

Growing Up Amish



By John R. Renno

Pilgrim Brethren Press

P.O. Box 171

Petersburg, Ohio 44454

PUBLISHER'S PREFACE

The Amish are a source of curiosity to many Americans and visitors to our shores. They appear to be so quaint and old-fashioned. In our day, many who are seeking to escape the rat-race of our fast-technological society are looking to the Amish way of life with horse-and-buggy transportation and "plain" dress and a simple, rural lifestyle as the way to go. This way of life has its advantages, but one thing many fail to realize is that Amishness is a religion.

Every man-made religion uses a police system to maintain its identity. Those that do not, usually run into problems with unregenerate members leading others astray. The Old Order Amish trace their roots to the Reformation of the 16th Century, the Anabaptists of Switzerland who rejected Zwingli's infant baptism. The State Church of that day persecuted these offenders even unto death for daring to challenge the authority of their church. But the Anabaptists continued and gained a degree of freedom of conscience to worship as they felt right. Freedom of religion came at no small cost.

In 1953, John R. Renno and others were excommunicated by the Old Order Amish church to which they belonged for the very same reason their Anabaptist forefathers were persecuted, for desiring to read the Bible and believe in assurance of salvation. The descendants of the persecuted Anabaptists had now become the persecutor. Such is the way of man.

I have been privileged to know John R. Renno for several years. He was right in saying he is blunt: but I do not fault him for that. The sovereign Lord had a reason for making each of us the way he is, and we can see His purposes a little more clearly as time passes. I appreciate John and the troubles and heartaches he has encountered as a result of being rejected by his relatives because of his stand for truth. In one sense we can liken John and Eli Renno, Kore, and Crist (Christ) Peachey to the early Anabaptists who challenged their religious leaders. We admire them for their stand.

The original manuscript for this book has been edited to some extent to clarify and reduce verbosity. It is our hope that this book may help some to understand more clearly the bondage of any religious system that is held together by man-made rules and regulations. Salvation is by grace through faith, not by works of flesh or law-keeping. We would urge the readers to look into the Bible and seek the Lord Jesus Christ alone for salvation.

Charles H. Shofstahl
November 20, 1991
Printed in the USA 1993

FOREWORD

By the providence of God, I was privileged to be born into an Old Order Amish home in a district in which my father was to become a leading bishop. I became a member of the sect in 1942 and remained in it until Divine intervention led me out in 1953.

I am well acquainted with the inward thoughts of the Amish mind, for I have been there; and if God had not intervened, I would be there still, for I thoroughly enjoyed Amish life. I had no thought or desire of leaving until it was revealed to me that the Kingdom of God is not meat and drink (that is, earthly necessities), but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. We all are in a sense, victims of circumstances, but God controls them.

I have written this treatise to reveal to anyone who is interested how the Amish function. I have seen many writings about them, but I have yet to see the article written by a person who has willingly left them without malice toward them.

My hope is to set the record straight for future generations to read. Most of the following pertains to the Amish in what is known as the Big Valley in eastern Pennsylvania, in Mifflin County, and how it was when I was there.

I can say with the Apostle Paul that I have lived with all good conscience before God and man until this day. If I were able to live my life over again, I would not change it, for it was so ordered by God, and He does everything perfectly. Certainly, I have made many mistakes and blunders, but had I not made them, my life would have been different, and I would not have learned what I did this way. I have no regrets. Indeed, if I did, I would be complaining indirectly against the Divine Architect; *“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son... and we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose”* (Romans 8:28-29).

Does this make me a puppet? Perhaps, call it that if you like, but I would rather have God control my life than try to control it myself. For in me, that is, *in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing*. God upholds all things by the word of his power.

Amish are good people from a humanistic viewpoint, equal to the Mormon church; but human goodness has no merit before God. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.

*John R. Renno
September 1990*

Contents:

Publisher's Preface

Foreword

1. How the Amish Began	5
<i>Confessions of Faith</i>	<i>10</i>
2. The Superstructure of the Old Order Amish	13
3. How Policy is Determined	20
<i>Church Districts.</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Regular Church Services.</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>Ordnungs.</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>The Punishment of Evildoers.</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>The Communion Service.</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>Baptismal Service</i>	<i>36</i>
4. Family Life	39
<i>Amish Weddings.</i>	<i>44</i>
<i>Funerals.</i>	<i>49</i>
<i>Church at Our House.</i>	<i>51</i>
5. The Future of the Amish	54
6. Circumstances that Caused Me to Leave the Amish Church	58
<i>In Retrospect</i>	<i>73</i>
7. An Unprecedented Event	75
8. Answers to Doctrinal Questions Asked by Official Edict of the Rush Ministry	85

Chapter One

How the Amish Began

The Amish can trace their lineage back to January 21, 1525, where in the home of Felix Manz fifteen men gathered to pray and seek further direction.

The term “Old Order” was not used until 1850, when an important meeting of church leaders was held to determine direction in America.

Martin Luther was born in 1483 and died in 1546. He was seeking God in truth, for the religion he had did not rid him from the guilt of sin. He was never sure he had done enough to atone for his sin.

In the study of Scripture, Luther found it recorded that “*the just shall live by faith.*” He had been trying to live by good works. His discovery of this truth led to the eyes of many being opened, and the Reformation was on its way. God used Luther in his native land of Germany.

Huldrych Zwingli, another Catholic priest, was born in Switzerland in 1484, and he died in 1531. Through study of the Scriptures he found his theology in error and resigned from the priesthood in 1522. Zwingli was not so vigorously resisted in Switzerland as was Luther in Germany, however. Their goal was to reform the corrupt church from within, and, with the political system in their favor, they set about to form a religious nation, such as Israel had been. The church and state were compatible for such a notion.

In Zwingli’s church was a very promising young man named Conrad Grebel, who was the son of a prominent businessman, raised in wealth and luxury. Conrad lived a riotous life in school, to the shame of his father, who forced him to come home when he cut off his funds. Conrad Grebel was converted under the preaching of Zwingli, and he became zealous for God. He began to raise questions about the way the church functioned, for corruption was the order of the day. As long as men were baptized as infants, were faithful in church attendance, and kept all the rules, they were accepted as God’s people. Grebel voiced his qualms to his pastor, Zwingli, who agreed that he too, had questions about infant baptism, and admitted that Grebel was right

in his other concerns. Zwingli suggested patience, fearing that to rock the boat was to ask for trouble.

Felix Manz and George Blaurock also, were disciples of Zwingli and friends and co-workers with Grebel. They suggested to Zwingli the possibility of simply meeting with people who lived a godly life and just ignoring the rest. Zwingli thought this would be ideal but hardly practical. He had just too much at stake and being an important preacher upon whom people depended for leadership, he could not bear to see his self-image destroyed.

His own disciples whom he had taught the way of truth however, took it seriously. About fifteen of them could stand it no longer, so they held a prayer meeting on that eventful January 21, 1525. The main disagreement centered on baptism.

These men discovered in their study of Scripture that infant baptism, in which they had been taught, was not in the Word of God. They had been taught that infant baptism was correct, for it corresponds with circumcision, which was to be performed at eight days old and stands for the sign by which one is brought under the covenant made by God. The Scriptures only demonstrate that people were baptized upon confession of their faith, after they believed.

At this meeting George Blaurock asked Conrad Grebel to baptize him in the Name of the Lord. They were all baptized, and this was the formation of a new church.

There is nothing religious officials hate worse than competition. Zwingli, who had been a close friend of Grebel, now became his bitter enemy. He said Grebel was now practicing as the devil's angel. The official church did what they thought they had to do in such a case. They did not mind those who were living in open sin against the Word of God, but they could not allow anyone to hold meetings in a corner; that would be treason. They determined to squelch subversives, no matter how extreme the action they felt they must take.

The success of the men who started this infant denomination was phenomenal. Circumstances then were much different from today. Many could not read and write, and few Bibles were available, but everyone has a desire to go to heaven after this life, and they feel they have a right to it. Then if someone with charisma comes and tells them they must do what he tells them, and they will get to heaven, most believe it and do what is

required. Folks were tired of the heavy financial demands of the Catholic church which supported luxurious living priests. The state church over which Zwingli officiated did not do much better. These new disciples went everywhere preaching their doctrine of salvation by faith in Christ and converts followed them in baptism.

The church officials took severe measures. Anyone who was caught at unauthorized meetings or who did not have his baby baptized was suspect. Those known to be guilty were hunted like big game, and whoever reported them was entitled to their property. Many had to flee for their lives, but they were willing to do this for the promise of a home in heaven.

The leaders of the new group were all imprisoned, but they escaped. Felix Manz was drowned in Lake Limmat in Zurich in 1526 in a public demonstration. George Blaurock was executed in 1529, but Grebel died of sickness just one year after the new church began. Persecution did not stop the new church. They lacked leadership, however, which resulted in many factions springing up, each interpreting the Scriptures according to its own culture.

Melchoir Hoffman was a prominent man who began circulating the doctrine of the soon return of Christ, which was accepted by many in these bad times. Some who began setting dates decided to take things into their own hands to bring in the kingdom. Jan Von Leyden said that Munster was the New Jerusalem and that he was of the royal line to sit on David's throne. Thousands of folks in a mad frenzy migrated to Munster, and many died enroute. Soon after the arrival of the crowd, the Roman Catholic church sent out emissaries, the city was sacked, and the people who were looking for the kingdom died.

A new leader emerged, Menno Simmons, after whom the Mennonites are named. He was born in 1496 and died in 1561. Menno had been a Catholic priest who was concerned about the low morality in the Roman church but was unable to do much about it. He felt it wrong for him and his colleagues to live in luxury while so many who were poor were forced to pay indulgences to have their sins forgiven.

Peter Simon, who was killed in the Munster uprising, was possibly Menno's brother. Menno was deeply disturbed by the needless waste of lives that took place there simply because some followed a vain leader.

Menno did not study much Scripture; all he needed was to know church dogma, but this did not give him any answers. Thus, in his time of need, he turned to the Scriptures where he found the answer to the deep longings of his heart. He began to preach the gospel.

Menno was ordained a priest in 1524 at age 28. He was afraid of the real truth at first, for he saw what it had done to Luther and Zwingli, but he did read the writings of Luther. Being of strong character, he felt constrained to tell his findings to his parishioners. This led to his demise from that church. He was forced to flee and remain in hiding, as a price was placed on his head. He joined the Anabaptists, who had heard of his defection. They were very much in need of leadership. Many had died since it had now been eleven years since they had begun, and the survivors could not agree on the meaning of Scripture.

At first Menno did not want to assume this role, but he finally yielded and was a great help to them. Nonetheless at the time of his death, forty factions were already in existence. These endured many hardships, being persecuted by both Catholics and Protestants, but they believed strongly enough in their doctrine to die for it. Life held little meaning for them.

Many false teachings were afloat. Even Menno himself did not accept the doctrine of the real humanity of Christ. The doctrine of original sin was not accepted generally, according to the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, people did not become sinners until they reached the “age of accountability” and made a voluntary choice to disobey God. It was largely believed that babies were born as pure and free from sin as was Adam, and that a man was not a sinner unless he first made a voluntary choice to come out from the canopy of innocence. This they supposed, was provided by the death of Christ, so they believed a man is not saved until he first chooses Christ.

Menno Simmons married and had children, but he had a very insecure life. He died a natural death and was buried in his own garden in 1561. After Menno’s death, things continued along the same lines for 100 years. The Anabaptists grew in spite of the sacerdotal churches, moving away from trouble whenever they were able, and prospered and grew wealthy whenever they found rest. It was believed the Christian religion teaches thrift, and in

Anabaptist circles we find people living simple lives as a part of their religion. Separation from the world is an exercise to them.

Jakob Ammann was born in 1644. From him the Amish derive their name. He became a bishop, but he instituted some things that had not previously been practiced. He established the times for communion services to be twice a year and introduced foot washing. Because he wanted his people to look different from society and from his competitor, Hans Reist, he told his people to wear hooks and eyes instead of buttons on their clothes and to wear clothing different from that worn by society in general. He also introduced the ban, which was a form of discipline excluding any church member who did not come in line with his teachings. That person was excommunicated, totally cut off from all the others so that they would have nothing to do with him. A man under the ban was not even allowed to eat or sleep with his wife. This teaching proved to be too much for many folks, of course, but Ammann still had a large following, since he was an influential man. He claimed that anyone who did not follow him would not get to heaven. He traveled and sought out disciples, placing all who refused him under the ban, including all other preachers. His colleagues called for clemency, but he gave none, and in 1693 a major split occurred. Those remaining with the Reist group were called Mennonites, and those who followed Ammann's doctrine were called Amish.

Later Ammann repented and tried to make reconciliation, but the rift was permanent, and the division remained. All efforts at reconciliation failed. The misunderstanding was so deep and the hatred so ingrained that centuries passed before it abated, and even to this day it has not been totally eliminated, though both groups have the same basic doctrine. It is said that the Mennonites and Amish did not even want to come to America on the same ship.

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

The first book ever published by the Anabaptists (Mennonites) was the *Dortrecht Confession of Faith*, which was published in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1737.

Many factions existed among the Anabaptists because from the beginning, no champion existed among them to write a manifesto of their creed that would be a common denominator. Though various attempts were made, no one individual had enough popularity or charisma to weld the majority into a common faith.

The oldest confession of faith was written on February 4, 1527, by Michael Sattler, and is held by many Mennonites. It was not extensive, treating only seven articles of agreement upon doctrine peculiar to Anabaptists. In order these are: *Baptism, Excommunication, The Lord's Supper, Separation from the world, The church, Nonresistance, and Non-swearing of oaths*. Sattler's confession served to keep arguments to a minimum until Menno Simons came on the scene about ten years later.

The main banner of Anabaptists was that Scripture is the only safe rule of faith and practice. This is a sound beginning, but not the complete picture. Scripture must also be interpreted according to sound homiletical principles, including understanding grammatical rules and word meanings in the language in which the Scriptures were written. It is also important to know who the human author was, the cultural conditions at that time, and the author's meaning in his writings. Men who wrote Scripture were fully rational and knew what they were writing, though perhaps they did not know they were writing the inspired Word of God that would be preserved for us.

Also, to understand Scripture correctly as a rule of faith and practice, we must realize that it is not simply a book of rules and conduct, such as the Law of Moses was to Israel, but a book of principles. Rules of conduct need to adapt to culture and geography, and in time, history, but principles never change. For instance, the first book of the Bible says, "*In the beginning, God.*" This is a principle that stands forever. Also, the lives of the Patriarchs are examples of principles for us to follow rather than rules set in concrete. The New Testament is to be understood likewise. Yes, we do find many rules of conduct there, but they are

not meant as laws just to be obeyed, but rather to be understood as instructive for the life that will be lived by those who are in Christ.

These are some of the things those early people did not know or understand. No doubt men like Conrad Grebel and Menno Simons, who were educated in linguistics, knew, and tempered their teaching accordingly, but the mass of people did not know. Books had only begun to come into real prominence, for printing by moveable type had just been invented, and only a few could read at that time. The way people understood Scripture was determined by those who taught them, and because there were so many teachers with so many different ideas, many factions arose.

We must be careful not to be too critical of them, with all their frailties and misunderstandings, for how much better are we doing, who have all the literary benefits they were denied? Are we in perfect harmony? Those who walk after the Spirit do not fulfill the lusts of the flesh and they get along together.

Since Michael Sattler wrote his creed, no other has remained. Jacob Kautz wrote his opinion and nailed it to the church door at Worms on June 9, 1527, but no one really took him seriously, for he was only one man who did not have the power to make it stick.

From 1615 to 1655 many attempts were made to write confessions and defenses of confessions. Some were later found in prisons where their authors had been incarcerated.

Three main factions developed among Mennonites according to geographical location: the Flemish, the Friesians, and the Waterlanders. On April 12, 1632, Adrian Cornelize, an elder of a Flemish congregation, wrote what became known as the *Dortrecht Confession of Faith*, which was later signed at a meeting by fifty-one delegates from seventeen Dutch countries. This action was intended to unify the different Anabaptist groups and to bring them to a stricter understanding of the rules.

The *Dortrecht Confession* was translated into German in 1658, and in 1661 it was attested to by the signatures of thirteen German leaders at a meeting in Ohnenheim, Germany. This was just thirty years before the major rift that never healed. The *Dortrecht Confession* is adhered to by most of the Anabaptists, Amish, and Mennonites alike, though some claim to lean more toward the *Schleitheim Confession*.

This brief overview of the beginnings of the Amish brings us to America where many factions still exist among them. Those who first left were called the “Old Order Amish - Conservative Mennonite Conference,” but later the title “Old Order Amish” was dropped. About 1925, Moses Beachy of Somerset County, Pennsylvania decided that allowing automobiles would not be too worldly. Thus, the name “Beachy Amish” developed. In 1968 a group that broke away from the Old Order Amish in Lancaster County was first called the Melita Group. Today it is amalgamated with the new order Beachy Amish, and they call themselves the Fellowship Churches. The Old Order Beachy group still exists, which retains the German language and tries to maintain more of an old-fashioned lifestyle.

The Amish we are going to consider are the Old Order Amish, who still use the old *Ausbund Hymnal*, which is the oldest song book still in use. These do not have automobiles and most reject modern inventions as worldly. A New Order Amish group exists too, which allows every modern convenience except cars.

Chapter Two

The Superstructure of the Old Order Amish

I believe the Amish have the best, most workable form of worship service, with a minimum of organizational structure, of all that I am familiar with. They operate very much like the early church functioned in New Testament times, when for 300 years there were no church buildings as we know them today, and people simply met in homes for worship services.

The Amish system is kept together by peer pressure and observation of strict rules with heavy penalties for violating them. Also, a strong restraining force is the fear of going to eternal destruction if you leave the Amish, for in the heart of many Amish is the belief that they are the people of God, and their way of doing things is the only right way in the sight of God. I speak from experience; I was born in an Amish home, grew up Amish, and was a member of an Amish church from 1942 until 1953.

The feeling of group kinship and *esprit de corps* is what makes the system function. Add to this the fact that they maintain the Pennsylvania Dutch dialect in their homes and High German in the preaching services. History has abundantly proven that if the language barrier is removed, and the language of the business world is adopted, no force is strong enough to prevent the people from going “worldly.”

One good example took place in Adams County, Indiana, about 1864. Amish Mennonite minister Henry Egli began to stress the importance of being sure that you are saved. Now the heirs of the Anabaptists had lost this doctrine of assurance, and they considered it heresy to know that you are for certain in Christ, for this destroys their binding ability. Henry Egli began preaching that if a person is already saved, there is no point in keeping the rules to obtain salvation, which is practiced by the Amish. He also complained that the church was not careful enough in sifting its members when they join. He claimed they put too much emphasis on outward appearances and not enough on inward experience. His strong preaching soon created a difference of opinion, resulting in estrangement. Henry Egli finally withdrew from the Amish in 1866. His following was extremely strict at first, not allowing their members to attend other denominational services, exercising strict discipline, and laying great stress on experiential religion.

The movement soon spread to Illinois, and the cause was espoused by other discontented preachers. By 1890 however, a division occurred among them because of immersion baptism. The immersion group united with the Christian Alliance, calling themselves the Mission Church. This new offshoot practiced the same thing their predecessors had done, insisting on rebaptizing, etc. But they did not long retain their Amish identity, for the two greatest enemies of the Amish church are assurance of salvation and the English language. Without these no congregation can continue its distinctive Amishness, but within a generation worldly practices will predominate.

The superstructure of the Amish is the ministry, which is composed of three offices: the *Bishop*, (called in German the *Full Minister*), the *Minister to the Book*, who just preaches and helps keep members straight; and the *Deacon*, which is an ordained office that lasts for life, unless he is voted upon for bishop. But then he is not Full Bishop, but a Full Deacon.

The bishop has great authority. He alone has authority to baptize members, marry couples, excommunicate, and receive repentant excommunicated members back into the church. The bishop also makes suggestions concerning actions to be taken. The deacons may preach if no other ordained man is present, although in my experience I do not remember that ever happening.

Communion is a high holy time, because then all differences are laid down and the whole congregation is in peace. The service lasts all day, and this is also the time for ordaining ministers. If for some reason a congregation does not have four ordained men, three ministers and a deacon, a vote is taken some time before communion to have an ordination at the next communion service.

Amish policy allows taking any kind of action only when it has been voted on by all members and they are all in agreement. This may seem strange, but it gives opportunity to find out if anyone is in disagreement. But if anyone dares to voice an objection, he had better have an exceptionally good reason, or he will be disciplined for disturbing the peace.

Voting is considered part of the baptismal vow of church members; therefore all must vote. Since the services are held in homes, the preachers retire to an upstairs room, except one who stands at the bottom of the stairway to receive the vote of each

member. (*No Amish house has an open stairway.*) Each member gives the name of the man he thinks is qualified to be a minister. A man must receive three votes to be put into the lot, though some churches accept only two. In voting, my father had told me, the young folks usually cast the votes that place someone in the lot, for they choose the one they happen to like best, while the older folks usually are agreed on whom they feel is best qualified.

After the whole congregation has filed past and voted, one of the ministers comes down the stairs and picks up a book for each man who is in the lot. He takes the books back upstairs and they put a slip of paper in one on which is written Acts 1:24, "*Thou Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen.*". They then tie the books shut with a string, (*the books are the old Ausbund hymnals*) and mix up the books so that nobody knows which book contains the slip of paper. Then the ministers come downstairs, set the books on a table, and reveal the names of those in the lot. These men come forward and sit around the table and each one chooses a book. Once each man in the lot has his book, the bishop opens the books beginning with the man who has received the most votes placing him in the lot. The bishop then calls the man with the next highest votes, and so on, until the man with the book containing the hidden paper is discovered. Then that man immediately kneels before the church, the bishop lays his hands on the man, and pronounces his obligations for the office. The other ministers stand around them during this time. The obligation is something like this: "You shall preach the Word of God, visit the sick, help in the ongoing of the church, help to keep order, warn the unruly," etc.

The same method is used in choosing a deacon, but his office is to read the Scripture before the assembly, to watch for the erring and try to get them on the right road, etc.

This method of finding ministers has its good features. Men are forced to live in a right way at home. They are also expected to stay there and live in a right way daily before their parishioners, to put their gospel into shoe leather. They do not get paid a cent; they must work to make their own living, just like everyone else. They never get called to another church that pays more money and offers more benefits. It is a ministry for which the man is responsible before God, not a job or a profession. Ministers take turns preaching, and church is held only every other week, so that eases

the burden somewhat. Also, they are not required to attend frequent committee and board meetings during the week. When a minister travels or visits in another community, then he is asked to preach, for having a strange preacher is a luxury. Those who cannot preach well just do not travel much, for listening to a poor preacher is boring.

Using this method also holds its terrors. The lot is a form of chance, humanly speaking, and it is considered God's choice to choose that minister. Nobody wants that responsibility of being a minister, and it is assumed that if a man is put into the ministry by lot, it is a work of God, and nobody can argue with God. If he cannot preach, then God gave you one who cannot preach. But he has to stand before the church as long as he can, and everyone is supposed to believe that God ordained it that way.

In one case a young man was ordained who could not read any German, and the bishop had to stand beside him and tell him the words. This did not happen in my church, which was in a small community and did not have too many rowdy young men because it was better policed than larger churches can be, and the rowdy ones were threatened or put out of the church.

There are instances where a man was chosen who had been wild in his youth but turned out to be an excellent preacher. The policy is not to prepare a text or even know ahead of time what you are going to preach as in other churches, but just stand up and let the Spirit speak through you.

I was in the lot once, and it is a time of great suspense for the candidate. I did not choose the right book, for which I am thankful, because it turned out that I would not have been in the ministry too long. Soon afterwards I discovered that I was saved eternally, and it is hard to preach to Amish people if you know that, for they consider that heresy.

My father was ordained to ministry in 1924, the year I was born. He said that when he sat at the table and reached for the book, his hand felt noticeably light and seemed to be guided to the book with the lot in it.

Normally one bishop has two districts, containing no more than about 150 adults to oversee. If the number of adults increases above that, the church then is divided and a new one organized.

To find a bishop, it is done by the lot in the same way, except a bishop is chosen only from among those already in the

ministry. Seldom does anyone vote for a deacon to become a bishop. The office of bishop is considered a high and holy office. The man chosen as bishop is looked upon as almost infallible, so every man shrinks from such a responsibility.

I was present when my father was chosen to be bishop. It was in the fall, and my father and I had husked corn together and spoke much about the upcoming ordination.

Our church district had three ministers and one deacon, and our bishop was from the upper district. He would come and officiate, but his health was bad, and he died a few months after my father was ordained. He had a tumor on the brain, we discovered later. He was 51, and my father was 53. The vote was taken long before the time, and no one doubted that my father would be in the lot, for he was a very gifted speaker and well liked in the church and community. The other two preachers were not qualified for this office of Bishop in the minds of many. One was ordained when he was older and could not speak well, for he could not memorize.

According to Amish tradition, you dare not use a Bible to read from when preaching, but to let the Spirit speak through you, and using a Bible would be forbidden. But the Scripture could be read at the proper time at the end of the service, and it could be discussed some, but it was wrong to preach from an open bible. But contrary to that, when praying, one must not pray from his heart, but must read the prayers that were offered in public. This is because our forefathers, who were holy men, wrote these prayers, and we are not qualified to pray personally in public, since we are not as holy as they were.

As the time for the ordination service approached, suspense grew. My father hoped he would not be the chosen one, for he did not want that responsibility, and for anyone to even suggest that he would like to be a preacher was considered as gross pride of the worst kind.

That church service was held at the home of Menno Yoder, about five miles from our home, north of Belleville. We hitched up the horse and carriage and went. It was an all-day affair since communion normally was not over until 5 pm, and to ordain a bishop would make it even later, so we took our buggy lantern.

Bishops and preachers were there from Lancaster County, for their churches were in common with ours. Old Bishop Ben

Byler preached the communion sermon, which lasted from noon till three in the afternoon. It was late fall, and we had to light a kerosene lamp because of the shortness of the daylight. The preachers filed upstairs and told us to come and cast our vote for the man whom we thought qualified for bishop. In this instance, qualification was not the question, for only one man was really qualified. But we had to go through the lot, and perhaps the Lord would not agree and would have to show us by lot whom He had chosen.

It was a difficult decision for me to make, for I was really hoping that Father would be chosen. I could not bear to think of sitting through those day-long sessions and listening to one who had nothing to say except that we should be faithful to the church. On the other hand, I did not want to vote for Father because I knew it would be improper. The man receiving the votes would know who I was voting for, so I did the best I could under the circumstances and voted for Sam Peight. He was a fairly good preacher, an old man but was not as gifted to handle the office, so I was hoping he would not get the book with the paper in it. He was not a traditional man either; his main theme was “*the just shall live by faith*,” which is true to Scripture, but it destroys a setting where rules and regulations predominate.

When the voting was completed, a preacher came down and got only two books, so then we knew that only two of the three were in the lot. To me this held more suspense than the Presidential election, for my father was in the lot. The preachers all came back downstairs and set the two books on the table. The two men, John Renno and Sam Kanagy, were told to sit up at the table and draw their book. Father drew the first book and Sam took the remaining one. Father’s book was opened first, and everyone was nervous and tense. With trembling hands, Noah Yoder opened the book to the page where the paper was. His voice broke as he announced that the lot fell on John Renno. Father’s hands went up to his eyes, and he shook all over. There was hardly a dry eye in the place.

“Kneel here before us, and we will give you your charge,” the bishop said. Ordaining a bishop requires laying on of hands by two bishops. The charge went something like this: “You shall preach the Word of God. You shall watch over your flock. You shall declare the Lord’s death (which means preach the

communion sermon). You shall baptize converts. You shall marry couples. You shall declare the ban upon the disobedient and keep house according to the tradition of our fathers.”

Then Father stood up, and all the preachers greeted him with a handshake and a holy kiss. Testimony time followed, a song was sung, and all hurried home. Many wished Father well in his new ministry.

My father was quiet, and each of us had his own thoughts on the five-mile drive home.

Chapter Three

How Policy is Determined

All church decisions must be unanimously approved by vote of the membership. Voting takes place after a normal preaching session. Immediately before the last song is sung, the bishop says, "After the singing of the song we request that everyone who is a brother, or a sister may remain seated." As the last note of the song dies, all who are not members of this congregation are expected to leave, unless they belong to this denomination and are visiting this service from some distance. These may sit and listen but are not permitted to vote. When asked, they are expected to reply that they will leave it up to this church. Visitors from other denominations and young people will then leave. This usually includes all young people under the age of 17, since that is the age when they begin to come for baptism.

After all strangers and non-members leave, the bishop makes a *Foreschlock*, or proposal, which is actually much stronger than a simple proposal. Just as in the time of Moses, it was Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and On who were violently destroyed by God when they dared to voice their displeasure against Moses and were cast alive into hell, (*Numbers 16*) so the Amish bishop is looked upon as God's specially anointed servant, and everyone fears disagreeing with the bishop lest a similar fate overtakes them. This attitude is strengthened by preaching about the fate of those who disagreed with Moses, which takes place often.

During every service, for 30 minutes or more while the church is singing, the preachers go to the *Abrote*, or "off council," where they privately take counsel together to discuss business. When they are all agreed, the bishop is ready to make the *Foreschlock*, knowing he has the backing of his helpers. This meeting takes place even if no extra decision must be considered, and the preachers go aside to a separate room, usually upstairs, where they have prayer and decide who will preach that day.

After the bishop presents the *Foreschlock*, each minister speaks his agreement with the bishop. Then two of the preachers stand up and go to every person to receive their votes. Each person is expected to say he is satisfied. Then the preacher says, "If I have overlooked anyone, make it known. It was unintentional." They then take their seats, and the one receiving the votes from the men

says, "If I have understood the council correctly, they are all agreed." If they are not agreed, he says that too, but he does not mention who disagreed, though in a small room it is known who voiced an objection. The one who asked for the women's votes says the same. Then the bishop says, "We thank our heavenly Father, trusting that the vote was not only of men, but also of God." If there was no serious objection, the *Foreschlock* is passed. If no more business is to be considered, he dismisses the assembly in the name of the Lord.

CHURCH DISTRICTS

Church services are held in private homes, or in the barn, if it is not too cold, since it is considered worldly to have a regular church building. Separation requires the Amish to do things differently than society does, and church buildings are considered worldly.

This may seem ridiculous, and in a sense, it is, but you must understand that these folks have lost the spiritual sense of Scripture, and their whole emphasis is on the physical. A favorite cliché among them is, "Clothes do not make one a Christian, but a Christian makes the clothes." This is a true saying, and if you are taught this from your youth and hear it preached every service that we are saved by grace and not by works, but if we have no works then we are lost, you will believe it. This statement is also true, but if we believe we are saved by grace and kept by our fidelity, then we are on man's platform, which is the wrong one. God's platform is this: saved by grace, kept by grace, and works will follow because of our love for the Lord. It matters not what happens to us, because God's glory and not our welfare is what is important. But you see, it is impossible to explain God's salvation in any language if you do not have it, because you cannot understand it. Salvation is a gift that is bestowed upon God's people at God's discretion.

The church district is geographically divided. In my time there were two church districts, an upper and a lower, divided by the Waynesburg Road. All who lived south of the Waynesburg Road went to the upper district. It was called upper because of the way the waters flow.

In my time there was a murmuring consensus that the district was too large, since the houses were too small to accommodate them all. Most were agreed that it was too large and said it should be divided into three districts. But when a district is divided more preachers are needed, and no one wants to be a preacher. Also, the dividing line might place some people in a different setting, and they would be required to attend service where they did not want to go. Thus, it was hashed about for a while, and since my father was bishop, he knew he must take action.

First, he made a *Foreschlock*, or proposal and folks thought about how it ought to be. My father was a wise organizer; he knew just how to handle people so they would respond favorably with a minimum of friction.

He framed the thought in his mind, something like an architect. Then he discussed it in our home. Finally, he took a paper and pencil and began figuring how many folks would be in each district.

I remember this as clear as day. Father was sitting in the living room at the table with the boys, and Mother was in the kitchen washing dishes with the girls. Father would say, "How many children do So-and-So's have?" Mother or the girls would know, and he would mark down the number. Thus, the valley was divided into three districts on paper and in his mind.

The valley was thirty miles long and three miles wide at the Belleville area. The mountains came together at the south end, with only the creek and road leading out to Mill Creek. The back mountain proceeded north to Siglerville, then made a horseshoe curve, coming back south to Reedsville, where again the front mountain began, leaving only the Narrows for the road and Kish Creek. This made it easy to divide into three districts.

The Waynesburg Road now became the south boundary of the middle district, and Dry House Road, north of Belleville, became the boundary for the north district. All who lived to the north of Dry House Road now belonged to the upper district, and those below the Waynesburg Road belonged to the lower district.

It was a cold wintry day when the council was taken to divide the church into three districts, and council must be taken in all three districts. After the *Foreschlock*, the vote was taken, and several voiced objections because of some personal inconvenience.

When the voting was completed and the report given that most were agreed, and though a few voiced objections, no one would stop the procedures. My father said that if there were no holdups, the action would be passed, and the church would now be divided into three districts. At that, Levi Kanagy, who was Deacon was not exactly satisfied, and said he thought that too few people were present to make such a momentous decision, for it was winter, and quite a few folks were unable to attend. His objection was ignored. Father told me later that if absence can stop an action, it would not get done.

After the division, the south district had four ministers, and the Middle and North both had two. In a year or so, a vote was taken to ordain a minister. I was in the lot at that time, but fortunately I was not chosen. It would not have worked anyway, for I was beginning to see the doctrine of God's great salvation and I was not an organizational man, and my interest rather was with the organism, which is the body of Christ, since organizations are of this world and organisms are not. What life is to the human body, so the organism is to the organization.

REGULAR CHURCH SERVICES

Services begin at nine o'clock. As the buggies gather together, the horses are taken to the stable and tied, and the women go to the wash house, woodshed, or kitchen. At that time there were very few modern bathrooms. I never even saw a bathtub until I visited Grandpa's house. The women hung or piled their wraps in the specified place, and the older women would file into the downstairs bedroom, the younger women and those with children would sit in the kitchen, and the single girls would sit in the living room behind the preachers. If you were early, you would have time to talk with friends, if not, you hurried inside. Some were chronically late, but very few. Everyone went to church if at all possible. It is part of the religion.

The old men would file into the living room to the back bench. The younger men would sit in front of them, and when the men were all in place, the single boys would sit in front of the preacher, who sat in the middle. Sometimes not all the men could

get into the living room. These would sit in the kitchen, or in the large porch, if there was one.

The Amish built their homes to accommodate such meetings. Doors between adjoining downstairs rooms could be removed. No homes had halls or open stairways; they were built for church meetings.

At nine o'clock the song leader, a man with musical ability, would announce the page of the hymn to be sung in the *Ausbund* hymnal. He would sing the first syllable, and then everybody would join in. All singing was a cappella; four-part singing was considered worldly and was forbidden. At the beginning of the second line, the preachers would stand up and file upstairs to a room, or *Abrote* where each would give testimony as to his feelings and other pertinent matters. If any issue needed taken care of, they discussed that. Then they would have prayer and come back down, and the singing would stop. The Amish are very rank-conscious. The man with most seniority in the ministry would go first, unless a young bishop was present; then he would lead. When they returned from the *Abrote*, the one who was supposed to speak the longest sermon would be in the lead; the one who was to conduct the opening was second; the one who was to read the Scripture was third; and others would follow according to ministerial longevity. Amish hold services only once every two weeks. The preachers go on for about an hour and a half. The benches have no backs, and if you become tired, you lean forward with your elbows on your legs. If the speaker really had nothing interesting to say, many would fall asleep.

The opening speaker would stand up and wish greetings to everyone, saying how thankful he is for the mercies of God. A wordy speaker would be one who knew the Scriptures, and he would quote verse after verse, making application a little here and there. His application usually would be slanted to mean we must be faithful and obedient and then we will enjoy the blessings of God. Illustrations from the Old Testament would show the consequences of faithfulness and of unfaithfulness. The opening speaker would be expected to talk for at least half an hour. If he were a good speaker and he knew the man following him was not, he would speak longer to help use up time for the next speaker. Then he would say it was time for prayer, and he would quote incidents in Scripture where men prayed and the results. He would ask prayer

for himself and his family, saying he is likeminded to pray for us, but it is always in great weakness and spiritual poverty. Then the whole congregation would kneel, and everyone was supposed to pray silently. When the speaker stood up again, everyone else stood up too and prayer time was ended in this way.

With the congregation standing, the deacon would make a few remarks and then read the Scripture for the day, which is governed by the season, according to the calendar of Amish events. If it were harvest time, he would read in John 4 of the Samaritans and the passage in Revelation 14 that speaks of an angel striking in his sickle. If it were seed time, he would read something pertaining to sowing seed. Two chapters were read in every service. After reading, the deacon would say, "So far hath this Scripture stretched itself, I would wish it would be better understood than brought to words."

Then all would sit down and the man bringing the main sermon would now stand up and begin speaking. If he were good, you would be able to listen well; but if he were a poor speaker and the message was boring, your mind would begin to wander, and you would do everything you could, to pass the time, such as counting all the numbers on the calendar or anything to occupy the time. Nobody dared complain, for if he could not speak well, he nevertheless was the man whom God had chosen by lot, and he was expected to stand there for an hour, and who can argue with God? Many of course would catch up on their sleep; but sleeping would not be needed much, for in those days we had no labor-saving devices, and therefore fewer things to pay for, and did not have to work so much, and we could enjoy life, and nine o'clock was bedtime.

When he was through preaching, the main speaker would read another chapter of Scripture, always from the New Testament. He would explain some, but since he was not supposed to preach with the Bible in hand, his comments were limited. And if he had not studied, the Spirit would not give him anything. My father would always spend much time in study. He had learning ability and knew the Scriptures and how to apply them. All were glad when it came his turn to speak.

When he was finished, the main speaker would then sit down and ask for testimony, for no sermon would be considered true unless it was attested by two or three witnesses. Human

dignity again would enter the picture here, you dared not disagree with what the speaker said, for he was supposed to be speaking according to the Spirit's instruction, and who would argue with the Spirit of God?

Only ordained men would be asked for testimony and at times there were two ordained men present. If however, there would not be more than one, then one of the older men would be asked to testify. The oldest men would usually sit in a rocking chair at the doorway between the rooms so that they could hear. Once when old Ben Peachy was asked for testimony and he did not care to speak, he abruptly said, "I am not ordained to speak in public" and someone else had to be asked. You must understand it is awfully hard for anyone who did not have experience to speak, and that is why nobody wanted to be a preacher. If only one ordained man was at the church, he would conduct the entire service, having the opening, reading the Scripture, and preaching the main sermon. Then he would ask some brethren to testify.

Preacher Sam Peight was different from everyone else in that he would never acknowledge that what he had heard was the Word of God, as did everyone else. Sam would say that all he heard he agreed with, and he had heard nothing that would lead anyone astray, but that was all.

Everyone who spoke always asked for prayer, saying he prays for us but always in great weakness. This was done at every service, if he did not want to be considered proud. The Amish are immensely proud of their humility.

After receiving favorable testimony, the speaker would again stand up and speak of the importance of prayer. Then he would say, "All those who are in harmony with me, let us kneel." I have never seen an incident when all did not kneel, even though to do so was to admit harmony with the speaker. Even if one were very belligerent, he would still kneel, thereby saying that he was in harmony with him. Not to kneel would be a disgrace.

The prayer would always be read from the prayer book in the German language, taking about ten minutes, depending upon the speaker's reading ability. After this, all would stand up and remain standing until the speaker pronounced the benediction, and at the name of Jesus Christ all would bow the knee. Then all would once again sit down. If there was counseling to be done, the bishop would tell all who are brothers or sisters to remain. If nothing were

on the agenda, he would remain silent. The deacon would then say, "If the Lord will, and we live, in fourteen days church will be at So-and-So's." Then another song would be sung, and all would file out.

The men would go to the barn and relieve themselves, since they had sat through a three-hour church session without getting up. Then they would visit a few minutes. The man of the house would shove two benches together to form a table. A similar table would be formed for the women. The delegated girls and neighbor women would spread the table with food, which consisted of pies, half-moon pies (*made by cooking dried apples until they were moist and baking them in a folded pie shell*), pickles, pickled beets, bread and butter, apple butter, coffee, and water. The preachers and old men would sit at the first table, and when it was filled, the older women's table would fill up. The bishop would say, "If the tables are full, let us pray." All heads would bow, and a time of silent prayer followed. After eating, he would say, "If all are satisfied, let us give thanks," and again heads would bow. Then these filed out and the next oldest came in. The boys all walked single file, the oldest first, the youngest last. I remember when I was often the very last one, although I was not the youngest; Joe Peachy was a few weeks younger, but he thought it beneath his dignity to walk behind a Renno, so he would go in front, but I did not care.

After the meal, the folks would slowly leave, one-by-one. The man would go and ask his wife if she were ready to go; then he would go and hitch up the horse and out the lane they would go. Usually neighbors and relatives would stay for the rest of the afternoon and eat an evening meal, which would be a real full-fledged feast with all the trimmings, for women like to show off their ability to cook. All were good cooks; it is just part of the Amish culture.

Thrift and good manners were taught, along with frugality. The fellowship was exceptionally good, and everyone knew each other, and we would care for each other when one got into a pinch. No offering was ever lifted, for when you have church in private homes there are no expenses, and no paid ministers, and if you wanted to give toward missions that was your business, but most did not believe in it. It was the so-called worldly churches that made a great fuss about the lost, and the Amish believe you must

adopt their own culture if you really want to please God. Really though, who would want to crucify the flesh and put away their cars and store-bought clothing and live life old-fashioned? Yet this was the life of God according to the Amish, and if we were to send out missionaries, we would be laughed to scorn. It was believed that the Great Commission was fulfilled by the Apostles, for Paul said the gospel has been preached to every creature which is under heaven of which he was made a minister. (*Colossians 1:23*)

ORDNUNGS

“*Ordnungs*” means the traditions and rules. Twice a year the rules would be reviewed in the service. It would begin like any other service, but the first speaker would begin at Genesis and go through the Ante-Deluvian people and the flood, describing how wickedness prevailed until the flood. He would stop with Noah and the ark. Then the second speaker would get up and go from the ark through the tower of Babel, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the selling of Joseph into Egypt. Then he covered their prosperity, the bondage and deliverance, their march through the wilderness, their rebellion, the swift judgements of God, and he would stop when they got into the land of Canaan. If he were a good speaker and remembered the Scripture, it would be interesting. I never got tired of hearing the types and shadows of Scripture, for they are principles for us to follow. In the Old testament, Christ is concealed; in the New Testament, Christ is revealed.

Let me say here that if you do not have your salvation doctrine grounded in the Old Testament, (*the foundation for the New Testament is in the old*) how do you know that you know the Christ of all Scripture? The gospel is how Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures. (*1 Corinthians 15:3-4*) Do you know this Christ, or is He a figment of the imagination of some religious huckster with a bargain-counter Jesus, who only lasts as long as life on earth lasts? You had better be sure!

This part of the Amish services was valuable to me and gave me the solid foundation on which to build later. I thank God for my heritage.

This service would last until about 1:30, and then it would close in the normal way. The bishop would say, "All those who are brothers and sisters may remain seated after the song."

Now we would all hear the *Ordnung* (*Amish rules and regulations*) recited and I will relate these from memory. The Amish have no written record; they never take minutes; their rules are never on paper but are told from generation to generation. Before the rules are laid down, the bishop makes the *Foreshtelling*, which is a brief summary of the types and shadows, beginning with Adam, and lasting about fifteen minutes. Then he begins with the rules.

Beginning with the men: The hat shall have a four-inch crown and a four-inch brim, no dents in it; telescoped hats are permitted, but if the top is too high it must be folded together to look nice. All church members are required to wear the *Mutza*, which was a split-tail coat that was rounded in front. (This was formerly called the swallow-tail coat, because that is what the old folks used to wear). All males were required to wear it, and it was required for church services only. When you went away on Sunday other than church, you could wear your coat. All had to have hooks and eyes instead of buttons. The work coat did not dare have any buttons unless it had a waistband around it. This was an old tradition, and no one wore it unless he was very old-fashioned.

The trousers had to be the barn door type, opening in the front with no zipper, because the world wore that kind. We did not wear pressed trousers, but just kept them round like stove pipes. One suspender was allowed for the men if they could not do without it. A vest must be worn at all times. When it was hot you could take off your *Mutza*, but you had to wear a vest, for the world went without vests, and old men usually wore vests at home. Dress shirts were permitted to have a collar to protect your neck from being rubbed by the coat. Work shirts worn during the week usually had no collar. Neither did any coat dare have a collar, except the overcoat, and that had to have a cape on it extending from the neck to the shoulders, making it different from the world. This was also a good protection from the cold wind in an open buggy. Coveralls were not permitted. Buttons and zippers were prohibited, except for buttons with which to fasten the suspenders.

Buggies were required to have wooden seats with open backs. The seat panel was not to be wider than seven inches, and

the back no more than eight. In winter you could throw a blanket over the back. Rubber tires were prohibited on all equipment, until at last they came on wheelbarrows. Carriages were to have open fronts with no storm fronts. Market wagons were allowed a storm front with a window.

The horse harness was to be plain with no rosettes and no reins over the top of the horse's ears. Farming with a tractor was forbidden, though they could be used for belt power. No electric generators were allowed on anything. A battery was allowed to power one light in front and one in back on a buggy, and only one reflector was allowed during my time with the Amish.

In church, married women wore a black cape and apron and single girls wore white. All had to wear a large covering that covered the hair, which must not be frizzed up so that the covering could not fit over it. But girls had a way of looking neat, and even observing all the required clothing laws, they still made their dresses tight. Every law can be bent some. At that time, no slipper shoes were worn, all women wore high-topped shoes, black stockings, and skirts to the ankles. Women wore a shawl over their shoulders but no outer coat. Frills were allowed on the shawls if they were no longer than two inches, and all had to be black.

Electricity, gas water heaters and mechanical refrigerators were prohibited. If you needed ice in the summer, you bought it.

Homes must be plain with no fancy curtains in the windows. It was commonly believed that if something served no other purpose than to look nice, it was evil, and all modern inventions were thought to be from the evil one.

One modern invention that was allowed was the chain saw. When they first came into use, they were frowned upon but not forbidden, since they could not be proved by precedent, as no one had ever had one before and buzz saws were allowed to saw wood. Some of the men, including our deacon, got themselves chain saws, and then they were never forbidden.

Spring wagons with platform springs were forbidden. Worldly people did not use them anymore, but because the world at one time did use them, they were considered worldly by precedent and therefore forbidden. Laws dare not be changed, for if one law is allowed to be changed, then it will not be hard to change another one, and you have to draw the line somewhere. Because platform springs were at one time forbidden, even though

that law no longer made sense to anyone including preachers, they were still not allowed. Since they were no longer in common use, you could buy them cheap, so someone came up with the idea that they would take out half of the springs and put in a wooden piece instead, and then they were allowed.

After the bishop was finished stating all the rules he could think of, all the other ministers would take a turn to touch on whatever had been missed. It was always said that if anything was not mentioned, that did not mean it was now allowed. No law may ever be changed, for change is dangerous. The Amish would say, just look at the Mennonite church. One day they were just as plain as we are! In fact, we were all the same at one time. But they allowed a little change to creep in, and now look where they are! You cannot tell the difference between them and the world by looking at them. The argument is that Christians ought to be identified by sight because of their uniformity in dress, the same as policemen, soldiers, and postmen. Most officials can be identified by their uniforms.

After the laws were quoted, anyone needing warning or punishment, received it in order to prepare everyone for communion. A disagreement that could not be reconciled would prevent the communion service. At the council session, beginning with the bishop, everyone would say these words or similar ones: *"I am satisfied with this church and acknowledge it to be a Christ-oriented church. I am at peace with the way we are doing things and want no change in our baptism, communion and feet washing. I am in complete harmony with the brothers and sisters who walk the way they did when they received the Lord Jesus, and I am better satisfied with them than I am with myself. Now if there is anyone present who knows or has seen or heard anything about me that is not good, I ask them to tell me about it, and I want to make it right. I heartily ask them for forgiveness and forbearance, and if this does not settle it, then I will not be a partaker of the coming communion service, for that would be eating and drinking it unworthily, which I do not want to do. If no one has anything to say against me, then I want to be a weak participant."*

After the ministers all made a similar confession, two of them would get up, one asking the men and the other asking the women, who were supposed to say they were satisfied. If the council was not held up, communion service was announced to be

held in two weeks. After this the service would be dismissed and lunch would be served, though by this time it would be around three o'clock.

THE PUNISHMENT OF EVILDOERS

If someone had violated some rule, the deacon's duty was to go and talk to him about it and ask him to make confession before the church. There were always those who pushed at the boundaries, and occasionally they would break a rule. Occasionally someone who got behind in his farm work would hire someone to plow with a tractor. This was a serious offense, and before communion could be held, he must be cleansed. He would have a hearing, and those who had gone to see him about it would say what they had found and how he had responded, and then he would have an opportunity to answer for himself. If he were sorry for his sin, the punishment would be light. He would be asked to leave the council, and the bishop would make the *Foreschlock* (*proposal*) stating that if the offender would just make a public confession admitting wrong, and ask for patience and forgiveness, that would settle the matter. Everyone present would then be asked if they were satisfied with that, and if so, he would be called in and told that there was unanimous agreement of what he was required to do. If he meekly submitted, he was cleared of the offence. For a more serious offense, he would be asked to kneel before the bishop and make the same confession.

If anyone refused to obey and would not listen to the church council, the only remaining course was to excommunicate him. It was preached that if anyone were put out of the church and happened to die in that state, he would be in hell and most people commonly believed that there would be no hope for him. Thus, it was fairly easy to maintain purity in the church since everyone was moved by fear.

If a person was excommunicated, not only was his spiritual life in danger, but his social life was also. He immediately lost all his friends and close associates, for they no longer were permitted to have anything to do with him. His wife was no longer allowed to ride home with him, for it was illegal to ride along with anyone who was under the ban. But if she were to take the reins and drive,

it would be all right, for then he would be riding with her, At home she was not allowed to eat at the same table or sleep in the same bed as him.

Much of the strength of the Amish system, at least in the church where I was, lay in the power to inflict the ban on a person. If he went to another church, of which there were six, and they did not recognize our ban, then he would be banned for the rest of his life. If you had been raised in this system and had been taught it from your youth, you were a firm believer in it, and your faith was strong, most would be ready to give their lives for it.

Now it is good to believe in what you stand for, but if what you have faith in lacks Scriptural authority, then it is a serious error. Furthermore it is taught, that to keep these rules is our righteousness. To violate them is to sin against God and transgress His Word, because it is believed the bishop and the ministry have the power to make the laws, which means that if you violate their laws, you violate the God who gave them this authority. This is generally true in all strict churches. It is the only way it can be done. If you have rules, they must be enforced; otherwise they are of no value at all.

The third degree of punishment was called the highest acknowledgement. In this case the offender must kneel before the bishop who asks him if he confesses before God and this assembly that he has deserved this chastisement. He must answer yes. Then he is asked if he promises from here on to avoid this offense, as much as lies in his power, and he affirms it, then the bishop gives him the right hand of fellowship and greets him with a kiss, and the offender is again reinstated. This is the same procedure used to bring someone out of the ban.

Some sins simply cannot be forgiven, but the guilty person must be placed in the ban. He is required to do more than simply confess his wrong. Sins such as drunkenness, fornication or adultery require that the offender be in the ban at least two weeks. This seldom happened where I was, for we had good fellowship and good preaching, and outward evil was under strict control. Nothing could control a person's thoughts, but if he never put them into action, he was considered on his way to heaven.

Only the bishop had the authority to put anyone in the ban, and most of the time a bishop had to be present to punish anyone,

since common preachers were not considered as powerful as the bishop.

Putting anyone in the ban was considered a serious step, for that was to deliver him to Satan for the destruction of the flesh. Who in his right mind wants that threat hanging over his head?

All the congregation were required to give their unanimous consent that a person was worthy to be put in the ban. Then the bishop would stand before the church and say: *“In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of the Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver him to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”* (1 Corinthians 5:4-5). With these words spoken over the offender, he was put in the ban.

My father later told me he knew the church discipline was of no value if the heart did not change, but you could not tell this to the people, for they would not understand. In that organizational context, it is impossible for any leader to be absolutely honest in presenting truth.

THE COMMUNION SERVICE

This service began much like the other, except the bishop would again make the *Foreshtelling*; that is to go briefly through the types and shadows from Adam to the Babylonian captivity, for about fifteen minutes. Then a preacher would get up and again begin at Adam and go through to Noah, just as at the council meeting, and the second preacher likewise, but they had to be done by noon. Then the bishop would go through all those beautiful prophecies concerning the glorious reign of the Lord Jesus Christ which would take one hour. The noon meal would be eaten during preaching since the service was much longer than normal.

Then at one o'clock he would begin expounding the book of Matthew until two. Then he would begin passing out the bread for communion, going through the entire congregation and giving each person a small piece of bread. The congregation would all be standing for this, and each person would make a slight bow and sit down when he received his piece of bread until all were seated.

Then the wine would be served, and the congregation would stand. The bishop would take a sip and then give the cup to

a fellow minister, who would then give it to the others. Then pans of water would be brought in at different places, and the congregation would sing while washing one another's feet. As we passed out of the room, we gave our alms money to the deacon, which was the only offering to be lifted and this was to help the poor if such were to be found in our midst.

Participation in the communion service is of utmost importance to the Amish. They believe a person has no hope of eternal life unless he takes communion. They quote the Lord Jesus in John 6:53-58, in which it is stated four times that to eat His flesh guarantees eternal life, and they take this in a literal sense. *"Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father; so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven; not as your fathers did eat manna and are dead; he that eateth of this bread shall live forever."* So, you see why the communion service was so important to them. This is also the reason the Amish and many religious groups require people to be members in some church; otherwise they cannot partake of the communion elements.

What they fail to see is that Jesus said, you do not eat His flesh and drink His blood as the Jews did eat manna, that is actually, or literally, he said that they are no longer living, their eating it did not keep them alive. Just so, the actual partaking of the emblems has no value to anyone to keep them alive spiritually.

It is quite clear that He meant that the eating of His flesh and blood was to be taken in a spiritual sense. Furthermore, to partake of His flesh and blood only twice a year, as they hold their communion service, is certainly not the same as having a constant diet of Christ in eternal life. To limit the partaking of Christ to the communion service is to follow the practice of Roman Catholics in transubstantiation.

Partaking of the emblems and holding membership in a church is not wrong in itself, but if you trust in that as having any saving merit before God, you are not trusting in the blood of Christ

to take away your sin; you are adding your own efforts, and this is idolatry. It certainly is not right to make an idol of any church or church service. Scripture says, "*Little children, keep yourselves from idols*" (1 John 5:21). When Israel made a calf in the wilderness, it was something they thought they needed, a symbol to help them in their worship, something they could perceive with their natural senses. In like manner, it is possible to make a calf of any church service or ordinance today.

BAPTISMAL SERVICE

The Amish usually baptize only once every two years in a particular church district if there are any ready at the right age to be baptized. Normally young people did not begin to go to the singings and go with the young people until age sixteen. Because of strict upbringing and rules, young people were usually very shy. Beginning to move about with young people was a new venture, and therefore those who were just beginning were awkward. This was the rule, and there were no exceptions. After spring communion, at age sixteen for girls and about eighteen for boys, they would go to the *Abrote* with the preachers and sit with them. The bishop would ask them what their request was that caused them to come to them that morning, and they are supposed to say, "*I came to seek peace with God and His church.*" Everyone sitting in with the preachers would say that every time they went, and they had to do this nine different Sundays. Since church was held only every other Sunday, it took eighteen weeks to do this. At this meeting, the preachers would teach them the seriousness of the step they were taking, the principles of the Christian life, and go over the *Dortrecht Confession of Faith*. Then the Saturday before one was to be baptized, he would meet with the ministers again and go over it more thoroughly. Each candidate had to vow to abide by the rules, and boys were required to make a vow that if they were in the lot for minister, they would assume this responsibility.

The following Sunday morning at the normal church service the bishop would recite the entire book of Acts from memory. Since no Amish ever used a Bible to preach, it must be

from memory, though some cannot do it. These would be helped by the ministers sitting by in the meeting.

After the preaching, about one o'clock, the baptismal candidates would form two rows, boys facing girls, all candidates kneeling. The bishop would ask these questions: "Do you confess this to be a Christian church, and all the rules accordingly?" The candidates would say yes. "Do you promise to abide by this church, help to counsel and work in it as long as you live?" Again, the reply would be yes. He would ask everyone if they believed that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and the answer would be, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." The candidates would also promise to receive Jesus Christ and to put off the old man with his deeds. Then the bishop would cup his hands on the candidate's head and the deacon would pour water over his head three times, once each for the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Then the candidate would receive the right hand of fellowship and a kiss and be told to be faithful.

The Anabaptists or their predecessors have always used the method of pouring in their baptism. To them baptism symbolizes the outpouring of the Spirit of God at the beginning of the church at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit sat upon each of the disciples. In the German Bible, it reads that the love of God is "poured" into our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given to all of us. (*Romans 5:5*) The scripture also says, (by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body.) (*1 Corinthians 12:13*) This is the body of Christ, and no human being has the authority to do that; it is strictly the work of God. I have no quarrel with those who pour for baptism. On many occasions, folks became perturbed about the method, and the Anabaptist churches even split over the mode of baptism, but it seems the majority of those who began to dip always left the Mennonite faith. One exception was the Russian Mennonites.

Since Amish do not have revival meetings or other extra meetings as most evangelical churches do, the young people do not have the usual opportunity to be pressed to make a decision to be saved, join the church, and be baptized. Each Amish church district takes applicants for baptism every other year, and when one reaches the right age on a baptism year, then he joins the church. Yet it is supposed to be his own decision. In my case, there never was any question about joining the church when I reached the right age. It was just the thing everyone did at that age.

It is commonly believed among the Amish that children who are raised up in Christian homes never need to experience a change of heart from the old life to the new, for the workings of the old life are never tolerated, and therefore no change is necessary. Historically Anabaptists did not believe in original sin, that all are born in sin. Those outside the Amish church of course did not fit this description; they needed a change of life. But one who was born and reared in such a godly environment could hardly be considered a sinner. Furthermore, they reason, if one were born in sin and died in infancy, how could that one be saved? If they were born in sin, then they ought to be baptized as infants in order to wash away the original sin. But because Anabaptists never did believe in original sin, they considered infant baptism to be unnecessary.

I am only relating what my father taught me and what I find in the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*. As long as young applicants were obedient to all church rules and their parents, their fidelity to God was taken for granted. A sinner would not be willing to keep all the rules of the church, therefore the faithful must be saints.

Chapter Four

Family Life

Finding a life partner in the Amish church must be done in secret. It was not easy for me to find a wife, yet I wanted one. I assumed I would be a farmer because most Amish were farmers. It was not according to church rules to work in shops or public works. Amish could do carpenter work, but that takes special aptitude, which I did not have. At any rate, nearly everyone hopes to get married someday and start a family and I was no different.

Since I had never left the limestone bowl into which I had been born, I could not conceive of the existence of other places. We did see visitors coming in from time to time, including young folks from Lancaster County. My brother Dave got a partner that way, but I was not really that interested.

Because so many are related, inter-marrying among the Amish can create serious deficiencies down through the years, and these show up in your offspring; but you have to do what is right. Just about everyone was my cousin or second cousin. We were all related in one way or another. To go to another church to look for a partner would not be right in the mind of a devoted Amish boy; so eventually I married my second cousin, since my mother and my wife's father were first cousins.

Courting began by going to the singings at age sixteen and joining those who "ran around," as it is sometimes called. Every Sunday evening there was a singing somewhere, unless there was a communion service, when everyone was required to stay home and meditate. After you go with the young folks and find out the "pecking order" (where you belonged in the group, who you could lord it over and who your superior was), you became acclimated. Of course, the boys would see the girls, for they sat across from each other, and they observed one another's behavior. And as Solomon said, even he did not know the way of a man with a maid, neither do I profess to know, but some things seem to click, and you finally spot one whom you care for. Now some fellows make it their business to date every girl they could, but I did not believe in this. My Uncle Ezra told me to take it easy and not get excited about girls until I was eighteen. Then was the time he suggested I should take action.

Dan Y. Peachey had a daughter who was not taken, who had caught my eye. She was two years younger than I and very shy as Amish people are. It is their philosophy that children should be seen and not heard. But at these singings you could not just go and ask her in front of everybody, but you had to be very secret about it. So I went to her place after dark when all were in bed. I did not take my horse, for that would make noise, and nobody was supposed to know about this, so I walked.

All was dark and quiet when I arrived. I went to the side of the house where I supposed she slept. This was easy since Amish houses are all similar. Parents all slept downstairs in a bedroom. Her bedroom was on the second floor on the east side of the house, and her parents' bedroom was on the first floor on the west side of the house. When you attend church in homes, you get to know all these things. It is a very close-knit and integrated society, and that is why it is so difficult to leave them and go out into the cold, hard world where it is dog-eat-dog, and nobody cares for you.

I took some gravel from the driveway and threw it against her window. Now I had not said anything to her before, but she had that feminine intuition that told her I would be around, and it did not take much to wake her. She came to the window and asked who was down there, and I suggested that she come down and investigate, and she did.

At that time, it was customary when dating, to lay in bed together. This might seem immoral in our present sex-crazed society, but I am speaking of something different. This was a time when folks were decent, and Amish women wore their skirts to their ankles, and the skirts were very loose and did not reveal the contours of the body. Furthermore, at night most kitchen fires went out and water would freeze in the tea kettle. Most had a coal fire in the living room at that time, but bed courtship began when there were no fires at all, and if you wanted to keep warm and be in secret, you went to bed just to keep warm. And once a tradition is established, it speaks louder and clearer than Scripture does, and in a society where change was thought to be evil, who would dare to suggest a change? At that time there was little immorality among the Amish, and divorce was almost unheard of.

Of course, we did not undress when we went to bed; we were total strangers to each other, and very shy. But it had to be done if the desired end was to be achieved.

After that, I began coming to her house to take her to the singings, and in the wintertime, it was dark, so we could get away without detection for a while. After going to the singings together long enough, it became common knowledge, but at first it was top secret, and one did everything possible to keep prying noses off the scent. Courtship then was only once every two weeks, and then only until midnight.

Weddings were held only in the fall, after the corn was husked. I was twenty-one when we were married, and she was nineteen. But the time and fact of the wedding was top secret, no one could know except for a special few.

A young man did not go and ask the hand of his fiancée from her father. He had to go to his favorite preacher and ask him to speak for him. I went to Abe Peachey after dark one night, but I did not want to drive in his lane, and it was too far to walk. So I tied the horse to the fence post along the lane and walked the rest of the way. This was not wise since my buggy blocked the lane. When I approached the house, I saw they were not at home. This was top secret, no one was supposed to know about it, so I did not knock on the door, but looked in the windows. While I was gone from my buggy, he drove in the lane and almost into my buggy, but he got stopped in time. So I got my mission accomplished, but there was one thing wrong; Abe Peachey had retired, and Kore Peachey was living there and doing the farming, and Kore was with Abe, so he saw me. He said, "Now the cat's out of the bag! I know what you want here." But he promised not to tell, though he considered himself important to know about it.

In a closed social group, it is impossible to hide anything, for everyone knows you, and you know everyone; and all knew that my wedding was coming up either this year or next, though no one knew the details. Church was at my wife's Uncle Dave Swarey's that Sunday when it became public knowledge. Abe Peachey had made the proper arrangements, and we would be published to be married. Everyone expected it but were not sure. Now girls would take along a black cape and apron if they were planning to spend the afternoon somewhere after church, for they wore white in church but black at all other times. The other girls checked Salina's little suitcase to see if she had brought extra clothes along to determine if she would be staying anywhere that afternoon. The girls were sure this would be Salina's big day, and

they were puzzled when they saw her suitcase. That meant she was not going to be published.

After everything was done, just before the last song, instead of the preacher telling the members to remain, he said, "It is also true that two people have decided to enter into matrimony; namely John Renno and Dan Peachey's daughter Salina." Then I stood up and went out and hitched my horse, and she came out and we left for her home.

Any other time it would have been a violation for me to be at her home for a visit in broad daylight, but now it was legal. While the last song was sung, we were getting ready and left before anyone could come out and spy on us.

Courtship was looked upon as a necessary evil. It was against the rules of the church for anyone to be with his girl during the daylight hours. You were not even allowed to be at an after-church gathering for supper if she was there. If you were caught, you had to confess the fault before the church before your sin could be forgiven.

This was the way we always did it, and to suggest a change, was to become suspect of heterodoxy. To violate the traditions laid down by the elders was certainly evil. And yet at the same time we would hear it preached how Jesus condemned the Pharisees for upholding their tradition in violation of the law of God. Nobody would dare suggest that we were doing the same thing. Yes, we criticized the Jews for being so foolish as to break God's laws in favor of their own, and we did the same thing. But if anyone even thought this, he would not dare mention it.

This is what got me into trouble. I wanted to know why we did things that made no sense, but condemned others who in another age did so. My father rebuked me severely for my curiosity and independence for asking such questions, and I kept them to myself as best I could, but I kept wondering. I never even once thought about leaving the Amish church, for who would want to forsake his own mercy and go to hell?

At Salina's house I met her parents for the first time in broad daylight, but in private. It certainly was not easy, and I felt like an intruder. But this was the old custom, and nobody dared to change. I ate supper there and stayed overnight, yes, slept in the same bed with her (*but that was all!*) and the next day was a busy one.

About this time bed courtship was phased out. My father was bishop, and he opposed it, but he still would not dare make an announcement forbidding it. But in a kind, fatherly way, he suggested its discontinuance. We loved him and obeyed him because of that, not because we feared him. If children have the right training, they will obey when Dad is not around.

One could detect in his preaching that he thought it was an ungodlike practice, and some eyebrows were raised, but his popularity carried him over. He told how it was a bad light for those in society.

The next day was the time to give out wedding invitations. This is done by the bridegroom personally. He spends all day driving to each home and inviting all those he wants to see at his wedding.

Some living in other areas had to be invited by mail, but most lived in the valley and could be invited personally, which took all day. Close uncles and aunts received a special invitation to be cooks, and they gathered the day before to prepare. It is a big thing for any girl to have a wedding day; it usually happens only once in a lifetime. Preparations are made long ahead to prepare for cooking.

Being rural folks, we raised much of our food on the farm, so actual cost was a minor item. In the light of all the festivities and the felicity of the occasion in being together with friends and loved ones, all disadvantages were forgotten.

Weddings always took place on Tuesday or Thursday, with Thursday being preferred, along with the right sign of the moon. No, the moon was not depended upon, but there was no use taking any chances.

The 28th of November 1945 was a great day. It was Wednesday, and long before daylight, things were astir. The usual chores had to be done, and those who were cooks who wanted to be early, came early. It was kind of an unspoken social race to see who could be the earliest. The water in the big kettle was boiling before daylight. When enough folks had arrived, you began beheading chickens. It is the duty of the bridegroom to cut off their heads. A favorite trick he had to beware of, was when the one holding the chicken's head over the block, would jerk it back just before the ax fell and throw the chicken. But instead of the beheaded chicken flopping in place until it was dead, it would run

and cackle. Next the chickens would be scalded, and the feathers pulled off and the chicken plucked clean. All this took place among much jesting and banter.

There was much to be done in preparing food for two hundred guests and feeding them two meals. Of course, the women had most of the work, but the men were along and there were always those who work the most and those who did most of the talking. Then there is a big dinner at noon, and the house has to be rearranged to make room for the guests; furniture has to be removed, and trestles made for temporary tables all through the living room and kitchen. Most farmhouses had a summer kitchen and a wash house where the preparation was done.

About two o'clock in the afternoon, the men's work was pretty well done, and they gathered in the shop around a good fire, and those who liked to smoke lit up, and they began to see who could tell the tallest tales. There was some serious talk, but you did not dare get too interested in spiritual things for the folks who did, usually left the church.

AMISH WEDDINGS

All weddings have half a day of spiritual exercises, including a church service just like any other. Of course, at the bride's home there is yet much work to be done, and the important cooks cannot attend the service proper. The groom stays at the bride's house, and by now, having been together through all this period of stress, they get to know one another quite well, for they are in their best work clothes. Early in the morning those who were appointed to be best men and maids come early to the bride's home, and those who were appointed to take care of the horses come and get everything ready, for this is one day when the bride and groom get nothing but served. At the proper time the groom gets his bride and walks out to his buggy, for the church service was not held at the home of the bride, but a neighbor's.

Three buggies went out the lane with three people in each; a male and a female on the seat and the hostler who was driving sitting half on each lap. Some folks were gathered at the neighbor's house, and the couples were taken to the gate and got out of the buggies and went into the house. In the middle of the living room

were six chairs facing each other. The couples sat each facing his partner. At the beginning of the second line of the first hymn being sung, the preachers got up and went to the *Abrote* (off council) and the groom and his bride followed. The ministers asked them why they came, and they answered that they came to learn of the matrimonial duties.

Now though my father was bishop, he did not want to be the leader for my wedding day, for it was not easy for any father to see his son leave home, especially if they have been close, as we had. He suggested I invite Levi Stolfus to the wedding to officiate. My father, being leader of the home church, asked why we came, but then declined to give the duties and told Levi to do it. But Levi also declined, saying he would rather not; so it fell to my father after all.

The first question asked was if we are yet free from all other mates. This was a personal question asked of each of us. After answering the affirmative, we were instructed that after this day we were free to engage in intimate relationships except when the woman has her period. At this time, I had no knowledge of a woman's menstrual cycle; it was new to me and was simply called a "monthly sickness." Then further admonitions were given including a word or two by the other ministers, and we were excused to return to our seats. The ministers followed immediately.

The opening minister again is required to begin at Adam, especially bringing out the facts of the first marriage enacted by God and continues down to Noah entering the ark. Then he suggests prayer, and everyone kneels, and a silent prayer is said. When the minister stands up, everyone else does too. Then the account in Matthew 19 of the Jews asking Jesus whether it is right to divorce is read by the deacon. After this, the bishop who is officiating, speaks briefly on the types and shadows of the Old Testament, especially concerning marriage, and speaking extensively on Genesis 24. Then he goes to the uninspired books of the Apocrypha, explaining the book of Tobit. This is the account of a deeply religious man who performed many virtuous deeds during his life, but became poor, and his wife like Job's wife, suggested that he forsake God and die if that is all the reward he reaps for his piety. In his prosperity he had loaned money to a friend who lived some distance away, and he sent his only son to get the money. He told his son to find a suitable companion to accompany him in

retrieving the money, and he brought him to his father, who inquired into this young man's family and was satisfied with his answers. The old man had lost his sight when in his good work he lay down under a swallow's nest and bird droppings fell into his eyes and blinded him. He asked the young man to accompany his son into the far country and retrieve the money. As the two were traveling, they had to provide themselves with food, and when fishing, a big fish came up and desired to eat young Tobit, and he screamed saying, "O Lord, he will eat me!" But he was told to fear not but catch the fish by the fins. He did so, and his companion cut out the liver, saying it was good for sightless eyes and also would drive away evil spirits. Later on in their journey, they stopped at a certain godly man's house who had a daughter who had been married seven times, but always on their wedding night her husband was slain by evil spirits. Her name was Susanna. This time she fasted three days and nights seeking Divine help. Tobit's companion, who was an angel of God, told Tobit that he wanted him to marry Susanna, but Tobit was afraid a similar fate might befall him as had her previous husbands, to the grief of his father. He did marry her, however, and at the wedding the angel took the hands of the maiden and gave her into the hand of Tobit.

This is the only place in the entirety of Scripture where any hint is made of a wedding ceremony. I understand that even a Justice of the Peace uses this as a precedent when performing a ceremony. After having such bitter experiences before, they were sure Tobit would be dead by morning, but the angel intervened with the fish liver, offering it as incense, and the evil spirit was defeated. Tobit was alive in the morning, although they had dug a fresh grave for him the night before, because they were sure that he would be dead. The marriage was successful, and they went on their journey, obtained the money, and returned home, applied the fish liver to the eyes of old Tobit, and he received his sight. They wanted to reward the young man who had showed this kindness, but it turned out he was a Divine messenger.

At the wedding, all this had to be done by 11:30 when the hand of the clock is on the upward swing so that the marriage will continually grow better as time goes on. Not that they were superstitious, but again there is no use taking any chances. Even if no good can come from it, it certainly can do no harm. The bishop now having completed the sermon and coming to the place where

young Tobit is married by receiving the hand of his bride, he says, "There are now two young folks here who have agreed to enter into matrimony;" and again he tells who they are and says, "If anyone has a good reason why these two should not be married, let him now speak." When no one speaks, he says to the couple, "If you are still of the same opinion, you may come up to me." He then asks the usual questions and gives her hand into his and declares them man and wife. Then he finishes his story of Tobit's successful encounters.

After taking his seat, the bishop asks for testimony so that every word may be established by two or three witnesses. Then while the first strains of the last song rise, the wedding party departs for the bride's home.

It is also believed that if the married couple walks over a broom upon entering the house, the marriage will be assured of success. A rug is laid at the door with a broom under it, but the bride expecting this reaches down and picks up the broom before entering. The opposing party of course tries to prevent this, and a slight struggle ensues. I had no such superstition in such matters, but Salina was successful in retrieving the broom.

The party then enters the living room where the tables are and sits in the main corner. The guests are then invited in, and the youngest unmarried people fill the living room, boys on one side and girls on the other. The "Snizler" (*one who has been honored to serve the bride and groom*) sits across from the bride and groom and puts food on their plate, cuts the cake, and does everything else for them and they do nothing but eat. They are not even supposed to sing at their own wedding but have the whole day off.

After all have eaten, the singing begins and continues for about an hour and a half. Then everyone who wants to, joins in on the singing. First, slow tunes are employed, but then faster ones are sung as the singing progresses. Finally, all are tired and want to go outside, and a recess lasts for several hours until the tables are cleared, and the dishes washed, and supper prepared. The guests then are free to visit, and some have to go home to do their chores.

At that time, it was customary for the bridegroom to walk around and pass out cigars to guests, and the old workshop was blue with cigar smoke. That custom was already beginning to change then, for the Mennonites were much opposed to smoking, and their attitude has had some effect on the Amish. Smoking and

drinking in moderation are old German customs. In Germany it is still the custom to drink wine for a beverage instead of water, as they say water is for cattle. And since smoking is an old custom and a tradition, it seemed best to keep it up rather than admit that the worldly Mennonites were right. Furthermore, time has proven that anyone who begins to see evil in such old traditions is likely to take an interest in discussing Scripture too, and to many, that is a danger signal that he may be on the way out of the Amish. The reasoning is that smoking may not be quite the thing to do but it cannot be as bad as getting saved and leaving the Amish church. So, it is best just to keep a low profile on these questionable subjects. My father told me later that the most helpful members in the church are those who do not know much Scripture, but just mind their own business and obey the church rules and never cause any trouble. For when a man begins to think for himself, he is just liable to question some of the traditions and demand answers. I had a similar experience with a Mennonite preacher concerning baptismal vows. I claimed that they were not according to Scripture, and he admitted this may be so, but he defended his position by saying that if you demand Scriptural proof for every practice the church does, you will one day find yourself out in left field all by yourself. This is an unacceptable position for those who are only church denomination oriented.

At weddings it was also the practice to have a barn party which is about the same as a dance. Since dancing was forbidden, the young people did not keep in step. My father was opposed to these and as bishop, he phased them out, not by edict but by personal opinion. Remember, the Bishop's opinion was considered to be next to a Divine opinion. Barn parties are now a thing of the past.

Around six o'clock the bridal party returned to the table, where supper was now ready. All the unmarried would pair up and appear in public with a partner. Those who have been going together have their steady, and those young men who have none, must for that evening ask a girl to go in and sit with them. This is not compulsory, but if you want to be with the "in" group, you had better get a partner. The purpose of the barn party was to give opportunity to ask someone to be a partner with no publicity. It is not deemed proper for a boy to walk up to a girl and ask her without warning; that would be too brazen, or even worldly.

So you sent your best friend to ask her for you. There were cases when a man sent his friend to ask a girl, but instead he asked for himself, and if she agreed, he went back and told his friend that she declined.

The supper table is a beautiful sight, since the whole living room is filled with tables thronged with young couples. More than one life partner has been selected in this way. Supper is a big meal, not just potato chips and ice cream, like modern weddings have. When everyone is full, the singing begins again and continues until about nine o'clock. Then everyone goes home, after having a look at all the gifts, which are piled on a bed in an upstairs room.

The weather on a couple's wedding day, traditionally was thought to be an indicator of how the marriage will fare financially and otherwise. If the weather is nice, the marriage will be good; if cloudy, not so good. If it rains, you will get a slop for a wife; and if it snows, you are liable to become rich. On our wedding day it snowed all day, but with practically no accumulation!

Amish youth have little training about marriage. Yes, Scriptures are quoted where we are told to love each other etc., but love is not a commodity that can be produced at will. It takes knowledge. Under the Old Testament, love was not the motive for marriage. Wives were usually selected by the groom's parents and paid for. Under the law no woman had a right to leave her husband. She was little more than chattel, and the husband could legally send her out if she did not meet with his expectations. This is not the way it was with our first parents, but as time passed, many infractions occurred, and laws became necessary. The Amish are similar in their social life to Old Testament times. They claim the Bible as their rule book rather than a book of principles, for that is the way they are taught.

FUNERALS

When someone dies, the undertaker is notified and he prepares the body and embalms it and makes a wooden coffin that fits the contour of the body, wider at the shoulders, narrow at the feet and with a lid pitched like a roof. The hinges are located a little below the shoulders, and two lids open downward toward the feet, so that just the bust is exposed at the viewing.

Usually a short service is conducted in the home with just immediate relatives present. At nine o'clock the rest of the people file in through the home just as they would in a church service. At a funeral service there is no singing, the preachers do not go to a private council, and the speakers are chosen by the family. The opening speaker stands up and makes a few remarks, but he is required to relate the story of the creation, how man began, and how he fell into sin. A favorite quote is from the Apocryphal book of Jesus Sirach, where he says, "By the hatred of the devil sin came into the world, and they that belong to him help him with it." Another one is, "It is a sorrowful, lamentable thing of every man's life; there is always care, fear, hope, and at last death. This happens to all men, to the one who sits in high honors as well as to him of the lowest of the earth."

The main speaker then stands. This is usually the bishop, though it is not a requirement, and anyone who is an able speaker is usually asked to preach the funeral sermon. Sometimes one who is not so able is asked if he is a distant relative and folks want to honor him by asking him to speak.

The main speaker leads in prayer by reading from a prayer book written by an Anabaptist, while the congregation kneels. Then the age of the dead person is given, and the good of his life is spoken of and held up as an example if they have been faithful members of the church and are therefore expected to enter heaven. However, the Amish say that no one can be absolutely sure until the judgement day, for Scripture is very emphatic that the books were opened, and every man was judged according to his works.

After the service, the coffin is placed by the exit door and everyone files back through the house and has a last view, and then goes right on through and out the back door.

The grave would have been dug by hand the day before the funeral, and a rough box of boards with no bottom is placed as a liner. The coffin is let down by straps into the grave, and the grave diggers throw in dirt and cover the coffin while the people look on. A few parting remarks are made, and the assembly is dismissed.

CHURCH AT OUR HOUSE

If you happen to live in a church district where twenty-six families can attend service, church comes to your house once a year. Some folks have a small house, and some folks do not have a farm. These sometimes supply the food for lunch, but the service is held at an Amish neighbors farm if they agree to it.

If the deacon would say, "If the Lord wills and we live, in fourteen days from today church will be at John Renno's," then for two weeks we would be living with this in mind, for along with church being at your house, your qualifications and management are on the line. For if you are a farmer and go to another farm, the first thing you look for is similar things to what you see at home. When everyone is intimately acquainted, it is different than when a total stranger comes. Your honor is on the line, and a man will surrender everything else in life before he will his honor or dignity, or the things he feels those are bound up in; and keeping a good homestead if one of those. When the milk inspector comes around, he is only interested in the dairy operation and things pertaining to it; when church is at your house, everything is under observation.

These are some of the disadvantages of being Amish, but the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages. Since you are taught all your life that this is the right way, you automatically believe it. It is a part of your life, and yes, even your eternal welfare is connected with this. Who would not do everything in his own power if his earthly and heavenly well-being depended upon it? To leave the Amish would be spiritual suicide.

Early on Saturday morning, the neighbor ladies come and help your wife bake pies and half-moon pies, and prepare things for supper, for almost always someone stays for supper, and after church many stay. The honor of the housekeeper is on the line.

The house must be made ready, and the benches had to be brought down from the woodshed loft and dusted off and set in the house so they could get warm overnight.

One advantage to having church at our house is that we did not need to go away for church, but everyone else had to come to you. We had to get up early Sunday morning to get the chores done. The benches must be set in order, the door between the rooms removed from its hinges, and in the winter, the cattle must be crowded together to make room for the horses in the barn. In a

district with twenty families, the host would have to make room for thirty horses, since some would bring more than one rig. And also, someone might be visiting from another district.

At about 8:15 the first carriage would arrive, and the diligent host family is ready to help them unhitch and exchange greetings, discuss the weather, and lead their horses into the stable.

The first to enter the house are the preachers, then the older men, the younger men, and finally, all the younger boys enter about five minutes until nine, and shortly afterwards the opening hymn begins. Of course, I had to stay outside and take care of all the late-comers and make sure all their horses have hay and behave themselves. A steady stream of buggies had been arriving since about 8:40, and I could not take care of them all at once, so I let them line up and concentrated on the elderly, and let the younger folks fend for themselves. There was quite a lineup of rigs by then.

Working all morning develops an appetite, and the thinking host would have hidden some moon pies for himself to eat before entering the house for the service. By the time the host gets in, the singing is about over, and if everyone is properly seated, he finds a seat for himself.

While the first preacher is standing, the host wife brings some pies and water for the small children. Older children do not get any, for it is considered a mark of maturity not to eat in church. Small children sit with their father or mother, but the older ones have learned to sit still for three hours on a backless bench. Older ones sit with the boys or girls all by themselves. This is quite a feat for a youngster.

When the second preacher finishes speaking, he gets a Bible and reads the text for that day. As soon as he begins reading, two of the girls on the back bench go out to the summer kitchen and begin preparing lunch. While you are sitting in the meeting listening to the final remarks, you smell that delicious aroma of coffee permeating the room. This is just as Amish as apple pie!

After the last song is sung, everyone files out, unless there is to be a special council requiring only the members. In a setting such as this, it often happens that someone is guilty of violating Amish law or making some bad judgement. In that case, all the members remain sitting for the court to iron things out and make judgments. The standard for truth takes precedent, and that is what our fathers did in a similar situation.

After everyone leaves the meeting rooms, the man of the house must see that the extra benches are removed and two of them set together as a table. The table was the same height as the bench you sat on. But that was not difficult, for you only had pies and bread and pickles and pickled beets to eat, and all these can be eaten by hand or with a fork, though forks were sometimes missing, and you learned to eat with a knife.

The host must keep things running smoothly during the meal. Usually one table was set for men on one side of the room and one for the women on the other side. When a table of people is finished, the host seats the next group. After everyone has eaten, they sit around and visit with friends until mid-afternoon. Then they leave one by one. The host family may invite as many as they want to stay for supper, and middle-aged hosts usually have young people who will invite their friends to stay. One of the leaders of the young people will ask the host if it is suitable to have the singing there, which is usually taken for granted. In rare occasions when it does not suit, someone else will make their home available for it.

Only the youth come to the singing, and some do not come to sing but to have a good time. In the setting where I was reared, there were few "toughs," as they were called, and there were as many as seventy young folks at one time at a singing. When the number increases, more of the undesirables show up, who have a low self-esteem and want to prove their prowess by doing something spectacular, or they might be trying to get the attention of some girl.

The host of the singing usually would sit in the kitchen while the youth sang in the living room. There would be one table with the boys on one side facing the girls on the other side. For those who could not find room at the table, benches were placed behind those at the table.

At about nine o'clock they would begin leaving, and by ten they were usually all gone. The host then would go outside to check things over and see that no doors were left open and nothing was amiss. The next morning, he would have to clean up outside, for they usually did not unhitch their horses but just tied them up with a blanket over them if it were cold. So there would be lots of manure around for the host to clean up.

Chapter Five

The Future of the Amish

It has often been predicted that the Amish have no future in maintaining their separate culture, but they have been around for a long time. It is true there have been many splits in which some have left because they have not felt that maintaining this culture is any godlier than any other. Sometimes someone will come up with a less strict law on certain practices that gains him a following. This sort of thing has been going on for as long as the Amish have existed. I predict that they will remain indefinitely as long as they have leaders who can manage them. This is a gift possessed by only a few, but those people always show up, it seems.

My father was particularly good at managing people, but when he died, my younger brother was ordained in his place. He did not have that quality, and immediately the church split. The divisive element existed during my father's administration, but he knew how to hold things in check and not let it flare up. When my brother took the helm, it happened.

The element began with myself when I discovered that I had eternal life. It was unprecedented, for in that generation no one was in the ban in our community for having left the church purely over the matter of religious freedom. Many have left for other reasons, such as not wanting to keep the rules or wanting more modern equipment or automobiles, etc. But it was unheard of that one would leave who did not want to because he loved his people. But when it came to pass, quite a few began thinking, "We have put a man in the ban who has not broken any rules. He has not left the church voluntarily." My father himself was perplexed. He confided to me that it was the hardest thing he ever did, to put his own son in the ban, who had not violated any Scripture or church rule. But the tradition of the fathers and the peer pressure behind him were tremendous, and if he had not yielded, he would have lost his office, and he was one of the principal bishops in the east. He simply had too much at stake to follow his own inclinations and do what is right.

The old hymnal contains abundant evidence that most of those who wrote the hymns knew they were saved, but down through the generations this was lost, and it was proven that those who knew they were saved always left the church. Of course, those

who are saved by grace have no need for the rules and living under law has nothing to do with salvation, otherwise grace is no more grace.

Tradition says that those who leave the church and die in the ban are without hope. The Amish simply have lost their way in striving to maintain their traditions.

My father vaguely comprehended this, but he could not define it clearly, for he was well versed in Scripture. Of one thing he was sure; his confidants and peers were unanimous that those who knew they were saved should be condemned to the ban, for they knew they would eventually upset their traditions. So he stayed with the time-proven method, for he was pragmatic. But after a few years, he made a confession to one of his friends, Abe Grassmeyer, that he knew things were not worked out according to his satisfaction, but he did what he had to under the circumstances. Then later on after Father's death, Abe revealed this to both of us who left the Amish church for the sake of salvation.

All the things that came up for which logical answers could not be found, worked in the minds of many people. For twenty years my father knew this was going on, but he protected these, for he knew if he let it become an issue, there would be a split. Folks who are truly saved do not seek to make trouble. They still stand for the faith, but they will not militantly cause strife.

When my brother came into leadership, nearly everyone was aware of the element of questioners within the group, and they wanted to take action and root out the hidden element, for of course those who walk by the legal code of ethics are militant. The element was exposed, and the split was underway. By now there were six church districts, and about fifteen miles from all the districts a group came out and formed a separate entity called the New Order Amish. Quite a few of these exist in Ohio, and some in Pennsylvania. But it is only a matter of time until they will be amalgamated into modern society, for when you begin to believe that salvation is by grace but still cling to rules as a guide, you sooner or later will have to drop one or the other. It is like standing on the backs of two horses; it is okay as long as they run parallel, but when they begin separating, you have to make up your mind which one is for you.

The little group that split off from the Amish at Belleville functioned satisfactorily for a few years, and they rejoiced in the

freedom of their religion, as long as it was new. They had not yet learned to walk by faith alone without the crutch of legalism as a guide. When an issue came up, they needed some legal code to tell them what was right, and they did not have one. Some wanted to stand by the old Amish traditions as a guide, but others thought it did not make for peace, so they did not want it. The strength of any violation is the law, and if there is no law to punish offenders, then the law is of no value. They were in a strait.

They were not well grounded in the faith of God's elect, though many of them knew God personally. They were living spiritually, yet they had not learned to walk. Infants that cannot yet walk will crawl and flounder, and that is the way these were, scattered by every wind of doctrine. Although this little group had such a good beginning, it could not go on, and these people practically dispersed. In 1983 there was still one man in it with some of his sons, and as long as they kept it a family affair, it functioned, but its days were numbered.

The rest of the people went to other denominations. They really are no better off than they would be if they had remained Amish, for they all still believe it is impossible to have a pure church without a legal code of ethics.

It takes about twenty years for a man to learn to walk by faith without the need of a legal crutch to keep him from falling. Many of course, will never learn; they simply do not believe the question formed in Galatians 3:3: *"Are ye so foolish having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?"* The subconscious answer is "yes," but the emotional answer is, "We don't know, but there must be some way."

The code of the Old Order Amish will continue in spite of those who split off or leave, for they have a good system that works. I have personally never found anything to equal it in simplicity and smooth functional qualities. They teach frugality, thrift, and honesty, and presently they have few moral problems, and divorce and remarriage are almost unknown in their midst. They have a system that can subdue human nature and keep it under by suppression. Yes, they experience hatred and rebellion, and they do everything that anyone else does; but they do not let these things get out in the open like the rest of society who do not have these strict laws. They are kept in check by the fear of eternal torment, and a man will endure it if he thinks that by this

endurance, he will at last gain an entrance into heaven. Their philosophy is, "Keep the Sermon on the Mount, and endure to the end, and you will be saved." They are sincere in their beliefs.

As long as they keep a separate language in their homes and religious service, and a different ethnic culture, and tie this in with their religion, they will not become amalgamated into society. But let them change their service from German into English, like many others have done, and it will only be a matter of time. History gives abundant proof of this.

Do not misunderstand; just because their religion works, and has the power to subdue evil, does not prove its Divine origin. It is purely human. All human organizations work to a certain degree of success, but theirs works better and more efficiently than most. But it does not make them holy or godly; it just gives the old Adam more fig leaves, and they do work if he stays out of the sun.

Every situation has its advantages and disadvantages, but in a closed society like the Amish have, advantages far outweigh disadvantages, for their very hopes of heaven are tied up with the way they live. The Amish live their religion every day.

Chapter Six

Circumstances that Caused Me to Leave the Amish Church

I was born on July 9, 1924, near Belleville, Pennsylvania, one mile east of White Hall in Menno Township, in the brick house that sits right along the main road. My father was 35 years old and had just been ordained to the ministry. Three of the twelve children born into our family died in infancy, and six boys and three girls reached adulthood.

I joined the Old Order Amish church, along twelve other youths, in the summer of 1942. Many joined during that period because the country had entered World War II, and it was hard to get a non-resistant status if you did not belong to a church. Noah D. Yoder was bishop at the time of my baptism on the barn floor of the Bennie Peachey residence on Back Mountain Road.

My father was a stern man who trained his children to obey him without question. We would not have dared to asked him why he did thus or so, nor would we talk back to him. But he was kind, and we did not obey him because we had to, but because we loved him and did not want to displease him in any way, nor did we want the consequences that would follow any disobedience. He was wise, understanding, and of above average intelligence for his time. He was an avid reader and subscribed to religious periodicals, including *Defender Magazine*.

I was well schooled in the religion of the Peachey church in that area. I verily believed what I was taught; that if I would abide faithful to the church, and obey my ministers, heaven would be my portion when this life ended. I believed in my church, believed it was the right one for me, and was convinced that any idea to the contrary was not sound teaching. I enjoyed the fellowship too, and I was sure I would not want anything else. I loved the people and appreciated my family as we grew up together and later were married and came together at various occasions. I looked upon this as a real pleasure and sought nothing better. I was completely satisfied. I was right with my family, my church, and my God. Surely the lines had fallen unto me in pleasant places, yea, I had a goodly heritage. (*Psalms 16:6*)

I seemed to be my father's favorite son, for he took a real interest in my upbringing. He subscribed for me the *Beams of Light*, a paper for young people from Scottdale, Pennsylvania. He

wanted to get me interested in spiritual things. He purchased a new sled for me when I was going to school. I do not remember that he ever did that for any of the others. When I started going to the singings with others from our church during my teen years, he bought me a spirited sorrel driving horse and a brand-new buggy. He saw that I had the best, and we were good friends and had talks together.

Father was ordained Bishop in the fall of 1942 and I also felt the great responsibility of such an office with him.

I was married to Salina Peachey, daughter of Dan Peachey, in the fall of 1945. In the spring of 1946, we moved onto the home farm and began our career of farming. We moved in with my parents initially, but the house was too small and very inconvenient, and my wife did not like the situation because there was not enough privacy for either of us. Father had earlier purchased the I.Y. Hostetler farm, and my brother Dave lived on that. It was a much more commodious house, and was formerly built for two families, so he moved in there. He then sold the home farm to me for \$12,000 and I was on my own.

I was satisfied, sheltered, and secure. It was just after the War, and making money was easy, for prices were always going up, and we did well financially. I enjoyed farming with horses and got along well with the work. I did a lot of reading and subscribed to different periodicals. I was never quite satisfied to accept things they were, so I studied to find out the facts.

About that time Joseph W. Yoder, an old man who had been raised in the Old Order Amish church but left in his teens, went to college, and married a Presbyterian woman. He lived in Huntington, Pa and tried his best to get the Amish to see the error of their ways. They paid little attention to him, so he could do nothing but rant and rave. Finally, he wrote a long letter to show us where we were wrong and sent it to every one of our Amish homes in the valley. I considered this a grave error, and along with many others, I answered him back, refuting him as an apostate. I tried to be objective and look at things honestly. He used many Scriptures, encouraging us to meet with him and discuss things, but nobody would, because they thought he was too far off the track. I was a diligent student of the Scriptures and ardently tried to defend the Amish faith, but I did notice that some things the Amish believe are not quite according to Scripture. For instance, we had many

rules that were made by men for man's welfare, and it was preached that these rules were necessary for our spiritual welfare; that we must follow these and make sure that we were right, etc. In Colossians chapter 2, Paul was warning the people at Colossae against philosophy and vain deceit from men who taught that we are not complete in Christ. They said we must add some more things to our faith to make our salvation complete. Paul said in verses 18-23 *"Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility, and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding the Head"*. He then told them, *"if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, touch not, taste not, handle not, which all are to perish with the using"*. He said all these things are only after commandments and doctrines of men. These things have a show of wisdom in will worship and humility and neglecting of the body, but it does not make us more like Christ, for we are complete in Him, and one cannot add to completeness.

This Scripture is one that Joe Yoder used, that I could not refute. It bothered me for a long time until finally I decided that if Scripture will not line up with what I am taught and have been told all my life, I will just have to quit reading those things which do not agree with my preachers. I felt they were men of God, and the Lord was speaking through them, and they could not be wrong. I also was taught that the Scripture was right, and I believed it; but later I was told that if you just take Scripture at face value and do not interpret it, it can lead you astray. Truly, this is the case if you take Scripture out of its context and setting and use it differently than the way it was intended. In Colossians 2, Paul was speaking to a people who were being persuaded to add trusting their own works to trusting in Christ for salvation. Needless to say, I was in a difficult situation. To make it worse, we were also taught that no one can know for sure if he is really saved. We just hoped so. It was reasoned that we must yet appear before the judgement seat of Christ and will receive for the things done in the body, whether it be good or bad. Since we do not know for sure just what the Lord thinks of our works, he may yet cast us off to the left and say, *"Depart from me ye cursed."* We knew that the Scripture speaks much of knowing your spiritual status. John said, *"These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God;*

that ye may know that ye have eternal life" (I John 5:13). Many such things came to the forefront, things that I could not gainsay or resist. Now my preachers told me that the Apostles were much holier men than we are, and they probably knew their standing with God; but we can never know that.

It was about this time when I was going through all this, that I went to Lewistown on the milk truck. I was standing on Valley Street watching for a ride back to Belleville, when along came John S. Zook, an old schoolmate whom I knew well. I was glad for the favor he showed me in offering me a ride, but he was not content to talk about things of this world; he spoke about things of the next. He ardently supported the Scriptures that upheld the assurance of salvation doctrine. He said he understood my position, and he was reasonable, but the arguments he gave and the Scripture that backed him up did not support my theory. This bothered me greatly, for I wanted to be right with God. I sought to please God with all my heart, and here I found myself disagreeing with the Word of God. What could I do? There was no use praying about it, for I knew the Lord would not change His Word, and I did not want to believe it, for I knew this would bring the frown of my church upon me. What could I do? I wanted God to be pleased with me the way I was. I also wanted to please my own church, and never depart from her doctrines. I had no desire to leave my church. To leave one's own social life, to turn back on the things he has always embraced from childhood, to grieve his parents and friends, and to have one's name cast out as evil is no light matter.

I always thought the Old Order Amish church was the right one for me, and I was shocked at anyone who questioned her veracity. My main ambition was to get to heaven when this life was over, which meant faithfulness to the church in which you were raised and to which you promised to be faithful in baptism. You were also asked whether you agreed that all the rules she espoused were in accordance with Scripture, and you promised to keep them until death. I could readily do this, for I believed in my church.

I stood at the crossroads. Would I accept Scripture at face value, or would I not? Now that should be an easy decision for anyone to make. We all know the Scripture cannot be broken, and to violate any of its precepts will bring a sure penalty. But what would be the consequences? For me to differ from my spiritual

advisors because I say I believe the Scriptures, would make them look as though they did not believe it. When a battle is raging inside a person, there is no peace. Peace is what everyone wants and seeks to attain. I thought I knew where it could be found, but was it worth the price? Did I understand the Scripture correctly? So, I read and read and studied constantly, but I still received the same answer. As Jacob wrestled with a man until the break of day, so I wrestled until I was totally exhausted. I decided that whatever the Scripture says, that is what I would follow, no matter the cost.

When I stopped wrestling and by faith accepted whatever it told me, then I found total peace. When I was ready and willing to lay down my own ideas and accept the Word of God at face value, come what may, then I could see. It was as plain as day in Ephesians 2:8, *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.”* Why had I not seen that before that it is not of yourselves? I had read it often, but it never registered because I would not accept it as factual. I would not receive it by faith, but on my own conditions. This is not a verse taken out of context, for in chapter 1, Paul speaks to the saints and faithful in Christ Jesus and speaks on the context of salvation. Chapter 2 also is a continuation of the main theme. It speaks of how the saints were saved, what is involved, and how salvation operates. I believed it and that settled it for me. The Scripture said I was saved because of His work in me, and I knew it to be true.

Now the Word of God became a real source of inspiration, for all hostilities had ceased. I no longer believed it with my own conditions but was ready to accept anything it had to declare. Of course, I did not know the rules of Scriptural interpretation, and had more zeal than knowledge, but I had eternal life. God had delivered me from the powers of darkness and translated me into the kingdom of His dear Son, as Colossians 1:13 says. I took a copy of the Scripture, a little pocket New Testament with me everywhere I went, such as plowing or working in the fields. While giving the horses a rest, I would sit and read a little. I thoroughly enjoyed it.

I was not careful enough where I read it though for some of my friends heard that I had strange ideas and watched me; but I did not really care. I was then told to stop reading the Scriptures so much, for people who do that will lose their mind and go crazy. My father told me this in a nice way, for he was concerned for my

welfare. I told him I would be more careful and not read it quite so much, for I did not want to go crazy. But I did wonder if anyone ever went out of his mind by reading the Scriptures and living in obedience to the Word of God. It is when you read and refuse to obey that it begins to take away your sanity.

Now I wrote J.W. Yoder again and told him I was not correct in answering him earlier, for now I saw things in a different light. As time went on, he answered me and was delighted, thinking he had found one convert among the Amish. He wanted me to enlist in his cause and try to lead them to see the truth, but I told him to take it easy. When handling a hot potato, you must take one at a time and handle it carefully lest you get burnt. The Amish were not ready or willing to accept what I believed right away. I hoped they would eventually, but I suggested patience.

At the time of this writing, twenty-five years later, I have re-read all of J.W. Yoder's books, and I find that he was very loose with the truth. In his book "*Amish Traditions*" on page 106 he says, "Had Paul lived in our times... I do not believe that Paul would have ever written as he did in the first ten verses of I Corinthians 11." He reveals his ignorance of spiritual truth concerning God's Spirit being the author of Scripture and that He never changes, no matter in what age He wrote. Twenty-five years ago, I believed Mr. Yoder to be a man of God, but after reading his writings more carefully, today I have reservations.

My brother Eli was working for me one winter. We had built a shanty up on the mountain where we used to go for the winter's supply of firewood. We would have it nice and warm inside when we ate our dinner, and we had the Bible there and discussed Scripture over the noon time. My brother Jonas also helped one day, and we brought him into the conversation, but he was not ready to accept what we told him. That evening he told our father that we had quite a discussion when we were cutting wood.

The next day, he told us that Dad was angry with us for having the Scriptures up in the shanty and reading and discussing them over the noon hour. He said Dad wanted to see me that evening, so I went down the hill for a visit. It was not as bad as Jonas pictured it; Father told me I must bring that Bible down away from the shanty, for that is not the place to study the Scriptures.

Now my father was a good man and I respected him and tried to please him whenever I could. We did not understand each other very well for he was sure I was doing the wrong thing. He had never heard of someone being so enthused about the Scripture as to make it a vital subject of discussion, especially during the week in a woodsman's shanty. Scripture to him was something especially important, and it told the way of salvation, but it was a holy book and was not to be defiled by mundane use.

We respected his wishes and stopped using it there, but we did not quite understand why it should be so wrong. From his viewpoint, it was not the Bible that was wrong. He was old and had seen by experience that folks who make very much of the Bible do not stay Amish. He did not want me to leave the Amish, and that thought was not in my mind. I knew that if a showdown would come, I would be expelled; but it was my aim to behave myself and prevent making an issue of it.

I supposed I would have succeeded, but it was no longer only between my father and me. Other people were concerned about this Renno's son who had a perverted faith, and many would stop in and talk to me and try to persuade me differently. The main argument was if I knew that I had eternal life, why then do I keep the rules and regulations of the church? It seemed to them that if salvation was simply by faith and accepting God at His Word, of what avail was the *Ordnung*? I told them it does me no harm, I can easily keep the rules since I did not consider them essential, to help save me or gain the favor of God. The rules are neither good nor bad in themselves. I did not plan to make any trouble. But many viewed my attitude as a threat to the old Amish way of life. They thought if I was allowed to continue to be officially at peace with the church, I would get others to see things my way. Indeed a few were becoming interested and listening to me, and so I was looked upon as a heretic who must be dealt with, for my doctrine was leaven and would corrupt the whole group.

Most of these were sincere men who felt I really was in serious error and would not listen when they spoke to me and I would answer since by now I was becoming pretty well versed in Scripture. I often told them (and still say) that if what I am practicing and saying is not in accord with Scripture, then I stand to be corrected and am in error; and not only now, but I will still be in error at the judgment bar of God. For if God's Word condemns

anything or anyone now, it will then. We know that judgment will be according to the Word of God which never changes.

Meanwhile, my father was becoming alarmed, especially since he knew I had corresponded with J.W. Yoder and thought I got my ideas from him. He asked me for the letters Mr. Yoder had sent me, but I told him I had not kept them, for I did not think that they were important. He wrote Joe Yoder and asked for a copy of our correspondence. Joe Yoder wrote me and suggested that we do not give the letters to my father, but he would do what I wanted. I told him I had nothing to hide from my father and he should send them. This was a mistake, for quite some time had passed and I did not remember everything I had written. I had not originally intended for my father to see those letters, so for him to read them just added insult to injury. But even though it was not wise on my part, I do believe it was providential.

Kore N. Peachey had been a close friend of mine for quite a number of years, and of course I spoke to him of my faith, and he was extremely interested. He also held to the teaching that at the end of six thousand years of sin on earth, there will be one thousand years of rest, and during this time Satan, the originator of sin and rebellion will be bound in the bottomless pit so that he could deceive the nations no more. (*Revelation 20*) When God made the world, He worked six days and the seventh he rested and hallowed it. The prophets also spoke much of the coming great time of peace on earth when Israel will dwell safely, each under his vine and fig tree. None shall make them afraid, saying the zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this. We believed it and were called heretics.

My father was a wise and intelligent man and an excellent church leader who had the confidence of the people. He also had a good reputation among those outside the church with businessmen, just as the Scripture says a bishop should. He had his children in subjection, and they were not accused of riot or unruly, but now one of his sons who had such a promising church life was entertaining ideas that were not in conformity with accepted church practices.

Father spoke to me about it, saying it was exceedingly difficult for him. He just did not know what to do. If it were a case of sin and unrighteousness, it would be a simple matter, but he did not think it right to censure a man who had done no evil. He

always expressed the belief that I was sincere and had no ulterior motive.

I had done nothing wrong that I should be accused. I had only claimed an understanding of the Scripture that did not fall in line with church teaching for as long as anyone could remember. But he knew he had to do something. His coworkers and many of the church members were not satisfied. They insisted that something had to be done to get this heretic to change his opinions or be cast out. Those most bitterly opposed to me already were beginning to avoid me so that they would not become defiled. These were not nearly as reasonable as Father was; they would have expelled me in short order for heresy. But Dad had better judgment; he thought as long as a man was honest, even if he was in error in his thinking, toleration should be used, especially if the man was not guilty of breaking any rules, and I had kept the all the rules of the church.

My father called a meeting one Saturday afternoon of Kore Peachey and I, plus our wives, parents on both sides and some of the principal ministers of the church. This took place at Dad's house in the summer of 1952. This was supposed to be a hearing to find out just what we believed and why. One of the main topics discussed that I remember was the thousand-year reign of Christ—whether it was to be understood as literal (actual) or spiritual, as the Amish church held. I asked the assembly point blank just what the scripture in Revelation 20 means if it does not mean what it says. This question angered Father a little and he used his authority and told me it makes no difference what it means, but that we were to obey the preachers. Then they told us to leave the room for a time and they would counsel together and decide what to do.

The verdict was that we should stop reading from the Book of Revelation for a while until these strange ideas subsided. We were supposed to read only from the four Gospels, and especially just from the Sermon on the Mount spoken by Jesus. And we were not to visit each other during this time to discuss issues together. Also, we were not supposed to speak to any of the Mennonite people around us about spiritual things of this nature. Also, we were told earlier to bring all our religious books to this meeting so they could examine them. I had quite a number by this time, and they confiscated those which they considered unsound, so I lost much of my library.

A young preacher who was in our church district was also at this meeting. He did not say much at the meeting, but he listened; and some things raised questions in his mind. He asked my father for permission to speak to me that evening in private. Father granted permission and told me to go to this man's place that evening. The young preacher questioned me thoroughly about my beliefs. My answers sounded Scriptural to him, and it was not long until he also was suspected of embracing this so-called perverted faith.

Needless to say, we did not abide by the rules that were laid down for us at that meeting. We did not think it was right or according to Scriptural principles, and we did not stop discussing these things among ourselves. More people were beginning to see that perhaps what we believed had some virtue after all. If we did not violate any Scripture, surely, we were not in error; and some actually began questioning whether the church was teaching things that were incorrect.

People always think and the mind feeds on something. When there is serious difficulty in the church, which lies close to the heart of each faithful member, questions would arise to which there were no answers—unless one dared question the stand of his church. Here were people who violated no church rules, but they were given an official edict to stop reading the Scripture which says right in context in Revelations, "*Blessed is he that readeth the things written therein.*" How could this be right? Now when the officials are challenged and cannot come up with a Scriptural defense, they ban the reading of Scripture. Can this be right? A few years later it was revealed that many people entertained these thoughts after that meeting.

The four of us were the chief offenders at that time, and since we did not heed the church council and would not repent and confess that we did wrong, there was only one thing for them to do. The Scripture plainly tells us that after admonishing a heretic once or twice, he should be rejected, for he is subverted and sinneth. (*Titus 3:10-11*) What else could the church do now, for we had committed a capital offense.

It was in March 1953, on that fateful Sunday morning that my father came up to our place while we were still doing the milking. He was very troubled because he had a difficult task to perform that day—expelling his son, whom he himself knew had

done nothing worthy of the ban. He did not know what else to do to protect his office and the tradition of the church. The people backing him were pushing him to act, and he knew that if he delayed much longer, they would question his integrity. He was in a very unhandy position; he could not do what he personally knew was the right thing. That was completely out of the question. What would the people think if he embraced the teaching that we can know we are saved, when all these years he had preached against it? Concerning the thousand-year reign of Christ, he would go through the prophets twice a year at communion and bring out all those tremendous prophetic utterances of how people will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruninghooks. Nations will not lift up sword against nation, neither will they learn war anymore. He knew that this never took place since man had inhabited the earth, for there had been only a few years when there was not a war somewhere on earth. Even the animal kingdom would stop killing each other. Cows and bears would feed together, and their young would lie down together. The lion would eat straw like the ox. The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. He knew all these things, for he was well versed in the Scriptures and was a great orator. I once asked him if Paul the apostle said that "*Christ liveth in me*," "could he also say that?" He said he would have to say so, for if Christ did not live in him, then he was lost.

I imagine that Sunday morning the hill between his home and my place seemed especially steep, for he had a difficult task to perform. Unless I did what he asked, he would still have to excommunicate me; but it would not be so difficult if I asked for it.

He came as a last resort to ask me if I would ask the church to place me in the ban, and then all the charges they had against me would not be brought up. All would be forgiven upon proper recommitment, and I would again be reinstated, and all would be well. If I had complied with his wishes, my life history would read differently. But for me to ask to be placed in the ban would be the same as admitting that what I believed was wrong, and that I had committed trespass against the Lord and the church by believing something that was not true. It would have been an easy way out of the difficulty, both for myself and my father, especially. But I did not comply that morning. I told him to go ahead and do as he had

planned and tell the church just what I believed. If they had thought I was in error, then they should do as they thought best.

By this time, the difficulty was very burdensome for both of us. We could not agree to remain together, and yet we could not agree to separate.

Separation was better than living together in such misunderstanding. By then I was ready to get the thing over with. I took no pleasure in leaving the Amish church, I had not definitely planned to do so. But I did have alternative plans if they would not allow me to remain a member there and have religious freedom.

I went to church that morning, but I did not stay for my trial, for I was asked to leave. I went home, and towards evening Deacon Levi Kanagy visited and told me I had been expelled for disobedience to the rules of the church. Kore Peachey's had made a recommitment and had said they were wrong; so they were reinstated and were at peace with the church again.

My wife was with child at that time, and the practice is that women in this condition do not go to church, for it is considered immoral. She was now supposed to avoid me, like Jesus said, "*If any will not hear the voice of the church, let him be as a heathen man and a publican,*" and the Jews stayed as far away from them as possible lest they be defiled. As the Amish believed, if one is banned from the church, there must be a complete boycott. But my wife did not think I was in doctrinal error. She did not go to church for quite a while, so matters were left there and not investigated.

If a man is expelled from church, the usual procedure to be reinstated is for him to go to the preachers on Sunday morning when they step aside for counseling together. He must do this on three different Sunday mornings. The preachers tell him where he failed and that he should repent and come back to God and the church. If he responds properly, on the third time he is asked to get on his knees before the bishop in the presence of the church. He is asked to confess that he deserved the punishment which had been laid upon because of the acts which he committed. He is asked if he will repent and live more in accordance with the standards of the church, etc. If he agrees, he is received in the name of the Lord and the church with a holy kiss from the bishop.

Now initially when one comes to the preachers to be admonished, they will ask him why he came to them and what his desire is. He is supposed to say his desire is to make peace with

God and the church, and then they instruct him for about thirty minutes. He then goes back to the assembly.

I did all this, not three times, but nine, which took eighteen weeks, since we had church only every other Sunday. When the offense is not serious, the man may go to another district and cut down on the time involved, but for a serious offense such as mine, he must stay within his own district.

Now since I was under the ban, none of the Amish farmers helped me make hay and cut and shock wheat and oats. They usually help one another in these things, and they would have helped me, but I would not have been allowed to help them in return, but I did not want to be so indebted to them. So, I hired help that summer and did the best I could for that long period. I tried and tried to get back into the church fellowship and be at peace, but always the question was asked whether I still believed in assurance of salvation. They would not let me return if I knew I was saved. If I cast away my assurance, they would accept me. When once you know something to be a fact, all the denying you can do will not change that fact. The Lord had graciously given to me eternal life, and I knew that. How then could I deny Him and say it is not true when I knew it was true? I could not with all good conscience say this, and so they could not conscientiously take me back as a brother in the church.

My father told me this was the hardest thing he ever did. He was called upon to teach men the way of salvation and truth, and a man was expelled for saying he knew he had salvation. Things just did not make sense to him, and he knew better; but he could not legally do anything about it. He asked me, "How can you come to the preachers on a Sunday morning and say you want to seek peace with God and the church when you say you *have* peace and know God and are known of Him? How can you say this?"

I told him I did not say that, and I never have said it. I say I want to *have* peace with God and the church, not *make* peace.

The next time I came, he asked me if I could not say, "I want to make peace." He finally told me that if I could not comply with the rules of doctrine, there was no purpose in my coming again.

Now what was I supposed to do? I was as a man cast out of his inheritance, from the people he knew and loved, cast out for conscience sake. I did not want to go to the Mennonite church. The

Mennonites were very worldly in their dress. But I knew that some of them were saved and loved the Lord.

At that time George Brunk was having great revival campaigns in the lower end of the valley, and many of the Mennonites were being revived and again wearing plain coats etc., showing signs of complying with the older standards of practice.

My wife in the meantime was also expelled for not avoiding her husband, and Kore Peachey's were also expelled. Their commitment did not last long, for they did not believe what they were doing, but just did it for the sake of peace.

We joined the Locust Grove Mennonite Church along with Kore's in the fall of 1953. It was less than we desired, but what else could we do?

We could have gone to the Spiker church, which had parted ways with our church back in 1918 over the matter of shunning expelled members. They were still Amish in part, but they allowed tractors for farm use and were fast approaching the use of automobiles and church houses, as well as all those things the Amish avoid, seeing it helps amalgamate their people into modern society. They cannot be a separate ethnic group if they look just like the society around them. Also, the Spiker Church had internal problems as many of them did not believe in assurance of salvation. They did allow for modern things, but that is not why we left the church, though that is an old accusation we still hear repeated.

We left for conscience' sake and no other reason. We did not want to cause trouble for our parents and friends and loved ones. We did not relish the thought of being outcasts from their society and be cast on the mercy of a people whom we did not know so intimately. It was not an easy decision to make; it was a case of necessity if you desire to belong to some church.

We lived among all our former associates for about three years, but I felt sorry for them. Dad had been so good to me and had sold me the farm with the intention of having it for a church place, but now most people driving their buggies by would not even so much as look in, for they felt so badly about it.

Since the valley was becoming full of people and the mountains held them in on every side, I looked around in preparation to leave the valley. I always believed that people with automobiles could easily go over the mountains and should leave

the farms in the valley for the Amish. I found a place in Luzerne County where land was much cheaper than in the valley; so, we moved there in the late summer of 1957 and sold the old home place to my brother Joshua. This had to be done through a mediator, for the Amish would have no dealings with me. Nelson Glick did the business part of it for me.

Giving the farm and home back to my relatives, whom I still appreciate, was the main motive for moving; but I was also disappointed in the Mennonite church in that area. They retained the form of godliness but denied the power thereof. When George Brunk came around preaching revival, they were revived to a degree, but it was not lasting. It was similar to the people of Israel in the days of Josiah, who sought such great reforms. As long as he was around, the people were with him; but when he died, they went right back into idolatry again. The revival was only on the surface.

Kore Peachey was less satisfied with them than we were, for he thought plain clothes and a beard still had virtue. The Church of God in Christ, Mennonite (Holdeman) denomination which had defected from the mainstream of Mennonites about a hundred years earlier also had about what Kore wanted in the way of religion. He brought the old Weiler schoolhouse, and they soon had a fellowship there. By that time, many others of the Amish who were questioning in their minds when they were dealing with us decided they were not satisfied with the doctrine either, so they were later excommunicated and joined the Holdeman church.

It should be brought out here that the young preacher who had asked for an interview with me because of my faith was Christ Peachey. He and I agreed on the doctrine, but he was less blunt than I and was able to continue with the Amish for twenty years after that. My father had shielded him. In 1970, when my father died, and my oldest brother took his place, then Christ Peachey was openly revealed. He also had to separate company with the original group because of matters of doctrine.

If an Amish group had existed that would have allowed us to be free to serve God according to the way we understood Scripture (according to our own consciences) at the time we left, we would still be Amish. But it was not to be, and necessity demanded that we leave.

IN RETROSPECT

In retrospect, I would like to make the following observations. It is today commonly reported among the Amish that we cannot come back to them anymore, even though I favor many of their ways. It is said that I have passed the point of no return and in one sense this is true. There would be no point in returning to them today since I have not changed my beliefs, my children are in another environment, and my associates have changed. It would be impractical to join the Amish again. Even though much of what the Amish stand for has virtue and helps them live a better life upon the earth, it does not gain them special favor with God. Neither can it make anyone holy and righteous. Neither are happiness and peace found in a special manner of life, but these are attitudes of the heart, and peace can be found only at its source, which is God Himself, the Author of all benevolence.

Modern machines and modern living do not make one happy or unhappy. We did not leave the Amish so we could live like the rest of society, but we left for freedom of religion. We have obtained what we sought. I have learned one thing, people are about the same everywhere, no matter what church they belong to or what they allow or disallow. All have similar troubles, trials, and temptations. Church governments are about the same too, and though they may have different rules to abide by, the methods of church membership and maintaining members are similar.

The Amish youth join church and go to take instruction at about the age of seventeen or eighteen. At the end of the instruction period, if they are in the order of the rules and regulations of the church, they are baptized and accounted as members and saints of God.

It is assumed if they were not saints of God, they would not want to abide by the rules. It is the same when joining the Mennonite church, except they take them at a younger age, and they have different rules, but the principle is the same. Great stress is laid upon the vows one is required to take at baptism. They vow

to lay off the works of the flesh and to serve Christ and His church faithfully until death.

Many people throughout America have left the Amish and joined the Mennonites. The main reason was to have more spiritual activity for their young people. Sunday School and other activities were hailed as a great success. The modern mission movement with which they are associated was looked upon as a major achievement. But the end result remains to be seen. They wanted to rid themselves of an old worn-out man-made tradition, but they have merely traded it for a newer modern man-made tradition.

There are exceptions to this rule, and after twenty years one can see the result. Some did leave the Amish, not for selfish reasons, but to enhance their spiritual life. These have obtained what they sought. This can be seen by observing their offspring. If their children are obedient and honorable, this shows the parents had no ulterior motive. If the children are otherwise, this generally reveals what was in the heart of the parents. Furthermore, one cannot really know what is in man, until he has reared children.

We can see today that most of the Mennonites who have followed the modern movement of missions have defected into apostasy. The thing that was hailed as a great preservative has proved a false assurance. The things they devised for their welfare have become a destructive factor. It takes much more than so-called spiritual activities to live a godly life; it takes a walk with God. Anyone who claims to be a saint of God and does not take the time to acquaint himself with the Word of God is living in self-deception. Church activities, important as they are, can never supply what is missed by a neglect of self-study.

You can never find out where you came from, why you were created, or where you are going if you do not find it in the Scriptures. Without this knowledge, life has no real meaning, no goal or sense of direction.

If we live after the flesh, we shall die, is the immutable verdict. And much fleshly living can be conveniently covered up from the eyes of man by engaging in so-called spiritual activity.

God searches the heart. By Him actions are weighed.

Chapter Seven

An Unprecedented Event

In 1977 the Mennonite Church commemorated her 450th anniversary. In 1693 a major division occurred between the Hans Reist and Jakob Ammann factions of the Mennonites. Ammann insisted that his people should appear different from his opponent and from society in general. This resulted in the division of the Amish from the Mennonites. For a long time, the Mennonites, especially the females, wore different clothing from society. By 1950, however, they were fast losing their identity. The Amish still wear the same cut of clothes as was worn in society about one hundred years ago. They believe if they faithfully abide by the rules of the church and remain “plain,” they cannot become worldly, since they interpret “being worldly” as doing things similar to the rest of society.

During this fast change of an ironclad rule by many Mennonite bishops, many people became disenchanted with the large denomination which had become the Mennonite institution, the *Mennonite General Conference*, and separated into a number of self-governing bodies not associated with any organization. This did not work very well however, because no one leader could bring everyone under his dominion and tell them what is right. Many small factions sprang up and peace ceased to exist among Mennonite groups. This happened because of degenerate human nature; for when it is my idea against yours concerning what is right and wrong, we seldom can agree: for basically I think I am just a little superior to you, and if you do not think so, then we just part ways.

In the 1960's another method to keep the Mennonites united was tried. Five bishops in the Lancaster Conference banded together and formed the *Mennonite Messianic Mission*. This was mostly to control the boys who went into voluntary service in lieu of military service. Mennonites historically have taught it is wrong to fight with guns in service for one's country. Since every boy has to register with the Selective Service and receive his draft card at the age of eighteen, the Mennonites sent their boys into alternate service to work at hospitals and other humane organizations. But many of these boys knew nothing about spiritual life, for they became church members by “making a decision” for Jesus and

were baptized into the Mennonite church. In many instances, it was not a work of God's grace at all, but simply following the tradition of their parents and ancestors in the Mennonite church. Their church rules were their standards of right and wrong since they were not taught to deny ungodliness by the grace of God. When they got away from church rules, many went wild and sowed wild oats and brought reproach to the name of Christ.

Through this formation of the *Mennonite Messianic Mission*, these concerned bishops provided homes called *Voluntary Service Units* for the more conservative boys who would abide by their strict rules. Most of the money they earned by working was returned to the Mission, which used it to conserve what they believed was right. Two units were sponsored, one at Wilmington, Delaware, and one at Danville, Pennsylvania.

This Mission held monthly meetings and informed the constituents of their activities, and gradually the *Eastern Mennonite Church* grew out of this. It was, in theory, a separate entity from the *Mennonite Messianic Mission*; however, those who controlled the Mission also controlled the church.

The need of these units has now disappeared, and the units no longer exist; but the organization still exists and sponsors mission work in Guatemala and British Columbia, and they still have their monthly informative meetings.

One of the bishops who helped form the *Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church*, Homer Bomberger, dropped out eventually because he dissented with the desire of his colleagues to enforce strict discipline in the Conference. In time he formed a separate congregation which became known as the Bomberger group, for want of a better name, but later on it was named the *Mid Atlantic Mennonite Fellowship*.

Because the Conference churches had failed to set standards prohibiting certain evils and worldly practices, many of their people were putting televisions and other things in their homes that the Eastern Mennonite Church leaders considered worldly. This became the common denominator that helped the Eastern group grow and flourish. They banned the use of the radio and even frowned on getting the daily newspaper. They believed if their people would refrain from hearing and reading evil, they could have more Christ-like minds. They made rules governing life and strictly enforced them. This gave them some authority to turn

to unlike those who had left the Mennonite wing ten years earlier. The bishop board along with some laymen decided policy, and laws were passed and enforced with penalties for violations, with a 51% majority vote from congregations and 80% vote from the ministry.

Five bishop districts presently exist, and since men have different ideas and the bishops all interpret the law differently, the strictness of the law varies between districts. But changing from one district to another is forbidden unless a person moves into a different district.

The Rush Mennonite Church, called such because it was located in Rush Township near Danville, Pa held services in the Old Rush Presbyterian Church building. This was formed basically for the Voluntary Service Unit boys, so people moved in from other areas, purchasing farms and starting businesses, and the congregation grew rapidly. This building was later closed, and a new church building at a different location was built and called the Danville Mennonite Church. This brings us to the unprecedented event.

The Event

In 1977 the Mennonite church at Danville, with Aaron Shank as bishop, cancelled the membership of eleven people from five families. In all, twenty-two people stopped attending church because of membership cancellations. The cancellations were due to a difference of belief in the doctrine of God. Many divisions and cancellations have taken place over time past, but the reasons for cancellations of membership were always because of some practical legal issue, not because of a difference in doctrine. Never before, to my knowledge, has history recorded anyone being put out of church as long as he kept all the rules and attended communion and council meetings faithfully, and expressed peace with God. Those who knew they had no peace were always tolerated; but the time had come when it was no longer tolerable. This was because knowing one had peace with God became a threat to church discipline, and history reveals how it has gone with those who disregarded discipline. They inevitably “went worldly” and joined right in with the rest of society.

It happened this way. I was asked to teach at the Tuesday evening prayer services on the five principal offerings the Lord required of the children of Israel. These consist of the whole burnt offering, the peace offering, the meat offering, the sin offering, and the trespass offering. These all have their anti-type among the saints of this age of grace.

THE BURNT OFFERING

The burnt offering typifies the Lord Jesus who offered Himself willingly. This offering was whole, except the blood, which was shed. The insides were washed with water; no bone was broken, etc., just as the body of the Lord hung on the cross. He offered Himself willingly for our sins. *“He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him”* (2 Corinthians 5:21).

THE PEACE OFFERING

Now when we know this, we have peace with God. There can be no peace, nor assurance of salvation, if we are not sure that Christ has taken away all our sins forever. If any part of our salvation depends to any degree upon our attitude, or conduct, there can be no peace; for we can never be sure that we will do our part fully, and we will live in fear that God will cast us off forever and discount His part in salvation because we have failed in ours. This results in a perennial question mark as to whether we will actually find ourselves meeting God in peace when we die. We can hope so most sincerely, but we can never be quite sure. Hence, there is no peace, and a person cannot eat of the peace offering if he does not have settled peace.

THE MEAT OFFERING

The meat offering was not made of flesh of animals but of finely-ground meal (literally, *meal-offering*). This typifies the broken body of our Lord. Only when we are absolutely sure that His body was broken for us, that He has become our Substitute, has taken our place at the judgment bar of God, and has taken away all our sins forever (past, present, and future) and only when

we know this beyond a shadow of a doubt can we eat of the meat offering and rejoice in the perfect salvation He has provided. This knowledge can come only by Divine revelation. It cannot come about as a result of anything we can do. It is by the sovereign and immutable act of God. We can make a decision to accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, but unless this is done because of Divine revelation, it is only an act of the flesh, and whatsoever is born of the flesh is flesh, not of God.

THE SIN OFFERING

The sin offering was not eaten but was taken outside the camp and burned. It typifies our sins which He took upon Himself and bore them away; and when something is burnt, it cannot be found again. God has removed the memory of the sins of those who place their trust in Him and has cast them in the depths of the sea.

THE TRESPASS OFFERING

The trespass offering was for the type of sins we commit after we have received the knowledge of sins forgiven. We confess them and add a fifth part thereunto. Salvation places us in a better standing than Adam before the fall; for before the fall, he knew not what sin was; but we know and experience the forgiveness of sin.

After I spoke on the five principal offerings, it was decided that I should continue speaking at the prayer meetings on the eight feasts of Jehovah. These are found in Leviticus 23. Actually, there are seven feasts, but figuring in the Sabbath makes it eight.

PASSOVER

Passover is the feast where a lamb of a year old is taken on the tenth day of the month Abib and kept until the fourteenth day. It was roasted whole with the hide and entrails. Its blood was sprinkled on the doorposts and lintels of the entrances to their homes to save the firstborn Israelites from death when the Death Angel visited Egypt. An Israelite was no better than an Egyptian, but Israel was God's chosen people. Therefore, they were told to apply the blood, and it was the blood that saved them. Their

opinion about the blood or how they felt about it did not save them, but the application of the blood to the doorpost. If it was applied, the firstborn was safe.

Thus, salvation is safely secured for anyone who has his sin taken away by the blood of Christ. It is not a matter of how hard a person tries, or how well he behaves himself, but has the blood taken away his sin? Only those who believe God, have the blood applied to take away their sin once and for all. This is a matter of faith, the faith of God's elect people just like the elder son of an Israelite.

UNLEAVENED BREAD

The second feast of Jehovah was the feast of Unleavened Bread, when for seven days in Israel no leaven was to be found in any house for seven days. This is the type of the life of the saint in the age of grace, when for the whole tenure of his life (for seven denotes the number of perfection), no sin is ever to be found. Leaven is the type of sin, and no leaven dare be found in your life. The blood applied does not change your old Adamic nature, but it mortifies it, or renders it ineffective, as though it had been killed. The new man, in whom is no sin, then takes precedence. Hence there is no sin in your new life even though your old sin nature still remains in you. God knows our hearts, and if we are in Christ, our sins are all taken away, for His blood has been shed in our place. He is our substitute, just as the lamb was the substitute for Israel. But the type of leaven or sin in your life becomes evident when a saint of God finds he is practicing that which is not right before God. He has trespassed, and he must confess his sin and be cleansed throughout his whole life, not be guilty of habitually engaging in any sinful practice.

FIRSTFRUITS

The third feast, Firstfruits, could only be kept in the land, for the sheaf had to be grown in the land which the Lord gave them, the Land of Promise, the land of Canaan. This was a type of the resurrection life, a life without leaven. The sheaf was the type of the Lord Jesus, who rose from among the dead. The people could eat neither fruit nor parched corn from the land until the first

sheaf was presented before the Lord. Thus, Christ our resurrected Lord is the first fruit of our life in Him.

PENTECOST

The fourth feast, Pentecost, was celebrated when two loaves baked with leaven were offered as first fruits. That took place fifty days after the feast of the first sheaf, when the Holy Spirit came and the church, the bride of Christ began.

The two loaves represent two peoples, Jews, and Gentiles. They were baked with leaven, a type of sin. This typifies the life of the believer in the age of grace. He has no sin on his life, but there is still sin in him, for the old nature has not been eradicated. But notice it is baked. Leaven is sourdough that grows with an unnatural growth until it is baked. Then the growth stops acting, but the principle is still present. There is a vast difference between sin being **in** you and sin being **on** you. Leaven, a type of sin in the believer, is baked and thus its action stops. It is mortified, as we find in Colossians 3:5. We keep the members but do not use them to commit such sinful practices. If we do, then there is leaven on us, and we are guilty until confessed.

The sin question is settled forever at the cross. Our salvation is certain as far as eternal judgment is concerned. But grace does not circumvent the just government of God, for we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ and receive for the deeds done in the body, whether they be good or bad. Our deeds will be rewarded, and our bad deeds which we may not have confessed, will be judged, even though we may not have been conscious of them as bad deeds. Ignorance is not an excuse. We are supposed to study and know the Word of God, then we will know not to commit such acts. To live by one's feelings or convictions is dangerous unless those convictions stand on the Scriptures. If a person is saved by sovereign grace, that grace also teaches him how to live a godly life. Titus 2:11-12, *For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.*

This is the sanctifying power of God and is daily at work with those whom He has chosen and called. This is why all things work together for good to them who are the called according to His

purpose. Nothing can happen to a called child of God that is not for his good, even though at the time it might seem bad. The overall purpose is for his good and to secure his salvation perfectly in Christ Jesus. This is why we can have boldness and have perfect confidence of meeting God in peace when we see the grace of God at work and His chastening hand upon us. This is where we get our assurance. It is not in feeling secure, but in knowing the facts when we see them at work.

TRUMPETS

The Feast of Trumpets, the fifth feast typifies the rapture of the church, the Bride of Christ. This will take place when the trumpet shall sound, and the Bride of Christ will ascend to Him with glorified bodies.

THE ATONEMENT

The sixth feast, the Day of Atonement typifies the judgment seat of Christ, and also on earth the great tribulation, the time of Jacob's Trouble. The one takes place in the heavens to present the Bride of Christ without spot or wrinkle, and the other takes place on earth to cleanse the earth and to get the Jews ready to receive Him whom they have pierced, and they shall say, *"Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."*

TABERNACLES

The seventh feast, Tabernacles typifies the thousand-year reign of Christ. When the whole world will come under the righteous reign of Christ, He will be the supreme Dictator. Satan will be absent, and righteousness will cover the earth as waters now cover the sea. But it will only last a thousand years, after which Satan will again be loosed, and those who have not been tried will be tempted by the Devil. Then the number going after him, even in the most perfect environment, will be as the sand on the seashore. This proves that man is incapable of governing himself.

This is a description of my understanding of the meaning of the feasts. But I was only allowed to teach through the fourth feast,

for by that time, those who were opposed to the doctrine of the Sovereign Grace of God and the perfect salvation of Christ had had enough. Some even threatened to stop coming to prayer meeting unless I was silenced, for they did not want their children to be exposed to such teaching.

It was this teaching that brought to a head the accusations against me that I was a Calvinist and unfit to be a member of the Mennonite Church. The bishop then sent me a questionnaire in which he asked me eleven questions. Those questions and my answers to them follow this section in the book.

Now many people have left the Mennonite Church before and gone into “Calvinistic heresy,” as it is called today; but it is not the teaching of John Calvin, since he merely revived the doctrine and brought it out of obscurity. He did not teach that a man is saved by his own free will, and that he is safe forever regardless of the kind of life he lives. He first of all did not teach salvation because of a human decision, but only according to God’s call to us as the Scriptures so clearly teach. When God calls someone, their life will drastically change because the grace of God teaches us. (*Titus 2:11-12*) If you would like to know what he taught, get yourself a copy of the two volumes Calvin wrote entitled *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* and search for yourself, instead of jumping to conclusions.

John Calvin’s teaching was not perfect, and he was influenced by the sacerdotalistic system of his day, the state church. But Calvin is much sounder in his theology than Jacobus Arminius, who began what is called Arminianism and was also was a preacher in the state church and was Calvin’s successor. But he was influenced by Pelagius, who believed that man is not born with a totally depraved nature and only needs a good environment to influence him to make the right decision and follow the truth.

Many people have previously left the Mennonite Church and embraced the doctrine of eternal salvation built upon a human choice. This doctrine is not true however, for if we are saved by a human choice, then we can also be lost by making a counter choice. What these people failed to believe is that man will not of his own voluntary will, make that choice for he hates God. See Romans 3:10-12, *There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They*

are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

The unprecedented point is that people were put away from the Mennonite Church for believing doctrine that can be thoroughly endorsed by Scripture, according to the whole body of revealed truth. This was never done before, according to my understanding of historical records.

We love the Mennonite Church. She has a good way of life. But the error is, when they say a person must do this or that to keep his salvation. This is the same as Israel when they made a golden calf to help them worship. The Mennonite Church is so afraid of antinomianism (*lawlessness*) that she always has trusted in some human merit to make one's salvation complete. They say one's way of life does not save him but insist that one cannot be saved without it. They say if a person does not keep these practices, he will then lose his salvation. We did not intend to depart from the Mennonite way of life. But history has proven that if a way of life is not taught as basic to obtaining or keeping salvation, the next generation will not keep it. But if it is so taught, the next generation will trust in it to keep them saved.

We meet in private homes at the time of this writing, and one of us conducts an expository Bible study, similar to the way prayer meetings are conducted. We have no Sunday Schools as such, for it has pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe. Sunday School is mostly dialogue, each person giving his own thoughts, and no definite conclusion is reached. The truth must be taught as a "*thus saith the Lord,*" and not as the popular approach; "What do *you* think?"

The man who is taught of God must get his message from the Word of God and declare it plainly, as it is the Word of God, and not ask for men's opinions.

We are just a small local assembly, controlled only by revealed truth. As long as we walk in the Spirit, we will not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

Chapter Eight
Answers to Doctrinal Questions Asked by Official Edict of the
Rush Ministry

The following questions were sent to me by Bishop Aaron Shank and my answers were returned to him on June 12, 1976.

1. Did Christ die for all mankind, and is his grace and salvation available for all?

Answer:

In Revelation 5 we read of the book sealed with seven seals, and no man in heaven or earth was found worthy to open the book or look thereon. This book was the title to the earth which the first Adam by transgression forfeited his right to, and the Lion of the Tribe of Judah prevailed and was worthy to open the book and loose the seven seals. He is also known as the "Second Adam." In Colossians 1:20, we read, *"And having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven."*

The death of Christ is first and foremost efficacious, to reconcile things, whether they be things in heaven or earth. I assume this includes all mankind, too, since God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.

But there is also something special that it wrought. Verse 21, *"And you" ... the saints and faithful in Christ Jesus to whom this letter was addressed "...that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled."* Not only is reconciliation available for the saints, but He actually did it. He reconciled them to Himself. Back in verses 13-14 of Colossians 1 he says, *"Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son; in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins."*

The field is the world, and finding a treasure in this field, He emptied Himself, took on the form of a servant, and died on the cross to buy that field for the treasure that was in it. This treasure is the Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all. *God at the first did visit the Gentiles to take out of them a*

people for His name (Acts 5:14). He did not visit them with the intention of taking all of them, although they were all his by virtue of creation and redemption. But He took out of them a certain people for His name, not because the people were so precious, but because His name was precious. It is to the praise of the glory of His grace that we are saved.

Christ did die for all mankind in this respect; that He died for all. It is due to the fact that He died for all that all may now live in this life. The very breath they take to blaspheme and curse His name is given to them by the mercy of God. Were it not for the death of Christ, mercy could not have been shown to any man. He is the propitiation for the whole world. Just as judgment fell upon all men by the sin of the first Adam, so justification of life came to all men by the righteousness of one. (*Romans 5:18*) He now can declare (*demand*) all men everywhere to repent. (*Acts 17:30*) The grace of God hath appeared to all men, but it only teaches the saints. (*Titus 2:11*)

Christ did die for all mankind, and His salvation by grace is available to all if they want it. No one is excluded if he wants it, whosoever will. But because all have sinned in Adam and all are a reproduction of Adam, they do just like he did until God called him—run and hide themselves. They do not call upon God but try to cover their own shame by their own devices, by a product of their own ingenuity. “*There is none that doeth good, no, not one.*” (*Romans 3:12*) And unless and until God calls upon them just like He did to Adam, they will remain estranged from God, for they hate Him, just like their progenitor the Devil hates Him.

2. Is the grace of God effective in a salvation experience conditionally or unconditionally?

Answer:

It all depends on what you mean by the term salvation experience. If you mean what is generally taught and believed among us, then it is conditional. Mennonites believe in general that their decision to accept Christ as Savior is the cause of our salvation experience, and deny the fact that man is so far alienated from God that he has no power to make such a good decision.

Even if he did have that power, he would not use it to choose to serve God any more than his progenitor the Devil would do so.

It is taught by them that just as Adam and Eve had the choice to choose or reject God's counsel and were not persuaded either for or against making such a decision, even so we also have the same privilege.

If this is true, then our salvation is conditioned upon that choice. For we then by making a counter choice could disannul the first one, and again be lost in sin. If this were true, then we could be saved numerous times, be born again of the Spirit of God, then lose it and make another decision and be born all over again. And depending on which decision we had last made when we die would determine whether we are saved or lost for eternity. In this case our will is the principal thing and God is our servant, and He could only go as far as we allow Him.

But Scripture teaches no such thing, but rather we are saved by grace, through faith; and this is not something that comes from anything we can initiate. *"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God, Not of works, lest any man should boast"*. (Ephesians 2:8-9) It is not of ourselves; neither is it of works, lest we would have something to boast about for all eternity.

We could say, yes God made the provision, but I by my wise choice, made the decision to accept it. In Ephesians 2:10 he says, *"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them"*. Where is boasting then? It is excluded! (Romans 3:27)

In John 1:13 we read that we are not saved by being in the right blood line. Neither are we saved because of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. If we are saved, it is because of God's will. *"For of his own will begat he us that we should be a kind of first fruits"* (James 1:18).

In *Ephesians 1:4-11*, we read that we were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, because He had predestined us unto the adoption of children, and this again not according to anything we had done, or what He knew we would do, but according to the good pleasure of His will. And we have obtained an inheritance, because we were predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to His will. And you know who that is, that is God, He alone is able to work all things according to His will and is not hindered or persuaded by any power outside of Himself. He alone has complete sovereignty.

In 2 Timothy 1:9 it says, *"He saved us according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before*

the world began". It makes no mention of this grace being given to us according to our deportment. It is rather because this grace was given us, that our behavior is controlled. Our behavior does not control this grace. Jesus said, "*Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you*" (John 15:16).

Scripture nowhere implies that our choice has anything to do with the obtaining of salvation. Neither is it against our choice, but it is actively engaged to work in harmony with what God has chosen.

God's will is always first in everything. "*He is before all things and by Him all things consist*". (Colossians 1:17) "*It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy*". (Romans 9:16) No one is saved, but he to whom God shews mercy. *For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever, Amen.* (Romans 11:36)

3. Can one who is saved by grace forfeit the grace of God and be lost?

Answer:

"For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of Him that calleth... as it is written, 'Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated'" (Romans 9:11,13).

Grace is the Divine influence in the heart, actively engaged in regeneration, to sanctify, to set apart, and to keep it. It is the grace of God that teaches the saints *...to deny ungodliness, worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and Godly in this present world.* (Titus 2:11-12) It is the grace of God that teaches the saints to look for Him and prepares them for it.

Forfeiture means to be penalized by the loss of something you have obtained because of a breach of promise or violating rules. Now since salvation is by grace, it did not come because of anything we have done, or according to any promise we have previously made. If it did, it is not by grace but of debt. Then God is only fulfilling His obligation, His part of a contract or covenant.

Scripture plainly says in Romans 9:11-15 why God chose Jacob and not Esau, "*...so that the purpose of God according to election might stand...*" The boys did not yet live, and they had

done neither good nor evil when God chose. Neither was it because God knew ahead of time that Jacob would serve Him. Had not God called Jacob in this way; he never would have served Him.

It is because of God's grace that He calls us, and that call will result in the effectual working out of His will in a person's heart. So, the only possible way a man could forfeit the grace of God would be if the man were first of all responsible for having obtained it. And if he is responsible, then it is not grace but works. It says, *to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted to him for righteousness.* (Romans 4:5) You see, a man is not righteous, just counted so, because he believes what God has said, as did Abraham.

Grace is when God Himself takes the sinner's place at the judgment for sin and the wrath of God against sin; and He justifies that man and declares him righteous. He is justified, but not because of what he is by his actions or because of any choice that he had promised to make, but simply because it pleased God to take his place and declare him free; that's grace. If salvation comes to a man by any other means, then it is not of grace. Let me re-emphasize, if salvation comes to any man because of anything that he has done, be it making a decision or performing an act; then it is not solely of grace. If so, then it could be forfeited if that man fails to keep his part of the covenant. *"For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself."* God was *"willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath; That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us."* (Hebrews 6:13,17-18)

If a man would lose the salvation which he obtained by grace, what about the oath which God made to all the heirs of promise? How could you flee for refuge into that which was not dependable? The earnest or down payment which God made, of which we read in Ephesians 1 will last until He comes to redeem the purchased possession. The reason it will last is because of the seal of the Holy Spirit. Is that seal then invalidated? Is the earnest nullified? Would God indeed promise and seal that which He knew He would not get because of circumstances? Does God not know everything? *"Art thou a master in Israel, and knowest not these things? We speak that we do know and testify that we have seen;*

and ye receive not our witness.” (John 3:10-11) But he that receives it puts to his seal that God is true.

4. If the grace of God provides total automation for the Christian, what did Jesus mean when He said, “strive to enter in” and Peter, “give diligence to make your calling and election sure,” and Hebrews, “looking diligently lest any fail of the grace of God.”

Answer:

In Luke 13:23-24, a question was asked of our Lord concerning the number of the saved, or whether there be few. Jesus was entering Jerusalem to be crucified and had just ended His rigorous encounter with the Scribes and Pharisees. And it was in this context in which the question was asked. But this thought has hardly any bearing on the above question, for Jesus was not speaking to a group of saints but to the general multitude as He was journeying toward Jerusalem. To strive to enter in is not for the saint, for he is already in, and on the way. You only enter in once. There is continual strife for the saint as he is buffeted and keep this body under, lest he become a castaway, etc. But this battle is fought in the power of the Spirit of God; the Spirit lusteth against the flesh. This is the Lord’s work to keep us by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Peter was speaking to those who had “*obtained like precious faith... through the righteousness of God,*” and those to whom “*divine power hath given ... all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue.*” And through this was given “*exceeding great and precious promises; that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.*” Then he admonishes us to “*add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity*”. By doing this, you “*make your calling and election sure.*” (2 Peter 1:1-10) This has to do with our deportment after we are saved and is part of the battle which is the Lord’s. And even though the Christian

life is one of total automation, God always uses many means to accomplish His purposes. He uses the Word and the fellowship of the saints. He may even use sinners to help keep you in your place. God is absolutely without limits and never lacks for methods to accomplish his own plan and purpose. He does not work as if by magic while we just sit back and take it easy. We have much work to do to “*make our calling and election sure*”, and it is only through the Word. We are only empowered to do that after God saves us, and our labor is not of the flesh; it is always through the power of the Spirit. If we see the word of God at work and see the chastening hand of God upon us, then we know we have been called and elected.

It is never that we try by our own efforts to do things so that we will keep ourselves saved. No, not at all. Our salvation has been once and for all, settled when Christ took upon Himself our sins in His own body on the tree, and became a curse for us. His righteousness was then imputed to us, and our guilt and sin was imputed to Him. “*Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin*”. (Romans 4:8) This blessedness does not come by doing deeds, but by *the hearing of faith*, the faith of God’s elect. “*Not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through faith of Christ, the righteousness of God by faith*”. (Philippians 3:9)

Again, the book of Hebrews was not written to saints as such, but to the Hebrews. Some were saints and some were not. To interpret this as all being to the saints of God is taking Scripture out of context and making it into a pretext. This is not exegesis, but eisegesis, which is reading into it just what you want it to say.

If any man is like the Hebrews were and does not know whether he is saved by grace or not, because he has a hard time to let go of his fleshly efforts to be and to keep saved, then Hebrews applies to him, for the same situation exists. And if you fail of the grace of God and a root of bitterness does spring up, then you’d better take stock of yourself. For if grace does not work, then it is not there. Salvation, which is of God, always works for you, and keeps you, and you then cease from your own works and trust in Him.

5. If there are no ifs, ands, or buts to salvation, then what did Jesus mean when He said, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed," and "he that doeth the will of my Father," and "if a man abide not in me he is cast forth as a branch," and "if ye continue in the faith grounded and settled."

Answer:

Again, this first statement must be taken in its context. For it was not spoken to saints but to those who were likely candidates to be saints, and He told them how to become saints. It was spoken to those who believed with their brains and not yet with their hearts, for they were not yet disciples indeed. To be a disciple indeed one must continue in the Word. If he does not, then he is like that seed which fell by the wayside or among the thorns and never brought fruit; but it was all head knowledge. Jesus told them they would then know the truth, and the truth would set them free; but they did not know they were not free. They were like many Mennonites are. They were born and raised in the church, and they made their decision for Jesus. They were baptized, partake of communion emblems, and are in good standing in the church, they keep the disciplines and are blameless. They trust in their heritage and in the things of sense, and they put forth efforts to get saved and keep saved. So were these, to whom Jesus spoke. They were Abraham's seed; they trusted in their progenitor. But Jesus later told them who their real father was, and it was not God.

The next thought again was not spoken to saints, but was in the sermon on the mount, and is part of the kingdom gospel. That kingdom which John the Baptist and Jesus preached was near, but the Jews rejected their King, so that kingdom never came as yet. We are in the kingdom of God now, but the kingdom of heaven is when righteousness shall cover the earth as the waters now cover the sea. But the thought would apply to this age, nevertheless. It is not those who say, "Lord, Lord," or those who think by their good deeds and self-righteous ambitions they have an edge on God; but they that prove their salvation by walking in the Spirit and not fulfilling the lusts of the flesh. These are they that prove their calling and election unquestionably.

I am not altogether sure as to the true meaning of the third thought. One could by this, gather that a person could forfeit his

eternal life by not abiding in Christ. But this is an implication, and you never cast aside positive statements by an implied statement, as we will discuss later. Paul said if he does not keep his body under, he would become a castaway, would be put out of the ministry, and his testimony would be worthless. Being reprobable in God's sight and being a reprobate are two different things. In the Corinthian church, there was a man who had a sinful relationship with his father's wife, and they with him were glorying instead of mourning. Paul said to give such a one over to Satan, for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. We know by the Scripture that this man and his colleagues repented and were cleared, and the man's flesh was not destroyed. But if a man persists in taking his own way and will not let himself be chastened by the Lord into subjection, then the Lord will give his flesh over to Satan for its destruction. But we would say the man died, for you need a body of flesh to live among men. The Lord will preserve His saints; there are no ifs, ands, or buts. They will live with Him forever. He will raise them up at the last day, that is for certain, He plainly says so in many places. If the flesh of a child of God is destroyed for disobedience, it is done so that he will not be destroyed with the world, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. If any man's work is burned up yet he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire.

“And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled, in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouable in his sight: if ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel...” (Colossians 1:21-23)

Notice in the first statement of the above passage, that they have been reconciled by the death of Christ; a positive statement, no question about it. The saints have a standing with God, they are reconciled. Now He deals with them as with sons. He does not say it was made possible for them to be reconciled, but that He already did it, the work was already finished. And the reason He reconciled them is to present them holy, unblameable, and unreprouable. God insists that His saints be a holy people. They have the word written in their hearts if they are saints. And if they do not follow His word, He chastises them into subjection.

But this was written to people much like we are. They were in danger of being moved away from the hope of the gospel into trusting something else besides the grace of God. There were those men who came to them in a voluntary humility and told them they were not complete in Christ, unless they add something else to make their salvation complete. They must obey some rules: "*touch not, taste not, handle not, which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body*" (Colossians 2:21,23) Those things will all perish. But to abstain from amoral things that are neither good nor bad in themselves because someone wants to bring you into subjection to his will, is being moved away from the hope of the gospel. This makes a man reprobable, and he is to be blamed for trusting something less than the God of all grace.

He says we are "*complete in Christ*". (Colossians 2:10) That is a positive statement; and it is a fact that you cannot add anything to completeness. That which is absolutely perfect, as is the standing of the saint in Christ, needs nothing to make it more complete. This is being moved away from the hope of the gospel and makes men unholy in their deportment. It does not affect their standing with God. That is as fixed and settled between the saint and Christ, as is the standing between the Son and the Father; both are inseparable. This is one indisputable fact of Scripture. For by one offering He forever put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. (*Hebrews 9:26*) For anyone to say that salvation can be lost, is saying the blood of Christ did not put away sin, it only covered it. This makes the blood of Christ just like the blood of animals, less than perfect, needing something yet more to make the salvation complete. The saints are "*circumcised without hands in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him....And you, being dead in your sins....hath he quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses.*" (Colossians 2:11-13) Not only were the sins forgiven up until the time of their conversion "*from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son*", but they were all forgiven, past, present, and future. (Colossians 1:13)

That is why He says, "*Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again,*

who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us” (Romans 8:33-34). It is now the intercessory work of Christ that keeps us, for God Himself has justified us, having taken our sins upon Himself—all of them, not one is left. That is why we are complete in Him, having no sin to our name. “How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation”? (Hebrews 2:3) And we do neglect it if we say we are less than complete in Him.

6. If we are saved by grace irrespective of good works, why is every judgment portrayal of the Bible based on good or bad works? And why did Jesus emphasize the importance of good works and the seriousness of bad works in his message to the churches of Asia?

Answer:

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my Word, and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death into life. (John 5:24) He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him. (John 3:36)

That every man shall be judged according to his works is beyond dispute. But there is more than one judgment scene. The one is after the rapture of the saints and is just for the saints. It is not to determine their destiny, but their rewards, or lack of them, or punishment. *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad”.* (2 Cor. 5:10)

How could words be plainer? Just because a man is saved for time and for eternity does not exclude him from standing trial for the deeds done in his body. Because we still are possessed by a sinful, incorrigible nature, and because this body is under the curse of God, we are subject to failures, sins, and mistakes. And God is absolutely holy, nothing less could ever be in His Divine presence. Although eternal judgment for this has already taken place when Christ bore our sins in His own body and became a curse for us, so that now His righteousness is imputed to us, and God only sees us

as He sees Christ, yet this does not free us from standing trial for negligence while we lived in the body, or for rewards for faithfulness, too. Everything shall receive a just recompense of reward; we will never get away with anything, and so our works and actions after we are saved will be judged, whether good or bad.

While we are in the body, we are always discovering areas in our life that need changing, areas in which we commit sins unknown to us for a long time. Then through the study of the Word, or the preaching, or some other method, it is revealed to us and then we confess that we have been wrong, and He cleanses us, that thing will not be held against our account. *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9). Once you confess something to God as sin, you become careful lest you do it again. You do not ask for forgiveness in the sense of eternal judgment, for all our sins have been forgiven. God's attitude toward the blood of Christ takes care of eternal judgment, for He became a curse for us. We live in sinful bodies that are prone to sin, but we are not held under the power of the sinful nature because He broke the power of sin (*Romans 6:6-11*) and *"made us accepted in the beloved"* (Ephesians 1:6) but because of ignorance, we do many things that are unrighteous. Any thought that does not bring glory to God is sin and is charged to our account. This is where grace comes in, to teach us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts. (*Titus 2:11*) This constant teaching causes us to ever be more careful lest we bring dishonor to His name. Since we are always finding areas of life that need cleansing, and we never reach that stage where we need none, it is logical that we will die with attitudes that may have been wrong and things that we were not aware of, because we were too busy with other things of only earthly values. We did not take the time to search the Scriptures and take the necessary time to add to our faith as is stated in 1 Peter 1.

This will be judged, and if we read writings that are harmful and we begin to be led astray, of this too we will give an account at the judgement seat of Christ. Those that believe in God are to be careful to maintain good works for necessary uses, and men will see the changed lives, the changed values, and will inquire, and this will bring glory to God. Even though they hate us, they will be ashamed having no evil thing to say of us. All that we say and do has to line up with scripture since not being careful of

maintaining good works brings reproach to the name of the Lord. And we will have to answer for this at the judgment unless we are made aware and repent of it beforehand. This should answer the reason why Jesus emphasized the importance of good works to the churches of Asia.

Why can we not think of judgment except only in the terms of eternal hellfire? Our minds have been perverted by long-standing human tradition, where we view the judge standing and dividing the sheep from the goats. We think our good works will be weighed; and if they are light, we will roll over into hell. If they are heavy enough, then we will roll over into heaven. It is true where that scene is depicted that bliss and torment seem to be the lot of those who did good or bad works; but that is when Jesus shall judge the nations that harmed or helped Israel during the tribulation. Because we do not understand the different dispensations, we cannot interpret Scripture correctly.

Anyone who tries to serve the Lord by doing good works so that he will not go to hell does not know anything about the operation of the grace of God. He knows nothing of the cleansing blood of Christ. He constantly rejects God's righteousness and offers his own, which is nothing but filthy rags, however good it may seem in the eyes of men. Such a one is still living under the law of sin and death. He knows nothing of repentance from dead works. His main thought is himself, trying to save himself from eternal retribution; because inwardly he thinks he is not all that bad to deserve hell. He is just like his father Adam was after he had sinned. He ran and hid and tried to provide his own covering. Or as Cain who brought the thank-offering before the sin offering had been applied, because he thought he needed no sin offering. Every natural man thinks this in his heart and sees no need for repentance, for he feels quite good enough; all he needs is some enlightenment and guidance.

The crux of the whole problem is that men do not see themselves as totally depraved and "*dead in trespasses and sin*", (Ephesians 2:1) and totally unable to do anything that avails before God. They think they can by their own will, repent and call upon God. And they do that too, but it is not the Eternal God of heaven they call upon, but a god of their own making, one who is like them; and that god is self-ruling and reigning on the throne of the human heart. They hate the God of heaven and will not have Him,

for He threatens their existence; He says, self must be crucified. No normal, living human being would, of his own choice, be crucified, because by nature he is very much like the Devil, and his inward thought is, "I will ascend into heaven. I am good enough."

It may be that some live morally better lives than some saints do, but instead of trusting the blood of Christ for salvation, they trust their own abilities. They do not have the faith of Christ, nor the righteousness which is of God is by faith. The only faith they possess is of human origin, all the good that they can do, is also of human origin, and anything of human origin is cursed by God, and He cannot accept it.

For anyone to be saved he must judge himself with God's judgment, that he is all bad and not even able to call upon God or do anything that merits His attention. He must say, I deserve hell; I ought to be there. That is where I belong, for I am all bad, there is nothing good whatsoever in or about me.

7. If saints are saved because of God's foreordination and election irrespective of their will and choice, are sinners damned to hell for the same reason?

Answer:

That saints are saved because of God's will and election is without controversy. Scripture is filled with this implication. But they are not saved irrespective of their will and choice.

Paul's salvation was set forth as a pattern for all those who should hereafter believe on Christ unto life everlasting. Did Paul call upon God and ask to be saved? Did God appear to Paul at his beck and call? Certainly not. God first struck him down and broke his human will and showed him what a sinner he was. This is the first step in salvation. God must first reveal to us that we are sinners and worthy of eternal damnation, and that there is absolutely no good in us that should attract God's attention. It is all of pure, free grace. That men are dead in trespasses and sin is also without question. Before the sinner gets saved, he must first be given life, for scripture says he is dead. Except a man be born again first, he cannot see, because dead men cannot see; they have

no seeing capacity. Before they can see, they must first be born and be given life. Then they will call upon God, just as Paul did.

If a man's will has never been broken by Divine intervention, then he is yet in his sin, irrespective of how many decisions and choices he in his own human strength has made. Experiences, visions, and dreams are no proof of salvation; hence, anyone whose idea of salvation does not follow the Divine pattern which God was pleased to reveal to us through the Word, such a one's salvation is not unto life everlasting. It will only last as long as he lives in the body. Then he will be one of those who stands outside when the door is shut and loudly proclaims how much good he has done and how well he has served the Lord. But the answer will be, "I never knew you." Notice it is not, "I once knew you and you have fallen by the wayside," but he never knew them.

After God reveals Himself to the sinner, then that sinner is able and ready and willing to choose to submit to God's order; for to see God is to worship Him. Salvation is not easy from then on. In fact, it was not until after Isaac was born that Ishmael started to make trouble. This is when a man goes through the wilderness. Inwardly he loves the law of the Lord, but he has not yet learned to walk without stumbling and falling. But as he grows in grace, that grace will teach him; and "*they shall all be taught of God*", is the Divine record.

Now the question is: "Are sinners damned to hell by God's choice?" Remember, all men are already lost because of Adam's transgression. And if God would have let them go into perdition, He would have been just and righteous. This is where grace is manifested. God chose some in Christ Jesus, according to the grace which was given them before the world began. This is an established fact and cannot be changed. But God did not choose everyone to glorify Him by salvation. The vessels of mercy were afore prepared unto glory; even us, not of the Jews only but also of the Gentiles. But the vessels of wrath, God endured with much longsuffering, to show His wrath and make His power known. (*Romans 9:22-23*)

Did the Jews want to crucify Christ? It was predetermined that they should, and they were very willing to do it; their will worked in perfect harmony with God's will. Did Judas want to betray the Lord? He was very willing but was not forced to do it; yet he did it, and it fulfilled Scripture. Those whom Scripture says

were of old ordained to condemnation, these were willing to sin against God.

Peter says Christ is made a rock of offense and a stone of stumbling to those who stumble at the Word, being disobedient whereunto they also were appointed. (*1 Peter 2:8*)

Jesus said that the people of Tyre and Sidon would have repented if they would have had an opportunity like the people of Chorazin and Bethsaida. (*Matthew 11:21*) But the opportunity was not given; God apparently had not chosen to give it to them. God appointed Cyrus, that cruel king, to subdue nations, and surnamed him even though he did not know Him. Cyrus thought he was doing just as he pleased, and he was. But what he pleased to do was just what God had designed for him to do.

“Woe unto him that striveth with his maker... shall the clay say to him that fashioned it, what makest thou?” (Isaiah 45:9)

“Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?”

(Romans 9:21) Certainly, He does, but we prove that we have not been broken by the Word of God, and self is still enthroned, until we learn to be silent at the work of God and shut our mouth before Him, and stop judging Him, *“For the natural man cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned”*. (1 Corinthians 2:14)

8. Is God responsible, through predestination, for all wicked persons and all wickedness in the world?

Answer:

“He is before all things, and by him all things consist” (Colossians 1:17). *“For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things, to whom be glory forever, Amen”* (Romans 11:36) God is responsible for all things in the sense that all things are under His absolute control. He could have avoided evil had He chosen to do so by keeping Lucifer from falling. But God is not obligated to anyone. If He chooses to save some, but let others go their own way like He did Lucifer, that is not wrong, since He owes nothing to anyone.

Righteousness is positive; evil is negative. Light is positive, and darkness is negative. If you turn off the light in your room, are you responsible for making the room dark? No, you did not make it dark, darkness is simply the absence of light. You turned off the light, and it became dark. So likewise, if God withholds light and righteousness, evil will prevail. God is light, and if He chooses to withdraw Himself, and not reveal His light, is He responsible for making it dark? Certainly not!

God certainly controls wickedness and wicked men, but they are just naturally that way, without being predestined to be so. Righteous men must be predestined to be righteous, or they would be evil too. If God would just have made salvation possible without predestinating anyone to it, then all would have been lost, for everyone wants to go his own way and that way is down. Scripture says, “*There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.* (Romans 3:11) It is the grace of God that saves some, and this grace was given to the saints before the foundation of the world. This was not merely to save men from hell, but to display His grace to everything and everyone in heaven and on earth, and to glorify His name who is worthy of all honor, power, glory, and praise!

9. If God predestinated all things as they are, do you believe that He predestinated the Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church to be basically Arminian in theology, and that He may have predestinated the church to challenge you, or to deal with you because of your Calvinistic errors or tendencies?

Answer:

As afore stated, God does not need to predestinate evil, any more than you have to throw a heavy object down; it will go down by specific gravity. It is when you want things to go up that you need to employ energy. If the Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church is good, then she has been predestinated by God. For He must needs predetermine all good things. But this church is not old enough yet for me to say whether it is good or evil. We will leave that to future historians and to God. It is an organization of men, by men, and for men; and organizations in themselves are amoral.

They are neither good nor bad in themselves. It is only the way they are used that makes them evil or good.

As for the Arminian theory, it is not Scriptural. Hence, it is not of God, neither did He predestinate it; for it is just another theory concocted by men. There are some things taught by it that are good, but it is basically erroneous because it does not prescribe to God His rightful place as absolutely holy, having absolute power and authority over all things all the time. The chief error is, that it says God wants all men to be saved eternally, but because of some hindrance, that is not being done. Thus, it ascribes disappointments and frustrations to the Omnipotent One. It says God wills that which He cannot achieve. It also says that man is the chief object of God in providing salvation. This is in direct contradiction to Scripture, which says that it is for the praise of the glory of His grace.

Arminianism just began in 1588 by Jacobus Arminius, who was a successor of John Calvin. But he became disgruntled because he could not reason everything out as to the operations of God, so he leaned toward Pelagianism, which began much earlier. This doctrine teaches that men are good, and all need to come to the truth through good teaching and environment. Arminius denied that man is totally depraved, but he said there is some good found in some men. Hence, God saves those whom He foreknew would be good and would obey Him, all because of some goodness found within. This teaching is contrary to Scripture, which says that they are all alike bad, and all are alienated and “*were by nature the children of wrath*”. (Ephesians 2:3)

There was a six-month church conference held at Dort in Holland, concerning the doctrine which Arminius began, and it was found to be in error and not according to Scripture; but some still held to the doctrine, and John Wesley brought it to America.

Menno Simmons was so minded also. Howbeit many Anabaptists were not, according to the writings of some of the songs that are left to us.

What is known as Calvinism in our day is not what John Calvin propagated, but another concoction of men, and this is also basically erroneous because this modern perversion says that man is saved by a choice of the will, and then he can never be lost again regardless of succeeding choices.

There are many shades and variations of both doctrines, and they are all of men. But salvation which is according to Scripture needs no endorsement of men, for it is of God, and will stand forever. Men can stamp it to the dust; but it will always rise again, because the truth is justified of all her children.

You ask, has God predestinated the church to deal with me? If what I hold to is of men, it will fail. If it is of God according to truth, then no power anywhere can eliminate it, regardless of what happens to me. I am of no significance; it is the truth that is justified of all her children. If I am a child of the truth, I shall be justified.

10. If God predestinated all things and works all things according to His will, irrespective of man's will and choices, why should you or I or anyone else be concerned whether people are lost or saved, or what their doctrinal position is, whether the church drifts into worldliness, or keeps pure and holy, how things are going in the church or in the world, what the end result will be, or any other thing?

Answer:

The fact that God does work all things according to the counsel of His own will is without debate. The question then is, why should a person have a care in the world, for what will be, will be! The answer to that is, he should not. For "*which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin, and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?*" (Matthew 6:27-30) This Scripture was spoken in the Kingdom context, but it would apply to a question of this nature.

Let me ask you some questions. Will there be anyone in heaven who was not chosen of God before the foundation of the world? Or will anyone be missing from that number who was chosen of God? Can you by praying long and hard and loud

enough, increase the inhabitants of heaven? Remember Jesus said, *"I have chosen you that you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatsoever ye ask of my Father, he will give it you."* (John 15:16) Having your requests granted is one of the parts of bearing fruit.

If God is not willing that any should perish, and since He has promised to answer every request if it is asked according to His will, why can we not just pray everyone into heaven? God never says anywhere that He is not willing that any soul perish when He was speaking of the world in general. Even Jesus did not pray for the salvation of the world but instead prayed for their destruction. Jesus said, *"I pray for them, I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me, for they are thine."* (John 17:9).

The task of the pastor is to first of all, take heed to himself and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost has made him overseer, and to feed the church of God which Christ purchased with His own blood. The whole world is not the charge of the pastor, only the flock of God which He has purchased with His own blood. (See Acts 20:28.) Those who are without, God will judge. The pastor will judge those who are within.

If the pastor knows that God has chosen him for a specific charge, then it is not his business to ask God why he did this, but to obey the commission given to him, and leave the results with God, who ordained all things. The fact that God has chosen pastors is one of the means that God uses to fulfill His predestinated plan. God does not work without means. The pastors who care for and nurture the flock are one of the means which God employs. It has pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe. (*1 Corinthians 1:21*) The gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth. (*Romans 1:16*) Men do not believe without means, neither are we kept saved without means; for it is the grace of God that teaches and keeps on teaching us. O Love that will not let me go! I rest my weary soul in thee, I give thee back the life I owe, That in thine ocean depths its flow. God does take care of His own, and one of the means He is pleased to use is pastors that feed the flock. Neither is any saint of God without adversaries, and those who charge him unjustly. God uses these means to make him study to make his calling and election sure. We do not become worried, but we must do what we can, for this is the will of God, which He has so predestined.

11. What are the doctrinal and practical changes you would like to see the church make?

Answer:

The major doctrinal change I would like to see is to let God be God, and not make the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, a victim of finite man's whims and wishes. Either God rules over all the affairs of men, or He is ruled by them. If He is in any way ruled by them or persuaded against His will, then He is less than infinite, which means He is not the Sovereign Lord after all, but a God controlled by man's wishes.

I often hear the term, "If we allow God to have his way..." If we can by our actions and stubborn rebellion cause God to change His course or predestinated plan in any way, then He is less than infinite, for He is subject to change.

When Christ was crucified, it was according to the "*determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God*". (Acts 2:23). Was God opposed to His Son being crucified? Were the Jews robots when they fulfilled Scripture? Did they do it against their will? The same way, if we resist God, we are proving to ourselves and others that God is having His way, regardless of our actions.

If God were given His rightful place in our preaching, then men would fear God, and we could eliminate many of our man-made rules and discipline, for they would not be needed. For rules are not for Godly believers who are taught and controlled by the grace of God, but for unbelievers who do not know God and need something to keep them in line.

The first step in man's downward course is when men cease to glorify Him as God. Then they become unthankful, and their foolish heart is darkened. They profess themselves to be wise and become fools.

I believe the Mennonite church has for too long been worshipping at the shrine of the human will and has tried to make God subject to that. Men will not fear nor obey God if He is so small and powerless as to be controlled or influenced by finite man. Because this is so, we need all kinds of strict discipline to make men fear, lest they be penalized. Then we assume because

men obey the disciplines, that they are obeying God while in their heart they can be just as worldly minded as anyone who is not a member of our group, and we call them saints.

This act in itself is being moved away from the hope of the gospel. For if we are dead to the world, why as though living in the world are we subject to ordinances? (See Colossians 2:20-23.) Keeping these ordinances because of regimentation is called worldly, for that is how government keeps order.

Do we then make void the law through faith? Nay, we establish the law. For if men are taught by the grace of God, the law of God is written in their hearts and in their minds; and they are ruled by love, which does no ill to his neighbor, and violates no moral law.

This is why a major part of Mennonitism suddenly became what we term “worldly.” When the preachers relaxed the standards, the people were not ruled by the law of God written in their hearts, but by the law of men written on tablets of paper. When men relaxed, the people relaxed also. The law written on paper meant nothing, and those who went by them had nothing deeper to hold them, so they could do nothing but go with the tide.

Now we are treading the same path and ruling over our constituents by a law written on paper, and as long as we have teeth in that, the people will stay conservative. But of what value is it, can that make them holy? Does conservatism make a man live by the word of God? Can it change his desires from the earthly to the heavenly? Of course not, it just makes him afraid to come out and show what he really is on the inside.

I would therefore like to see and hear nothing but Christ known or preached, *“that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith: that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge...”* (Ephesians 3:17-19) This is far beyond anything that human mind can conceive. If this doctrine of God were kept straight, then everything else would fall into its proper place. We would not need to give invitations for people to accept Christ, and make it known in our so-called revival meetings. If the Word is preached, then God would by that method call those out whom He has chosen. But if the Word is neglected and we use our own

means to call men to be saved, then we have all kinds of backslidings.

That is why we have so many people in our assemblies who would not stand true, if it were not for the discipline that tells them what they may or may not do. They do not trust God, they do not need to, all they need to do is obey the commands of men, and salvation is promised.

We could also eliminate our preparatory services and council meetings. These certainly are not required by Scripture. For if the grace of God teaches a man, he will automatically examine himself all the time, every day, and not wait until communion time comes around, for this is fleshly.

If men hear Christ and are taught by Him, then they will put off the conversation of the old man and the corrupt deeds according to the deceitful lusts. For if they are renewed in the spirit of their mind and put on the new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness, then people will stop lying and speak the truth. They will not steal, become angry, or give place to the Devil, and corrupt communication will not proceed out of their mouth but that which is good to the use of edifying. (*Ephesians 4:22-32*)

All these things are the result of men believing God, not the result of a new and strictly enforced discipline, even as Jesus said, *"It is written in the prophets: And they shall all be taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard and hath learned of the Father cometh unto me."* (John 6:45) There are no rules to follow or conditions to meet. If a man learns of the Father by the preaching and is taught of God, he will come unto Him; for this is the method God has chosen to call men unto Himself.

But remember Jesus also rejoiced that God had hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes, and He said, *"All things are delivered unto me of my Father, and no man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father; and who the Father is but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him."* (Luke 10:22) God cannot be known by an act of the human will, but only by Divine revelation. If this were preached, then those men whom God has chosen would hearken, and those whom He has not effectually called would prove that by their continual rejection of that preaching. *"For the preaching of the cross is foolishness to them that perish, but unto us who are saved it is the*

power of God". (1 Corinthians 1:18) The preaching of the Word will reveal who is called by God, and who is not. That is not for us to decide; men will decide that for themselves by what they do with the truth. For "*the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*" (1 Corinthians 2:14)

So shall my Word be that goeth forth out of my mouth, it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that thing which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. (Isaiah 55:11) *And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing, and He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay His hand or say unto Him, what doest thou?* (Daniel 4:35)

"Oh, that men would praise the Lord for his goodness and for his wonderful works unto the children of men. (*Psalms 107:31*)

"Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; Behold ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you." (*Acts 13:40-41*)

Respectfully Submitted,
John R. Renno

The following poem was written by my brother Eli S. Renno.

*My boyhood days from care were free,
No sense of guilt or strife;
My parents and home were dear to me,
And I enjoyed my life.*

*To walk the path the ancients trod,
This was my foremost goal;
For I was told this leads to God,
And I could save my soul.*

*But as I into manhood grew,
I wasn't quite so sure;
Since now a sense of guilt I knew,
And I felt insecure.*

*O how could I from sin be freed?
This was my heartfelt cry;
For God has firmly thus decreed,
"The soul that sins shall die!"*

*Could I perchance by good deeds done
The wrath of God appease;
No, these for sin could not atone
Nor set my heart at ease.*

*The Bible says by faith we must
From sin be justified;
And if on God we put our trust,
We cannot be denied.*

*This promise I believed, and so,
I took Him at His Word;
My heart found peace, and now I know,
That Jesus is my Lord.*

*I praise the Lord for refuge found,
His precepts I embrace;
Now I can know I'm heaven bound,
Saved by His wondrous grace.*

*Although my life has many flaws,
So oft I've failed the Lord,
Yet still I can rejoice because
I'm trusting in His Word.*

*When Christ who is our life shall come,
With rapture in the skies;
May I then hear the welcome home,
Where glory never dies.*

*There in that land of blissful rest,
Our Savior we shall see;
We'll sing His praise with all the blest,
And live eternally.*

-Eli S. Renno