

THOUGHTS ON THE FUNERAL FOR MY AMISH BROTHER JONAS

John R. Renno

March 25, 2002

The funeral was held in the house where my immediate family was born. It was built by my grandfather, David Y. Renno, about 1910 near the time my parents were married. He divided the home farm and gave one farm to my Uncle Ezra and the other to my parents who lived there 40 years and where all nine of their children were born.

In 1946 I took over the farm and our children were born there. We lived there until we bought a farm in Luzerne County. We moved in 1957 and sold the home farm to my oldest brother. Now it is owned by his son-in-law and family.

I was not physically fit to attend this funeral because of the infirmity of my flesh but, because of persistent determination and an inner urge and favorable circumstances, my oldest son, Dan, was my body guard and took me to the place of our birth, his and mine. This had a nostalgic effect on both of us.

The service was presided over by my wife's nephew, Josiah Peachey, the son of her brother, Joe. He is a strict bishop, zealous to keep the traditions established by his predecessors. This is what my father, who was a bishop, would have wanted, for to them, keeping the old traditions is their salvation.

When new life in Christ was revealed to me by an intense study of the word, I discovered that I was saved eternally by faith in Christ alone. For this reason, I was expelled from the Amish church. Any member not trusting this religion is persecuted for breach of their baptismal vow and considered an apostate. My father warned, it is dangerous to take all scripture literally. It will lead astray.

About that time, they began preaching against assurance of salvation, calling it a doctrine of demons saying we cannot know we are saved until we are judged according to our works written in the books. Only if we trust and keep our baptismal vows can we have a living hope of heaven ... but never be sure.

They teach we are born again when we become a member of the church. Every teenager is taught the articles of faith and then get down on their knees before God and the church to make a declaration that they believe that Jesus is the Son of God. They are asked to confess that this is a Christian organization, promise to renounce Satan and his works, receive Jesus Christ and his righteousness, and to remain faithful to the church for the rest of this life. The deacon pours 3 drops of water on the head in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

This is the system that Jonas believed in and he was faithful to his vow to the end. He knew the Scriptures better than most do which allows me only a faint hope for his eternal salvation.

I mourned for my people the next day. I felt as we read 2 Kings 19:3 (This is a day of distress for the children have come to birth but there is no strength to deliver.), they are zealous for God of

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their own making but ignore the truth of Scripture and go about to establish their own. They claim salvation is by trusting in their vows and he that endureth to the end shall be saved.

Yet there are a few among them who trust the blood of Christ alone but they must keep it secret. As Elijah complained to God, I am the only one left, but God said, I have reserve for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal, a very small remnant compared to the whole nation.

The Amish system was begun in 1683 by Jacob Ammon. He separated himself and his followers from the rest. He wanted his followers to wear distinctive clothing like police where uniforms. Their oft-quoted text is, "Be not conformed to this world," where world means anyone not Amish.

They assume they are about the only Godly people left and, when this crowd gets too small, the world will burn up. The righteous will be taken to heaven and those who remain will burn forever. They do not believe that Satan will be bound when Christ reigns. We were officially forbidden to study that nor discuss this doctrine.

The Amish ignore the blessing promised to those who keep these words and the curse against those who deny them. This is the sad result for those who accept the value of tradition above the word of God. The Amish are a closed mission field for they refuse to listen to anyone who tells the truth. May the Lord vindicate himself. He owns the world.