more becoming to a minister in the desk and will make a better impression upon the people than would be made by a combination of two or three different colors in his apparel. . . . The very dress will be a recommendation of the truth to unbelievers. It will be a sermon in itself. . . .

“A minister who is negligent in his apparel often wounds those of good taste and refined sensibilities. . . . The loss of some souls at last will be traced to the untidiness of the minister. The first appearance affected the people unfavorably because they could not in any way link his appearance with the truths he presented. His dress was against him; and the impression given was that the people whom he represented were a careless set who cared for nothing about their dress, and his hearers did not want anything to do with such a class of people. . . .

“Our words, our actions, our deportment, our dress, everything, should preach. Not only with our words should we speak to the people, but everything pertaining to our person should be a sermon to them, that right impressions may be made upon them, and that the truth spoken may be taken by them to their homes. Thus our faith will stand in a better light before the community” (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 2, pp. 610-613, 618).